

# *The Standard Bearer*

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## CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Being of Good Cheer in the Storms of Life <b>REV. JOHN MARCUS</b>	362
<i>Editorial</i>	The 2010 Synod: Opportunities to Inspect, Test, Build, and Give Thanks <b>PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA</b>	364
<i>Letters</i>	Sarcasm Sanctified?	367
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (7) <b>PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA</b>	368
<i>Feature Article</i>	Organization of Heritage PRC <b>REV. ALLEN BRUMMEL</b>	369
<i>Decendy and Order</i>	Financial Assistance for the Poor Who Move <b>PROF. RONALD CAMMENG</b>	371
<i>Word Fitly Spoken</i>	Mountain <b>REV. BILL LANGERAK</b>	374
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	Book Review <b>MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA</b>	375
<i>Ministering to the Saints</i>	Diaconal Conferences (2) <b>REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER</b>	376
<i>Taking Heed to the Doctrine</i>	Dispensational View of the Rapture (2) <b>REV. JAMES LANING</b>	379
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities <b>MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER</b>	382

# Being of Good Cheer in the Storms of Life

But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

Matthew 14:27

Jesus spoke these words to His disciples as He walked out to them in the midst of a storm on the Sea of Galilee. Today, He speaks these words to us: "Be of good cheer." That is to say, take courage, be firm and resolute in your adverse circumstances. Truly, there is nothing to fear knowing that Jesus cares for us. When the storms of life bring us low, causing us to wonder if we can stay the course, we need to fix our eyes of faith upon Jesus and be of good cheer.

After Jesus had finished feeding the five thousand, the people wanted to force Him to be their king. In response, Jesus constrained His disciples to get into a boat and go before Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

While the disciples made their way to the other side, Jesus sent the multitudes away and went up into a mountain to pray. What exactly Jesus included in His petitions to God the Scriptures do not say. But we can well imagine what He might have prayed. Likely, He prayed that God would be glorified and that the kingdom of heaven would be established. And, knowing Jesus' care for His disciples, we can be sure that He prayed for them as well, even as they made their way to the other side of the sea.

Striking, then, that while Jesus prayed, a storm should

arise on the sea. Jesus must have known there was a storm. Could He not have commanded the storm to cease as soon as it had arisen? Alternatively, could He not have kept the storm from arising in the first place? Surely, He who had rebuked the winds and the waves on a previous occasion (cf. Matt. 8:26) could have done the same again in order to expedite the disciples' crossing of the sea. But Jesus did not pray for the disciples to be kept from the storm. If He had, the storm would never have arisen.

That troubled sea still speaks to us today. As we look at God's dealings with His people in that day, we learn something about the way God deals with the church in all ages.

Note, in the first place, that being a member of the church of Jesus Christ is no guarantee that we will escape the storms of life. The Scriptures do not teach a health-and-wealth gospel. They do not teach that believers will have a life of ease. Far from it. In fact, Jesus warns His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Count on it, you will experience all sorts of troubles that inflict distress upon you. "But," Jesus says, "be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

In the second place, even though Jesus had constrained the disciples to cross the sea and they were doing so in obedience to Him, the wind was still contrary. So, too, we may be walking in obedience to the command of Christ, and yet, for all that, still experience troubles and turmoil. Even though Jesus prays for us in heaven, troubles still

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come. That doesn't mean that He is too weak to keep hardship from coming. Rather, we can be of good cheer knowing He has a greater purpose in mind for us.



The troubled sea became an occasion to strengthen the disciples' faith. But first, it manifested their weakness of faith.

When Jesus saw the disciples toiling against the wind, He went out to them walking on the sea. Instead of rejoicing to see Jesus, the disciples cried out in fear, "*It is a ghost!*" Even if it had been a ghost, they still had no reason to fear; for God was watching over them. In their fear, they were not trusting God as they should have. Amazing! Jesus Himself was coming to help them, and yet they cry out in fear.

We manifest the same fear at times. Even when God is approaching to help us, we don't recognize His nearness. So we fear all kinds of situations. In hard economic times we ask, "How will we provide for ourselves without a job?" Or, "What will happen to the house?" When God takes a loved one from us, we ask, "How in the world will I manage?" Or, when God is coming to deliver us from this valley of tears, the very thought of death strikes fear in our hearts. We believe; help Thou our unbelief.

Even more striking than the disciples in the boat is the example of Peter's weak faith. When Jesus said, "Come," Peter actually went out to Jesus walking on the water. However, when Peter noticed the boisterous sea, he was afraid and began to sink. He took his eyes off Jesus and began to focus on the stormy sea. He forgot that he was standing in the presence of Him who had complete authority over the wind and waves. Instead of trusting Jesus, he feared the wind. Yes, Peter had faith; but it was weak.

Too often we are just like Peter. When storms come and winds blow, we don't keep our focus on Christ. Instead, we fix our thoughts on the wind and waves. Sometimes we focus on the horribleness of our sin and its consequences. Other times, seemingly unbearable circumstances press upon us. In the midst of our distresses, we tend to think too much of the turmoil at hand, and forget to look to Christ, who rules over the turmoil. Focusing only on our troubles, we start a downward spiral that leads to despair. How little is our faith. How we need to consider the presence of our Lord and be of good cheer.



When Peter began to sink in fear, he cried out, "Lord,

save me!" Though Peter's faith was weak, by God's grace he recognized that his help was in the Lord. A lord is someone who has authority and power over someone or something else. Peter knew Jesus was the Sovereign, who was able to save him.

When we begin to sink under the burden of our problems, we need to call upon Him who has supreme power to help us in all our circumstances. Psalm 50:15: "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Not that calling upon God earns His help. But God has promised graciously to help us when we call upon him. God is the Sovereign One, who is surely able to help us. In addition, His willingness to help us ought to be evident from the fact that He already sent His only begotten Son to die for us.

Jesus showed His sovereign authority over creation in a number of ways. In the first place, the winds and waves did not keep Him from going out to help His disciples. He simply walked out to them on the sea. This miracle shows that the laws of nature are, in fact, God's laws. He rules over every aspect of creation.

When Peter saw Jesus' lordship over the winds and waves, he believed (for a moment) that with Jesus' help, he too could walk on the water. When we know God's sovereign rule over our circumstances, we too can be of good cheer, knowing He is able to equip us to serve Him.

In addition, Jesus showed His lordship over the situation when Peter called out to Him. "Immediately, Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him." From that we learn that no force of nature, no enemy, no circumstance, nothing at all in the whole of creation puts us beyond the loving reach of our sovereign Lord. Someone says, "But you don't know the mess I have gotten myself into." "You don't know the horribleness of my sin!" Maybe others don't know our turmoil. But God knows. And He is sovereign to help us.

How strong is our Lord? When Jesus and Peter climbed into the ship, the wind ceased. If Jesus is sovereign to control that part of Creation, surely He is sovereign over all our troubles. 1 Corinthians 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." That's the Savior we serve.

Therefore, be of good cheer. Jesus is at hand to help us.



# The 2010 Synod: Opportunities to Inspect, Test, Build, and Give Thanks

**T**he annual synod drawing near for the Protestant Reformed Churches has an unusual feature—its calling church and its meeting place are not the same. The calling church is Southeast PRC, but the place where synod is scheduled to meet is First PRC (Grand Rapids). In spite of the limitations of their church building, Southeast desired to host the synod of 2010. A main reason was that one of the two seminary students to be examined at synod (Mr. Dan Holstege) is from the Southeast congregation. A noble reason, and synod of 2009 readily consented to their request.

Synods are a blessing from the King of the church. In times gone by, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands had extended periods when the government prohibited holding a national synod. One dreadful time (after the great synod of Dordt, 1618-'19) was a stretch of over two hundred years without a national synod. In such a time, the church suffers, as the weeds of neglect and—far worse—of error begin to take root.

Sad to say, some Reformed churches have had synods that acted hierarchically, and as a result such churches consider them almost a necessary evil. Far from viewing the broadest assembly with suspicion,

the Protestant Reformed Churches rejoice that ecclesiastical assemblies can yet meet in peace and conduct the business of the church. It is a time to inspect and assess the work, a time to advance the building of the churches, and a time to give thanks to God for His work in and through the churches.

## Inspection and Assessment

Synod will be “checking on” the work of the churches especially as synod has commissioned the synodical committees to perform certain tasks on behalf of the churches. These various committees send their yearly reports on their labors to the stated clerk. That makes up the bulk of the synodical agenda. Synod then grants approval (either tacit or explicit) of their work, or disapproves and instructs the committee to change.

