

THE *January 15, 2006* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Special Issue:
The Protestant Reformed Seminary

- ◆ Committing the Gospel to Faithful Men 170
- ◆ Editor's Notes 172
- ◆ Seminary Applicants and the Role of the Elders 172
- ◆ Basis and Benefits of Seminary Training 174
- ◆ Church History and New Testament Studies 177
- ◆ Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies 180
- ◆ Practical Theology 182
- ◆ A Church-Controlled Seminary 184
- ◆ Position and Task of the Professor of Theology 186
- ◆ Seminary Internships 188
- ◆ News From Our Churches 190

Volume 82 ◆ Number 8

Committing the Gospel to Faithful Men

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

II Timothy 2:2

Timothy had accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys as a co-laborer. During that time Paul had instructed Timothy in the gospel of Jesus Christ with many sound words. Paul had also laid hands on Timothy to ordain him as a minister of the gospel, thereby committing the gospel to Timothy's care.

Now Paul exhorts Timothy, who is laboring in Ephesus, to hold fast the form of sound words that he had heard from Paul and to keep that which was committed to him (1:13, 14).

But there is more.

Timothy must take the same things that he had heard from Paul

and commit them to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. The glorious gospel of salvation must be proclaimed throughout the churches and beyond to the whole world. Men must be instructed in the gospel and trained to proclaim it. This is what Paul had done with Timothy. This is what Paul now instructs Timothy to do with others.

We as a denomination are doing the same with our seminary. There were times in the Reformed tradition when the training of future ministers was done by individual pastors. But by the grace of God we have the resources to do this important work through our seminary. Our professors are ordained ministers of the gospel. To them has been committed the important work of training faithful men in the gospel so that they may teach others.

A glorious gospel!

Paul speaks of "the things that thou hast heard of me." The things

that Timothy heard of Paul were the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.

According to 1:13 these were "sound words." "Sound words" are words (teachings) that promote health. This is certainly true of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the power of God to bring His elect to the saving health of faith and salvation. It is also the power of God to keep them in the health of salvation.

From Paul's own mouth Timothy heard the sound words of the gospel. Timothy heard them in Paul's preaching on his first missionary journey, when Timothy and his mother and grandmother were brought to Jesus Christ. Timothy then joined Paul on his second and subsequent missionary journeys, and was taught more fully in the doctrines of Christ.

We too have heard these same sound words of the gospel. What Paul taught Timothy he also recorded in his epistles. What Paul taught Timothy was not divorced from the Old Testament Scriptures

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692) is a semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc., 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer, P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cpraudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE

\$17.00 per year in the U.S., US\$20.00 elsewhere.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The Standard Bearer does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$10.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

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

but rooted in them, as his epistles demonstrate. The rest of the New Testament Scriptures, not written by Paul, complements what Paul taught and wrote. These glorious truths of the gospel have also been summarized in our Reformed creeds. Through the faithful preaching of the gospel, we have heard the same sound words of the gospel as did Timothy.

The things that Timothy had heard from Paul were heard among many witnesses. These witnesses were the saints of God to whom Paul ministered. Paul did not teach in secret but publicly in the church and in the community. And Paul did not give to Timothy anything different than what he taught openly to the public. The saints were witnesses, therefore, of Paul's teachings. They were witnesses not only in that they heard what Paul preached, but also in that they testified of its power. The gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ is powerful. It is the power of God to work faith, to bring reconciliation with God, to transform lives, to lift the heads of the downtrodden with hope, to give joy to the sorrowful. And the saints bore witness to this. They did this to Paul, to Timothy, to their fellow saints, and also to those outside the household of faith. And many of the saints sealed their witness with their blood.

That witness has continued down through the ages as the saints of God have heard and been transformed by the power of the gospel.

What a tribute to the gospel of Jesus Christ!

A high calling!

The same commit thou to faithful men.

Faithful men are men who are worthy of trust. They are men upon whom one can rely.

To be faithful requires that one have faith. Faith is not something that originates with us. It is the gift of God to His people, worked by

the Spirit through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be faithful also requires that one be mature in his faith. There are babes in the faith. Sometimes this is because they are children or new to the faith. Sometimes this is because they never grew up in their faith. To be faithful, one must grow up in his faith so that he is spiritually mature. This happens when one places himself under sound preaching, uses the sacraments, gives himself over to prayer, and seeks the communion of the saints.

Such mature believers will be faithful. Their faithfulness is a faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ. They love the Lord and the truth about Him. They can be relied upon, therefore, to promote and defend the truth, to live the truth, and even to suffer for the gospel as good soldiers of Christ (vv. 3-5).

This is the chief qualification for a minister of the gospel. A minister of the gospel must have certain gifts of leadership. Certainly he must be apt to teach. But above all he must be faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Timothy is charged to commit the gospel of Jesus Christ, which he had heard from Paul, to such faithful men.

To commit means to give into someone's possession something of great value as a sacred trust, to entrust a valued possession to someone else's care. We do that when we deposit our money in the bank. In like manner Timothy is to commit the gospel of Jesus Christ to faithful men.

What a precious possession is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the power of God to salvation and eternal life.

Jesus has committed this precious gospel to His church as a sacred trust. He did so through Paul and the other apostles, through whom He revealed the gospel.

It is the calling of the church to preserve the gospel, as well as

to defend it and proclaim it. The church carries out this high calling in part by committing the gospel to faithful men who, holding the office of minister of the gospel, are called to labor in the Word.

On behalf of the church, Paul also committed the gospel to faithful Timothy. He had done this by instructing Timothy thoroughly in this gospel and training him to preach it. And then Paul ordained him with the laying on of hands to the office of evangelist and minister of the gospel.

Now Timothy is charged to do the same, in his capacity as an evangelist.


In a similar manner the church must commit the gospel to faithful men also today. This is no longer done through apostles and evangelists. Those were special offices in the church for the transition from the old to the new covenant. The church carries out this calling by training men in the seminary and then ordaining them to the office of pastor.

An important purpose!

The purpose is that such faithful men teach others the precious gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the purpose of God that His salvation be brought to future generations of the church as well as to the nations. The power to accomplish this is the preaching of the gospel. And so there must be in every generation of the church the work of committing the gospel to faithful men, who will teach others.

Pray that the Lord may raise up faithful men to whom the gospel may be committed.

Pray for the seminary, that the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ may be committed to these faithful men.

And pray that the gospel of salvation may be proclaimed in the churches and across the world, bringing the health of faith and salvation to as many as God has ordained to eternal life! 

Editor's Notes

This special issue intends to set before the minds of the readers the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches. From a practical point of view, it is closely related to an officebearers conference held by Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches in September of 2005. All the articles, other than the meditation and the two internship reports, are adaptations of speeches given there.

The purpose behind this special issue, I am happy to say, is not to solicit funds. On the contrary, as the official name implies, this seminary belongs to the Protestant Reformed Churches. Accordingly, the PRC have not only appointed

the professors, set the courses, and erected the building, they also finance the daily operation of the seminary. Others give gifts — genuinely appreciated gifts — to the seminary from time to time, but the churches generously support their seminary.

The purpose of the special issue is not to draw in more students to enlarge the enrollment. The PRC's seminary is maintained primarily to train men for the gospel ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches, though the seminary has had the privilege of training men from other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations.

Rather, the editors consider the work of the seminary to be impor-

tant enough to warrant a special issue. The purpose of highlighting the seminary is especially twofold. First, it is to inform the readers — in the PRC and beyond — about the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Obviously there is a general understanding of the labors expended in the seminary — men are trained to preach the gospel. Yet it is good that more specific knowledge be set forth concerning what the seminary does and why. That goal serves the second, namely, that believers will pray with understanding for the seminary, will pray for specific needs, and will pray convicted of the need for this vital work.

—RJD 

Editorial

Prof. Barry Gritters

Seminary Applicants and the Role of the Elders

In the matter of judging seminary applicants, there are at least three parties—not two—who have responsibility. There is the student himself. There is the denomination. And there are also the elders—who may not always realize the full responsibility that is theirs.

The prospective student must judge himself. He must have an inclination, a strong inclination, that leads him to seek admission. He loves the Lord and the Lord's church. In his heart he senses a call. Certain gifts are his from the Lord. He has the ability and will to read, study, reason. And the Lord does not give him peace in his present occupation. If the man, younger or older, has these gifts and this sense, he writes a couple of letters to make application to the seminary.

Second, the denomination makes judgments. The churches in their synod have appointed a committee to do the synod's work throughout the year. The Theological School Committee (TSC) is somewhat comparable to a school board, except that it is made up of elders and ministers appointed by synod. The TSC receives applications from prospective students and makes judgments. Has the student earned a bachelor's degree? Do his official transcripts of college courses indicate that he has obtained all the prescribed course requirements and earned a satisfactory grade point average? Did he obtain a certification of good health from a physician? Then the TSC conducts a personal interview with the student. If the requirements are met and the interview goes well,

the TSC will recommend to the following synod that he be admitted to the school. Synod makes the final judgment.

But there is also a judgment that must be made by the elders. The elders play an important part in the process of application to the seminary. I purposely omitted one crucial piece of the prospective student's application process. No prospective student will even be considered for an interview with the TSC without a letter of recommendation from his home consistory.

This letter is indispensable.

But first the elders have another responsibility.

Consistorial recruiters

The elders' place is not only evaluating those who ask to be admitted. The calling of the elders

begins with seeking out and encouraging promising young men in their congregation. The Christ-appointed elders ought to look for godly and capable young men to direct towards Christ's ministry.

The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches calls the elders to this task. Article 19 mandates: "The churches shall exert themselves, as far as necessary, that there may be students supported by them to be trained for the ministry of the word." In addition to the *financial* support of students (generous in the PRC, we gratefully acknowledge), this Church Order article reminds the churches to "see to it" that there are students. Indeed, parents can do this; and schoolteachers involve themselves. But the *churches* must. The elders take the lead.

