

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • October 15, 2015

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Who Will Go for Us?

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

Isaiah 6:8

How willing are we to go wherever God calls us? Would we be willing if it meant great sacrifice?

Isaiah records God's call to him as a prophet. That call certainly applies to ministers of the gospel and to those who serve in the special offices. But there is something in this call for each and every one of us.

Prior to receiving the call, Isaiah saw a glorious vision of the King sitting on His throne, high and lifted up. His train filled the temple. Above the throne were seraphim in postures of utmost reverence: with two of their wings they covered their faces; with two wings they covered their feet; and with two they flew. These angels called out "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts" (Is. 6:3).

When Isaiah saw the revelation of God's holiness, he immediately recognized his own unworthiness: "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean

lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Is. 6:5). Isaiah mentions his lips because they are the instrument that a prophet must use in the service of God. Isaiah sees his unfitness to serve the holy God and so declares his lips to be unclean.

Graciously, God did not leave Isaiah in this miserable state. Rather, He sends an angel to take a burning coal from the altar and touch his lips in order to cleanse Isaiah from iniquity, not only the iniquity of his lips, but also that of his heart. The angel tells him, "Thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged" (Is. 6:7). Isaiah came to understand that there is forgiveness and cleansing on the basis of the sacrifice offered on the altar.

After this good news, Isaiah hears a voice, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah responds, "Here am I; send me." Oh, that God would work in us such a willingness to serve that we would be willing to go wherever He calls!



After the angel assured Isaiah that there was forgiveness for his iniquity and sin, Isaiah says, "I heard the voice of the Lord" (Is. 6:8). Isaiah refers to God as 'Lord'

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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Editorial Office

Prof. Barrett Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave.
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
38 Abbeyvale
Corbally
Co Limerick, Ireland

Subscription Price

\$23.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$23.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$11.50.

Advertising Policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (e-mail: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
Website for PRC: www.prc.org

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(Heb., *Adonai*) because he knows God is his Master and he is God's servant. Such is the way we need to see ourselves: we belong body and soul to our faithful Savior. He not only created us; He bought us with His precious blood. He has complete authority over us.

How sad when the Sovereign Lord speaks to us and we fail to bow before Him and listen! How shameful when the Lord of heaven and earth reveals His commands and we take them as mere suggestions! The Lord who speaks to Isaiah and to us is none other than the King, Jehovah of hosts, who sits on His throne. He is the Great I AM, who rules over all the hosts of heaven and earth. He is the thrice holy God whose purpose is always to glorify Himself. His glory ought to be our chief purpose as well.

This glorious King sitting upon the throne is one God, for He asks "Whom shall I send?" But, He is also three Persons, as evidenced by the question, "Who will go for *us*?" The King is holding a conversation among the Persons of the Trinity. These three Persons in covenant fellowship are the Holy, Holy, Holy God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All of them together work to create us and to accomplish our salvation, to the glory of His great and holy Name.

It is this worthy and loving covenant King who calls Isaiah to serve by the words, "Who will go for *us*?" That is, "Who will go in our service? Who will go on a mission that will bring glory to *us*?" Although the King does not mention Isaiah by name, He does bring the need to Isaiah's attention. As if God said, "I desire a servant to accomplish my decrees." Of course, God does not need servants; but God has chosen to use means to accomplish His will.

Perhaps Isaiah did not know how difficult the task was that lay ahead of him. But a difficult mission it was:

And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed (Is. 6:9-10).

His mission was to preach to the people in order that their hearts would be hardened.

Who would want to be a prophet whose word hardens the hearts of a nation? Who wants to preach a message

that will bring greater judgment upon others? Who would want to preach a message if he knew that the great majority of people would reject it? That is why Isaiah asks, "Lord, how long?" (Is. 6:11). Isaiah did not relish God's answer either: "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land" (Is. 6:11-12). Isaiah's mission would bring judgment upon the land. And yet, Isaiah knows it would also be for God's glory.

Consider that God calls each one of us to serve Him. He calls officebearers in the church. But He also calls believers in general to serve him in our individual stations and callings. He calls fathers to serve Him as spiritual heads of our homes, providing for our families by the work of our hands. He calls mothers to serve Him in the day-to-day task of keeping the home. He calls children to serve Him by honoring father and mother. He calls young people and young adults to serve Him in school and at work. Older folk, too, He calls to serve Him through their pains and frailties. The truth is, these duties are often burdensome and at times downright depressing. But then, I need to remember, God called me to do this! God put me right here, right now, for a particular reason and purpose.



What was Isaiah's response to the call? He does not respond as we do at times: "Does it have to be me?" "Why not send someone else?" "I suppose, if I absolutely have to!" "Al right; but, I'm only going to do this much and no more!" Rather, he says, "Here am I; send me."

Answering that way, Isaiah was not emphasizing how capable he was. He was not trying to sell himself by saying, "Lord, I am the best man for the job!" He was not comparing himself with others. Rather, he was simply acknowledging his desire and availability to serve God in the task at hand. As if to say, "Lord, if Thou desirest someone to go in Thy service, I want to be used by Thee; I will go wherever Thou desirest to send me."

Isaiah's response was of someone eager to serve his holy God. Previously, he had seen his sins and sinfulness, crying out "Woe is me! For I am undone." But, now he stands as one who knows the forgiveness of God. In light

of God's abundant mercy, Isaiah responds in thankfulness: "Here am I, send me!"

Is that our response in light of God's mercy toward us? "Wherever you send, Lord, I am willing to go." God calls and sends officebearers to be His servants. It is not always the most pleasant labor. It may mean long evenings away from the family and long hours in the study. God says, "Whom shall I send?" How do we respond?

God calls fathers and mothers to teach and discipline their children. Do we say, "Lord, why must I do this over and over again?" Or, do we say, "Here am I. Whatever way You tell me to raise them, I will do it to the utmost of my ability. Grant me the grace I need for this difficult task." God calls husbands and wives to love one another as Christ loved the church. Do we say, "Lord, You don't know my husband!" "You don't know my wife!" Or, do we say, "Lord, Here am I! You have called me here; grant me now the grace to serve You and be faithful to Your will in my marriage." God calls young people to a life of holiness. Do you say, "Lord, when I am older, then I will serve Thee." Or, do we say, "Here am I, send me." No matter what station and calling, no matter the circumstances, young or old, God would have us serve Him. Are we eager to serve our gracious God, no matter what the cost?



When we see the enormity of the calling God sets before us, we must see that we cannot serve the King in our own strength. The possibility of faithful service must rest in the King who sits upon His throne.

In the first place, it is the King who elected a people for Himself. In essence, Jesus Christ, the anointed of God, said to His Father, "Here am I, send me." He was willing to serve as Mediator between God and man. Christ, the King, humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant. And, though He was rejected of men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, nevertheless, He did everything for the glory of God, even when that service cost Him His very life.

Jesus was and is the Servant of Jehovah, *sent* to save. That is why Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61 at the beginning of His ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; *he hath sent me* to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised..." (Luke 4:18). When God sent Him, He went in love for His God and for His people. He will certainly accomplish the gracious work He began.

Our faithful service to God is possible only because of Christ, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Tit. 2:14). We would be truly undone if we were still under God's wrath for the guilt of our sins. But the King has made a sacrifice for us on the altar. He gave Himself so that we would be justified and stand in God's favor. Now Christ

touches us with the coal of His Holy Spirit so that we experience forgiveness and all the blessings of salvation. The same Spirit works in us true thankfulness for all His mercies.

When the King applies that salvation to us, by His grace we will say, "Here am I, send me." Not that the

struggle is gone. The old man of sin seeks his own glory instead of God's. There will certainly be hesitation when we say, "Here am I." We might be like Jonah for a time and refuse to go where God calls. When we recognize that hesitation, we must repent and pray to the King on His throne: "Forgive my lack of devotion to Thee. I am willing; help Thou my unwillingness." Augustine put it this way, "Lord give what thou commandest, and command what thou wilt, and thou shalt not command in vain."

The King on the throne calls us to live lives of thankful service: "Who will go for us?" What will be our response?

He is worthy, worthy, worthy of all our service. May He be glorified in us. ☞

*No matter what station
and calling,
no matter the circumstances,
young or old,
God would have us serve Him.*

What It Means To Be Reformed (9)

The Church: My Chief Joy (2)

As a Reformed Christian, I love the church of Jesus Christ. And love for the church commits me, as it does all Reformed Christians, to devotion to the church. So much is devotion to God's *church* a part of being *Reformed* that, if I did not love the church, my profession of being Reformed would be empty. We saw last time that this is the teaching of the Reformed creeds.