The Foreign Mission Committee reports on their many activities, the bulk of which involves the mission work in the Philippines. They report on the moves and settling of the two missionaries and their families (Revs. Richard Smit and Daniel Kleyn). The missionaries are deeply immersed in the work. The FMC and the missionaries have worked out a division of labors between the men—roughly that Rev. Smit concentrates on the Berean PRC in the Philippines, and Rev. Kleyn on the many contacts outside

of the Berean congregation. Both men have an abundance of work to do, and it is plain that they coordinate their activities well. The joint missionary report is a joy to read.

The Domestic Mission Committee reports on mission labors in several areas of the country. They report that the work progressed well over the last year in Pittsburgh, PA and in Sioux Falls, SD. The DMC report gives ample evidence of an energetic and zealous missionary and mission group in Pittsburgh. They are active in their outreach and in their promotion of the Reformed faith. Both the DMC and Southwest PRC consistory (the calling church) express much appreciation for the labors of Rev. and Mrs. Bruinsma, whose labors are certainly broader than the group in Pittsburgh.

The DMC has the privilege of reporting also that the mission group in Sioux Falls, SD was organized into a Protestant Reformed congregation in the spring of 2010. The report makes plain that the life of the mission group was very much like that of an established congregation even before organization. The group has used innovative advertisement that has been effective in making them known in Sioux Falls. The labors of Rev. Brummel are also much appreciated.



The DMC is working with the consistory of the Redlands PRC to see to it that a group in Tucson, AZ gets needed support and instruction. This is with a view, possibly, to the calling of a missionary to labor there.

The Committee for Contact with Other Churches reports on another busy year. The first responsibility of the CC is the maintenance of the sister-church relationship with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. Through the CC, the PRC enjoys an excellent relationship with the CPRC NI. Certainly this relationship is what a sister-church relationship ought to be, including mutual respect and appreciation, and being able to learn from each other. The PRC can learn from the CPRC NI's zeal for the truth; her active promotion of it; the astounding commitment that such a small group has to the work. May God continue to bless this faithful witness to the truth. The CC reports that, in harmony with the standing agreement, two members of the CC conducted the annual church visitation in Covenant.

Through the CC, Covenant requests that synod give their seminary student, Mr. Martyn McGeown, the full examination given to all PRC seminarians at the end of their schooling (as was done with Rev. Stewart in 2001). Such an exam testifies to Covenant that their student is qualified to be a candidate for the ministry of the Word. The benefit for our relationship is that if in the future Mr. McGeown should accept a call from a congregation in the PRC, there would be no hin-

drance to his coming to the PRC. Elder Brian Crossett plans to be present for the examination and the graduation exercises.

The CC maintained contact with our longstanding friends and allies in the gospel of grace in Australia—the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches. Last year, synod put the final touches on the “corresponding relationship” with the EPC. The EPC responded to this arrangement with appreciation and delight. Although more contact is desired, the only personal contact we had was an unofficial meeting with Rev. Chris Connors when he attended and spoke at the Calvin conference sponsored by the seminary. They have invited the PRC to attend their fiftieth anniversary celebration in April of 2011.

The CC reports that contact with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore continued to grow and develop. Several ministers agreed to preach and teach in the CERC for weeks at a time. Rising above all the rest are Prof. Hanko and his longsuffering wife, who continue, even at an age approaching 80, to demonstrate their love for the saints in Singapore by their tireless labors on their behalf.

The CC reports on discussions between the session of the CERC and the CC—discussions on various matters, from doctrine, to liturgy, to church government. These discussions are held in hopes that all significant differences and misunderstandings be removed, and that with a view to a sister-church relationship that can benefit both the PRC and the CERC. The prospect certainly appears to be good.

The CC reports also on continued contact with the Confessing Evangelical Reformed Church in Giessen, Germany. The contact is limited, and the progress slow. This is to be explained largely by the fact that the congregation in Giessen is small, and the few leaders, burdened with the care of the congregation, have little time left to read books and papers from the PRC (written in English, not their first language), and then hold discussions with the CC. Nonetheless, both they and the CC hold out hope of more significant discussions in the future.

This and more is included in the reports, including reports from such committees as the Board of Trustees, the Catechism Book Committee, and others.

## Proving

One of the things that synods are called to do is to test and prove the work of others. This includes, first, the testing of the seminary graduates. As noted above, two students will be examined—Mr. Dan Holstege and Mr. Martyn McGeown. Both the Theological School Committee and the seminary faculty recommend the men for examination. The Lord willing, they will be giving their sermon specimens on Tuesday, June 8, and facing vigorous oral examination from their professors on Wednesday and Thursday. Their graduation, if approved by synod, is set for Monday, June 14.

Another kind of proving that synods do involves the testing of past decisions. Such evaluation is

necessary when a member of the PRC brings a protest or appeal of past decisions. This is another benefit of Reformed church government—aggrieved members have the right to make a case that consistories, classes, or the past synod erred. Six members availed themselves of this right. One appeal raised the interesting church political question of whether a Classis may use Article 12 to encourage a minister to resign. Four others object to decisions of the synod of 2009. All the protests/appeals will be given the required serious attention and adjudicated. May the Spirit of Christ direct the delegates in wisdom.

## Building

Synod 2010 has many opportunities to build—to direct and further the work of the church of Jesus Christ. That work is particularly the work of sending forth the gospel of Jesus Christ. By examining the two students, and, the Lord willing, finding them able and orthodox, the synod will enable two men to go forth to preach the glorious gospel of grace.

Synod will have that opportunity also in facing the recommendation of the Theological School Committee to reappoint Prof. Ronald Cammenga as professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament studies, and to grant permanent tenure to Prof. Barrett Gritters as professor of Practical Theology.

The TSC recommends that synod approve two students for entrance into the seminary in the fall of 2010. One of these young men is recommended by Covenant PRC in

Northern Ireland. The second is from the PRC. Names and information can wait until after synod votes.

No doubt synod will advance the work of building by encouraging the FMC and the DMC and the missionaries in their diligent labors, giving direction for the work, and approving their respective budgets.

The FMC gives opportunity for laying good ground work in the matter of benevolence for a mission field, asking the synod to adopt their “Foreign Benevolence Protocol.” The proposed protocol is a good and necessary start, though the document could probably be sharpened.

Synod will face two new matters brought by the Contact Committee that may be considered building the church. It certainly requires the synod to give direction. Both are exciting developments.

First, the CC reports that six churches in Namibia, Africa joined together to bring a request that the CC send a delegation to meet with them. They desire to discuss their situation, as well as the doctrines and circumstances of the PRC. The background of these churches is the Dutch Reformed churches that settled in the southern part of Africa. They seem to be well informed about the PRC and express appreciation for the clarity of the writings that set forth the Reformed faith that the PRC maintains. Since the constitution of the CC instructs the CC to pursue such a contact, the CC is committed to making a visit, although the details need to be worked out.

Second, the CC received an unexpected request from the association of eleven denominations called the

North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (NAPARC). They ask the PRC to send observers to their annual meeting in the fall of 2010. The CC brings a lengthy recommendation that synod authorize the CC to send *observers* as invited. The CC demonstrates that the PRC has historically been interested in discussion with other churches who invite them to talk. NAPARC is not totally new to the PRC, and the proposal sets forth the history of interaction. In the early 1950s, Rev. H. Hoeksema was secretary of the committee that gave grounds for accepting the invitation received from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. The committee considered it good for the PRC, and a good opportunity to set forth the truth that the PRC maintained. (Cf. Acts, 1952, p. 83.) Time will tell whether the delegates to the synod of 2010 will see this invitation from NAPARC—admittedly a different organization, and a different age—as a good opportunity for the PRC today.

Finally, as regards building, synod will face an overture from the consistory of the Faith PRC to reorganize the PRC from two classes to three. Although Classis East did not favor it, Faith argues against the sole ground of Classis East, and brings significant grounds for adopting the overture. It certainly deserves careful consideration.

## Thanksgiving

The agenda of the 2010 synod gives the PRC much cause for thanksgiving to God as they consider the wise and careful ways that

their respective committees are doing the work assigned them. We give thanks for the many labors of faithful ministers, elders, and other servants of the church, including faithfulness and carefulness with finances. God's blessing of gifted and energetic missionaries is a cause for much gratitude. We can

rejoice in the open doors God is giving in all areas—in domestic, foreign, and contact committees. In utter humility, we thank God for the unity that we are enjoying—God's precious gift, namely, unity in the truth of sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant of grace.

Pray for the synod of 2010. Pray

that God may give the delegates wisdom and courage to stand for His truth, and for the good of the church of Jesus Christ. If you have opportunity, do visit. At least join the seminary and the synod at the seminary graduation, June 14, 7:30 P.M., in First PRC. Prof. Gritters will deliver the message. ∞

## LETTERS

### Sarcasm Sanctified?

I wish to express my viewpoint concerning your recent editorial "Sanctified Sarcasm" (April 1, 2010, p. 293).