Synod asks the elders to do this. That is, the churches together remind their officebearers to be involved. My research shows that, as early as 1961, synod was calling the consistories to bring this need before their congregations. And just since 1999, synod has reminded the churches *at least four times* to press capable young men to consider the ministry (see *Acts of Synod*: 1999:74; 2002:46; 2003:53; and 2004:23, 24).

This is the elders' solemn duty. The churches need ministers.

The elders can encourage men in a couple of ways. Just a question may be sufficient to move a young man to action. The elder may ask: "Have you ever considered the ministry?" Or, "Have you considered college courses that, although useful for other occupations too, would open the way for you to enter seminary?" The elders plant a seed.

Stronger would be a statement: "I believe that you have the gifts for the ministry. I see in you abilities that would fit well in the pastorate. I would like you to pray about and consider seriously the gospel ministry."

But the elders may even be stronger and, perhaps by a com-

mittee visit, *press upon* him the need to consider seminary: "Brother, you must pray about the ministry. We judge you to have the gifts."

About this admittedly "high-pressure" approach: 1) I use language that synod used: "press." A question ("Have you ever considered?") is not pressing. A mere statement ("I see in you gifts") is not pressing. But the body of elders telling the young man that they have judged that he has gifts he ought to consider using for God's church in the ministry—that's pressure. 2) There is such a thing as "undue" pressure. But that's a danger on the opposite side, and Protestant Reformed elders have not been known to be guilty of this error. Besides, consider the pressure that William Farel put on a fellow elder, John Calvin, and how God used that pressure to bring Calvin to his main work.

Are the elders busy in this? Are they even aware of this duty of their office? Have they ever spoken of it in consistory meetings—even including it as an item on their agenda? More, have they discussed *certain* young men they have observed to be qualified? (Wisdom dictates that the elders *together* make this judgment, to spare one elder from making an assessment that is not shared by the others.) Do they remind their minister to pray about this regularly, and to address the matter with the young men in catechism and at family visitation?

In my judgment, one thing must stand out above the others as the elders' duty to promote the ministry among the young men. They must labor in prayer that the life in the congregation be healthy, peaceful, godly, spiritual—especially the life of the church in relation to her own minister. If God blesses that labor, the people will love their minister. The children will know that their parents love their minister. The young will men grow up knowing that there is a wonderful relation between the

flock and their shepherd.

I have no way of knowing how many young men have aspired to the ministry who grew up in churches where there were conflicts. But the elders could ask themselves that question. And this question: How many have sought the office who matured in churches where the relation between the flock and the shepherd can only be described as beautiful? The pastor loved the flock and the flock loved their pastor. The young men saw this. If the *opposite* is true (although God performs wonders at times), the young man will not be able to run from the ministry fast enough (and what about the rest of the young people?). But there is a *good* relationship between pastor and congregation that can make the ministry attractive.

Encourage the capable young men. Even *press* them.

Christ's Judges

Then, elders also must judge the qualifications of those who, with or without encouragement, seek admittance.

Elders *are* involved in this. Obviously, if a young man has a speech impediment that hinders him from being understood, or leads an ungodly life, the elders will not give the letter recommending him to the Theological School Committee. But there are other areas the elders must judge.

The elders' letter of recommendation to the TSC is no rubber stamp. It may never become so. No prospective student may think, "I'll quickly ask my minister to write this letter, get it approved by the consistory tonight, and send it off to the TSC." The elders must judge his request carefully.

In fact, the elders' responsibility to judge carefully has recently increased.

The old constitution of the TSC said: "Permission to pursue the course of study at the school shall be granted by the synod upon recommendation of the TSC to such

an aspirant only who comes supplied with a testimonial of his consistory that he is member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk." Notice, these qualifications are no more than any young person needs to make confession of faith: "sound in faith and upright in walk."

Synod changed the TSC's constitution, and now asks the elders to judge and report more. The new article says, "sound in faith and upright in walk *and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister. Such recommendation ought to contain the consistory's evaluation of the applicant's spiritual and intellectual gifts, as well as any areas of concern.*" Now the elders assess and report on the man's qualifications for the ministry.

The elders must ask themselves questions like these: "Is he a godly man?" The minister serves as *an example of the believers* (I Tim. 4:12). "What are his intellectual abilities?" The ministry needs capable, perceptive men. "Is he apt to teach (I Tim. 3:2)?" When a young man

first expresses interest, he ought to be put in a position to be judged regarding this aptitude: for example, teaching a Sunday School class, or assisting in leading a Bible study. "Is he mature, level-headed, wise?" Godly men, gifted with intellectual and teaching gifts, do not necessarily have the discretion required of a preacher. And, "Is he a novice?" Careful thought must be given to recommending a man who is new to the faith or new to the churches. New to the faith, he is a novice. New to the churches, he is not known; the elders must know the man they recommend.

The Churches' Profit


For the elders to make these good judgments will be profitable for the churches.

First, the seminary faculty cannot make all of the judgments necessary. The faculty sees the students mostly in limited, formal settings. The elders know the members of their congregations and can be a great help to the faculty and the TSC.

Second, an early intervention

by the elders may spare an aspirant the hurt of a lengthy period of study, only to find out after a couple of years that he does not have the gifts for the ministry. The elders cannot do *all* the work of judging qualifications. The faculty must judge, too. But the elders' early help will be of blessing to all.

Third, remedial aid can be given to others. Elders may see many gifts, recommend the man for training, but realize work must be done in some areas. They can assist the young man to develop and grow in these areas of weakness.

Elders' involvement in the lives of the young men can only serve for long-term good. What is more desirable than ministers who, because of the elders' careful assistance of them, esteem the eldership highly? "These men watched out for me, helped me. I love the place God has for the elders in the church." This love and respect will show in the new minister's pastorate, too, so that the office of elder is esteemed and elevated in the life of the whole church. 

Rev. Allen Brummel

The Basis and Benefits of Seminary Training

Paul writes to Timothy, his spiritual son, concerning the calling that God places upon him and upon the church of Jesus Christ in the world. The ministry of the gospel is essential to the church of Jesus Christ. God has ordained that the gathering of His church take place through the ministry of men. Upon every pastor,

Jehovah places this calling: "the same commit thou to faithful men." While the reference is clearly to ministers teaching other men to become ministers, the calling is not limited just to some men. Every pastor has this calling. The pastor teaches his catechism classes and the young people's society in the awareness that God is using him to prepare future ministers and missionaries in the churches. He preaches the gospel with conviction, in all its power, conscious that God is using that Word to speak to

men who may be called to continue his own labor. Finally, the minister in the seminary very specifically takes up this calling as he teaches young men and prepares them for the gospel ministry.

Reformed believers know the importance of the church and of the ministry of the gospel. We understand that the ministry of the gospel is necessary for faithful Sabbath observance, as Lord's Day 38 teaches. We confess that the preaching of the gospel is the chief means of grace that God uses to convert and instruct

Rev. Brummel is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois.

His children. I Corinthians 1:21 teaches that it pleases God “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”

Through the ages there has been opposition to the idea that theological training is necessary for the preparation for the ministry. This opposition centered in a false view of the church and the offices of the church as well as a wrong view of the Holy Spirit’s work. At the time of the Reformation the Anabaptists did not share the conviction of the Reformation regarding the importance of the church and its special offices. This was reflected in their rejection of theological training. Rather than insisting on a solid theological training, the Anabaptists looked for men who claimed direct revelations from God and were filled by the Spirit. Some boasted about the fact that they were not trained by books, but only by the Holy Spirit. The lack of rigorous training in the liberal arts and in the doctrines of Scripture that is prominent today is not biblical. The Holy Spirit gives gifts for the ministry. He does so through means, and in ways that require development and testing.

God has entrusted the truth to His church and commands His church to be a faithful steward of the treasures of the gospel. “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15). Faithful stewardship requires that the churches not only teach and preach the gospel but also make preparations for the preservation of the gospel ministry in her midst. The church that loves God and His Word will see to it that godly men are taught the truths of God’s Word and equipped with the tools necessary to divide the Word of truth rightly.

We admit that a good theological training does not necessarily make a good minister. There are certain qualifications for the min-



l. to r: R. Cammenga, R. Dykstra, D. Engelsma, R. Decker, B. Gritters

istry that a theological education can never give. A man must be godly, humble, modest, and give evidence of spiritual discretion and gifts of speaking, as Article 8 of our Church Order sets forth. Seminary training may be used by God to develop these gifts, but no training itself can make a man godly, humble, modest, etc. There is even a caution required. It is possible that a thorough liberal arts and seminary training might make a man proud, so that he considers himself to be above the man or woman in the pew. Such an attitude must be condemned. Without the calling from God and the gifts of the Holy Spirit a seminary instruction is vain.

Reformed churches have always allowed room for admitting to the ministry those who did not have seminary training. There are times in the history of the church when there is a great scarcity of trained men, or when God in His sovereign good pleasure gives some men extraordinary gifts and qualifications for office that the church of Jesus Christ ought not to pass by. These are exceptions to the rule. The rule is sound, thorough liberal arts and theological training. The consistories and the theological schools need to be care-

ful to admit men to the seminary who give evidence of the gifts of godliness and humility. Men who will, the Lord willing, be benefited by solid theological instruction.

The word seminary comes from the Latin word *seminarium*, which is related to the Latin word *semen*, or seed. This word *seminarium* means “a piece of ground where seed is sown for later transplanting of plants, a nursery, a seed plat.” We understand a seminary to be an institution for the training of men for the ministry. The seminary is a greenhouse, a seedbed where young men are prepared to function as ministers of the gospel. They are prepared for later transplantation into our churches, where they function as faithful Reformed pastors. The greenhouse does not produce plants. It only raises them and prepares them and trains them. God alone is able to call men to the ministry of the gospel. Only God produces preachers and gives them gifts. He uses seminary instruction to cultivate those gifts and confirm His purpose in the man who is called. The seminary’s purpose is to prepare not merely scholars, but preachers. The whole of the curriculum is united in its purpose to nurture and send out preachers of the gospel.