The True Church

A Reformed believer's love for the church, however, is not a love for any church. His love is for the *true* church of Jesus Christ. Many years ago when my father declined what was probably a generous promotion that would have required him to move four hundred miles north to the state capital, it was not because there were no churches there. There would have been hundreds. Dad declined the promotion because he was devoted to *our* church, which he firmly believed manifested most clearly the marks of the true church. There was not one like it in Sacramento.

The advice of the Billy Graham

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Crusade to new converts that they "join the church of their choice" is not Reformed advice. Had Graham been Reformed, he would have given the advice of the Reformed creed: "[You] ought diligently and circum-spectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church" (Art. 29). Just a year or two after the Belgic Confession professed that, the lesser-known but important Second Helvetic Confession expressed similar thoughts: "We do not acknowledge every church to be the true church which vaunts herself to be such."¹ Then, so the pattern of these creeds was, they taught what are the distinguishing marks of the true church: the pure preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments,

¹ For an exposition of this important but lesser-known creed, we encourage you to follow Prof. R. Cammenga's series of articles in the rubric "Believing and Confessing" beginning January 1, 2015.

and the righteous exercise of church discipline. "Especially," the Second Helvetic said, "the lawful and sincere preaching of the Word of God."

The Reformed fathers wanted Reformed Christians not only to be devoted to the church, but to the *true* church. And they were convinced that this true church could be found by looking at these distinguishing marks.

The Pure Preaching of the Word of God

"Especially," said the Second Helvetic. This mark is first. This mark controls the other marks. Under this mark are subordinated any other marks. If the Word is not preached purely, the sacraments cannot be administered properly nor church discipline exercised righteously. This mark is first, especially, because it indicates the presence of Jesus Christ in the church, and nothing indicates the genuineness of a church like the presence of Jesus there. So the Second Helvetic reasoned: the preaching leads to Christ, "who said in the Gospel: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life. A stranger they do not follow, but they flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers' (John 10:5, 27, 28)."

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2015, p. 5.

Pure preaching marks a true church, the Reformed faith says. Not just any preaching, because almost every church has preaching. But pure preaching, preaching faithful to Scripture. To hear the truth is to hear Christ. When Christ speaks, He does not speak the lie. “My sheep hear my voice.”

A believer who desires to be a member of a Reformed church, then, will examine the preaching of the church he considers joining. And he will not just listen to a few or even many sermons, but will look into the church’s official view of preaching, her attitude toward preaching, and her oversight of the preaching. He will also want carefully to scrutinize the preaching that takes place in the catechism room, examining the curriculum in all its dimensions. And he will want to know where and how future preachers are trained to preach. A church true to the Reformed tradition will be known by its pure preaching.

Proper Administration of the Sacraments

Second on the traditional (Reformed) list of the marks of a true church is *proper administration of the sacraments*. The Belgic Confession has “pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ.” The Second Helvetic refers to “the sacraments instituted by Christ, and delivered unto us by his apostles, using them in no other way than as they received them from the Lord.” The Westminster Confession has: “...ordinances administered...purely....” And:

“only two sacraments ordained by Christ...neither of which may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the word, lawfully ordained.”

Reformed Christians consider it very important that the church they join not multiply sacraments, but limit them to the two the Lord instituted: Baptism and the Holy Supper. Nor may they embellish these two with man-made nonsense, so that the sign is obscured by the entertainment or unbiblical ritual. Simple, straightforward, as-instituted-by-Christ sacraments mark the true church. That is, sacraments that point to Jesus Christ and His gracious, sovereign salvation.

The Broader Perspective

But looking at these marks—and especially the second mark—more broadly, proper *worship in its entirety* may be viewed as a mark of the true church. Sacraments—a fundamental *aspect* of worship—are a part of the larger reality of worship. And preaching is the chief element—but an *element*—in worship. Jesus’ presence in any church is determined and known by the entire worship of the church, not only by whether the bare sacraments are administered properly or sermons speak truth, fundamental as these are. The totality of a church’s worship shows whether it is true to the Reformed faith.

Viewing these marks of the true church in connection with worship, broadly, fits with the Reformers’ major concern during the Reformation: pure *doctrine* must be preached *in order that* there be proper worship. Rome’s heretical

doctrine also explains why Rome improperly administered the sacraments. But Rome’s heresy manifested itself in worship more extensively than we might imagine.

The Westminster Confession takes this perspective of the marks. These Presbyterian fathers said that a particular church is more or less pure (we would say, “manifests the marks of the true church”) “according as the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, *and public worship performed* more or less purely in them” (emphasis added).

Application of this point is vital. Even as not just any *preaching* allows a church to identify as Reformed, even so not just any *worship* will allow that either. Worship only of a certain kind is Reformed worship. With songs of a certain kind. And activity limited to what God commands. What I want or what makes you feel good does not determine the kind of worship we offer God. Some kinds of worship are simply out of bounds if a church will have the identity Reformed.

To be blunt, it is as inappropriate for a Reformed church to advertise “9 A.M.: Traditional Worship, 11 A.M.: Contemporary Worship” as it would be to advertise “9 A.M.: Calvinism; 11 A.M.: Arminianism.” Worship is that important. Reformation history will not allow us to see it any other way. Five hundred years ago the danger was vestments, incense, candles, altars, images, kneeling, and homilies that were not sermons. Today, although some want to return to the errors of Rome’s worship, the more common

danger is praise bands and loud music, pulsing lights, a hip speaker sitting on a stool to go with the hip-hop music—in the service of what someone once called the “liturgy of scruff.”

God calls His people to “serve” Him “acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28). Some worship is unacceptable to God. Worship’s acceptability by God has everything to do with “reverence and godly fear.” Why? “For our God is a consuming fire.” That reason is not to be criticized as “Old Testamentish,” because it is New, from Hebrews 12. Faith cannot be separated from the form in which it expresses itself in public worship. Every *theology* will have its corresponding (that is, matching) *doxology*.

This explains why Westminster has a *Directory for Public Worship*, the Church of Scotland her *Book of Common Order*, and why our Dutch Reformed fathers carried to church their ecclesiastically adopted *kerkboekjes* (little worship/prayer books), which included what to sing and how to worship. Their good sense told them that worship is too important to be left to the whim of the (perhaps creative) minister, or even to the regular brainstorming of a worship committee. There is a “decency and order” (I Cor. 14:40) required in worship—a phrase to be applied not first of all to church *government*, as we often apply it (not improperly), but to public *worship*, as the context of I Corinthians 14 indicates.

Calvin’s Principles

Of course, cautions are in order.

Such as: this is not to say that only one specific order of worship can be called Reformed and any other order must be labelled “un-Reformed.” But principles governed the worship of churches that used the name Reformed, and these principles made their worship look very similar from one church to another across Europe and in America. Even if Reformed churches were not always able to require “strict liturgical uniformity,” they were always convinced of the importance of a “common form and content” in their worship.²

Those who know Calvin will recognize the lead he has given to Reformed churches in their worship. Generally speaking, these are Calvin’s principles:

- The *sermon*—the Word of God—is *central*. Nothing may squeeze out the sermon from having pride of place. For, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; I Cor. 1:21).

- Second, *theological soundness* is paramount. Feelings and emotion, aesthetics and beauty, must always be subordinate to sound doctrine. Know the truth. Be sanctified by the truth. Beware the lie. God’s name (His reputation, revealed in His works) must be protected above all (John 8:32, 44; 17:17; II Thess. 2:11).

- Third, worship must serve *unto edification*. Not only must sermons

² These are the expressions Robin A. Leaver uses in his preface to Daniel Meeter’s fine treatment of the Dutch liturgy, *Bless the Lord, O My Soul: The New-York Liturgy of the Dutch Reformed Church*, 1767, Lanham, Md., & London: The Scarecrow Press, 1998, viii.

be central, and theologically sound, they must be understood. Preachers must read the Word, give the sense, and *cause* the hearers to *understand* the reading (see Neh. 8:8). There can be no edification without understanding (I Cor. 14!).

- Fourth, worship must be *simple, uncomplicated*, free from pomp and embellishments. “Omit,” Calvin said, “all theatrical pomp which dazzles the eyes of the simple and deadens their mind.” When the Reformed fathers in the creeds explained the second commandment, they said, “This means: do not include in the worship of God what God has not called to be there!” The command does not refer to furniture or wall-hangings (although pictures that are intended to teach are kept out), but to the assembled congregation’s activity. This determination to restrict worship to what God commands has led to worship that is beautiful for its simplicity, understandable even by children.

- *Full congregational participation* is high on the list of governing principles. A Reformed church does not ask others to worship God *for* the people. Special numbers and choral presentations in public worship violate the principle the Reformers fought for when the Romish priests were worshipping and the layman only watching: the priesthood of every believer (I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). The church members will sing, Calvin said, contrary to the advice of Zwingli who thought music had too much power to move emotions. But she will sing wisely, which leads to the final principle.