First, though, please know I treasure the *Standard Bearer*. Also please know I highly commend Rev. Koole for his many fine articles, in which he displays his sanctified desire, dedication, and courage to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

My dictionary describes sarcasm as "a taunting, sneering, cutting, or caustic remark." Being sarcastic is described as "using, or fond of using, sarcasm." The dictionary says, "sarcastic" implies intent to hurt by taunting with mocking ridicule, veiled sneers, etc."

To my shame, I sometimes resort to sarcasm, or sarcastic thoughts. I could never defend such actions, under any circumstances.

In contrast to Rev. Koole's defense of sarcasm (granted, only in carefully defined and limited circumstances), I call attention to all the Scripture passages which clearly militate against a Christian's use of sarcastic language. (See, for instance, Romans 12:19; I Peter 2:20-25.)

Rev. Koole states that his defense of sarcasm is "in the context of biblical truth (which is our concern)."

Defending biblical truth includes more than exposing the errors of heretical teaching. It includes the Bible's instruction regarding our whole conduct. (See James 3 in this regard.)

As much as I recognize a certain validity of Rev.

Koole's viewpoints in the article, I felt compelled to write my heartfelt response.

John Hilton  
Waterville, Maine

### Response:

We can appreciate the good brother's sincere 'reservations' about the Christian and any legitimate use of sarcasm. The points he raises are precisely the questions raised in the Bible study societies and were the occasion for the article.

But the question, then, is, what are we to do with the biblical evidence and reality—Elijah's use of a mocking sarcasm and Jehovah's scathing words towards apostate officebearers found in the various places in the prophets? Are they to be rebuked for such rebukes? We demur.

Dictionaries are a fine thing, but, unlike the Scriptures, they are not inspired. What we refer to as 'sanctified sarcasm' is not merely a 'word,' but a spirit and perspective towards those who in the name of 'truth' knowingly spout dishonest follies. Every scriptural evidence is that they are to be exposed for what they are, men set on folly and little else.

But the words of our brother do underscore a point worth taking to heart, namely, for the Christian, sarcasm ought not be common place, the rule, but the exception and used with discernment.

—ed. KK ∞

## Chapter Four

## Postmillennialism (7)

# The Postmillennial Interpretation of Revelation 20 (cont.)

## A Mortal Blow to Postmillennialism

There is no excuse for this desperate twisting of Scripture. But there is an explanation of it. Revelation 20:7-9 is a mortal blow to the whole postmillennial scheme. As Selbrede rightly contends, “There is a fundamental inconsistency in postmillennialists holding to a final apostasy.”<sup>1</sup> The passage must, therefore, be explained away. Postmillennialism dreams of an *earthly* victory of the kingdom of Christ *within history*. This victory ought to bring history to its end, for, according to postmillennialism, the Messianic kingdom lasts only until the coming of Christ. With the coming of Christ, the Messianic kingdom is finished. A final, worldwide revolt against the kingdom of Messiah would mean the defeat of King Jesus in the end.

It is exactly the defeat of King Jesus that postmillennialism is always charging against amillennialism as its great sin. The postmillennial theologians charge that amillennialism, with its sober, biblical expectation of a great falling away, or apostasy; of Antichrist; and of great tribulation for the saints is defeatist and pessimistic. These unboundedly optimistic theologians take great delight in, and amuse each other greatly by, deriding this Reformed, biblical eschatology as “pessimillennialism.”

Shattering the postmillennial dream and dashing the postmillennial optimism is Revelation 20:7-9. The history of this age comes to its end with the loosing of Satan. The chain is unlocked. The prison door is opened. Up from

the abyss he comes. Now he can accomplish his burning desire and malignant purpose: the deceiving of all the nations on earth so that they unite as the world-kingdom of the beast, Antichrist.

These nations are Gog and Magog inasmuch as they are the New Testament reality typified in the Old Testament by a vast alliance of idolatrous, heathen nations called Magog in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The chief prince of this horde was Gog (Ezek. 38:2; 39:1). Ezekiel prophesied that this great army of the ungodly would “ascend and come like a storm...against my people of Israel” (Ezek. 38:9, 16). But Jehovah God would come to the defense of His covenant people, destroying Magog with fire: “I will send a fire on Magog” (Ezek. 39:6).

Ezekiel’s prophecy looked to the Messianic, New Testament age: “in the latter years” (Ezek. 38:8). Revelation 20:7-9 conclusively teaches that Ezekiel’s prophecy of Magog, its attack on the covenant people of God, and its destruction will be fulfilled towards the very end of the present, New Testament age—after the thousand years have reached their Christ-appointed goal. Magog, that is, the united nations of Antichrist, will attack the true church of Jesus Christ. This attack will be the great tribulation foretold by Christ in Matthew 24:21 and the victorious war of the beast against the saints described in Revelation 13:7.

In keeping with the truth that Old Testament Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital, was the type of the church, the church, which is the object of the attack of Satan’s minions, is symbolically called “the camp of the saints” and “the beloved city” in Revelation 20:9. The members of the congregation of God throughout the world are holy friends and servants of God. The church, He loves.

In this love, He will deliver the church, cutting the

<sup>1</sup> Martin G. Selbrede, “Reconstructing Postmillennialism,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* 15 (Winter, 1998), 216.

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*Previous article in this series: May 1, 2010, p. 350.*



time of Satan's earthly triumph short: "a little season." The deliverance will be complete and final. "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thess. 1:7, 8).

Thus, the church, which is the spiritual kingdom and city of Christ, will triumph. Her public, visible, glorious triumph, in which she is established in all the (new) creation and "dominates" over all things, does not take place *within history*, by *her own efforts*, godly though they may be. But her triumph will be the *goal* of history—history's *end*—at the second coming of Christ. And this triumph will be *the wonderful work of Christ* Himself personally on her behalf: the destruction of her enemies; the resurrection of her members; her public vindication in the final judgment; and her reigning with Christ over all things in the renewed creation of heaven and earth.

There is good reason why this climactic, everlasting triumph of the Messianic kingdom will be the work of Christ, by a wonder, altogether apart from the activity of the church herself. It must be evident that the triumph of the kingdom of Christ, like the salvation of every elect

citizen, is the miraculous accomplishment of God in Jesus Christ. Christ must have the glory of the deliverance and perfection of His kingdom. No postmillennial Puritan or Presbyterian church, no band of Christian Reconstructionist brothers, and, for that matter, no denomination of true churches of Christ will ever be able to say, or even to think, "We defeated the kingdom of the evil one, and we established the kingdom of God and Christ in all the world." Nor may the ungodly world think so.

The hope of the church, therefore, is not a future, earthly postmillennial kingdom.

Revelation 20:7-9 exposes this hope as false. Selbrede is right when he says that "it would be hard to imagine a more potent weapon against postmillennialism than the final apostasy 'doctrine.'"<sup>2</sup> The "potent weapon" is Holy Scripture, vigorously wielded by Reformed amillennialism.

Not a kingdom of earthly dominion within history, but the coming of Christ as the end of history is the hope of the church.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! (Rev. 22:20)

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 203.

## FEATURE ARTICLE

REV. ALLEN BRUMMEL

# Organization of Heritage PRC

**O**n April 23, 2010 the Heritage Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Sioux Falls became the Heritage Protestant Reformed Church of Sioux Falls. The Protestant Reformed Churches once again have a congregation of Jesus Christ in South Dakota. While previously the congregations in South Dakota were located in the sparsely populated cities of Isabel and Forbes, the new church is located in the largest city of South Dakota, with a population of over 155,000 and a metropolitan population of over 233,000 residents. There is much potential for growth in the congregation

both from within, since the newly formed congregation is comprised of a majority of young families, and from the community of Sioux Falls.

The organization of this congregation is the answer to the prayers and labors of more than two decades. For many years the Protestant Reformed Churches in Northwest Iowa and Southwest Minnesota investigated ways to start a mission work in Sioux Falls. Many Bible studies were held and worship services were conducted, but none of them were able to bring about the desired fruit. Now, in God's good timing, in the year of our Lord 2010, with the involvement of the Domestic Mission Committee, those prayers have been answered. We give all thanks and praise to our faithful heavenly Father,

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*Rev. Brummel is a home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches.*

who sends forth His word and gathers His church by His Spirit and Word in His good time.