Throughout history, a principle has repeatedly been the motivation of the people of God: God has bestowed on us a treasure! Paul talks in Romans 3:2 of this treasure as "the oracles of God." The Word of truth takes hold of us, and our desire as faithful stewards before God is to preserve that Word. "These things which ye have heard of me ... commit to faithful men!" God has entrusted us with a treasure. He has placed His Word in our hearts, giving us to know and to embrace the wonder of salvation. He gives His saints and His church a desire to see that gospel taught to their children and grandchildren.

But there is more. It is the doctrine of election that serves as the motivation for a trained ministry. Our Form for the Installation of Professors of Theology makes reference to that.

Since our God, who is rich in mercy, has chosen in His great love a church unto Himself for the inheritance of eternal life, and will gather this church through His Spirit and Word to the fellowship of His Son in the unity of true faith and to the increase of the knowledge of His will, so it pleases Him to call men by His Holy Spirit, who as ministers of the Word are to preach the glad tidings of salvation among those who already belong to the church, and among those outside, who are yet without the knowledge of God's ways.

God is pleased to gather His church through the ministry of men. Men must be trained so that they can go forth, called by Christ and His church to preach the authoritative gospel of Jesus Christ.

The man who believes himself called by God to the ministry must look at the seminary training as necessary and good for his preparation. God uses the whole of his upbringing, but especially his years in the seminary, as a means to prepare him for the ministry. Some of you young men in junior high

and high school feel God calling you to the ministry. You need to give yourself to your studies now. Don't be lazy. A lazy student will be a lazy preacher. Give yourself to your studies now in grade school and high school and in college, and be confident that God will use these studies to prepare you for seminary. It seems like a long process and many years of instruction, but it is a necessary preparation. You will never have another opportunity to be students. Using the greenhouse analogy, the plants are not grown in the greenhouse to stay there. They are raised to be transplanted. The purpose of the greenhouse is to grow the plants as quickly as possible so that they can be sold. Similarly, God uses your training, concentrated in a few early years, to prepare you as rapidly as possible for the time when you will receive the final confirmation in a call from the churches and will be ready to be transplanted into the churches.

There are many blessings for the students who undergo seminary instruction. First, they learn the physical and spiritual discipline necessary for the work of the ministry. The ministry is the hardest task to which any human being can be called. There are no shortcuts. In the way of faithfulness to God, there are rewards that are also richer and sweeter than the rewards of any other vocation known to man.


Second, the young men are taught to learn who their enemy is and to know how to use the weapons that they will need to use to fight against all the spiritual foes that threaten the gospel.

Finally, you will learn to see God as a God of holiness and righteousness. Through their seminary training, young men are brought to their knees as they are brought to see the glory and the faithfulness of their God. Every school day they hear about the glory and greatness of God, whether in Greek, in Hebrew, in Exegesis, in Church History, or in Church Polity.

There are also benefits for the churches. First, when the churches themselves provide the means of instruction for their own students, the churches will receive men who have enjoyed a uniform course of instruction. While each man brings into the ministry his own unique gifts and abilities, they can be expected to agree in the truths of God's Word as embraced and confessed by the churches. All have been taught the same theology and the same approach to counseling, to catechism instruction and Bible study, and to the confessions of the churches.

Secondly, there will be fellowship and friendships among the ministers that bind them together in mutual trust and assistance of one another, which will be for the good of the churches.

Finally, the churches will have confidence in the ministry of the gospel. We live in a day when the credibility of and respect for pastors is not what it should be. Much of this is brought on by pastors themselves, who are not adequately equipped for the ministry. They are not willing to take on the difficult day-to-day labors of counseling, instructing prospective members, visiting the aged and sick, leading societies, teaching catechism, and making two sermons a week. The result is that the credibility of the pastorate is at stake. We hold high the position of the minister, deeming it to be the highest of callings that God places upon men. We show that by taking seriously the need for thorough, careful training to equip such a man for faithful labor.

We count it a privilege to have and to support such a seminary. The saints of God love the truth and love the church of Jesus Christ. We do not want to see a famine of the Word, but we want to see that Word feed and nourish our children and grandchildren. Cheerfully give your money, your time, your prayers, and your sons for this work of God! 

Church History and New Testament Studies

New Testament Studies

By the time a student in the Protestant Reformed Seminary completes all the pre-seminary and seminary classes required for New Testament studies, he will have sat through over 500 hours of classes, and spent approximately 1500 additional hours on his own in these areas, not counting the hundreds of hours given to sermons on NT texts. That gives an indication of how important we consider it to be that the students know the Scriptures.

What does New Testament Studies include? It begins with the study of the Greek language and continues on to the exegesis of NT texts. It includes a full year of NT History (Gospels and Acts), and concludes with NT Isagogics, which is an introduction to the books of the New Testament Scriptures.

The Greek Language

The Protestant Reformed Seminary has found it beneficial to continue offering a few pre-seminary courses, and two of those are Greek. Four semesters of Greek are required of the prospective seminary student — a year of grammar and a year of reading from Scripture. One additional year of reading from Scripture is taught in seminary. This year of Greek reading is a bridge to exegesis. Stu-

dents must be able to identify every word in the verse, explain the grammar, and begin to explain how the grammar helps to understand the verse.

Obviously, the seminary considers it vital that graduates know and use the Greek — the language in which the Holy Spirit gave the New Testament Scriptures.

From a certain point of view, it is not essential that a minister know the original languages. A minister could read and study the English, prepare biblical sermons, and preach them for the good edification of the believers. If that were not the case, the ordinary believer would not be able to read and understand the Bible. He can, and so could the minister. Nonetheless, this stress upon the knowledge of the original languages is proper. First of all, this emphasis arises out of a high view of the Bible. We insist that the Bible is the Word of God, infallibly inspired. The Holy Spirit moved holy men of old to write God's Word. Each word is exactly what God wanted on paper. We can read the individual words that the Spirit gave to Matthew, to John, and to Peter, and that they wrote upon their scrolls. Knowing the original languages enables the minister to study the very words as given by the Spirit.

Having those very words before him, the student of Scripture (the minister) has an advantage that can be summed up in two words: precision and richness. He has the advantage of precision in his exegesis because he knows ex-

actly the words that the Spirit used. This is important because translating is not an exact science. A good translator strives to be accurate, but often times words can have more than one meaning. (Look up the English word "wash" as an example of an English word with many connotations.) Translators make thousands of decisions as to which English word is the best translation for the Greek (or Hebrew) word. It follows that the minister ought not be reliant on a translation of Scripture, but should know precisely what words the Spirit used.

Jesus' discourse with Peter recorded in John 21:15-17 illustrates the importance of precision. Perhaps you know that the Greek language has two words for love used in Scripture. One term defines love as a decision, a matter of the will. The other, a weaker term, emphasizes that love is also feeling, and attraction, and includes friendship. In John 21:15-17, both words are used, where the English translation can only translate both words "love."

Secondly, knowledge of the original languages allows for a certain richness in the minister's work. Just as with the English verb "wash" there is a depth of meaning that is not captured by the definition "to clean," so in the original language. The Greek words for straying, erring, or deceiving are all related and refer to one who wanders. From the Greek root comes the English term "planet." This indicates that one who errs or one who deceives, moves. He does

Prof. Dykstra is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

not hold to solid and unchanging truth, but he wanders far afield, like a planet. The word for preacher in the Greek is “a herald of the king.” What richness can be discovered as one explores the nature of a king’s official proclamation to his people and the role of the herald, and then applies that to King Jesus and His preachers!

All of this is captured by Luther in his letter *To the Councilmen of all Cities in Germany that They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*. He wrote:

Although faith and the gospel may indeed be proclaimed by simple preachers without a knowledge of [the Greek and Hebrew] languages, such preaching is flat and tame; people finally become weary and bored with it, and it falls to the ground. But where the preacher is versed in the languages, there is always a freshness and vigor in his preaching. Scripture is treated in its entirety, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and illustrations.

Exegesis

The word exegesis comes from two Greek words that mean, literally, “to lead out.” Thus it refers to the activity of bringing out the meaning of the text, of explaining what it means. The importance of exegesis simply cannot be overstated, for it is the essential work of the preacher. He expounds Scripture. The apostles instructed the church to select deacons so that they might give themselves continually to the word of God and prayer (Acts 6:4). The Holy Spirit through Paul admonished young Timothy, and thus all preachers: “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Every aspect of the minister’s labors involves exegesis of Scripture, from teaching catechism to bringing a word of comfort to the sick, giving counsel in the study,

making speeches, and above all, preparing sermons — it all requires exegesis.

Exegesis follows from Hermeneutics — the study of the interpretation of Scripture. Hermeneutics is a foundational subject in seminary. In this course the rules for interpretation of Scripture are set forth and put into practice. The method of interpreting Scripture consciously followed in the Protestant Reformed Seminary is that of the Reformation, set forth especially by Luther and Calvin. The heart of this method is the well known principle of the Reformation — Scripture interprets Scripture.

The principle that Scripture is and must be its own interpreter is based on the proper view of Scripture. The Bible is God’s Word as a whole and in every part, and has but one author, namely, the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit is the author of the whole of Scripture, it is entirely consistent with itself, Genesis with Matthew, and Romans with the Psalms. The goal of exegesis, then, is to determine the meaning that the Spirit intends in any given text, using all of Scripture.

In addition, a number of practical rules for interpreting Scripture are laid out. For example, students learn to interpret the verse in light of the context. They study the meanings of words as the Spirit gives the words content in the Bible. They learn to expound a text in harmony with the kind of literature that it is — whether Psalms, history, epistles, or prophecy. All this and much more is studied in Hermeneutics.

We confess that the Bible is the revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Therefore the exegete must see how Christ crucified comes into focus in the text. If he does not discover that, he has not

grasped the heart of the text and the meaning of the Spirit. This is what Paul testified to the Corinthians, as he wrote, “I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). In addition, 2 Corinthians 4:6 makes it plain that the preacher must “give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

As to the specifics of exegesis, briefly, students must find the main idea of the text. They must develop the concepts of the text in the light of all of Scripture — concepts such as the righteousness of God, justification by faith, or the sovereignty of God. Finally, they are to show how the concepts are related to each other and to the main thought.