- Calvin’s central theme was *Soli*

Deo Gloria—in worship as well as theology (which, remember, always are reflections of each other). To God alone be the glory. Among other things, this principle led Re-

formed churches to sing the Psalms in worship. It moved Calvin repeatedly to advise that church music never be “light or frivolous,” but always have “weight and majesty.”

Sound principles, all of them, in

the quest for a true church. The principles are Reformed.

Next time: A Reformed church is identified by its *church discipline*.



IN MEMORIAM

REV. WILLIAM LANGERAK

In Memoriam of the Reverend Dale H. Kuiper

Late Sunday evening, September 21, 2014, the Lord took Rev. Dale Kuiper to live with Him in Paradise. That he lives where there is no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain was comforting for family and friends, especially because for several years prior, Rev. Kuiper suffered the debilitating effects of a stroke. It was difficult to see this man who enjoyed being outdoors, confined to a wheelchair; one who loved visiting others, needing company himself; and one whose work depended upon a ready mind and speech, struggling to converse. But this also demonstrated the truth he preached: All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass; the grass withers; the flower fades away; But the Word of the Lord endures for ever (I Pet. 1:24-25).

Sunday was a fitting day for Rev. Kuiper to go home. For over half of his life, he prepared each week for Sunday, a day he worked while others rested, and worked to help his flock begin in this life the eternal Sabbath (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 38). Fitting that on a Sunday he could fully enter into that rest himself. That it was in September was also special, for that was the month he was ordained into the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the PRCA, and began preaching that enduring gospel of eternal life by the grace of God.

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Our thanks to Rev. Langerak for writing this memorial. The editors apologize for it coming a year late.

Rev. Kuiper was ordained in 1967. Over the next 36 years he served as pastor of six different congregations. The first five were in Classis West: Randolph, WI (1967-1970); Pella, IA (1970-1974); Lynden, WA (1976-1985); Hope-Isabel, SD (1985-1987); Immanuel-Lacombe, AB (1987-1992). His sixth, last, and longest pastorate was at Southeast-Grand Rapids, MI where he labored 11 years until retirement in 2003.



Rev. Dale Harmon Kuiper
November 22, 1935-September 21, 2014

Besides his many congregational duties, Rev. Kuiper also served in many denominational capacities. From 1974-1976 he was Home Missionary laboring mainly in Skowhegan, ME. He also wrote frequently for the *Standard Bearer*, especially in later years for the rubric, "A Word Fitly Spoken." He was often a Delegate *ad Examina* in both Classis East and West, church visitor, member of Synod, Domestic Mission Committee, Board of Trustees, and Theological School Committee, where he served frequently as President. In conducting interviews with prospective seminarians, you could plan on him asking, "What is the most important qualification of a minister?" Expected answer: "Humility" (I Pet. 5:5).

Although Rev. Kuiper was a stickler for decorum, he would not take issue with my calling him Dale here. First, because it is a reminder that he has laid down the mantle of his office—he rests also now from his ministerial labors (Rev. 14:13). Secondly, it is a reminder that no man is his office—every believer, including ministers, is a child of God, living a life of a prophet, priest, and king before God, regardless of any special office. Although most knew him mainly as pastor, Rev. Kuiper loved Jesus long before he held that office, and served his Lord not simply as a pastor, but also as a husband, father, and individual member of the church.

Born in Orange City, IA on November 22, 1935, Dale Harmon Kuiper was the third child of Rev. Henry H. and Winnie Kuiper, joining siblings Hulda and Henry. Celia, Ruth, and Harlow would follow. Dale's father had been ordained into the PRCA pastorate the year before, and would serve in Orange City, IA; Randolph, WI; Hope-Redlands, CA; and Loveland, CO. While his father was in Randolph, teen-aged Dale moved to Michigan and attended Grand Rapids Christian High, graduating the year of the schism, 1953. Afterwards, he attended the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh, and then worked for the California Highway Department on engineering projects that often required working weeks out in the desert. While his father was in Loveland, Dale attended Colorado State University, and graduated in 1962 with a degree in chemistry. Prior to entering the seminary, he was a teacher at Free Christian School in Edgerton, MN, and Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI. He would return to Edgerton to date one of his former students, Velerie Kay Miersma. They were married August

20, 1965 with newly appointed seminary professor, Rev. H. Hanko officiating. During 49 years together, Rev. Kuiper and Vel were blessed with six sons, three daughters, and 29 grandchildren. After Rev. Kuiper's retirement they especially appreciated the time it afforded to visit the family, especially those living far from home.


Although an avid reader and studious pastor, Rev. Kuiper preferred spending his free time outdoors getting exercise and scratching his rather intense competitive itch. I noticed this the first time we met. Walking into his office filled with the usual books and paraphernalia of a pastor, I also had to navigate shot-puts, bench press, and barbells to sit down. Turned out he was training for the Senior Olympics. For many years, Rev. Kuiper pitched at a high level in fast-pitch softball leagues. When he gave that up for the ministry, he took up tennis, and no matter where his pastorate was, always managed to find someone to help keep his game sharp. Being stationed often near beautiful natural surroundings, he took up rock collecting, hiking, and hunting, especially deer, antelope, and bear, either with firearm or bow.

Rev. Kuiper is remembered by most, however, for his pastoral labors, which was the most visible aspect of his sanctified life, and occupied the majority of his time and energy in the church by the grace of God. At Southeast, Rev. Kuiper was especially known and beloved for a serious dedication to the pastorate, coupled with a somewhat deadpan and dry sense of humor. There are many stories to illustrate, but the most apt is probably when, just before his retirement, we hung a portrait of Rev. Kuiper on the consistory wall to join those of other former pastors. Pointing at his photo an elder said, "Nice picture, Reverend, but why didn't you smile?" His response: "I am smiling." And no one doubted that this was true.

Although conducting business with a sense of humor, Rev. Kuiper was a dedicated minister who clearly felt the responsibility of his office before God. This showed in his attention to detail in carrying out his work—the carefulness with which he wrote out sermons and delivered them, his insistence on good behavior and recitation in catechism, and his efficient and wise leading of consistory and council meetings. Rev. Kuiper clearly loved the flock of God entrusted to his care. He enjoyed giving pastoral counsel, bringing the Word, and visiting, whether sick, shut-ins, widows, children, or families. Many remember

the conviction with which he preached, his passion and spiritual application, especially when preaching the Psalms. While interning under Rev. Kuiper, I saw how hard he still worked making new sermons and polishing homiletics, even with retirement only months away. And even after retirement, he continued preaching and teaching catechism as long as he was able. He was a faithful pastor.

We must give thanks to God. We remember the Rev. Dale Harmon Kuiper not for his sake, any natural abili-

ties, or as a sinless man. He was not perfect—not as a person, husband, father, church member, or as a pastor. And whatever he did faithfully, he did by the grace of God. Therefore, our remembrance is that of thanksgiving. We ought to give thanks for such fruits of the Spirit, for the truth that God is pleased to save sinners, and that He is able to use sinners to feed His flock. Thanks, Lord Jesus, for faithful pastors. And as sheep in continual need, continue to provide us faithful pastors. 

ALL AROUND US

REV. DANIEL HOLSTEGE

■ Pope Francis' First Visit to the U.S.

"As Francis makes his first U.S. visit, his emphasis on serving the poor over enforcing doctrine has inspired joy and anxiety in Roman Catholics"—that is the subheading of an article on Pope Francis by Robert Draper in the August issue of *National Geographic*.

The new pope visited the United States for the first time in his life September 23-27, 2015. On the docket, according to the August 31 issue of *Time*, were two days in Washington D.C. to visit President Obama and discuss their shared values, such as responding to global warming and advancing economic opportunity for all. He was also invited to address a joint session of Congress. He spent one day in New York City to give a speech at the U.N. and hold an interfaith service at the 9/11 Memorial. Then Pope Francis was two days in Philadelphia to attend the World Meeting of Families, "an interfaith celebration of family, community and faith" (37).

Let me introduce the current pope to you. Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis on March 13, 2013. He arrived at this summit of the Roman Catholic hierarchy after two decades of climbing. In his hometown of Buenos Aires, Argentina, he became bishop in 1992, archbishop in 1998, and cardinal in 2001. He is the first pope from South America and the first pope not born in Europe in over a thousand years. He was elected to the papacy after Benedict resigned suddenly, something unheard of in the past six centuries. He was chosen,

writes Draper, at a time of "mounting sentiment among more progressive cardinals that the hoary and Eurocentric mind-set of the Holy See was rotting the Catholic Church from within" (NG, 39). He is the first Jesuit pope. He is also the first pope to take the name Francis as his papal moniker, after St. Francis of Assisi, a known advocate of the poor.