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, MN, conducted the worship service on that rainy April 23 evening, using as his text I Peter 2:4-6: "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." The damp evening outside did not hamper the joyful atmosphere inside the beautiful Starlight Room on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the Holiday Inn, City Center in Sioux Falls. The theme of his sermon was: "Lively Stones Built Up a Spiritual House." Rev. Lee developed the text along the lines of the Project, the Process, and the Purpose. Approximately 225 people from Sioux Falls and the neighboring Protestant Reformed congregations of Hull, Doon, and Edgerton were edified by the message. The 41 charter members were encouraged in their endeavor.

The Edgerton deacons collected a generous offering of \$4,591.50, which was designated for the Building Fund of the newly established congregation. The saints have been contributing generously to the Building Fund

in anticipation of the great needs ahead involving the purchase of a parsonage and a place of worship. Over \$100,000 has been collected already, but with the great needs ahead the new church will appreciate any assistance possible through collections from her sister congregations, Lord willing.

The membership records of the 14 families and two individuals were received. The membership includes 30 confessing members and 11 non-confessing individuals. Two elders and one deacon were elected from a double slate, which Edgerton consistory nominated and published a few weeks prior to the meeting. Rev. Allen Brummel, missionary to Sioux Falls, read the form for the ordination of officebearers and installed the three men into their respective offices. After signing the formula of subscription, they were presented with the membership records of the new congregation.

Letters of greeting were received and read from the stated clerk of Classis West, the Domestic Mission Com-



*Mr. Ed VanEgdom, elder;  
Mr. Kyle Bleyenburgh, deacon;  
Mr. Gaylen TeSlaa, elder*




*Heritage Protestant Reformed Church, Sioux Falls, SD  
Instituted in the Year of our Lord 2010*

mittee, the calling church, and one of our sister churches. Thanksgiving was expressed for the love and care of the denomination of which we are a part. The newly formed congregation and her officebearers covet the prayers of the churches on her behalf as she seeks to be a faithful congregation of Jesus Christ.

A wonderful time of fellowship and refreshments followed the service.

God has established another candlestick for the purpose of showing forth His glory. May the light of His glory and grace shine brightly through the individual congregations as we witness to the truth of sovereign

particular grace in these last days. With thanksgiving to God, the Protestant Reformed Churches rejoice in this, another evidence of God's blessings upon our mission labors. May we continue to press on in the work of missions with zeal and faithfulness, trusting that Jesus Christ will prosper and bless those labors in His time and according to His good pleasure.

"The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places: yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Ps. 16:5, 6). 

DECENCY AND ORDER

PROF. RONALD CAMMENG

## Financial Assistance for the Poor Who Move

"Furthermore, to the poor, removing for sufficient reasons, so much money for traveling shall be given by the deacons as they deem adequate. The consistory and the deacons shall, however, see to it that they be not too much inclined to relieve their churches of the poor, with whom they would without necessity burden other churches."

Church Order, Article 83.

**A**rticle 83 of the Church Order is closely related to Article 82. Article 82 concerns transfer of membership from one congregation to another congregation within the denomination. Those who transfer from one congregation to another are to be given a certificate of testimonial, affirming the uprightness of their "profession and conduct." Article 83 takes up the special case of the transfer of membership of the poor. For compelling reasons, the poor ought to be granted assistance for moving from the diaconate of the congregation from which they are transferring their membership.

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*Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.*

*Previous article in this series: July 2009, p. 423.*

### The Poor Who Move

The poor who are the concern of the church in Article 83 are the poor within the congregation. The poor who are members of the church are the special object of the care of the deacons. Although the deacons are not prohibited from extending relief to the poor outside of the congregation, poor whom God in one way or another places in the pathway of a congregation, the main focus of the deacons is the care of the poor members of the church. This is clear from the account of the origin of the office of deacon in Acts 6. And this is the teaching of the apostle in Galatians 6:10: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Article 83 is a specific application of the calling that the church has for the care of the poor whom God has placed in her midst.

These poor desire to move. It is understood that their

desire to relocate is for financial reasons. The possibility for employment or better employment opportunities are the motivating factors in the desire of the poor to move. Very likely, these poor have been for some time the object of the care of the deacons in the local congregation of which they are members. The possibility exists that they will be able to better themselves financially by a move to a different locale. Their hope is that such a move will provide them with the opportunity to be gainfully employed, and thus relieve the church of the necessity of supporting them. But since they are poor, they have not the means to enable them to relocate. In such circumstances, the deacons are to come to the aid of the poor and provide them with sufficient funds to move their families and their belongings.

The article speaks of “sufficient reasons.” The sufficient reasons are both sufficient reasons for justifying the move, as well as sufficient reasons for the amount that the poor request in order to move. Of special importance are the “sufficient reasons” that the poor adduce for moving. The point is that there should be “sufficient reasons.” The deacons should not assist the poor who might be taking advantage of the church in order to move. The move must not be on a mere whim, merely the desire for a change of scenery or warmer climes. The poor must be able to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the deacons that their move is occasioned by the real possibility of the improvement of their economic situation. In such cases, the deacons ought to provide assistance to the poor.

When the deacons provide assistance to the poor who move, they ought to be in communication with the deacons of the congregation to which they are relocating. The original Article 83 required that the necessity for the assistance and the amount of the assistance received were to be noted on the reverse side of the Certificate of Transfer. This provision has been removed from the present form of Article 83, having been dropped by the revision that was made to the Church Order by the Christian Reformed Church in 1914. Nevertheless, the article implies that the deacons of the two congregations ought to be in contact with each other. If these poor are genuinely poor, so poor that they do not even have the means to move, they will undoubtedly soon become the objects of the care of the deacons in the congregation that they will be joining. Those deacons should be informed

of the history of the work of the deacons with the poor who are now moving to their congregation.

### Moving from One Congregation to Another

Article 83 concerns the poor who move from one congregation to another *within the denomination*. The poor leave the congregation in which they and their family have their membership in order to become members in a like-minded congregation. This says something about the strength of faith of these poor believers. Although their move is certainly precipitated by financial considerations, those financial considerations are not the only, nor even the main, considerations. Although the poor head-of-household feels the weight of his God-ordained responsibility to provide for the needs of his family, and so is willing to relocate in order to meet that responsibility, he recognizes that his financial responsibility is not the only, nor even the main, responsibility that he has towards his family.

His main responsibility is the spiritual responsibility. His responsibility before God is not only to do his utmost to put food on his table, but to see to it that the members of his family are provided with the meat and drink of life eternal. His responsibility before God is not only to provide physically for his family's needs, but, understanding that man does not live by bread alone, to see to their provision of the means of grace.

Poverty is often attended by sore temptations. There is the temptation to become bitter against the Lord because of His hard way. There is the temptation to despair and to give up. There is the temptation to steal, to use illegal means to procure the necessities of this life. Recognizing these temptations, Solomon prays, “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8b, 9).

Included in the temptations that confront the believing poor is the temptation to leave the church for economic opportunity. That is, indeed, a sore temptation. It is the temptation for the sake of a job or a better job to leave the church, moving to an area where there is no Reformed church. Or it is the temptation to leave a true church for a church that is not faithful to the truth of the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.



The poor of Article 83 are the poor who recognize their calling to be and to remain members of the true church of Jesus Christ in the world. They are poor who honor the vow of their confession of faith to remain faithful members of the true church of Christ in the world. They are poor who understand the obligation expressed in the Belgic Confession, Article 28, that “Everyone is bound to join himself to the true church,” and that no one may separate from the true church, “even though the magistrates and edicts of princes were against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment....” Church membership is precious to these poor, so precious that when it comes to economic advancement or even survival in comparison to membership in a true church, they choose poverty rather than forsake the true church of Christ in the world. They hold dear Jesus’ promise in Matthew 19:29: “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” These poor are willing to move from one congregation to another, but they are not willing to remove their membership from the true church.


### The Judgment of the Consistory and the Deacons

Article 83 calls for the judgment of the consistory and the deacons. The reasons adduced by the poor for moving, as well as the amount they request to assist in their move, is subject to the approval of the diaconate: “...so much money for traveling shall be given by the deacons as *they deem adequate*.” The “they” are not the poor, of course, but “they” are the deacons. As always, the deacons must approve any assistance to the poor out of the benevolent fund of the church. The assistance requested by the poor under Article 83 is a bit beyond the basic assistance that the deacons provide for the everyday needs of the poor. But moving expenses provided out of the benevolent fund of the church do have as their goal alleviation of the future needs of the poor, and thus do fall properly within the scope of the work of the deacons.