Church History

A total of six semesters of church history is required in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

This includes four semesters of church history proper — Ancient, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern — and two semesters of History of Dogma. The latter course examines the history of the development of doctrine. This subject lies between Dogmatics and church history, and there is necessarily some overlap.

We consider the study of church history to be very important for the Reformed minister of the gospel for a number of reasons. First of all, we insist that church history is *our* history. The church of Christ is one, and its history is ours. As it is always important for an individual to know something of his *family* history — so likewise with his *church family* history. Church history answers such questions as, How did we get here? And, How did we develop to be what we are today? In the study of the church’s history,

... the Bible is the revelation of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Therefore the exegete must see how Christ crucified comes into focus in the text.

we trace the line of the true church of Christ from the apostles to the present day.

A second reason why the preacher must know church history is that the development of doctrine is inseparable from the history of the church. Thus the knowledge of church history is of inestimable value for understanding the essence of the doctrines expounded by the church. More on this later.

Thirdly, since history is the unfolding of God's counsel, it is a revelation of God in His works, through Christ. The history of the church is the record of the work of the Son of God, who, "from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen unto everlasting life" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 54). God's people study history with eagerness (particularly church history), delighting in the glory of God there revealed.

It is my own conviction that church history should be taught by developing themes, not merely reciting facts. Students need to see trends, patterns, and principles, and the facts ought to be brought in to demonstrate the same. This is the most instructive, for there is nothing new under the sun. What the church faced in the past, we face again in different dress. A couple examples will illustrate this.

First, very early in her history the church faced the error of Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a synthesis religion, drawing from Greek pagan religions and philosophies, from the Jews, and from Christianity. It is important that we recognize the character of this religion, because it reappears throughout history — attempts to synthesize Christianity and other religions. And in the end, it will be the religion of the Antichrist.

A second example is Montanism. In the mid-second century, a man named Montanus made trouble in the church. He pro-

moted himself as the man through whom the Holy Spirit speaks — the Paraclete. He ordained women prophets and rejected the other special offices in the church. What is this, but the first charismatic movement in the church? (A movement, by the way, that the ancient church rejected.)

A second characteristic of good church history instruction is that it is doctrinal, emphasizing the truth. Courses in church history enable the prospective ministers to learn how the truth of God was attacked, how it was defended, and how the truth was written in confessions. It can be noted that church history also indicates the cost to faithful servants for standing for the truth of God. Seminary students must count the cost before entering the ministry.

In addition, in church history we look for lessons for the church today. For example, in the Arian controversy of the fourth century, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ and the Trinity were at stake. A proper study of church history reveals how the church struggled with doctrine, and had to realize that she had to formulate the proper language, and could not simply use the words of Scripture. The church through her struggles needed to use non-Scriptural terms, such as Trinity and person, to describe this basic doctrine of God — three in person and one in essence.


From the Arian controversy can be learned also how heresy forced the church to set forth the truth carefully. From this students learn the importance of precision in theology. The Council of Nicaea held long debates on which word correctly defined the unity of the first and second persons of the Trinity — *homoi-ousia* (like essence) or *homo-ousia* (same essence). In the end, the orthodox theologians rejected the first term and adopted the second. Notice that the difference between orthodoxy and dreadful error (denying Christ and

the Trinity) was a difference of one letter. Church history and the history of dogma teaches the modern-day theologian to be precise in the formulation of doctrine.

Another benefit of the study of church history is that it confirms the faith of believers. As the various controversies are studied — Athanasius against Arius, Augustine against Pelagius, and Calvin and Luther against Rome — we discover that we believe essentially the same things that the orthodox fathers taught. This is important for Reformed believers who can seem to be so very alone in their stand on various biblical doctrines. It is indeed a blessing to know that others who have gone before upheld the doctrines of election and reprobation, rejected the shows of the world, stood for the truth of marriage as a picture of God's covenant.

Conclusion

Teaching in a seminary is exciting work. We professors deal with fine, gifted, spiritually-minded young men. We have the privilege of studying God's Word, and bringing the truth into focus in our respective areas.

We are convicted of the importance of the labor. It is of utmost importance that these young men are well trained, know the Reformed faith, and are convicted of the truth. This calling is not an academic exercise for us — our children and grandchildren are and will be taught by these men. All the subjects of the curriculum are taught, consciously, with a view to equipping the men for the gospel ministry. Students are not only tested for their mastery of the subject matter, but also evaluated as to their convictions with regard to the Reformed faith, as well as their commitment to and gifts for the work of a minister. The church of God, dependent on the preaching of the gospel, demands this of the professors in her seminary. 

Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies

The Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS) is committed to the training of men to be capable preachers of the gospel. The goal of the seminary is that young men graduate who are equipped to preach the glorious gospel of God's sovereign, particular grace in Jesus Christ (the Reformed faith) in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA), in the sister churches of the PRCA, and in other churches of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world. Included in this goal is the goal of preparing men also to labor on the mission fields of the PRCA, her sister churches, and elsewhere in the world where Christ is gathering His church through the work of faithful missionary-preachers.

PRTS is committed to preparing *preachers*. This is the task of the seminary because we are convinced that preaching is the chief—really the only—calling of the minister of the gospel. This is so because preaching is the God-ordained means by which lost sinners hear Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of Christ are brought to salvation and into the church. This is Scripture's (which is to say, God's) regard for the preaching of the gospel. The apostle Paul teaches this in I Corinthians 1:21, where he says

that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (See also such passages as Romans 1:16, 17 and Romans 10:14, 15.)

The church must have preachers. But the church must have *sound* preachers, preachers who are committed to expounding the truth of Scripture, preachers who rightly divide the sacred text. It is not just anything that passes for preaching that is the means of God unto salvation, but the preaching of the *truth*. The preacher is to "nourish up" the flock "in the words of faith and of *good doctrine*" (I Tim. 4:6). For the sake of this, he is himself to "hold fast the form of *sound words*" (II Tim. 1:13). Paul's charge to the minister is: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering *and doctrine*." And he warns that "the time will come when they will not endure *sound doctrine*; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (II Tim. 4:2, 3).

As a Reformed seminary, PRTS is committed to the distinctive doctrines of the Reformed faith, as those truths are summed in the historic Reformed creeds and have been developed by the Protestant Reformed Churches throughout their history. This commitment is expressed in the *Catalog of the Theo-*

logical School of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The seminary is therefore dedicated to preserve and develop the truth of the Word of God and to provide an education in this truth in all branches of theology. More specifically, the seminary maintains this truth as it has been historically maintained since the time of the great Protestant Reformation, especially the Reformation of John Calvin.

There is no need therefore for apology in pointing out that these principles and truths of the Calvin Reformation form the heart of all the instruction offered (p. 4).

The instruction in all the courses taught in the seminary curriculum aims to ground the student in the doctrines of the Reformed faith, thus preparing him to proclaim these great doctrines one day in his public preaching and teaching. But this is especially the focus of the Dogmatics courses. The Dogmatics courses are at the heart of the curriculum of PRTS. This central place of Dogmatics in the curriculum is emphasized in the Catalog.

... the emphasis in the curriculum is on dogmatics and exegesis. This is not without good reason. Dogmatics is important inasmuch as all the life of the church flows out of sound doctrine and a clear and concise understanding of the faith "once delivered to the saints."

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

Sound and effective preaching is preaching of the truth (p. 5).

Dogmatics

Dogmatics, as the name itself indicates, is the study of dogma, that is, the doctrines of Scripture as those doctrines have been systematized and set forth by the church. Another name for this discipline is Systematic Theology. In Dogmatics all the main doctrines of Scripture are studied, as those doctrines are elicited from Scripture. At PRTS, Scripture is regarded as the only, the ultimate, and the infallible authority for right doctrine. Careful attention is paid also to the creeds of the church, since the creeds authoritatively define the dogmas of the Reformed faith. In addition, the Christian tradition, specifically the Reformed tradition, is examined. The Protestant Reformed Churches recognize their debt to and dependence on the church of the past as that church was led by the Spirit of Christ into the truth (John 16:13). The text used in the Dogmatics courses taught at PRTS is *Reformed Dogmatics*, by Herman Hoeksema. In addition to the main text, students are required to do extensive reading in other sources, both within and outside of the Reformed tradition.

At PRTS, all the doctrines of the Bible are treated according to the traditional method in the Reformed church of the six loci. The word "locus," the plural of which is "loci," means "topic" or "subject." Reformed Dogmatics arranges all the main doctrines of Scripture under six main headings. Those six main headings, along with a description of the material covered in each of them as found in the *Catalog of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, are as follows.

The Protestant Reformed Churches recognize their debt to and dependence on the church of the past as that church was led by the Spirit of Christ into the truth (John 16:13).

✠ **Theology.** A study of the doctrine of God, treating the knowability of God, being of God, the names and attributes of God, the Trinity, and the divine decrees.

✠ **Anthropology.** A study of the doctrine of man, treating creation, providence, the original state of man, the fall and sin, and the punishment of sin.

✠ **Christology.** A study of the doctrine of Christ with emphasis on the counsel of peace, and on the names, natures, offices, and states of Christ.

✠ **Soteriology.** A study of the doctrine of salvation, including the idea of the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) and the various steps in the *ordo salutis*: regeneration, calling, faith and conversion, justification, sanctification, preservation and perseverance, and glorification.

✠ **Ecclesiology.** A study of the doctrine of the church, including definitions of the church, the attributes of the church, the marks of the church, and the means of grace.

✠ **Eschatology.** A study of the last things, including a treatment of the idea of the end, the intermediate state, the signs of the second coming, the return of Christ, the resurrection, the final judgment, and the new creation.

One semester is devoted to each of the six loci of Dogmatics. This means that through three of the four years of his seminary career, the student at PRTS is taking one or another of the Dogmatics courses.

