



# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

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**PRC Synod  
1996**

**Highlights**

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In This Issue ...

Featured in this issue of the *Standard Bearer* is the annual synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). The editorial gives a report of some of the main actions of synod in words. The meditation is Rev. G. VanBaren's pre-synodical sermon. Thanks to managing editor Don Doezema, there is also a report by pictures.

Captions identify the pictures found throughout the body of the magazine. On the cover (clockwise from upper left), Protestant Reformed Seminary graduate Richard Smit and his wife Tricia are congratulated by Rev. J. Slopesma; Protestant Reformed Seminary graduate Cheah Fook Meng is congratulated by Prof. D. Engelsma, rector of the seminary; Prof. H. Hanko receives a commemorative plaque from synod's president, Rev. J. Slopesma, in recognition of Prof. Hanko's 41 years in the ministry and 31 years at the seminary; and the two fraternal delegates from the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (ERCS), Pastor Lau Chin Kwee (on the left) and Elder Tan Tor Swee prepare a slide presentation of missions in Myanmar.

Just below this column is a picture of the delegates and advisors who made up the synod of 1996. From left to right: Rev. Lau Chin Kwee; Elder Tan Tor Swee; Prof. H. Hanko; Elder R. Brands; Elder D. Doezema; Rev. B. Gritters; Elder K. DeJong; Elder J. Kalsbeek, Jr.; Elder W. Smit; Rev. S. Key; Elder G. Wassink; Rev. J. Slopesma; Rev. G. VanBaren; Elder C. Jonker; Prof. D. Engelsma; Rev. A. den Hartog; Elder A. Brummel; Elder J. Regnerus; Rev. R. Dykstra; Elder H. Langerak; Rev. C. Terpstra; Rev. R. Cammenga; Rev. R. VanOverloop; Prof. R. Decker; Rev. C. Haak.

It was a joy — and beneficial — to have with us as fraternal delegates who entered into the deliberations our brothers from the ERCS. The prayer of the ERCS with which Pastor Lau ended his address was answered: "that the presence and contribution of our two delegates at your synod may serve to promote a closer sister-relationship between us."

— DJE





# Preparing for the Lord's Return

*Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;*

*And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.*

*Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

*And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.*

Luke 12:35-38

We have in this passage a summary of the larger, lengthier account of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. We have in these verses an emphasis on the central theme: the kingdom of heaven.

As we assemble here together tonight, and as the members of Synod begin their work tomorrow, we must do so in a deep awareness of that kingdom: what it is, what is involved in laboring in and for that kingdom. Christ, you remember, gave warnings in that regard, not only to the individual members but to the church of

Christ as a whole. We are not to be as others who set their hearts on things earthly and material. The question always was, and still is today: "What shall we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed?" In all honesty, those questions often trouble us, too. Do we have enough? Will we be able to sustain ourselves not only today but tomorrow and next year as well?

The reminder of Christ is very much to the point: "Consider the lilies," He said. "Consider the birds of the air. Did God not clothe the lilies with a beauty that we can only admire and never duplicate? Does He not feed the birds of the air? Shall He not take care of us, too, who are so often of little faith?" He gives that beautiful assurance, at the same time, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

That assurance has comforted God's little church throughout the ages. It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Nothing, no one, not the devil himself can change that Word of God. And he who labors in the consciousness of that fact will never labor in vain.

What we have in our text is in the form of a parable, reminding the disciples and the church and the synod concerning proper preparation. There is a calling to be prepared and preparing for the Lord's return.

Notice, then, three things:

I. The Imminent Return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. The Slaves' Preparation with a View to that Return.

III. The Blessedness of the Servants at the Time of His Return.

In this parable Christ speaks to His disciples of a great lord who was attending a marriage feast. That the lord was a prominent individual, probably a very wealthy, honorable man, is evident from several factors. First of all, he had many servants. There were not many people in the land of Canaan who could afford many servants. It appears, too, that he lived in a grand palace, or at least a very large home. This is evident not only because of the many servants, but also because of the many lights at his home. These lights were lanterns, oil lamps, that had to be kept



Rev. Gise VanBaren

*Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado. This is the text of the pre-synodical sermon, given on June 10, 1996.*



burning. They had to be tended regularly. To have many lights would indicate a large home.

This lord was attending a wedding feast, and the time of his return was uncertain. The servants, waiting his return, were not sure at what hour he would come. It could be, we read, in the second or third watch, representing the period of night. A wedding feast went on, sometimes, for a whole week. The master would return at the conclusion of that wedding feast. And the servants had to be ready for him when he came.

That he would come at night might be considered an inconvenience for his servants. They were slaves who, perhaps, had been working all day, and now at night they had to continue to watch in order to be ready the moment their lord returns. One would say it would almost be an imposition upon these slaves to expect them to work hard through the day and then continue to watch even through the night. But despite what seems to be an inconvenience, a great difficulty, the servants are there watching, at the door, for their lord's return.

It does remind us, as Christ intended, of His own return on the clouds of glory. We know He is coming again. He came once to bear the infinite wrath of God for all of our sins, to die and then to rise again and ascend to glory. There He prepares for us a place. He is at that wedding feast, though much of His bride remains still on this earth.

His servants, slaves, are here on this earth awaiting His return. If they are faithful servants, diligent servants, they watch for His return. And they know that He is coming again soon. In the light of such knowledge, they are diligent, faithful. They are not lazy, nor are they of those who say, "But the lord delayeth his coming," and then go about beating and maltreating the servants. They are not involved in all kinds of extrane-

ous activities unrelated to the return of their Lord. They realize full well that they have a duty, a responsibility before their Lord: to be ready for His return.