Here is a man who shows little interest in the culture wars, like the battle over same-sex marriage,¹ but focuses instead on world poverty and climate change. His primary ambition: "How I would like a church that is poor and for the poor" (38). Draper concludes his article with these words: "This would appear to be the pope's mission: to ignite a revolution inside the Vatican and beyond its walls, without overturning a host of long-held precepts. 'He won't change doctrine,' insists de la Serna, his Argentine friend. 'What he will do is return the church to its true doctrine—the one it has forgotten, *the one that puts man back in the center*. For too long, the church put sin in the center. But putting the suffering of man, and his relationship with God, back in the center, these harsh attitudes toward homosexuality, divorce, and other things will start to change" (59, emphasis added).

Here is a man who wants unity among world religions. While still a cardinal, he spoke at an ecumenical event

¹ Although he does not seem to disagree with the Roman Catholic position that homosexual practice is a sin, or that homosexuals may not be ordained as priests, he is reported to have said, "If someone is gay, and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" And his lack of interest in talking critically on this greatest socio-cultural issue of our day is a change from the previous popes.

Rev. Holstege is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.

between Roman Catholics and evangelicals in Buenos Aires. He asserted that the distinctions between Catholics and evangelicals do not matter to God: “How nice that brothers are united, that brothers pray together. How nice to see that nobody negotiates their history on the path of faith—that we are diverse but that we want to be, and are already beginning to be, a reconciled diversity” (36). Moreover, he embraced and prayed with a Muslim imam and a Jewish rabbi at the Western Wall in Jerusalem (51). Draper quotes the Jewish rabbi, Abraham Skorka, a personal friend of Francis, as saying that the pope “is changing religiosity throughout the world.” Draper comments that “Francis has kindled a spiritual spark among not only Catholics but also other Christians, those of other faiths, and even nonbelievers.” Even atheists like him. Draper also quotes Thomas J. Reese, a Jesuit senior analyst at the *National Catholic Reporter*, as saying:

Two years ago if you asked anybody on the street, “What’s the Catholic Church for and against?” you would’ve gotten, “It’s against gay marriage, against birth control”—all this stuff. Now if you ask people, they’ll say, “Oh, the pope—he’s the guy who loves the poor and doesn’t live in a palace.” That’s an extraordinary achievement for such an old institution. I jokingly say that Harvard Business School could use him to teach rebranding. And politicians in Washington would kill for his approval rating (56).

Are we watching for the rise of Antichrist? For both his political and religious aspects? For the beast of the sea and the beast of the earth? The second beast seen by John, also known as the false prophet,

had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast.... And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast.... And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six (Rev. 13:11-18).

When the world unites around a single man, we should be paying attention. When that man focuses on solving world poverty, and says things like this, “Some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. Meanwhile, the excluded are still waiting” (*Time*, June 1)—we should be wondering what he thinks should be done to advance economic opportunity for all. Perhaps a mark in everyone’s right hand or forehead to level the playing field of buying and selling? When a man is admired in America both by Republicans and Democrats.... When a man speaks of a unified diversity not only within Christendom, but also among Christians, Muslims, and Jews.... We should be watching him closely.

■ The Ashley Madison Scandal

“Life is eternal. Don’t have an affair.” So wrote Ed Stetzer, executive director of LifeWay Research, in an August 25 blog entry responding to the hack of AshleyMadison.com, which leaked the data of over 30 million users of the adultery-promoting, marriage-destroying website last July.² Stetzer’s choice of words was fitting. The motto of the Ashley Madison website is, “Life is short. Have an affair”—a wicked philosophy held by many who reject the truths of the resurrection, the final judgment, heaven and hell, saying, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (I Cor. 15:32). Stetzer writes, “Ashley Madison was right. Life is short.” “But,” he quickly adds, “the proper response to the brevity of this life is to focus on those things that will last beyond it.”

Ashley Madison—the name of a website, not a real person—offers married people an opportunity for a secret adulterous affair by connecting them to other affair seekers. Ashley Madison has used modern technology to lead our sexually perverse culture from bad to worse, from the secretive and easily-accessible use of Internet pornography to the now secretive and easily accessible act of adultery itself. Ashley Madison has disregarded the Tenth Commandment, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s wife,” and instead enticed married men to satisfy their sexual fantasies by entering a virtual temple to the sex-goddess Aphrodite.

² <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/august/life-is-eternal-dont-have-affair.html>.

Millions signed up. Most of them men. Also Christian men. Then last July their data was leaked on the worldwide web. And their secrets were revealed. Some government officials. Some pastors, like the renowned R. C. Sproul, Jr.³ Other famous persons, like Josh Duggar. That is not to say they all went through with it and had an affair. Many of them claim they did not. But many of them did. And for a few of them, the shame was so intense that they felt they could not go on, and they committed suicide.

The warning of the Word of God went unheeded. Solomon cries out to all married men in the covenant of grace, “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers’ with thee. Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth” (Prov. 5:15-18). He also warns that “whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away” (Prov. 6:32-33).

Tim Challies, a Canadian pastor and co-founder of Cruciform Press, had this to say in his August 21 blog entry, “One of the great deceptions of the Internet is that it allows us to think there are two parts to us, the part who exists in real time and space, and the part who exists in cyberspace. But events like this ought to make us realize that when you go online you display and expose who and what you really are. And who you really are will eventually find you out. God will not be mocked.”⁴

His wife Aileen also wrote a blog entry, expressing her sadness over the whole thing: “Now there are more broken homes, more devastated churches, more weeping wives, more mocking of God. And I have to tell you, this week, today, I am struggling to find hope.” She spoke directly to Christian husbands involved in sexual sins: “I plead with you. I plead with you on behalf of your wives, on behalf of your future wives, on behalf of Christian women everywhere: Stop. Just stop.”⁵

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/august/ligonier-suspends-rc-sproul-jr-over-ashley-madison.html>.


⁴ <http://www.challies.com/articles/ashley-madison-and-who-you-are-online>.

⁵ <http://www.challies.com/articles/my-wifes-plea-to-christian-men>.

All around us, the devil is attacking the Christian home. Are you, beloved reader, fighting hard and standing firm against these assaults? Of all Christians and churches, we who call homosexuality a sin and take a stand against God-defying homosexual marriage; we who maintain that marriage—an intimate relationship between one man and one woman for life—is a beautiful figure of the covenant of grace, the relationship between Christ and His church; we who repudiate divorce for any cause except adultery, and who say no to remarriage after divorce—we of all people ought to be fighting hard and standing firm against the allurements of the devil in this Internet age. *Hypocrite* is the word that correctly identifies one who speaks out loudly against all kinds of sexual perversion while privately indulging his lusts.

Have you, Christian man, become ensnared in the secretive sin of Internet pornography? Have you become bored with your life and discontent in your marriage? Do you feel the allure of a website like Ashley Madison?

Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are the Lord’s” (I Cor. 6:18-20).

Flee to Christ. The dirty, stinking, shameful sins of every repentant sinner are forgiven freely by the supremely glorious grace of God through the blood that Christ shed for us on the cross. Flee to Him and repent. Even if you have fallen a hundred thousand times. Repent in dust and ashes. Cry out to God, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness.... Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Ps. 51:1, 4). Then resolve to put off your old man with his filthy, rotten, wicked deeds. Never let your eyes be diverted from Christ who “loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5). Let us all be warned by the Ashley Madison episode that no sin is done in secret, “but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). 

Upon This Rock (21)

Robbing Christ of His Honor (13)

Who, in his right mind or even not quite so, would ever try to teach something of the beauty of a symphony by Beethoven, or a piano concerto of Mozart... to a donkey?

Have you taken a moment to ponder that? Then think of this, from John Calvin:

What must be “carefully attended to,” he writes in his commentary on I Corinthians 1:20, is that “man with all his shrewdness is as stupid about understanding by himself the mysteries of God as an ass is incapable of understanding musical harmony.”

Earlier this week, I visited an elderly saint, long active in the church, now under hospice care. We talked about... heaven. What we know about heaven. What we do *not* know. And what we *cannot* know. Reminded me of Calvin’s analogy. Surely the things of *heaven* are as far beyond our ken as Beethoven’s music is beyond the ability of an ass to appreciate. Eye hath not seen. Nor ear heard. Neither have entered into the heart of man, the things of... heaven.

That those words of Paul in I Corinthians 2:9 can be made to apply to heaven is clear on the surface. Streets of gold? Gates of pearl? We know very well that heaven will have no gold. Heaven will have no pearls. At least, not as we know them in the here and now. For the very “elements” of this old world are going to “melt with fervent heat.” Not in order that they be annihilated, but transformed, for existence in a reality that is beyond the comprehension of our earthly senses.