Although the deacons ought to make determination regarding the specifics of the request of the poor for moving expenses, the work of the deacons is subject to the supervision of the elders. As is the case throughout

the Church Order, “consistory” in Article 83 refers to the elders. The supervision of the elders was included already in Article 25’s description of the work of the deacons. That article called for the deacons to “render an account in consistory.” The exceptional request, not for the immediate needs of the poor, but moving expenses, ought to be brought by the deacons to the consistory for the input and approval of the elders. Article 83 calls for good cooperation between the elders and the deacons in the local congregation. If all things are well in a congregation, there will be a good cooperative spirit between the elders and the deacons.

It is clear from this article that while the churches must be eager to help their poor, they must also take care lest benevolence fall into the hands of the undeserving. The concern ought to be to help the poor who are poor indeed, and not those who travel from place to place taking wrongful advantage of the kindness of the saints. There have been those who, after they wore out their welcome in one place, simply packed up and moved on. To such, aid must be refused. Paul’s admonition is that “if any would not work, neither should he eat” (II Thess. 3:10).

A necessary warning is included in Article 83: “The consistory and the deacons shall, however, see to it that they be not too much inclined to relieve their churches of the poor, with whom they would without necessity burden other churches.” It is possible that a consistory encourages the poor to move so that their congregation will be relieved of the “burden” of the care of the poor. This is especially a temptation to a consistory when the benevolent case is longstanding, with no relief in sight. Human nature being what it is, and officebearers being the sinful men that they are, a consistory might encourage the poor to move, not with a view to the betterment of the poor, but so that the strain on their benevolent fund may be eased. A consistory “too much inclined” in this direction shows a wrong attitude towards the poor concerning whom it is God’s will that they ever be in the church (Matt. 26:11), as well as a disdain of the privilege that the church enjoys in being able to assist Christ’s poor. The church must never forget that we “ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). 

# Mountain


Many who have not the privilege of living near them, will likely at some point travel to see the mountains. Rightly so. Immense, beautiful, towering, majestic, rugged, wild, and permanent, they are awesome visual spectacles the Lord created for us to enjoy, and also as enduring earthly pictures of spiritual realities. In general, mountains represent kingdoms and people that inhabit them, but more specifically they are a type of the everlasting, universal, kingdom of God.

From the beginning, our Creator gave mountains a prominent place in old covenant history. Some are known mainly for their descriptive names: Halak (smooth), Seir (hairy), Jearim (forested), Shapher (beautiful), Zalmon (shady), Paran (cavernous), Hermon (sanctuary—also highest and northernmost mount in Canaan). Others are named after tribes (Naphtali, Ephraim, and Judah) or nations living nearby (Amorites, Amalek, and Lebanon). Still others are associated with significant covenant events—Hor (where Aaron died), Abarim (where Moses saw Canaan), Nebo (where Moses died), Gerizim and Ebal (where Israel read the curses and blessings of God's law), Gilboa (where Saul and Jonathan died), and Carmel (site of the Lord's great victory over Baal).

No mountains are mentioned more than Sinai (Horeb) and Zion (Moriah). Importantly, both are called the holy mountain of God, upon both He descended to dwell with Israel, and from both are derived the clearest spiritual pictures of mountains. At Sinai, God appeared in the burning bush to announce deliverance of Israel (Acts 7:30). After He redeemed them; He came down on it with lightning, earthquake, cloud, and trumpet (Ex. 19:18-19); His glory was a devouring fire (24:16); He lived with Moses (Ex. 24:16); the people met with God (Ex. 19:17); He made covenant with them (Deut. 5:2); and He gave judgments and laws (Lev. 26:46). Whereas Israel could not approach Sinai and saw God only from afar (Ex. 19:11-12), on Zion God graciously makes a permanent, safe home for His people to worship Him through atoning sacrifice. It is where Abraham sacrificed his only son (Gen. 22:2), and the Lord

established David's kingdom as a mighty fortress and built His temple (II Chr. 3:1). Collectively these mountains represent the everlasting kingdom God establishes graciously with His elect church, redeemed, sanctified, and blessed by His living presence through the Spirit of Jesus Christ and brought to glorious perfection in the new creation.

Essentially the Lord is the mountain of Israel (Is. 30:29). More glorious than the mountains, before they were brought forth, He is God (Ps. 76:4; 90:2). By His strength He sets them fast, weighs in the balance, and is praised by them (Ps. 65:6; Is. 40:12; 14:23). His righteousness is like the mountains (Ps. 36:6), and His covenant more enduring (Is. 54:10). Thus, when God in Christ comes to dwell personally with His church, it is the mountain of His holiness, beautiful for situation, joy of the whole earth, city of the great King (Ps. 48:1-2). As mountains drop dew, His people are blessed by His Spirit and their souls satisfied, for death is swallowed up in victory (Ps. 133:3; Jer. 50:19; Is. 25:8). Sanctified by His presence, it is a goodly mountain (Deut. 3:25), city of truth (Zech. 8:3), habitation of justice (Jer. 31:23). It is also a house of prayer (Is. 56:7). Made joyful and full of the knowledge of God, Jew and Gentile are brought to this holy mountain to worship lifting up voices with strength so the noise of a great people is heard (Is. 13:4; 40:9; 11:9).

Neither shall anything hurt nor destroy in all this holy mountain (Is. 11:9). It is the Lord's kingdom, city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Is. 24:23; Heb. 12:22). In it the Lamb stands with His redeemed 144,000, the elect, inheritors of His mountain (Rev. 14:1; Is. 65:9). His glory is their defense, His presence a shelter in the storm (Is. 4:5-6). They stand strong as Mt. Zion which cannot be removed but abideth forever (Ps. 30:7; 125:1). But it is not fully perfected until the great day of the Lord when this mountain of humble beginnings fills the whole earth (Dan. 2:35). In the last days, although all other mountains shall be moved out of their place (Rev. 6:14), this mountain of the Lord will be established, exalted over all, and the nations flow unto it. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together and dust shall be the serpent's meat. The Lord will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths, for out of Mt. Zion shall go forth His law (Is. 65:25; 2:2-3). 

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*The Weight of Your Words: Measuring the Impact of What You Say*, by Joseph M. Stowell. Moody Press, 1998. Reviewed by Justin Koole.

Many books are written with a small percentage of the population in mind, whether it is parents, ministers, or those who struggle with alcoholism or depression, as a few examples. Very few books speak to every individual on the planet. This is one of them that does. Everyone has a tongue, and everyone uses it daily (well, almost everyone). And everyone has used his tongue in sin; this is a certainty.

*The Weight of Your Words* was originally published by Victor Books in 1983 titled as *Tongue in Check*. The second printing was republished by Moody Press in 1998. As many readers are aware, Dr. Stowell is the former president of Moody Bible Institute located in Chicago, IL and the current president of Cornerstone University (a Christian university located in Grand Rapids, MI).

This book is based on James 3 and is Stowell's "attempt to address the issue" (p. 9) of how Christians' talk is a destructive power in and outside the home, and undermines the work of Christ in the church. And he does a marvelous job of exactly that: expounding the Word of God plainly, using literally hundreds of Scripture passages to demonstrate his point. Sprinkled in are little quotes from a multitude of sources, as well as short stories based on his thirty-plus years experience in the pastorate. The stories and quotes make the book interesting and easy to read.

The book is neither a dogmatic nor a doctrinal dissertation on James 3. I characterize it more as a handbook, first on how the devil works through the use of one's tongue and how the old man of sin often desecrates the tongue God gave man to glorify Himself; and second, what is the proper Christian behavior through proper speech.

Below are a several quotes that I personally enjoyed. They give a glimpse into how Stowell does not steer clear of difficult issues in order to avoid offending someone. (One can appreciate his directness when it comes to the sinfulness of human flesh.)

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A raging river can be destructive and demolish everything in its path. But if the river is channeled to... produce electricity, the same power becomes beneficial and desirable (p. 10).

Having a tongue is like having dynamite in our dentures—it's got to be reckoned with (p. 15).

We have an organized crime syndicate right in our mouths. Our tongues have the capacity to corrupt our entire beings. Nothing is exempt from the damage our tongues can cause (p. 19).

Stowell opens by summarizing James 3 in five principles, then continues by laying out the many sins the tongue and mouth commit, including, but not limited to, beguilement, deceit, lying, murmuring, slander, boasting, gossip, and taking God's name in vain. Again, these six chapters are replete with Scripture passages. Stowell did his research in using Scripture as his rudder for laying out the many sins our tongue and mouth commit. Then, after laying out the many sins and the seriousness of them, Stowell delves into the origin of these sins, to demonstrate the necessity of a change of heart.