In addition to the six Dogmatics courses, PRTS also requires incoming seminary students to take

a one semester course entitled "Introduction to Dogmatics." In this introductory course, the whole subject of Dogmatics is introduced, and a study is made of the name, definition, and principles of Dogmatics, with special attention paid to the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

Old Testament Studies

In a small seminary it is necessary that faculty members "double up" the courses that they teach. At PRTS Dogmatics is combined with Old Testament studies. The Old Testament branch of study is divided into three main areas: Hebrew, Old Testament Exegesis, and Old Testament History.

PRTS maintains a strong emphasis on mastery of the original languages in which God gave the Holy Scriptures to His church. At PRTS, seminary students are solidly grounded in the Hebrew language, the language of the Old Testament. Whereas many seminaries are relaxing their language requirements these days, PRTS continues to maintain high standards in its language departments. If a man cannot master Hebrew or Greek, that man is not ordinarily called to the ministry of the Word.

Two full years (four semesters) are devoted to a study of the Hebrew language. This course may very well be the most demanding of all the courses in the seminary curriculum. The first-year student devotes himself to a thorough study of the various elements of the Hebrew language, mastering the grammar and syntax of the language, as well as a working vocabulary. The second-year student, building on what he has learned in his first year, busies himself in reading and translating select passages out of the Hebrew Scriptures. Forms are identified; grammar and syntax are analyzed; and significant exegetical points are examined.

The student at PRTS who has successfully mastered the Hebrew language applies his language

skills in the Old Testament Exegesis classes. The word “exegesis” refers to interpretation and explanation of the Scriptures. PRTS offers three semesters of Old Testament exegesis. The three main types (genres) of Old Testament literature are studied: history, poetry, and prophecy. Lectures are presented explaining the important principles that govern the interpretation of these different types of Old Testament literature and illustrating the implementation of these principles. Students are assigned select passages out of the Hebrew Bible on which they must prepare written, detailed exegesis that would serve as the basis for making a sermon. That exegesis is presented in class, and then analyzed by fellow students and by the professor. Special emphasis is placed on preparing exegesis with a view to preaching. Students are instructed in making the all-important transition from exegesis to sermon.


Belonging to the Old Testament department is also the study of Old Testament History. At present, two semesters are devoted to a treatment of Old Testament History.

The first semester covers the history from creation through the conquest of Canaan. The second semester covers the history from the time of the Judges through the post-exilic period. Stress is placed on the covenant of God as the unifying factor in Old Testament history, as well as on the progress in revelation as the promise of God’s covenant gradually unfolds throughout the Old Testament. Students are given a thorough grounding in the facts and significance of Old Testament history in order to equip them to preach out of the Old Testament, teach Old Testament history catechism classes, and lead Bible studies that deal with various periods of Old Testament history.

The studies in Dogmatics and in the various subjects relating to the Old Testament are demanding—exceedingly demanding. Many, many hours of reading, writing, study, and preparation are required. But at the same time, what an exciting work! To be busy with the Scriptures—the very Word of God! To be mining from those

Scriptures the precious truths of God! To be examining the testimony of the church of the past and the writings of the giants of the faith raised up by God throughout the history of the church! To be preparing to preach the glorious gospel of grace for the gathering and building up of God’s people! There isn’t any more exciting work in the whole world! That excitement is shared by students and faculty alike at PRTS.

With humble thanks to God, the faculty of PRTS counts it a distinct privilege to be involved in the important work of the church in training men for the gospel ministry. Pray for us and for the work of the seminary. Pray that God will continue to keep us

faithful. Pray that He will continue to use us for the blessing of the Protestant Reformed Churches, our sister-churches, and Christ’s church the world over. Pray that He will continue to raise up men convicted of the call to the ministry, men who say with Paul, “Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (I Cor. 9:16). 

*There isn’t
any more exciting work
in the whole world!*

Prof. Robert Decker

Practical Theology

Some may think that the title of this article is a contradiction in terms. By theology we mean the doctrine of God, man, Christ, salvation, the church, and the last things. In other words, the true doctrine of Holy Scripture, summed in the Reformed confessions and taught in the Protestant

Reformed Churches and their theological seminary. By the term “practical” we mean that which pertains to our everyday living, our lifestyle, and our morals. How can theology be practical? What have, for example, God’s attributes or Christ’s two natures or any other doctrines have to do with how we live our lives? How can theology be practical?

It is our contention and firm conviction that theology is eminently practical and thus has ev-

erything to do with the Christian life! In fact, we are convinced that there is a fundamental principle involved in this whole matter. The theology revealed in Scripture is the foundation of the Christian life. Sound, true theology comes to expression in a Christian living that is in harmony with the will of God expressed in Scripture and summed in His law of liberty. Or we might describe true theology as the tree (or vine) that produces the fruit of good works in the life of

Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

the child of God (cf. Eph. 2:8 – 10; John 15:1-8; James 2:14-26).

Theology is practical. The Christian life is impossible without the sound foundation or healthy tree of sound theology. Hence, in our seminary we teach a number of classes in a department called Practical Theology, and it has been the undersigned's privilege to be the professor of Practical Theology for thirty-two and one-half years.

To practical theology belongs the class Homiletics/Liturgics. Homiletics refers to the art and science of preaching. That preaching is an art means that the preacher is born with certain gifts from God that will enable him to become a preacher of the gospel. He must have a deep love for God and His truth, he must love God's church, and he must live an exemplary, godly life (cf. I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9). If one lacks these gifts he cannot be a preacher. Preaching as an art cannot be taught. It is a unique, collective gift from God. Preaching is not merely public speaking. It cannot be described to a layperson. It can be experienced only by a faithful preacher. But preaching is also a science. By this we mean that there are certain rules and guidelines that must be followed in the producing and delivering of an acceptable sermon.

Among the more important of these rules are the following. The content of the sermon must be nothing more or less than the Word of God. The sermon must be *Theo*-centric and *Christo*-centric ("Christ crucified"). The main thought of the text must be expressed in the theme or title of the sermon and then developed logically and along the lines of the text. God's people must not be given a "jumble" of unrelated thoughts, but *the* message of the text as it applies to their daily living.

The ability to preach in the manner described above is also a gift from God. This means that the most a professor can do is help the student develop his God-given

abilities to construct a sermon and deliver it properly. In addition, the student must preach ten sermons before the faculty and student body in Practice Preaching, as well as a number of sermons during the six-month internship required of every student who intends to enter the ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). When a man is lawfully called by Christ through the church and succeeds in preaching properly, God's people do not hear a preacher, nor do they hear about Christ, but they hear Christ Himself and are taught by Christ Himself (cf. John 10; Eph. 4: 11, 20-21).

Liturgics is the study of the biblical principles of the worship of the church. God will be worshiped as He has commanded in His Word. Proper worship will, therefore, be "in spirit and in truth" because "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). Included in this seminary class is a study of the liturgical forms used in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

To Practical Theology belongs Church Polity. This is a study of the biblical, Reformed principles of the government of the church institute. We also teach the students how these principles are implemented in

the Church Order of Dordt as used by the PRC. We do this by taking the students through the Church Order article by article.

The Principles of Missions is another course taught in Practical Theology. In this class we concentrate on the biblical basis for mission work, the definition of mission work, and the necessity of mission work in the present day. The textbook used by the undersigned for this class is the excellent book *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, authored by Johan Bavinck.

Perhaps some of our people and officebearers (especially the calling churches for missionaries) might wish to purchase and read this volume. In addition to this class, we also teach two elective classes in missions: Cross-Cultural Missions and Contemporary Trends in Missiology.

Closely related to missions is a required class in World Religions. We study the history, main teachings, and practices (ritual or worship) of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism. We also study the Chinese religions: Confucianism, Taoism (sometimes called Daoism), and the three versions of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. These are critiqued in the light of Scripture and our confessions. Our conviction is that the gods of these religions are idols of man's making. We also insist that the name Jesus is the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved (Ex. 20; Acts 4:12).

Catechetics, as well, is taught in Practical Theology. We study the principles and pedagogical methods to be followed in the teaching of catechism. Our prayer is that this extremely important class will contribute to the PRC's understanding of the critical importance of catechism instruction

for the children and youth of our churches. A sound curriculum and faithful catechism teaching is a rich blessing of God used by the King of the church to preserve and maintain His covenant in the lines of the generations of believers. May God preserve in our generations His truth and a commitment to maintain faithful catechetical instruction of our children.

Poimenics is also a part of Practical Theology. This class emphasizes preparing the students to be faithful, competent undershep-

*May God preserve
in our generations
His truth and
a commitment
to maintain faithful
catechetical instruction
of our children.*


herds of the great, good, and chief Shepherd of the sheep, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The biblical principles and methods of pastoral care are taught in this class. The students gain invaluable practical experience in these areas when they serve their six-month internships in the churches. How ought a minister to instruct, admonish, or comfort a troubled member, a depressed/anxious saint, a member who is sick and in the hospital or facing serious surgery, a new mother and father, a couple having marital difficulties, a member

suffering the infirmities of old age, a shut-in who cannot attend worship services, an alcoholic or a drug addict, a wandering member, or a member who is mourning the loss of a loved one. These are just some of the areas we cover.

In his pastoral labors the minister must not attempt to be a clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist. He must not give medical advice. He must do two things in all of his pastoral work. Remembering that he is a servant of the merciful High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, tempted in

all points like as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:14-16), the pastor must bring and apply the Word of God to the specific spiritual need of each suffering member, and he must bring them boldly to the throne of grace in prayer!

This is his sacred calling!

Are you praying daily, and is your pastor praying in the congregational prayer, that God will give the PRC able, spiritually-minded men to give themselves to the highest calling to which any man could ever aspire, the ministry of the Word and sacraments? 

Prof. Herman Hanko

A Church-Controlled Seminary

It is a well-known fact that most seminaries that have been established in the last forty or fifty years have been independent seminaries under the control of some board of trustees and supported by tuition and private donors. This trend began with the organization of Westminster East in Philadelphia and has continued until the present.