What then? Will the gates be of *transformed* pearl, and the street of *transformed* gold? Fact is, the verse in Revelation 21 that speaks thus is not John’s vision of the new heavens and the new earth as such but of the glory

of the *church* in her triumphant, perfect state, under the figure of a celestial city. And when John does speak of heaven itself, he does so *metaphorically*. Out of necessity. Because the earthly is all that our finite minds can get a hold of. (The elderly saint to whom I referred above expressed his confidence that, when he opened his eyes in glory, no longer limited by finitude, he would find himself not bewildered, but... home.)

Think of that symphony of Beethoven. Played on a radio... in a barn. Calvin’s analogy works, does it not, when we consider our ability even to *imagine* “the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”... in heaven.

But did you notice that when the apostle Paul wrote of those things that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and have never entered the hearts of men, he did not have in mind heaven? At least, not specifically so. Our minds, I think, often instinctively go to that (heaven) when we ponder I Corinthians 2:9. Which is understandable, because heaven does indeed belong to those “things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” and because we so much ‘get’ the limitations of earthly senses and finite minds trying to grasp a reality that is so totally ‘other.’ The context, however, makes it clear that Paul is speaking of something different. “We speak,” he writes, “the wisdom of God” (v. 7). A wisdom wrapped up in “mystery.” A “hidden wisdom.” A wisdom that “none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” And, in chapter 1, verses 23, 24, a wisdom that is, essentially, “Christ crucified.” In other words, the gospel. A gospel preached by Paul (1:17). And believed by us (1:21). With our... finite minds.

Not, you see, quite like heaven, which, in the very *nature* of the case, is beyond the reach of our earthly senses. Paul, however, is referring to more than that. As is Calvin. It is concerning the *gospel itself* that Calvin says that man has, with respect to it, all of the abilities of an ass listening

Mr. Doezema is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.


Previous article in this series: September 15, 2015, p. 493.

to classical music. I couldn't help but wonder if Calvin might, here, be exaggerating a little, for the sake of emphasis. After all, hardly can it be said that Genesis 3:15 was *unintelligible* to Adam and Eve. And when Jesus, in the upper room after His resurrection, "breathed on" His disciples (John 20:22), it was not new powers of intellect that He imparted to them. He opened the understanding (Luke 22:45) of their still very much finite minds so that they could understand how Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled in *Him*. The mystery that had been "kept secret since the world began" was at long last revealed (Rom. 16:25). And with our earthly senses and finite minds we too lay hold of it. "A mystery," as Rev. Herman Hoeksema once wrote, "is *not* anything that is contrary to our understanding, some incomprehensible thing that we may never know, which we can never grasp, of which our human understanding can never lay hold." We are not, in other words, so it would seem, as stupid as asses.

Calvin's analogy, however, cannot be so easily dismissed, as if it were in fact nothing more than hyperbole. Truth is, one would be hard pressed to come up with an

analogy more apt with respect to the revelation of "the mystery." And Calvin does not contradict Hoeksema.

Perhaps if I were to reread previous articles in this series I would discover that we've already touched on this matter. But in my pondering, now, of the first two chapters of I Corinthians, I find myself wondering if I had, before, gotten to the bottom of it. And maybe that's because one of the delightful features of 'searching the Scriptures' is that one can never reach the 'bottom.' That is why this series, which I had anticipated to be short, is turning out to be not quite so. I find myself wondering still about questions like these: What exactly is the nature of that mystery? Why, and how, was it kept "hidden" for 4,000 years? What, exactly, was it that constituted robbing Christ of His honor in the old dispensation? How can it be said that, had the "princes of this world" known the "mystery" they "would not have crucified the Lord of glory"? And what does all this mean for us?

I hope you can bear with me, therefore, as I conclude this article with yet another "...to be continued." 

SPECIAL ARTICLE

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

The Minister and His Marriage (3)

The Minister's Calling with Regard to His Wife

We are at present considering the calling that the minister has toward the wife that God has graciously given him. We have seen that the expression in I Timothy 3:2 that the minister is to be "the husband of one wife" does not only underscore one of the important qualifications for ministers of the gospel; it also implies the calling that the minister has toward his wife. He is called to be a husband, with all that that implies, in relationship to his

wife. In the previous installment we saw that this means, negatively, that the minister is not to be a tyrant who lords it over his wife. That is not to be a husband, truly a husband, of his wife. And, positively, we saw that to be the husband of one wife implies *faithfulness* on the part of the minister/husband. Being a husband to his wife means that before the world and before the church he shows himself to be a devoted husband, a husband who will not allow anyone and anything to stand between him and the wife whom God has given to him.

Included in the faithfulness to his wife to which God calls every minister of the gospel is the prohibition of divorce and remarriage. This ought to go without saying, but sadly the situation in the church world of our day requires that we make this explicit application of the calling of the minister to be the husband of one wife. He

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This is the third installment of the address that was given on the occasion of the graduation of Candidate Mr. Ryan Barnhill from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary on June 11, 2015.

Previous installment was printed in the September 15, 2015 issue, p. 490.

may not be the husband of more than one wife because he is involved in extra-marital trysts. The minister who is involved in such despicable behavior is not walking as “the husband of one wife,” as he is required to be by I Timothy 3:2. Neither may he be the husband of more than one wife because he has divorced his first wife and married again. He must be the husband of the one wife to whom he was originally married, so long as that wife is living. This is the clear requirement of the New Testament upon all husbands in the church. This is especially the duty of the minister of the gospel, who by virtue of his office is called to be an example to God’s people.

It is a scandal in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today that there is so much unbiblical divorce and re-marriage among the membership. The greater scandal, however, is that so much of the clergy are unbiblically divorced and remarried. Men who are supposed to represent the great Bridegroom, who is always faithful to his wife and never violates His relationship to “the wife of [His] covenant” (Mal. 2:14), divorce their wives. Contrary to the express teaching of Scripture, they forsake “the wife of [their] youth” (Mal. 2:14) and take other wives. This is a clear violation of the apostle’s teaching in I Timothy 3:2, which requires the minister to be “the husband of *one* wife.”

Being the husband of one wife demands of the minister that he spend time with his wife. It is not enough that formally he is the husband of one wife, that on paper he is the husband of one wife. But what is required is that he must *actually* be husband to the one wife that God has given to him. That is necessary and that is vital. It is necessary for the example of the minister in the congregation. The minister is called to be “an example to the believers in word and conversation [that is, walk of life]” (I Tim. 4:12). In a uniquely important respect, the minister is called to be an example to the believers in his marriage and in his relationship to his wife. If the husbands in the congregation are going to live as they ought in relationship to their wives, they must be able to follow the example of their pastor. That example includes, though it is not limited to, his friendship toward and companionship (to use the language of Mal. 2:14) of his wife.

That the minister spend time with his wife is also necessary for the minister’s wife herself, who can too quickly feel neglected by her husband because of the busyness of

his work in the church. If night after night she is home alone, because her minister-husband is consumed with the work of the church and does not find time to spend with his wife, they will grow apart. And the minister’s wife will begin to feel like a widow, rather than a wife.

And it is necessary that the minister spend time with his wife for the health of their marriage. In that respect, marriage is like the life of sanctification generally: if we are not going forward, growing and developing, we are going backward and degenerating. It is one or the other. For the development of their relationship and the intimacy between them, the minister must find time to spend with his wife.

Finding time to spend with one’s wife can be a challenge for the minister, especially for the minister who is in the first few years of the ministry. But if the minister is to be a husband to his wife, he must take time for her and to be with her. He must spend time with her not only for devotions, though that, of course, is necessary. He must spend time with her not only at mealtimes, although that too is necessary. He must not only take time to go to church with her, although that too is vital for their marriage. But he must spend time with her in mutually enjoyable activities. They must do things together and go places together. He must spend time with his wife talking to her and with her. He must give her the opportunity to unburden her soul to him. He must give her the opportunity to discuss with him her problems, heartaches, and struggles. He must not only talk with her, but in the real sense of the word he must fellowship with her.

Included in the time that a minister spends with his wife is the time they spend together in private worship. They must not just spend leisure time together, but they must spend time together in the Word and in prayer. They must do this not only at meal times and with their children, if God graciously gives them children. But they must do this together, just the two of them, husband and wife before the face of God.