There is one area where I disagree with Stowell's analysis. In dealing with the why and how of "God's heart-transforming power" (p. 84), Stowell does mention the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts briefly on page 132. We know the Holy Spirit provides us a new life, so that we are able to follow His word. Stowell, in fact, often states that the power of God is the beginning of the new life for the transformation process, so that what is in the heart is shown through the spoken word. Yet, he stops short of, and fails to spend time showing, the effectual power of the Holy Spirit. That being said, he never insinuates or states that it is simply in man's power to be able to overcome the devil and one's own sinful flesh. It starts with daily prayer and the use of Scripture to change the heart.

Pick this book up and read it, and you will find yourself viewing your tongue (and really your heart) in a brand new light, for your spiritual benefit. One final quote: "Henry Ward Beecher said it well: 'Speak when you are angry, and you'll make the best speech you'll ever (emphasis mine – jmk) regret'" (p. 97). 

## Diaconal Conferences (2)

We noted in our last article that the term “diaconal conference” can be used in two senses. In the narrower sense, it refers to occasional meetings of deacons and other interested individuals to give instruction and encouragement regarding the work of the deacons. In the broader sense, it refers to an organization of diaconates residing in the same classis or denomination, to promote cooperation between them. In this broader sense Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster use the term: “The term ‘Conference’ here does not refer to scheduled meetings. It refers to a number of diaconates joined together by regional organization.”<sup>1</sup>

Such conferences manifest a proper and beneficial cooperation between diaconates—proper, because Article 26 of our Church Order makes provision for, and thus encourages, cooperation between diaconates; and beneficial, because of the wisdom that comes from a multitude of godly counselors (Prov. 11:14; 24:6). In our last article, we noted the benefits of diaconal cooperation, and pointed to ways in which the deacons do cooperate—including holding diaconal conferences, in the narrower sense of the term.

What more can be done to promote cooperation? Specifically, from the viewpoint of diaconal conferences two things come to mind: first, have deacons’ conferences (in the narrow sense) more often, and not only in areas

where churches are geographically close; and second, have a Protestant Reformed diaconal conference in the broader sense—an organization to promote cooperation.

### The Form of this Organization

In my judgment, such an organization should consist of regularly scheduled joint meetings of diaconates, or at least delegations of diaconates. At these meetings a small board of deacons should be chosen as an executive committee to set an agenda for the meetings, attend to correspondence, and carry out research or investigation on any matters that relate to the work of the conference.

One recognizes immediately that this form is similar to our division of our churches into Classis East and Classis West. Each consistory in a classis sends two delegates to meetings of classis, to deal with matters that pertain to the churches in common, and to assist any individual congregation’s elders in their work. But each classis appoints a classical committee, a stated clerk, and perhaps other functionaries to help the classis do its work smoothly.

While the *form* that I envision these conferences taking is similar to that of a classis, I am not suggesting that the *authority* of these conferences will be similar to that of a classis. Such conferences are not official ecclesiastical assemblies, governed by our Church Order. Nor do they need to be. Their purpose is to aid the deacons in cooperating with each other. DeJong’s comments regarding diaconal conferences are correct:

They are, of course, rather informal meetings and may never presume to exercise any official control over any of the diaconates. Nor should they take any binding decisions which would involve the local diaconries and rob

<sup>1</sup> Gerard Berghoef and Lester DeKoster, *The Deacons’ Handbook: A Manual of Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Christian’s Library Press, 1980), p. 188.

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*Previous article in this series: April 1, 2010, p. 296.*



them of their rightful independence or involve them into difficulty with their consistories. All official business must be transacted in the ecclesiastical assemblies—consistories, classes and synods, lest there be set up next to the eldership another governing body in the churches.<sup>2</sup>

The form that I am proposing is similar, if not identical, to that used by the churches of the *Doleantie* (the secession led by Abraham Kuyper in 1886), and found today (to the best of my knowledge) in the Christian Reformed Church. Peter Y. DeJong notes that the diaconates of *Doleantie* churches met in a conference.

Since that time they have been held regularly. They meet together not only regionally but also nationally. Under the supervision of this nation-wide organization a periodical devoted exclusively to the office of the deacons is published.<sup>3</sup>

A different form has been proposed, one that has been argued to be preferable to the form described above, but one about which we should have serious reservations. This alternate form is that the deacons' work and office be incorporated into the major assemblies—that is, the meetings of classis and synod itself. An early proponent of this plan was Herman Bavinck, who proposed developing the office of deacon along these lines:

8. That the ministry of mercy be given a much larger place on the agenda of all ecclesiastical assemblies than has been the case up until now.
9. That, along with ministers and elders, deacons be delegated to the major assemblies of the churches and be given a vote in all matters pertaining to the ministry of mercy.
10. That at these assemblies the ministry of mercy be organized in terms of general principles, bearing in mind the difference in congregational circumstances; that for general needs it be undertaken communally and expanded by asking the local church to assist other churches and further by assisting poor and oppressed fellow believers abroad.<sup>4</sup>

Respected authors in the Reformed community have

<sup>2</sup> Peter Y. DeJong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1963), p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> DeJong, p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), p. 429.

expressed themselves in favor of this plan. Dr. F. L. Rutgers, noted Dutch Reformed expert in church polity, indicated that Bavinck's plan was "practicable"; Abraham Kuyper himself is said to have hinted at it; and Prof. William Heyns writes, "This plan seems to be the only one that could safely be put in practice."<sup>5</sup> We noted Heyns' argument in our last article: only such a plan, in his opinion, does justice to a Reformed system of church polity.

Making the conferences part of the church's polity and government has two advantages, in the mind of those who prefer this form. First, the conferences can make decisions of a binding character. Second, they can be better regulated. Some felt that the conferences of the *Doleantie* churches began to act contrary to Reformed church polity, by considering themselves an "authoritative representation of the local Diaconates, and as empowered to make rules and regulations for diaconal matters... apart from the Churches themselves."<sup>6</sup>

But the arguments against this form, and in favor of the first one, are convincing to me.

First, to delegate deacons to our assemblies *along with ministers and elders* is contrary to our Church Order. At times a consistory might delegate a deacon to attend Classis *instead of a minister or elder*, because the minister or elder is unable to go. In such an instance, the deacon is authorized to function as an elder at the meetings of Classis, just as Article 37 of the Church Order permits deacons to be involved in the work of the elders by being added to small consistories. But to send a deacon in addition to the minister and elder to each meeting of the Classis, so that the deacon can be involved in any work of mercy at the classical level, finds no warrant in our Church Order.

Secondly, the broader assemblies are extensions of the ruling office of elder in the church. They are not, nor are they meant to be, extensions of the office of deacon. To tend to the affairs of the churches is to exercise rule; to adjudicate matters that come from the churches is to rule. But to rule is the work of the elders. Bavinck's plan to include the work of the ministry of mercy on the agenda

<sup>5</sup> William Heyns, *Handbook for Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1928), pp. 350-352. Heyns cites Rutgers book *Kerkrechtelijke Adviezen*, I, 210.

<sup>6</sup> Heyns, p. 351.

of classical and synodical meetings leads to a confusion of the offices.

At times, by means of protest and appeal, a matter pertaining to the work of the deacons, or the distribution of benevolence, might appear on the agenda of a broader assembly. In such an instance the ruling office of elder is the proper office to adjudicate the matter, for the elders are to see to it that the deacons are doing their work properly. This is different, however, from incorporating a diaconal conference into our classes.

Thirdly, I do not see the need for a diaconal conference to make binding decisions in the same sense in which classis or synod makes such. By organizing themselves into a conference, diaconates show themselves ready to hear the thoughts of all the men, to gain wisdom from them, and to apply what they have learned to their own needs.

### The Purpose and Work of this Organization

Such an organization, we have noted, would promote and help implement cooperation between diaconates.

Berghoef and DeKoster, in a sample “Constitution for a Diaconal Conference,” adapted from a form in use by Classis Kalamazoo of the Christian Reformed Church, suggest a four-fold purpose:

- a. The...Diaconal Conference exists for charitable and religious purposes: to promote the basic task of the deacons, the administration of Christian mercy, and to present and discuss the responsibilities and opportunities of deacons so that they can be challenged to administer the love of Christ.
- b. To establish close contact and fellowship among the diaconates.
- c. To inform the deacons regarding the needs of various institutions and organizations of mercy.
- d. To assist the deacons and other Church members in meeting diaconal needs in the Church and community in the name of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

And the website maintained by the diaconal ministry of the Christian Reformed Church says:

A diaconal conference (or committee) is a gathering of

<sup>7</sup> Berghoef and DeKoster, p. 196.

deacons who represent the different diaconates within a classis. A diaconal conference promotes the ministry of deacons through the following activities:

- Mutual sharing by deacons about their ministry.
- Opportunities for learning and training.
- Identifying community ministry opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

Applying this more specifically to our purposes, an organized conference of diaconates could arrange for regular opportunities for deacons’ conferences in the narrower sense of the term—meetings of current, past, and prospective deacons, for instruction and encouragement. “Here the nature, origin, function, purpose, and goal of the diaconies should be thoroughly discussed,” as well as “practical questions.”<sup>9</sup>

Not at a meeting involving past and prospective deacons, but at meetings with other current deacons, representatives of diaconates could discuss particularly difficult cases of benevolence, without naming names, and seek advice on how best to meet the needs of these sheep.