Further, seminaries that were once church-governed have in many instances loosed their ties with the denomination to which they once belonged and have become almost, if not completely, independent.

The biblical basis for a church-governed seminary is strong and is found especially in two passages of Holy Scripture. Ephesians 4:11, while identifying pastors and teachers as gifts God has given to

the church, nevertheless speaks of but one office, which includes both pastors and teachers. Historically this has been interpreted in Reformed churches as referring to ministers of the gospel and professors of theology. This interpretation has followed Calvin's exegesis of this passage, although Calvin viewed the office of the ministry and the office of professor of theology as two distinct offices.

The second passage is found in II Timothy 2:2, where Paul commits the task of training future ministers of the gospel to Timothy, who himself held that office. The training of ministers is therefore a part of the official work of the church.

Some Reformed and Presbyterian churches have taken this so literally that they have entrusted the training of future ministers to individual ministers in the denomination, but where a strong emphasis is placed on federative unity of like-minded congregations, the churches have banded together to labor in the cause of seminary in-

struction in mutual trust.

I wish briefly to mention a few of the dangers of independent seminaries and a few of the implications of church-governed seminaries.

A few of the dangers of independent seminaries are these.

First of all, the greatest danger is, quite obviously, that the seminary is answerable to no ecclesiastical body. It is, along with its board of trustees, a law unto itself. Now I am opposed in principle to ecclesiastical work done by way of individual activity and initiative, or by means of para-ecclesiastical organizations. The work of the church must be done by the church and not by individuals or organizations acting independently from the church. Such individuals and organizations are answerable to no one and are frequently detrimental to the work of the church rather than helpful.

Second, when a seminary is supported by individual contributions, it must placate its generous

Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

supporters in order to remain financially sound, and is, consequently, not free to teach and develop the truth as it ought to be developed and taught.

Third, the professors are not answerable to a church, nor governed by a church, and are, therefore, freer to teach what they wish, without any accountability. They are not even required to sign the Formula of Subscription as professors.

Finally, and most importantly, their teaching, freed from the official work of the church, loses its official character, and thus is fundamentally flawed in its ability to train ministers for the gospel ministry.

With that, we turn to the advantages of a church-controlled seminary.

The first advantage is that the seminary is answerable to the church and must give an account of its instruction to the church. It is not a para-church institution and free to operate on its own, but is regulated by an official church or group of churches through its ecclesiastical assemblies. This is important. Every one of us is prone to stray in doctrine and life. We need the church to control and regulate our life. This is especially true in instruction, for every minister and professor is prone to teach false doctrine or test new ideas in the pulpit or classroom. The restraints of colleagues, consistories, and ecclesiastical assemblies prevent him from proclaiming as truth his own theories. This does not mean that there is no room for development of ideas, but this development is within the sphere of the checks of ecclesiastical assemblies.

It is sometimes said that as goes the seminary, so go the churches. That is not entirely true. It could equally be said, As go the churches, so goes the seminary. The relation is mutual, and it is only in closest cooperation with the churches that the seminary can and

will remain faithful — only as long as the churches remain faithful.

The second advantage is that the instruction in the seminary is a form of the official preaching ministry of the church. This has many implications, all important for a seminary and for the churches which operate it.

First of all, the implication of the preaching ministry of the churches is that the seminary does not become a purely intellectual institution where mere knowledge is exalted. Many seminaries have fallen into this grievous error. When a seminary is for intellectual purposes only, scholarship becomes an end in itself, and scholarship demands innovation, new ideas, seminaries that are on the cutting edge of research, etc. Such an approach to the truth of Scripture leads to heresy, in today's world seen in every area of theological studies.

A seminary that preaches is a seminary that is practical in the good sense of the word. Such a seminary is interested in preparing the students who come to it spiritually as well as intellectually. It is interested in forming and fitting a man to labor as a spiritual and pious man in the church of Christ; and it is interested in preparing a man to preach the gospel with all its application to the life and calling of the saints in their walk in the world.


I am persuaded that only the preaching can do this, for the preaching is Christ's means of grace. Those who operate in independent seminaries are not preaching, though they be preachers. And, because they are not preaching, their instruction lacks a spiritual dimension that is effective in this spiritual preparation necessary to prepare men of God.

This is a subtle point, but our failure to appreciate this point fully is perhaps in large measure due to our failure to appreciate the centrality of the preaching in the lives of the people of God.

When seminary instruction is part of the official work of the church, such instruction is authoritative preaching, and in that respect no different from preaching in the church of Christ on the Lord's Day. It may be formal lecturing on a given subject. It may have room for questions from the students. The classroom may be a forum for discussion and debate. There may be little eye contact between professor and students, because of the furious writing of notes or the soft clackety-clack of a computer keyboard. But the instruction is preaching. The professor does not lead the student to explore various proposed options in the field of theology and leave it to the students to decide which best suits him — an almost universal way of teaching in post-graduate schools. He says, in his lecturing, "Thus saith the Lord."

That puts the student under the obligation to believe what the professor says and to receive it as his own faith, but also as the one body of doctrine that he must bring to Christ's sheep.

This same authority of the official proclamation of the Word regulates the life and conduct of the students in their studies, and so gives the professors a pastoral role in the spiritual and intellectual development of those who bring the gospel. This is important.

At the beginning of the history of our Protestant Reformed Churches, our fathers saw the need for a seminary. Within weeks of their expulsion from the Christian Reformed Church a seminary was established. It was established as a church-governed seminary in the firm conviction that Scripture required this, for instruction of future ministers is part of the official preaching of the Word. Our seminary has maintained this principle-beginning. That is one way in which God has kept our seminary faithful to the truth. 

The Position and Task of the Professor of Theology

Recently many of us were gathered for a special worship service at Faith Protestant Reformed Church for the purpose of installing Professor Ronald Cammenga as our newest professor. It was a joyful occasion. I was personally again impressed by hearing the reading of the form for the installation of professors. Let me give a few quotes from this form.

It follows therefore that the church has a divine mission to proclaim the Word of God, to collect from the Word of God her standards of faith, to study theology according to these words, and further to advance what is in direct connection with this study.

Later in this same form we read this charge that is made to professors of theology:

In behalf of our church the curators charge thee, esteemed brother, with the task of instructing and establishing in the knowledge of God's Word the students who hope once to minister in His church. Expound to them the mysteries of the faith; caution them in regard to errors and heresies of old, but especially of the new day; seek to explain how they not alone as teachers are to instruct but also as pastors are to shepherd the flock of the Lord. Assist in maintaining order and discipline among the disciples,

that our seminary may continue to enjoy the respect and support, the appreciation, the love, and the prayer of the church. Be a good example to the students, that they may not only profit from thy learning, but also find in thee a living illustration of the power and practice of true godliness.

The above is certainly an excellent statement. It speaks of the important formal duties of the professors of theology. It also has a warm spiritual perspective. Professors must not be cold and aloof from the churches. They should not do their theology in an "ivory tower" by themselves. They must do their theology in living connection with the church of Jesus Christ for whom they labor. It is of utmost importance that our professors labor to train men to be sound in doctrine and faithful to the Scriptures. They must teach men with great seriousness and devotion and scholarliness. Our future ministers must be trained to be profound theologians. Theology is important for the ministry. Sound and orthodox theology is the foundation of the true church.

But our future ministers must be trained also to be pastors of the flock of God. Our professors must be models for future ministers, examples to them of the power and practice of true godliness. It is a good tradition in our churches that one of the requirements for new professors of theology is that they have served for a number of years as pastors of the churches in our denomination. A seminary ideally

should have a group of specially-gifted pastors of the denomination as its professors, who are training other men to be pastors.

The Church Order of Dordt has this statement in Article 18 concerning the office of the Professor of Theology:

The office of the professor of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors.

It is rather interesting that this article does not even mention the training of students for the ministry, though of course that is the main task of the professor of theology. The Church Order emphasizes the role that professors of theology have in "expounding the Holy Scriptures and vindicating sound doctrine against heresies and errors."

We use the terminology "professor of theology" in the broad sense, meaning that we include not only those who specifically teach in the department of theology or dogmatics at the theological school but all the professors of the various disciplines.

It is the position of our churches that a professor of theology should be an ordained minister, or sometimes also called a teaching elder. He is one who devotes himself to the special aspect of teaching to prepare other men to be teachers. II Timothy 2:2 is often cited as a passage supporting the calling and need of special training for the ministry. "And the

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

things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." We also have important biblical examples for the need of special training of men for the ministry. There is the classic example of the training of the twelve apostles for the ministry by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Lord and King of the church. There is the interesting example of the school that was established by the apostle Paul in the city of Ephesus, where probably many future ministers of the Word and leaders for the churches of Asia Minor were trained, perhaps by the apostle Paul himself. Later, in the days of the apostolic fathers, schools were established in Alexandria and Antioch and in other places.

That there should be men devoted to the special task of professor of theology arises out of the fact that the church of Jesus Christ must always be engaged in very careful, profound study of the Word of God. The Word of God is inexhaustible in its depths and richness of meaning, glory, and blessedness. The church of Jesus Christ until the return of her Lord must always be growing and developing in her understanding of the Word of God. The professors of theology have a leading role in helping the church grow more and more in knowledge and love for the Word of God and the discernment of His truth.

The professor of theology devotes himself to labor in the science of theology. The word science has many bad connotations for us because of the prevalence of humanistic and ungodly science in the world. But this word can be properly used in respect to theology. In fact, it has been rightly taught in the churches that theology is the "queen" of all the sciences. The science of theology has to do with the true knowledge of God. There is no greater, more glorious, and wonderful knowledge than this knowledge. The reason

why there can be such a science called theology is that Scripture contains a grand and glorious unified system of doctrine. This doctrine is one organic whole. The Scriptures are not a compilation of many disconnected truths. As God is one, so His truth is one. The professor of theology studies Scripture as a whole. He labors to compare Scripture with Scripture. He does not write about "the theology of Moses" and "the theology of Paul." The Bible contains one organic, beautifully harmonious and consistent revelation of the truth of God. This is a very important labor in our day, when many contradictory and conflicting doctrines are promoted in the churches. Clearly contradictory systems of doctrine are defended on the false premise that the Scriptures are an incomprehensible mystery and apparently illogical to the human mind.