Being a husband to your wife, a loving and Christian husband, means also that when you sin against her, you confess your sins and seek her forgiveness. That also is being a husband to your wife, the kind of husband God intends. And that, too, is being an example to the believers. If you love your wife, and you do, you will *want* to confess your sins against her, seek her forgiveness, lift the

strain in your marriage, and restore the peace in your relationship. With regard to the faults of your wife, be ready always to look past minor weaknesses and character flaws. In one place Luther says that with regard to each other spouses should be a little blind. Someone else has said that a husband should have both eyes open to behold his wife's beauty, but only one eye to behold her faults.

The Good Fruit that Comes to the Minister Who Is a Husband to His Wife

There is good fruit that comes to the minister who is a husband to his wife. In the first place, the fruit is the encouragement and joy of the minister himself. Amid all the demands, the trials, and the disappointments of the ministry, the minister can find joy in his marriage and family. His marriage and family life is a blessed oasis in the midst of the demands of the ministry, a happy relief from the day-to-day pressures of the ministry.

Especially is the minister's wife an encouragement when he becomes discouraged in the work. That happens; that invariably happens from time to time, that the minister becomes discouraged. There may be any number of reasons. The minister's wife does not need to know the specific reason for her husband's discouragement. In fact, there are many times when he must not and should not share with his wife the specifics of the reason for his discouragement. This is the unique burden of the ministry. The minister should not and does not ordinarily want to burden his wife with the troubles and challenges that he is facing. A minister loves his wife too much to want to burden her with the care of the church. To be sure, now and again he may ask her advice or feedback. But no minister ought to burden his wife with all of the pastoral situations and other matters with which he is involved. And a good minister's wife will not ask her husband either. She has a good sense of what she ought not to know. But this does not take away from the fact

that the minister's wife is placed by God in a position in which she can be a special encouragement to him. And by her love and understanding, by her friendship and fellowship, she will be an encouragement to her husband.

The benefit for the minister is that, unencumbered by the cares of his household, the minister is able to devote himself to the work of the ministry. What tremendous value a good minister's wife is in this regard! Neither the minister nor his wife ought to underestimate the value of her service in this regard. That the minister can safely entrust to his wife the guiding of the household and the care of the children so that he can devote himself to the work of the ministry is of tremendous value. What a service the minister's wife renders to her husband and to the church in this regard!


Second, the benefit of the minister being a husband to his wife is the benefit enjoyed by the congregation. That benefit is twofold. First, through the minister's wife, the work of the ministry is actually advanced in the congregation. In that respect, different ministers' wives have different abilities. Some are very gifted and are able to use those gifts in the congregation. Others are very ordinary, if I may put it that way, but are cheerful and always ready to listen, given to hospitality, and always ready to help out the sick and suffering of God's people. The very ordinary minister's wife, who is a loving wife and devoted mother, and who shows herself to be a friend and friendly in the congregation, is a tremendous asset to the minister of the gospel.

...The benefit of the minister's being a husband to his wife is the power of his example and their example in the congregation.

And then, in addition, the benefit of the minister being a husband to his wife is the power of his example and *their* example in the congregation. The minister and his wife who live in a loving and faithful relationship are an example in the congregation—increasingly, in the evil age in which we are called to live, an exceptional example. And by the power of that example, they are a rich blessing in the life of the congregation. Through them the members generally, but especially the husbands and wives of the congregation,

are richly blessed. It may even be that those who are not living in their marriage as they ought, by the example of their pastor and his wife, are brought to see the error of their way, are brought to repentance, and encouraged to follow their godly example.

Thirdly, the minister who lives as a godly husband with his wife glorifies God. In his marriage, he is a fit picture of Christ, the Head and Husband of the church. He and

his wife are together a picture of Christ and His bride, the church. Together they are an example of Christ who loves His church, gives Himself for His church, and expends Himself on behalf of the church. As a faithful and loving Husband, Christ serves, honors, and saves the church. May that be the fruit of your marriage and of your life and love together with your wife in your marriage. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

The Place of the Aged Generations in the Covenant Family

In this article I want to consider one more reason why the Christian home is the ideal institution that God created for the raising of covenant children. Remember that I speak of that which is *ideal*. No home achieves that ideal. The best home in this world of sin is still imperfect. But the ideal is what God Himself has created the covenant home to be. We must strive after this ideal, conscious of the fact that we do this only through the exercise of our faith and earnest prayer.

The foundational truth of the Christian home is the truth of God's everlasting covenant of grace. According to the truth of God's covenant of grace, He is pleased to gather His people in the line of the continued generations of believers. In this series of articles, we have considered the many implications of this blessed truth. Most of these have been about the raising of children in the covenant home. Besides the children in the covenant family, there are also parents and grandparents and, if the Lord gives long life on earth, great-grandparents. Each member of the covenant family has his place and calling in the covenant home.

When the spiritual reality of the covenant is known and truly experienced, there is great blessing in the covenant home. God is known there. His truth binds the

generations of the covenant together in a blessed bond that the world does not and even cannot know. The blessed reality of the covenant is life and friendship and fellowship with God. Even to the end of their earthly pilgrimage aged saints have a place of great significance and a calling in this covenant home. They have the honor of having raised their children in the fear of the Lord. When these children with grace and humility in their hearts receive the covenant instruction of their parents, they are themselves blessed with the favor of God upon them. They arise with thankfulness to God to call their parents blessed. Great honor is given to true covenant parents. Because God preserves His truth in the covenant family, its blessing is known and remains strong from generation to generation.

There are also many trials and burdens and sorrows that we bear in our life in the world. Yet there is great comfort and hope and joy in the covenant home in the midst of all of these. The Lord, our faithful covenant God, sustains us. Each member of the covenant family has his calling to encourage and strengthen the others.

In describing the blessedness of the home of the God-fearing, the psalmist has this to say: "Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth" (Ps. 127:3). According to the figure used by

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

the psalmist, God blesses us with children in the days of our youth. In the days of our youth the Lord gives us the amazing power to bring forth children and the strength to raise them from day to day. And indeed there is much strength and wisdom required for this task. When our God-given children grow to adulthood, they are our protection from the enemy. When we begin to lose our strength, our children and grandchildren support us. Hopefully, we have been wise enough during our life in managing our finances so as not to burden our children for financial support. In the case when parents have suffered loss and been reduced to poverty, in the providence of God, aged saints are left without the necessary means to support themselves. Then children must also care for their aged parents financially, and do so without grudging. Those who do not do this are judged by Paul to have denied the faith and to be worse than infidels (see I Tim. 5:8).

But especially must our children give spiritual, psychological, and emotional support to their parents and grandparents in later life. The days of old age for most are some of the most difficult of their earthly life. For many aged saints, there comes a time when they cannot care for themselves. Our children bless us in our families with covenantal joy and encouragement. The psalmist in Psalm 127 speaks of the fact that we need not be afraid of “enemies in the gate.” We are surrounded and protected by our children and grandchildren. What a blessing of God this is for the covenant family!

In Psalm 128 the inspired psalmist describes the blessedness of the God-fearing man. The blessing of God to the home of the God-fearing man is not the enjoyment of great riches or glory in this world. These are in themselves vanity, when men set their hearts on them and when we do not fear God and He does not bless us. That the love of money is the root of all evil is shown in the world when children who receive an inheritance from their parents are often embroiled in bitter strife over how this money is divided among them. They resent it when parents decide to give all or some of the left-over resources to other causes.

The older we get in life, the less attraction the things of the world have for us. We are not like the aged of the world, often seen in gambling houses still trying to gain some unexpected riches they will not even live long

enough to enjoy. God teaches us that we brought nothing into this world and that it is sure that we can bring nothing out.

The blessing of God on the God-fearing man is that he sees his children’s children and peace upon the Israel of God. There is a great wonder of grace in Reformed churches where the truth of God’s covenant is known and maintained. In these churches one often sees three or more generations worshiping together and confessing together the unchanging truth of God’s wonderful salvation in Jesus Christ. Apostasy from this truth of the covenant often results in young people leaving the church already in their youth. Churches where there is such apostasy have mostly grey-headed members. The loss of the covenant youth from the church is the cause of great sorrow and anguish for aged saints who themselves have continued in the fear of the Lord. This is especially the case when God’s judgment comes on those who have passed their days in covetousness, careless about spiritual things, having little concern for the church. Their worldly lifestyle brings the chastening hand of God upon them in days of old age. Some realize this only after it is too late to do anything about it. The joy and strength of Israel is gone from many Reformed churches because of the awful apostasy and worldliness of their members.

Children who have been instructed in the truth of God and who grow up to walk in this truth are the great joy of their parents. John says, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth” (III John 4). All the members of the covenant home are by grace partakers of this joy, not the least of them the aged generation in the church.

In Reformed churches where the truth of God’s covenant is maintained and known, God gives the great blessing not only of the loving care of parents for their God-given covenant children but also the joyful blessing of children caring for the aged generation among them, giving to them the honor due to them in their old age. Properly instructed covenant children show their love for God and thankfulness to Him for the heritage of the covenant they have received through their godly parents and grandparents.