A diaconal conference could help coordinate the work of benevolence, especially outside the local congregations. No diaconate needs outside help coordinating the work of benevolence within the local congregation; and diaconates probably do not need outside help coordinating the work of benevolence with one other local diaconate. But if our deacons were engaged in addressing broader benevolent needs, such a conference would help.

“Broader benevolent needs” is a broad term. It could include responding to a community disaster (flood or earthquake), or overseeing an institution of mercy. It could also include arranging for all of the activities deacons properly engage in, regarding those who are not poor, but still needy. In articles under the series “The Diaconal Care of Non-Poor Christians” and “Women Assisting the Deacons,” we referred to the propriety of the deacons caring for the travel needs or other personal needs of the sick or elderly. In an area where several Protestant Reformed Churches are concentrated, a diaconal conference could help coordinate meeting such needs, making the work more efficient.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.diaconalministries.com/diaconalministry/diaconalconference.htm>, January 1, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> DeJong, pp. 106, 230.

## The Cost and Benefits of this Organization


Immediately reasons come to mind why this might be considered unnecessary or unfeasible. Unnecessary, because we've gotten along for eighty years without one! And unfeasible, because of the cost involved.

However, the cost for our churches in Classis East would be minimal. And for these diaconates the particular benefit would be the ability to coordinate their work outside the congregation.

Being geographically separated by long distances, some of our diaconates in Classis West don't feel any pressing need to coordinate work outside the congregation. Also, being geographically separated, the cost to have such

conferences would be greater. At the same time, the geographical separation means that these diaconates have little or no contact with each other, apart from informing each other of a benevolent surplus or deficit. In other words, the very circumstance that gives rise to a greater cost, also underscores the benefit of such meetings.

Cost is not to be overlooked when starting a new venture; always it is wise to count the cost. But, especially when the work is kingdom work, the cost must be viewed in light of the benefits that would be received.

Something to discuss, deacons, during coffee time at your next meeting! 

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

REV. JAMES LANING

## The Dispensational View of the Rapture (2)

# The Time of Jacob's Trouble

**I**n an effort to prove that the church will not be on earth during the tribulation, Dispensationalists cite passages that speak of judgments that are to come upon Israel. They come up with passages that they say have not yet been fulfilled. Some of these passages refer to the nations coming against Jerusalem. Before this can happen, say the Dispensationalists, the church must be removed from this earth, so that God can once again deal with His first people—the nation of Israel.

One of the main passages to which they refer speaks of the tribulation as a time of *Jacob's* trouble:

Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even *the time of Jacob's trouble*; but he shall be saved out of it. For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them (Jer. 30:7–9).

In an effort both to understand and to refute their position, let us consider the meaning of this specific prophecy.

### A typical fulfillment

It is good to begin by considering the context. This passage is found in a portion of the prophecy of Jeremiah that mentions the coming Babylonian captivity and the promised deliverance from that captivity. Jeremiah

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*Previous article in this series: May 1, 2010, p. 353.*

21–29 sets forth in detail the coming judgment that is to be executed upon Judah and the nations by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Then Jeremiah 30–33 speaks of the glorious restoration of Judah and Israel at the end of that Babylonian captivity. It is in this latter section that this prophecy about the time of Jacob's trouble is found.

Jeremiah 30 begins by focusing on the promised deliverance from this captivity:

For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it (Jer. 30:3).

Verse seven of that chapter then goes on to say that although the day of judgment is going to be great, God's people will certainly be delivered through it.

So what is this time of trouble? And what is the deliverance that is promised here?

Some, such as John Calvin, interpret this prophecy to have been fulfilled when Judah, after seventy years of captivity in Babylon, returned to the promised land. In his commentary on this passage, Calvin writes:

It was a dreadful spectacle to see the city destroyed, and the Temple partly pulled down and partly consumed by fire.... Hence the Prophet does not say without reason, that *that day* would be *great*, so that none would be *like it*: and he said this, to shake away the torpidity of the people, for they thought that the holy city, which God had chosen for his habitation, could not fall, nor the Temple perish.

The great day of judgment, according to this interpretation, would refer to the dreadful day when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, burned the temple, and destroyed the city. For seventy years after that, the Jews remained captives to the Babylonians. But then the Lord delivered His people from that heathen land, and brought them back to the land of promise.

There is a sense in which this was indeed a fulfillment of this prophecy. But this fulfillment was only a *typical* fulfillment, which served as a sign to point forward to a future fulfillment in the day of Christ.

## The fulfillment at Christ's resurrection

If you tell a Dispensationalist that this prophecy was fulfilled in the history surrounding the Babylonian captivity, they will be quick to point out that verse 9 of this prophecy speaks of the resurrection of David:

But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.

This resurrection, they will say, did not take place when the Jews returned from Babylon. So this prophecy, in their mind, remains unfulfilled.

To respond to this we must understand that when Scripture speaks of David here it is referring to Christ, whom David represented. As was pointed out previously, the Scriptures elsewhere refer to David reigning over God's people forever, which is proof that the name David must be a reference to Christ. Dispensationalists take this Jeremiah passage and limit David's reign to a thousand years. But the Scriptures say that David will reign over God's people forever:

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever (Ezek. 37:24–25).

This should be sufficient to prove that the reference to David here is really a reference to Christ, the one to whom David pointed. Christ is the one who reigns everlastingly over God's people. Calling him David serves to bring out that the northern tribes, who had departed from the house of David, were going to return to the house of David. And that thus all twelve tribes were again going to have "one shepherd."

This prophecy about Jacob serving a resurrected David was fulfilled centrally in the resurrection of Christ. There was a great day of judgment that came first, and then a great day of deliverance when our Lord arose.

God's promises are to Christ (Gal. 3:16), and are fulfilled in Christ (II Cor. 1:20). So the return from Baby-



lon could only be a typical fulfillment of the prophecy we are considering. Such an event pointed forward to what would take place in the day of our Lord Jesus. The principle fulfillment took place when the Son of David was raised from the dead, to reign over His people in the heavenly promised land.

### **A time of sorrow before the coming of our King**

But is there another fulfillment of this prophecy? Is this prophecy being fulfilled right now? And how about in the future? Is there going to be a future “time of Jacob’s trouble,” or not? To answer these questions, we must consider who Jacob is, and then look deeper into the question concerning what is meant by this time of trouble.

Jacob here is clearly a reference to God’s elect people, as is evident from the fact that God in these verses promises that Jacob will be saved:

...it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble; but he shall be saved out of it (Jer. 30:7b).

God made a covenant promise to save the seed of Jacob. That promise, like the promise to Abraham, was to Christ (Gal. 3:16), and thus to all those chosen to be in Christ (Gal. 3:29). So the promise here is to all those chosen to be in Christ, the Seed of Jacob.

Dispensationalists, insisting on their erroneous distinction between Israel and the church, will misinterpret this passage. They will argue that Jacob refers to the earthly nation of Israel, and not to the church. It certainly does include a remnant from the blood descendants of Jacob. But the reference here is to all those in Christ, the one Seed promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

So what specifically is this time of trouble? If we look at the preceding verses, we see that God compares this trouble to the travail of a woman with child:

Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:6–7a).

So in an effort to understand this passage, it would be worthwhile to see if we can find other similar passages in which God’s people are said to go through a time of sorrow comparable to that of a woman in travail.

We find a key passage like this in the fourth chapter of the prophecy of Micah:

...the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. *Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail.* Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies (Micah 4:8b-10).

Note that those sorrowing like a woman in travail are God’s people who are without their king, and are now dwelling in Babylon.

This leads us to consider a statement our Lord made when He talked to His disciples and told them they would have a time of sorrow likened to that of a woman in travail:

Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye enquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you (John 16:19–22).

Jesus here speaks of His disciples sorrowing during the time that He is apart from them. But then He says that this sorrow shall be turned to joy. Right now they are sorrowing like a woman in travail. But when Christ returns, the time of sorrowing will be over, and they will forget their sorrow, just as a woman forgets the sorrow as soon as the child is born.


So the time of sorrow is the time that God's people sorrow because their King is apart from them. That idea is found in the John 16 passage, the Micah 4 passage, and the specific passage that speaks of the time of Jacob's trouble. For that last passage says that Jacob will have a time of trouble until David (i.e., Christ) comes to reign over them.