Professors of theology have the calling to lead the churches in maintaining sound doctrine. Many times there arise in the church "the same old heresies that have arisen over and over again through the age." Our confessions speak of old heresies arising again out of hell. The devil works ever so hard at trying, if possible, to destroy the doctrinal foundation of the church. In our day we unashamedly say that sound doctrine has the name "The Reformed Faith." We believe that God restored sound doctrine to the church through the mighty work of the Reformation. The doctrines of the Reformed faith are outlined by the Reformed confessions. The professor of theology must be well acquainted with the history of doctrine through all the ages of the church. He must be faithful to the historic confessions of the church. For our churches, these are specifically the three forms of unity. The professor of theology must have a thorough knowledge of the heresies that have arisen in the churches in the past, to help in keeping these same heresies out of the churches

today. He must also be well acquainted with the subtleties and deceptiveness of modern-day heresies. There are always many of these.

The professor of theology ideally must do a tremendous amount of reading and study both of past and modern theology. This kind of labor takes place most often away from the notice of the community of the churches. These labors take a lot of time and discipline and intense study. The members of the churches must have a great appreciation for the many hours that professors must spend devoting themselves to the study of doctrine. There have been countless times in the history of the Reformed churches when heresies have actually arisen in the seminaries. What a shocking thing! We must guard that this never happens, but rather that our theological school leads the churches in maintaining sound doctrine.

Professors of theology have the calling to lead the churches through writing and through public teaching and lecturing in the churches. Professors of theology need to stand strong and courageous against popular heresies of the day. For the strong stands they take they will often be ridiculed and hated by leaders and acclaimed scholars in the apostate church of our day.

The church of Jesus Christ has the important calling to defend and preserve the true doctrine of God established in the past in the history of the church. The church also has the calling to be ever growing and developing in the knowledge of the truth. Even the church that is sound in doctrine must always be on her guard against the great evil of dead orthodoxy. History has proven what appalling effects 'dead orthodoxy' can have on the churches, destroying her spiritual life and zeal for true godliness. The truth of God must live in the minds and hearts of God's people.

She must have a living and spiritual appreciation of the truth of God. Professors of theology must labor to maintain this perspective in the churches.


The above-mentioned aspects of the calling and role of the professor of theology mean that professors of theology must do their work well and energetically and zealously. They need to give large blocks of time to prepare class courses, enriching these courses again and again over the years. They may not just present the same thing year after year. Doing theology often takes place for them as they are preparing class lectures. Many of the greatest theologians of the past have developed theology in connection with preparing their class lectures.

There is a common evil desire in the church for that which is new and different. There are times

when such desire in the church has led the church away from the historic basis of her faith. The doctrine of God is, after all, unchangeable from age to age. The church has, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, been developing the doctrine of Scripture for many centuries. Each new generation must build on the knowledge of the truth from the past generations. The faithful church is founded on centuries of developing of understanding of doctrine. When in these last days someone comes out with a new doctrine never before heard, the church rightly views such with a healthy measure of caution and even suspicion. Often that which is new is heretical.

On the other hand, there is the need in the church to give new expression to the wonderful unchanging truth of God in new books and new systematic theologies. We

ought to be very thankful to God when our professors can write new books on various important doctrines of the Word for the benefit of the churches in general. By doing so, the professors of our seminary serve to encourage the members of the churches always again to study the Word of God with fresh interest and excitement.

The strength and faithfulness of our theological school, the high standard of training that is given there, the depth of theological study engaged in, will play a very large role in giving the churches ministers of the highest caliber, well prepared to preach the Word and shepherd the churches of Jesus Christ. This in turn, by the grace of God, will keep our churches strong and steadfast in the truth, serving the glory of the Lord and the cause of His kingdom in the world. 

Reflections of the Interns

Seminary Internships

Andy Lanning

As part of the instruction in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, fourth-year students are sent to one of the Protestant Reformed churches for a six-month internship. The minister of the church serves as the student's mentor, overseeing his work and giving him guidance in the different aspects of the ministry. The goal of this internship is to give the seminary student firsthand experience in all aspects of the work of a minister of the Word. Under the oversight of his mentor the student makes and delivers sermons, teaches some catechism classes, goes on pastoral visits, leads some Bible studies, attends consistory meetings, and observes a meeting of classis. For my internship I was assigned to First Protestant Re-

formed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, under Rev. James Slopsema. From July 1 through December 31, 2005, my wife, our two children, and I worshiped with and participated in the congregational life of the saints at First PRC. We did not know many people when we arrived, but as the weeks passed, we came not only to know but also to love and appreciate First Church.

There are many things that could be said about the value of the internship. Through observing the pastor, elders, and deacons in their work, I came to appreciate more the wisdom that God gives to the officebearers in His church. I learned much from and enjoyed greatly the Monday afternoon meetings with Rev. Slopsema, in

which we would go over the work that I was doing. These meetings were also an opportunity for me to learn from his experiences in the church as he told me about difficult issues he had faced in the past and how he had dealt with them. But of all that could be said about the value of the internship, especially three things stand out.

The first thing that stood out was how much the making and preaching of sermons dominates all of the other tasks in the work of the ministry. The internship exposed me to most of the work that the minister must do. He is required carefully to prepare for and teach catechism; he must bring the Word to the sick and the shut-ins; he must counsel those who need or seek his help privately; he is

asked to prepare for and lead some of the societies in the church; and he must prepare for and lead the consistory and council meetings. But the work of the minister that dominates all of these other tasks is the work of expounding the Word of God in sermons that he makes and preaches.

That the main work of the minister is preaching comes as no surprise to us. We expect of the minister that he put his energy and time into his sermons first of all. We are familiar with Paul's charge to Timothy to "preach the word." As Paul nears the end of his life, and as he gives his final instructions to young pastor Timothy, his *main* charge to Timothy "before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ" is that Timothy must *preach* (II Tim. 4:1, 2). We are also familiar with the Holy Spirit's description of ministers as "ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us," a description that points to the minister's main work as that of speaking on Christ's behalf, just as an ambassador speaks on behalf of his sovereign (II Cor. 5:20). We are aware that the *Form of Ordination of the Ministers of God's Word* lists as the very first work that belongs to the office of minister "that they faithfully explain to their flock the Word of the Lord, revealed by the writings of the prophets and the apostles." Therefore it comes as no surprise that preaching is the main work.

Nevertheless, this truth was driven home to me on the internship. Even though I was required to make and deliver a word of edification only once every other week, it was that work that dominated all of the other work of the internship. Not only was most of my time spent making and preparing to deliver the words of edification, but much of the Monday afternoon meeting with Rev. Slopsema was spent reviewing those sermons, both before and after I delivered them. This is one way that my six months in First

PRC were valuable. I saw firsthand that *the* thing for the minister is his preaching. His time and his energy must go into his sermons first of all, so that he is a faithful ambassador of Christ who preaches the Word.

The second thing that stood out was that God uses His Word to build up His people in spite of the weaknesses of the men who bring it. The power of God's Word does not depend on the power of the *man* who brings it, but on the fact that it is *God's Word* that is brought. Again, this comes as no surprise. God tells us that the *gospel* is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). It is not the man, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or any other minister, that makes the Word powerful, but Christ crucified is the "power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:12, 23, 24).

This was driven home to me on one particular shut-in visit that I made with Rev. Slopsema. As part of the internship, Rev. Slopsema asked me to lead this visit. For various reasons, I did not think that the visit went well at all. After reading Psalm 23, explaining it, and applying it briefly, I ran out of things to say after only a few minutes. The widow with whom we were visiting expressed concerns for which I did not have an answer. I did not feel as if the visit could have been profitable to this saint in any way. But the next day I heard from the widow's children that she really appreciated the visit and that she was even helped by it. The only conclusion that I could come to was that God used His Word for good for His child in spite of the inexperience of the one who brought it. Whether I felt as if the visit had been profitable for this child of God or not, God's Word was powerful for her. Painful as this experience was, it also made the internship valuable. What a source of encouragement to a young seminary student that although he is inexperienced, if he

will bring the Word, God will bless it! What a reminder to me to be sure that I brings God's Word and not my own in all of my work! It also was encouragement to me to believe that, in spite of how I feel about a particular visit or sermon, God uses His Word to build up and to feed His sheep.

One final thing of note was the unique bond of love that develops between a pastor and his flock. Once again, this close relationship comes as no surprise when we remember the bond that Paul had with the churches he served. For example, we see him calling the Philippians "my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown." On the other hand, we see the love that the Philippians had for Paul, which they showed by their care of him throughout his ministry (Phil. 4:1, 10, 15, 16).

I saw this close bond firsthand during the internship. Not only did I witness this bond between Rev. Slopsema and the congregation of First PRC, but I got a taste of it myself. Even though the internship lasted only six brief months, and even though I was only an intern and not the pastor, I myself experienced the bond that develops between a pastor and the flock. In worshiping with the congregation and leading in worship, in teaching the lambs and the young people in catechism, in wrestling with God's Word with the saints in society, in visiting with the people in their homes, I got a taste of the deep joy that a pastor has in living with the flock and feeding them. Experiencing this was one more way that the internship was valuable.

Overall, my internship was an excellent part of my training in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Not only did I learn much about the work of the ministry, but it whet my appetite for that work. Thanks be to God that He has given us a faithful seminary that prepares men, also through the internship, for the ministry of His Word. ■

On July 1 I began my internship under Rev. VanOverloop and the council of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. This has been a big change for me. Instead of working at my regular summer job (repairing pallets) and taking classes in the seminary in the fall, I have been working for Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. This has been a change for my family as well. We are members at Faith PRC, but since the internship started we have been attending the worship services at Byron Center. It was hard to leave Faith, but we looked forward to meeting the congregation in Byron Center. The members in Byron Center welcomed us warmly, and we have greatly enjoyed their fellowship and communion.