The contrast to all of this is one of the greatest evils of this world. This is the evil of children who, when they are independent and self-sufficient later in life, de-

spise their parents and rebel against them, neglecting all responsibility of caring for them. These children forsake the covenant traditions of their parents and become totally worldly and ungodly. Even in nominally Christian America one comes across the sad and tragic situations where the aged are put away in rest homes, neglected and forgotten. Children occupy themselves in the pursuit of their own selfish ambitions and make themselves too busy to care for aged parents and grandparents. They have no time to visit them and forget the debt of thankfulness they owe to their parents for the many labors and sacrifices. They have no honor and respect for the aged generation. The busier and more complicated and fast-paced life in modern society becomes, the greater is often the desire to be rid of the responsibility and burden of caring for the aged. I know this from my experience as a pastor. I have visited too many senior saints of God languishing on beds of illness with no one who cares enough for them to visit them regularly and encourage them in all the trials and afflictions of old age. These often speak of the pain and anguish and loneliness they suffer. Few other sorrows are as great.

When God maintains the reality of the covenant among us from generation to generation, we enjoy a great reward in the later years of our life. In the covenant home children must be taught their responsibility to care for and to honor to their parents. They must be inspired by the love and fear of the Lord in their hearts to give the honor and respect that is due to their parents.

In the sphere of the covenant by the grace of God aged saints are an example in their families and in the church. Scripture exhorts aged men and aged women to instruct the younger generations in the home and family (see Tit. 2:1-5). At times old age can make one feel useless and without purpose in life. But aged saints of God who are active in their covenant calling even to the end of their life, and who love the church that they are part of, are given purpose and meaning in life, which by the grace of God is profoundly meaningful and blessed.

*We who know and love
the covenant of God
consider it a
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among us.*

A psalm that I have often used in connection with visiting elderly saints has this beautiful prayer of an elderly saint: "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to everyone that is to come" (Ps. 71:17, 18). For those who are filled with the grace and wisdom of God there cannot possibly be a more significant and blessed purpose in life than the one expressed in the prayer of this aged saint of God.

We who know and love the covenant of God consider it a most significant and powerful example to see godly aged saints among us. We see these members revealing their love and devotion to God and their steadfastness in the truth. We witness the sure hope of glory they have. When God finally takes them from us to glory, we have great comfort concerning them.

In the covenant and church of God where that covenant is known, aged saints of God are the source of great encouragement and inspiration. We can sometimes make lame excuses for not being in church on a given Lord's Day or for attending only one worship service. Then we are put to shame by the aged members of the church who come in with walkers and in wheelchairs. In the providence of the Lord, only very great affliction would keep them from the house of God and the great desire for hearing His Word. No earthly career of young men and women that gives worldly glory and riches and occupies all of their time and interest can compare to the blessedness of such aged saints. It is a vain thing to rise up early and sleep late only to build an earthly house and great city. These shall all pass away in the judgment of God.

This, then, is a blessing of God's covenant of grace among us in our generations. May the Lord keep us faithful to our calling whether we are children or aged saints of God. Let us pray earnestly that this blessing of God may never be taken away from us because of apostasy. ∞

The Elder's Ordination (3)

Significant for the Congregation

And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

I Thessalonians 5:12-13

Examining the necessity and significance of a public ceremony of installation for elders, in our last article we noted five points of significance for the elder himself: the church confirms her call of him; the elder expresses his confidence of being called of God; the elder expresses his resolve to do his work faithfully; the elder is assured that God will equip him; and the church promises to pray for him.

All these are indeed part of the significance of the installation ceremony. But there is more; there is significance for the congregation.

This “more” the last article assumed to be true, without stating it explicitly. This “more” is the occasion for the Holy Spirit repeatedly to admonish God's people regarding our calling toward our elders, as He does in I Thessalonians 5:12-13 (see above), in Hebrews 13:7 (“Remember them which have the rule over you”), and in Hebrews 13:17 (“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves”).

In the ceremony of public installation, God speaks. He speaks, not only in the instruction given in the “Form of Ordination (Installation) of Elders and Deacons,” and not only in the appropriate sermon that the minister preaches on this occasion. He speaks also in the *act of installation itself*.

This speech of God is not a sacramental word; the in-

stallation ceremony is not a sign and seal of God's grace. And this speech of God is certainly not audible—with our earthly ears we do not hear a voice from heaven saying: “These are my beloved elders; obey ye them.” But God speaks *symbolically*.

To this speech the congregation must listen. What is He saying? What must the congregation hear and know?

Authorized!

In the public installation ceremony, God instructs the congregation that He has *authorized* these men to do the work of the office of elder in Christ's church, as Christ's representative.

By the word “authorized” I mean to convey most strongly the idea that these men are appointed to do the work of God, in the name of God Himself. To say they have been *permitted* to do the work does not do justice; it is too weak. To say they are *called* by the church to do the work by the church is certainly true. But that they are *authorized* means that God has eternally determined that they should do this work, appointed them in time to do this work, and given them the necessary spiritual equipment to do this work, because their work is *His* work on behalf of *His* covenant in *His* church.

Paul stated this authority of the elders of Ephesus this way, describing their relationship to the saints of Ephesus: “over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). Defending Moses' authority to Aaron and Miriam, God called Moses “my servant” (Num. 12:7-8)—when all Israel was, in a sense, God's servant.

The church must know that her elders are the representatives of the exalted Lord to His church on earth, and receive them as she would receive Christ Himself. The installation ceremony confirms that the elders have

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.

Previous article in this series: June 2015, p. 404.

this authority. The congregation sees that these men are put into office. Even more, the congregation *puts* these men into office, through her officebearers.

At times, some members of the congregation challenge this authority. As Moses' authority was challenged by none less than Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12), and by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16); as the apostle Paul's authority was challenged by many; so is the authority of true officebearers in Christ's church challenged throughout history. Even more, if our Lord's authority as Mediator was challenged by the high priests and Pharisees, those who stand in the Lord's place in the church today can expect some to challenge their authority.

Sometimes this challenge to authority is blatant: the members of the congregation refuse to speak with the elders, or to meet with the elders. Other times this challenge to their authority is more subtle: always willing to listen and receive the elders, the people nonetheless do not heed the elders' good counsel. Again, some challenge the elders' authority *per se*, as if the elders have no authority at all. Other times people challenge some aspect of their authority—in this instance, or in that case.

To leave all such without excuse, God makes clear to the congregation that these men have authority from Him to do their work, and that the congregation must receive them as having authority. To this the congregation is exhorted, when the "Form of Ordination (Installation) of Elders and Deacons" is read: "On the other hand, beloved Christians, receive these men as the servants of God; count the elders that rule well worthy of double honor; give yourselves willingly to their inspection and government."¹ And in the prayer, the minister prays: "Grant also especially Thy divine grace to this people over whom they are placed, that they may willingly submit themselves to the good exhortations of the elders, counting them worthy of honor for their work's sake...."²

Laboring in the Lord Lovingly!

The congregation must also know that the elders use this authority in *love* for the congregation, with the love of Christ Himself.

¹ *The Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America), 293.

² *Confessions*, 294.

This too we might doubt or question at times. Realizing that the elders have authority, we might still think of them as being filled with a sense of their own greatness (proud); as making judgments and decisions merely on the basis of their own preferences (self-seeking); as being entirely unconcerned with the true well-being of the congregation (unloving).

I will not deny that this is a danger for elders. Elders, beware the danger! Be not proud, but humble; make judgments not on the basis of your preferences, but according to what is best for the congregation; on the basis of God's Word seek their well-being, as Christ does!

But it is the obligation of those whom God has appointed to the office of elder to use their authority *in love*; and godly men in the office do strive to do so, with the power of Christ in them.

That the elders use their authority in love for the people is implied in the phrase "over you in the Lord," which speaks of the relationship of the elders to the people. The phrase indicates that the elders are "over" the people, as rulers are above those whom they rule. But that they are "over" the people does not mean that the elders as men are greater than the people; they are over the people "in the Lord," representing the Lord, and for the sake of the Lord's work. Recognizing this, the elders will strive to manifest Christ's love to the people.

All the more clearly this point is expressed by the references to the work of the elders in I Thessalonians 5:12, where the elders are said to "admonish" the people. Admonitions are given in love; apart from love, admonitions become chiding and railing. Hebrews 13:7 speaks of the rulers having "spoken unto you the word of God." To speak God's Word to God's people is surely to give evidence of the genuine love of Christ. And Hebrews 13:17 indicates that the elders "watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief." To watch for one's spiritual well-being, and then to desire to give account of the soul of another with joy, indicates genuine love.