### **A sorrow that will be turned to joy**

Understanding this to be the reason for the time of trouble and sorrow, we can see how there is a sense in which right now is a time of trouble and sorrow for the church of Jesus Christ. There is a sense in which our King is with us, and we are experiencing a time of joy. But there is also a sense in which our King is apart from us. This present time is one in which we must submit to heathen rulers, just as God's people did in Babylon. And it is a time in which our sins keep rising up against us, prevailing day by day. In this sense we are experiencing a time of trouble and sorrow, longing for the bodily return of our King.

This trouble and sorrow will get worse at the time of the Great Tribulation, just as labor pains get more severe right before the time of deliverance. But we know that at that time we will be very close to our full deliverance—the moment our sorrow will be fully turned to joy.

So the time of Jacob's trouble is not a future period of trouble only for the earthly nation of Israel. It is a present and future time of trouble for the church. It is a time of trouble and sorrow that we are presently going through today—a time that will get more difficult in the future—until our King comes for us on the clouds of glory.

We must cling to the promise God gives us in these verses. We shall certainly be delivered from this time of trouble and sorrow. Our King shall come for us. Forever He shall reign over us. Our time of trouble is short. And when our King returns for us, we will forget all about it. Oh what a joy we will have on that day, as we dwell in perfection with our King and Husband whom we love with all our heart. 

## **NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES**

## **MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER**

### **Evangelism Activities**

In an effort to stir up interest in an upcoming lecture, the members of the Evangelism Committee of the Randolph, WI PRC asked their congregation the question, "What profit are we getting from our Bible study?" That question was answered on Friday evening, April 16, when the Evangelism Committee presented its annual spring lecture, "The Profitableness of Scripture,"

given by Rev. Arie denHartog, pastor of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI. The lecture was presented in Randolph's sanctuary, with fellowship and refreshments following.

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC recently encouraged their congregation to take a look at their new and improved home page on the Internet ([www.hudsonvilleprc.org](http://www.hudsonvilleprc.org)). The committee has been busy working to update the website so it can be more useful to the congregation, and so that it can continue being a useful tool for those who may be looking for a church home. The site will now also include a blog by Hudsonville's pastor, Rev. Garrett Eriks, on which he will start providing a summary of the

Sunday sermons, thus serving as a refresher throughout the week.

The Evangelism Committee of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada has been busy this spring. They report that they continue to receive around 200 visitors to their website ([www.edmontonprc.org](http://www.edmontonprc.org)) every month. In addition, they placed a sign on 107th Avenue, the street their sanctuary is on, advertising their services, and the committee is also looking into running an advertisement on the radio for around eight weeks.

### **Congregation Activities**

Calvary PRC in Hull, IA hosted the annual Ladies League Meeting

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*Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*

on Monday, April 19, at the Hull PRC. Mrs. Lori Gritters spoke to the ladies on the theme, "Walking in Fellowship with God."

At a congregational meeting in March, the congregation of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA approved a proposal to purchase new seating for their sanctuary. Covenant of Grace also received, as a gift from the Young People of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, a new supply of Psalters and Bibles. The new chairs should have a place for storing these.

Members of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI enjoyed their third annual Spring Break Roll and Bowl at the Lowell bowling rink, April 6. Activities included bowling, roller skating, and laser tag.

At a congregational meeting in early April, the members of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada approved proposals regarding their mortgage and their building fund, and decided to proceed with upgrading the speakers and sound system in their sanctuary.

In April, Seminarian Martyn McGeown, from the Covenant PRC, our sister church in Northern Ireland, was filling the pulpit of the Edgerton, MN PRC. After the evening service on April 11, he gave a presentation about himself and the work in Northern Ireland. Seminarian McGeown is in his final year at our seminary in Grandville, MI and looks forward to returning home and serving our Lord in his homeland, D.V. Everyone was invited to the church basement, following his presentation, for a time of fellowship and lunch.

The choir of the Hudsonville, MI PRC presented their annual spring concert after Hudsonville's evening worship service on April 11.

The Choral Society of Grace PRC in Standale, MI invited their congregation, as well as other area churches, to join them for an evening of praise to our great God on Sunday evening, April 18.

We pass along our congratulations and admiration to the catechism students from several of our churches who closed out this year's season of catechism instruction by reciting Hebrews 11 in its entirety. That's forty verses! "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light upon my path" (Ps. 119:105).

### **Sister-Church Activities**

Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, gave a lecture entitled, "Preaching: The Voice of Christ," on April 9 at the Protestant Hall in Ballymena. Rev. Stewart answered some very important questions regarding preaching: What does the Bible say about preaching? Who may preach? What is preaching's role in the church's worship? How are we to listen to preaching?

### **Young People's Activities**

The Young People's Society of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC hosted a pancake breakfast on Saturday morning, April 17, to help raise money for the registration fees for the upcoming convention being hosted August 16-20 by Hudsonville, MI PRC. We also remind you that if you have opportunity this spring to help support your own congregation's young

people, please do so. Registration for each of the young people attending this year's convention will be \$340. They need our help!

### **Young Adult Activities**


The Young Adult Societies of the west Michigan churches held their second annual end-of-year discussion on Sunday evening, April 18, at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. This year they chose the topic, "Growing Spiritually in a Selfish Age," for their evening's discussion.

### **School Activities**

The choir of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI, along with the choir of Heritage Christian High School in Dyer, IN, presented a combined concert on March 25 at the Grandville High School Auditorium. And then on April 15 Covenant's choir joined together with the choir of Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA at the Hull PRC for a combined choral concert.

### **Minister Activities**

Rev. Carl Haak declined the call from Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI; Rev. Doug Kuiper the call from Hull PRC in Hull, Ia; and Rev. Martin VanderWal the call from Bethel PRC in Roselle, IN.

Bethel PRC extended a call to Rev. Dennis Lee; Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN to Rev. Garrett Eriks; Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD, to Rev. Allen Brummel; First Holland (MI) PRC to Rev. Andrew Lanning; and Kalamazoo (MI) PRC to Rev. Carl Haak. 

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Resolution of sympathy

■ The consistory and congregation of Hull PRC wish to express their sympathy to Helinda Wiersma and Monica Wiersma in the passing of their husband and father,

#### **DAVID WIERSMA.**

May they be comforted by God's Word as found in Psalm 73:23, 24: "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Jim Andringa, President  
Gerald Brummel, Clerk of records

### Resolution of sympathy

■ The council of SE PRC extends Christian sympathy to Jane Dykstra in the death of her brother,

#### **OSCAR SCHIPPER,**

and to Joe VanKampen in the death of his brother,

#### **GERRIT VAN KAMPEN.**

We say with the apostle in I Corinthians 15:54: "Death is swallowed up in victory!"

Rev.W. Langerak, President  
Ed Ophoff Jr., Asst. Clerk

### Reminder

■ The *Standard Bearer* is published only once a month during the months of June, July, and August.

### Mission Awareness Day

■ The Domestic Mission Committee will present Mission Awareness Day on Saturday, June 12 at Georgetown PRC. Sectionals highlighting various aspects of Protestant Reformed mission work will be presented throughout the day by missionaries and others familiar with the work.

### Resolution of sympathy

■ The council and congregation of Calvary PRC express their sympathy to Roger Buys and family in the death of their mother and grandmother,

#### **MRS. BETTY BUYS.**

May the words of Revelation 21:4 give them comfort: "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."

Rev. Cory Griess, President  
Marv VanDenTop, Assistant Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

■ The council of SE PRC expresses Christian sympathy to Irene VanderWal in the death of her brother,

#### **ANDREW VOGEL.**

We say with the apostle in I Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

Rev.W. Langerak, President  
Ed Ophoff Jr., Assist. Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

■ The consistory and congregation of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD express Christian sympathy to Elder Ed and Carlene Van Egdom, Elizabeth, and Breanna and to Andon and Angie De Boer in the death of their mother and grandmother,

#### **MRS. ALIDA DE BONDT.**

We pray that God will comfort and strengthen the family with the words of Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Gaylen Te Slaa, Vice-President  
Kyle Bleyenburgh, Treasurer

### Call to Synod

■ Synod 2009 appointed Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan the calling church for the 2010 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2010 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 8, 2010 at 8:30 A.M., in the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held in *Southeast PRC* (not in *First Church*, as reported earlier) on Monday evening, June 7, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Key, president of the 2009 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. James Holstege, 1359 Spaulding Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546. Phone: (616) 285-9073, e-mail: jimholstege@sbcglobal.net.

Consistory of  
Southeast PRC  
James Holstege, Clerk.

**Check out the  
RFPA web page at  
[www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)**