Most of the work that I have done on the internship has been on behalf of Byron Center under the guidance of Rev. VanOverloop. The main aspects of this work include writing and delivering sermons, teaching catechism, and going on pastoral visits. I especially enjoyed going on pastoral visits, since this is an aspect of the ministry that cannot be experienced in seminary. At first I simply went along with Rev. VanOverloop to watch and listen. Later on, when we went on visits, I led, and on some visits I went alone.

There have been other new experiences that have not involved as much work on my part, but which nevertheless have taught me much about the ministry. Of these expe-


riences perhaps the most valuable has been sitting in on and observing consistory and council meetings. From these meetings I have gained insight into and a greater appreciation for the work that elders and deacons perform. In addition to this I have paid careful attention to how these meetings are chaired, knowing that ministers fresh out of seminary are given that responsibility as soon as they are installed! The experience that made me the most nervous was leading family visitation. I thought I could handle leading for ten or fifteen minutes, but a whole hour? Thankfully, the elder who accompanied me and the family we visited were very helpful, so that it went better than I expected.

Apart from the work that I did on behalf of Byron Center, I was also required by the seminary to read twelve books and write reports on them. I was able to finish most of these reports in the months before the busy catechism and society season started.

The most enjoyable part of the internship has been meeting with Rev. VanOverloop on Monday mornings, often at a coffee shop in Grandville. Though these meetings were mainly for the purpose of discussing my sermons, they became a time in which we discussed many things pertaining to the ministry and to the church in general. I used these meetings as an opportunity to ask Rev. VanOverloop many questions pertaining to practical aspects of the ministry. I ap-

preciate his patience in allowing me to ask the questions and in taking the time to answer them. Often Rev. VanOverloop used these meetings as an opportunity to talk about work that he did that I was not able to observe. He is a member of the Domestic Mission Committee and of the Theological School Committee, he serves as assistant stated clerk of synod, and he is one of the two church visitors appointed by Classis East. What I learned from talking about these activities is that ministers are busy working on behalf of the churches in general as well as for the particular church they are serving. It has been eye opening for my wife and me to find out how many nights a minister is away from home attending various meetings.

The internship has been a very positive experience for me and my family. I am glad that I have had this opportunity to gain practical experience by putting to use what I have learned in seminary. Through the internship God has confirmed in me even more my calling to serve in the ministry. In addition to this, I believe He has better equipped me for the work that I will soon be taking up, D.V.

As the internship draws to a close (December 31) my family and I are preparing to say goodbye to Byron Center. To Rev. VanOverloop and the congregation in Byron Center we say thanks for welcoming us into your fellowship and for all of your support. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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

190/Standard Bearer/January 15, 2006

Congregation Activities

On Monday evening, December 12, Rev. John Marcus was ordained and installed as the fourth

pastor of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada. Rev. Richard Smit, of neighboring Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, led the service. We re-

joyce and give thanks, along with Rev. Marcus, his wife, and family, as well as the congregation at First, for this final step in God's calling of Rev. Marcus into the ministry of the Word and sacraments. Rev. Marcus and his family had arrived in Edmonton on December 7, and as pastor elect he provided pulpit supply for First on December 11, the day before his ordination and installation. Then on Sunday, December 18, he addressed his congregation for the first time as their pastor, choosing to preach his inaugural sermon from the Word of God found in Ephesians 6:15-20, under the theme, "And for Me."

Sunday evening, December 4, the Choral Society of the Hudsonville, MI PRC presented a night of praise and thanksgiving in song to their congregation and members from our churches around the area. A collection was taken for the Northern Ireland Building Fund.

The following Sunday evening, December 11, the Choral Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI presented their annual Christmas concert. Faith's congregation and others from our area churches were invited to join together for an hour of praise to God.

The combined choirs of the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRC's presented a program in the auditorium of the Hull PRC Sunday evening, December 11. This program presented a variety of numbers that told of God's praise from His people and His creation around them, as well as songs fitting for the season of Thanksgiving and Christmas. An offering was taken, with proceeds going towards the 2006 Y.P. Convention. A repeat of this program was to be held the evening of January 1 in Doon, D.V.

The congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI was invited to remain after their evening worship service on Sunday, December 11 for a program presented by their church choir. In addition to their choir

and congregation joining together to sing praises celebrating our Savior's birth, the young people provided a special number, and Melonie Haak added a flute solo.

The deacons of at least two of our congregations, Georgetown and Hudsonville, once again this past Christmas season led efforts to help provide for the needy in their respective congregations by coordinating Holiday Food and Gift Certificate drives. Congregation members were encouraged to drop off food donations at their church or simply place gift certificates in the collection plate.

The council of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI recently approved initiating an e-mail mailing list, with the purpose of increasing communication and thereby strengthening the fellowship of saints at First Church as they share each other's burdens and joys. Members of the congregation who wanted to be notified of deaths, births, or hospitalizations within their own congregation were asked to write their name and e-mail address, or phone number if they did not have e-mail, on a sign-up sheet, and their pastor, Rev. James Slopsema, would use these to send out announcements when something happens during the week.

School Activities

The Student Council of Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI sponsored their annual gift certificate drive to help those in need in our churches in the area this past Christmas season. You might also be interested to know that these gift certificates are distributed in such a way that the students have no idea which area church receives them, since a teacher actually delivers the certificates to the area churches, and the deacons of that church distribute them to needy families.

The Foundation of Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids,


MI presented their second annual Christmas celebration concert on Saturday evening, December 10, at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. This year's concert was entitled "The Child of Wonder," and featured Mr. Eric Phelps playing the cello and his wife, Crista, playing piano. What a beautiful hour spent enjoying the songs of the Christmas season, and what a wonderful way to prepare for the coming Lord's Day! In addition to the Phelps, Miss Shari Faber provided about a 20-minute prelude to the concert by playing her harp for the enjoyment of the audience, and Rev. Mitchell Dick, pastor of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI, added his tenor voice for a couple of solos that evening as well.

Instead of a gift exchange this year at Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA, the students collected monies to give to the six students enrolled in our PR Seminary.

Minister Activities

We take this opportunity to remind our churches that the end of December brought the internships of Seminarians Andrew Lanning and Clay Spronk to a close. We are sure that we echo the members of First in Grand Rapids and the Byron Center congregation when we thank God very much for the blessings He gave through them during their past six-month internship. We pray God's continued blessing during their final semester in our seminary.

We also rejoice with Seminarian Nathan Langerak, who has been licensed by the seminary faculty to speak in our churches. We also pray that this experience will be used to confirm his call to the ministry.

Since our last News, both the Edgerton, MN PRC and the Kalamazoo, MI PRC have extended calls. On Sunday, December 18, Edgerton called Rev. M. Dick, and Kalamazoo called Rev. A. Brummel. 

THE STANDARD BEARER

PERIODICAL
Postage Paid at
Grandville,
Michigan

Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Adult Bible Society of Faith PRC expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to our leader and fellow members Mr. and Mrs. Fred Hanko in the death of his sister,

MISS ALYCE HANKO.

May they find comfort in the first Lord's Day — that we are not our own but belong both body and soul to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

John VanBaren, Vice-all
Jan Talsma, Sec.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Bomers and their family and to Mr. and Mrs. Jason Engelsma and family in the death of their father and grandfather,

MR. KENNETH RIETEMA.

May they be comforted by God's word in Philippians 1:21: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, president
Mr. Jack Brands, asst. clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 10, 2006, our parents and grandparents,

DAVID and LORILEE KUIPER, celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. We rejoice with them and pray that God will continue to bless them in their marriage in the years to come. We thank them for their encouragement to us in our marriages and as we raise our children in the fear of the Lord.

- * Jill and Jeremy Thull
Jimmy, Brooke, Bella
- * Sara and Josh Lubbers
Kelly, Jake
- * Joe and Kathleen Kuiper
- * Michelle Kuiper

Grandville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

"He willed that each succeeding race
His deeds might learn and know,
That children's children to their sons
Might all these wonders show."

Psalter 215:5

On September 13, 2005 our dear parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents,

BART and TILLIE ZANDSTRA,

were blessed by God to celebrate 55 years of holy marriage. We, their children, thank God for them, for their love, care, and instruction. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless them in the days and years ahead in their earthly pilgrimage. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations" (Psalm 89:1).

- * John and Claire Zandstra
 - * Peter and Julie Zandstra
 - * David and Karla Zandstra
 - * Charles and Karla Zandstra
 - * Wilbur and Mary Bruinsma
 - * Daniel and Dawn Zandstra
 - * Glen and Joanne VanMilligan
 - * Bart and Janice Zandstra
 - * Jeff and Betty Berens
 - * Mark and Brenda Zandstra
 - * Ahmad and Roseanne
- 44 grandchildren
20 great grandchildren

Lansing, Illinois

NOTICE!

The next regular meeting of Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado, on Wednesday, March 1, 2006 at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, January 30, 2006. An officebearers' conference is planned for Tuesday, February 28, the Lord willing, on the subject of "The Minister and His Money."

Rev. Richard J. Smit,
Stated Clerk of Classis West

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of the Doon Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy with their fellow officebearer Gaylen TeSlaa and his wife Laura in the death of Laura's mother,

MRS. HENRIETTA KLEIN.

May they find comfort in God's word: "For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:17, 18).

Rev. David Overway, President
Mr. Warren Boon, Clerk

NOTICE!!

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek (Phone: (616) 453-6455). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 27, 2006, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

NOTICE!!

The faculty of the seminary is pleased and thankful to our faithful God for the privilege of announcing to the churches that Seminarian Nathan Langerak has been licensed to speak a word of edification in the public worship of our churches and sister churches.

Our fervent prayer is that by means of God's gracious blessing upon Seminarian Langerak the churches will be edified by the word that he brings, and that this will prove as well to enhance his preparation for the highest calling to which any man could aspire, the ministry of the Word and sacraments.