But how does God convey this in the installation ceremony? The ceremony is God's Word that He, the gracious, merciful, loving God of the covenant, has placed over His beloved covenant people men who will care for us—men who are authorized to care for us, but who will not care for us as jailors care for the jailed, or as slave-

masters care for their slaves, but rather as a loving father cares for his beloved children.

Partly for this reason, the elders are asked publicly, before the church, “whether you do not feel in your hearts that ye are lawfully called of God’s church, and consequently of God Himself,” to their office.³ And the congregation prays, through the words of the minister, that “the Almighty God and Father replenish you all with His grace....”⁴

Esteem-worthy!

All of that being true, God’s Word to the congregation in the Scriptures, confirmed by the installation ceremony, is that the elders are worthy of honor: “And esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (I Thess. 5:13). And, “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor...” (I Tim. 5:17).

If honor is due to our divine King (I Tim. 1:17; 6:16); if we are to honor also widows (I Tim. 5:3) and the

³ *Confessions*, 292.

⁴ *Confessions*, 293.


members of the body that we think to be less honorable (I Cor. 12:23); and if loving husbands are to honor their wives (I Pet. 3:7), then certainly those whom God places in authority over us, representing Him, ought be honored.

This honor is not due to their person, but to their office: “for their work’s sake.” For this reason, our honor for one elder must be the same as our honor for another—our honor for the elder who is quick to give supportive encouragement no different from our honor for the elder who is assigned to rebuke and admonish the wayward; and our honor for the elder with the happy face no greater than our honor for the elder who seems always to be frowning.

The “Ordination Form” underscores this as well; the first two quotes above make the point sufficiently, so that we need not repeat them here.

God speaks.

The church listens.

And we receive our elders as servants of God—and honor them! 

CLASSIS EAST REPORT

MR. JON HUISKEN

September 9, 2015
Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church


Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 9, 2015 at Byron Center PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. A. den Hartog was the chairman for this session.

Most of the business was routine. The exception was

a request from a consistory to increase censure to the second step for one of its members. Classis advised this consistory to proceed with this action.

Expenses for this classis amounted to \$55.72.

Classis will meet next on Wednesday, January 13, 2016 at the Trinity PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Mission Activities

Monday, August 31 was a public holiday in the Philippines. Since many were not at work that day, the young adults of the area churches planned a “sports fest” for those

Mr. Van Edgom is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa.

in the Manila area. Under God’s blessing, the day was a great success! The weather, fellowship, and the turnout from the Berean PRC, Provident Christian Church of Marikina, and the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan were excellent. Rev. Vernon Ibe led in opening devotions and the games began. Included were chess, bad-

minton, volleyball, table tennis, and basketball. Rev. Daniel Kleyn was able to join the fun after a couple of hours in a Classis Standing Committee meeting in the morning. Since his specialty, arm wrestling, was not included in the schedule, he signed up to compete in table tennis (ping pong), only to be eliminated by someone with an identical last

name. Oh well, as they say..., maybe next time!

7M (Metro Manila Monthly Monday Morning Minister's Meeting) actually continues to meet twice a month with the pastors Kleyn, Trinidad, Ibe, Flores, Filiano, and Andres present. The group is studying the Church Order and also using Prof. Gritter's lectures on Catechetics. The location of the meetings used to vary. Now the group meets each time in Provident Christian Church of Marikina, as that location works best for all.

On September 13 Rev. Arie den Hartog along with three Council members from Southwest PRC attended the worship services at the Pittsburgh, PA mission, overseeing the work of the missionary and the members of the mission, including the administration of the Lord's Supper. May the Lord continue to bless this work, and may it be an encouragement for our Pittsburgh missionary, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma.

Minister Activities

Rev. Carl Haak announced on September 13 that the Lord of the harvest had led him to decline the call that had been extended to him to become the second missionary to the Philippines. This letter of decline was read in the calling church at Doon, IA, whose congregation has now been calling for a second missionary for over one year. Rev. Daniel Kleyn and his wife Sharon continue to labor in the metro Manila area of the Republic of the Philippines.

Congregation Activities

Men of the congregation in

Doon, IA gathered at the church and parsonage on Saturday morning, September 12, to plant shrubs and place landscaping rock around the church sign and the parsonage. They also backfilled the curb of the newly cemented parking lot and sowed new grass. It was a fresh, cool fall morning and all enjoyed God's creation and good fellowship. The donuts were delicious too!

There were hardly enough days in the week recently in the church life in First PRC of Edmonton, AB, Canada! On Sunday the Young People and Young Adults met at church. Monday the pre- and post-confession classes met to study the Canons of Dordt; the Ladies' Circle of the school also met that night. Tuesday found the Heidelberg Catechism and Essentials of Reformed Doctrine classes hard at work. Wednesday was Adult Bible Society, and Thursday included a consistory meeting. Friday saw the church visitors meeting with the council, while Saturday was the day for the Beginners, Juniors, and Seniors catechism classes to be held. Seven days of activities, just enough days in the week! We certainly notice the healthy busyness in all our churches now that catechism and Bible studies are in full swing.

Sister Church Activities

The following was found in the bulletin of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland and also printed in the *Ballymena Times* and *Ballymena Guardian* newspapers on September 8:

Teaching Classes at the CPRC: Our children go back to school in September but have you ever felt as an adult that you could do with some classes in the Christian faith? The Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in Ballymena is a church that emphasizes teaching, as well as doing. Besides our regular Sunday services (11 A.M. and 6 P.M.) and catechism classes for children, we have two weekly classes on Tuesday mornings and Wednesday evenings. We all know a certain amount about prayer but what about Christ's intercession for His people? How does Scripture assure us of His love, power and wisdom in praying for us, purifying our prayers and bringing us to our heavenly Father in prayer? This is the subject of Article 26 of the Belgic Confession, penned by Reformation martyr, Guido de Brés, in the Lowlands. The Belgic Confession class resumes this Wednesday (9 September) at 7:45 P.M. The Tuesday morning class (11 A.M.) is studying Hosea, the first-listed of the twelve minor prophets in the Old Testament. Jehovah told Hosea to marry a prostitute, so that, through his sad home life with his wife and her three children, God's relationship to wayward Israel would be mirrored. Questions and discussion are encouraged, and tea and coffee are served at both classes at the CPRC, 83 Clarence Street (off the Cullybackey Road) in Ballymena. For more information go on-line (www.cprc.co.uk). All are very welcome!

A nice job of local evangelism.

Rev. Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Limerick (Ireland) Reformed Fellowship, a mission of

the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland, spoke recently on the topic of “The Trinity” as part of his “Back to Basics” lecture series.

Evangelism Activities


The Evangelism Committee of the Edgerton, MN PRC sponsored a presentation in nearby Chandler,

MN on September 25. Pastor Doug Kuiper spoke on the topic “Search the Scriptures, a Presentation Regarding Bible Study.” Again, all those whose names did *not* begin with “B” were asked to bring bars or cookies.

Denominational Activities

Classis East met in regular session September 9 at Byron Center

PRC (MI) and is scheduled to convene next January 13, 2016 at Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI. For the report of the September 9 Classis, see page 46 of this issue.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to the Lane Brummel family in the loss of a wife and mother:

TRICIA BRUMMEL.

Also to the Pete Brummel family in the loss of a daughter-in-law and sister-in-law.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

Rev. James Laning, President
Gerald Brummel, clerk of records

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hope PRC, Walker, Michigan wish to extend their Christian sympathy to fellow council member Deacon Alex Kalsbeek and his wife Cyndi and family in the death of their infant newborn son,

EVAN JAY.

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 55:22: “Cast thy burdens upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

Rev. David Overway, President
David Moelker, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to the Jack and Hazel Andringa family and the Jim and Karen Andringa family in the loss of their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother:

REKA ANDRINGA.

May the Spirit apply the words of Christ to their heart. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. James Laning, President
Gerald Brummel, clerk of records

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Consistory and congregation of Edgerton PRC express their sympathy to Jim and Gloria Bleyenbergh and Matthew Bleyenbergh in the death of their mother and grandmother,

MARIE BRUMMEL.

May comfort be brought to them from Psalm 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, President
Allen Brummel, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Men’s Society of Hope PRC, Walker, MI, express Christian sympathy to member Kenneth Dykstra in the death of his mother,

MARILYN DYKSTRA.

May he find comfort in God’s Holy Word from Revelation 21:4: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Harry Langerak, President
Gary Nienhuis, Secretary

Notice

■ The September 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* was the last issue of Volume 91. If you want your loose issues bound, drop them off at the RFPA office before October 31.

Notice

■ The digital index of the *Standard Bearer* Volumes 1-91 is now available for \$10 at www.rfpa.org.