And He is coming again on the clouds of glory, even as the angels testified to the disciples who watched Him ascend into heaven. When is He coming? Tonight? No! Tomorrow? No. But soon. The day and the hour we do not know, nor the month, nor the year. But His servants, His church, our churches and our synod are and must be watching, ready, at the door, awaiting His coming.

Christ reminds us, in the parable, of the preparation these servants make. There are three things that we ought to observe.

In the first place, they have their loins girt. It is a figure which was perhaps understood more easily in Christ's day than in ours. The people of that day would often be clothed with a long, flowing garment. At times of leisure they could walk around with that garment flowing about their feet, with no problem. But, when they had to get down to work, that garment would easily trip them up, and interfere with their work. They could not carry out their duties properly and accurately. Consequently, those who would do their work would have a girdle, a belt, to tie about their waist in order to pull up that robe so that it would not hinder them. Jesus said, "That's what those slaves did who were waiting for the coming of their master from the wedding feast." Their garments were tied up so that they were ready to carry out the commands of their master. They couldn't stay somewhere in the house telling themselves, "When the time comes, we'll take our belts and tie them around our waist and begin our work." No, they were ready — though they knew not the watch in which their master would return.

Christ says concerning these

slaves, in the second place, that the lights were burning. (Not *their* lights, as we read in the KJV. The word *their* is in italics in most of our Bibles. But it was *the* lights of that palace in which the master lived.) They had to tend to those lights. At whatever time the master might come, they were ready.

And the third factor that Christ emphasizes is that these slaves are at the door. Now, if you are expecting a guest, even if you know approximately the time, you do not normally wait at the door. Yet these servants are doing just that. They are standing at the door, ready to open it — though the master might not come even in the second watch. It might be the third, late into the night. They are at the door, ready to open for their master. You can imagine them, not only standing at that door, but peering out the window. "Is the master coming now? Can we see him? Do we hear of his approach?" They are ready, waiting at the door.

That is quite something to live up to, is it not? To be watching, waiting, ready for Christ's return with that degree of faithfulness?

That is required of the individual child of God, first of all. We can tell ourselves that that is the duty of a synod, or of a consistory. No — first of all it is the responsibility of each child of God. You can say that it might not be for five years yet, maybe not for ten years. But that is not the question. Are you ready for Christ's return? Are you prepared, in all that you do and in all that you say and in all that you think, for Christ's return?

You see the signs about you. You cannot help but see them if your eyes are open. There is unrest throughout the world, revolutions, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, mighty winds, droughts and floods, diseases of every sort. There are signs of apostasy, of the sort we could hardly imagine twenty years ago:



churches departing from the confessions of the church, the old paths.

And the child of God who sees these signs, and who hears the hoofbeats of the horses of Revelation, is ready, watching, loins girded, with lights burning, at the door ready to open.

Are you? Am I?

Watchfulness requires diligent study of God's Word. How else can one watch, except through the spectacles of the Scriptures? We are called to watch by way of prayer, by way of earnest supplication to God for His guidance, for strength, for encouragement from day to day. Thus the child of God shows a readiness, an eagerness for the return of his Lord.

I ask you, are you watching for His coming?

That watchfulness is necessary for the church of Jesus Christ wherever it may be. But as far as we are concerned, we must be aware of the fact that we as Protestant Reformed Churches, and this week as the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, must show our concern and interest solely in the kingdom of heaven, and the return of its King, our Lord Jesus Christ, on the clouds of heaven.

There could be a temptation for the synod to think in terms of just the Protestant Reformed Churches. What kinds of decisions ought we to make in order to grow larger? What kinds of decisions ought we to make to gain the attention, or perhaps the admiration, of others? Let's face it. We have a sinful nature that is all too inclined to think of self and of self-aggrandizement rather than exclusively of the kingdom and its coming. For that reason we need the reminder that synod, as it considers many things that will affect our churches not only this year but in the years to come, must make decisions which always show our great interest in the kingdom of heaven.

Our sole consideration must be: How will our decisions serve God's kingdom cause? How do our decisions reflect our desire for our Lord's return?

There are several dangers we face as we consider acting (or not acting), in light of Christ's soon return. On the one hand (and that is not an unusual thought), we might say, "Since the Lord is coming again soon, there really is nothing more we have to do. We've done a lot in the past, we have sacrificed much. But our Lord is coming again, soon, so we can, if you will, sit in our rocking chairs, retired, inactive, looking heavenward, proclaiming to all who will hear, 'Our Lord is soon coming again.'" But that is not the way Christ portrayed those slaves in the parable. They were not in their rocking chairs. They were ready. And we also must not be inactive because we know our Lord will return soon.

On the other hand, there is another danger we face. There is the danger of becoming extremely active but in wrong ways. We can say, "Our Lord is coming again soon. We must be involved, therefore, in bringing the gospel to all the nations of the world." But we must not neglect the calling we have at home. We have mission work to do, and that is an important task. Yet, at the same time we all know that many churches in the past have placed the kind of emphasis on mission work which resulted in a neglect of their calling at home. As churches and as synod we must always remember that God continues His church in the line of our generations. We must be concerned about the training of our children and our children's children. That must not be neglected while performing other tasks.

The apostasy about us seems increasingly to be touching us too. For that reason we must be faithful in the preaching and faithful in teaching our children as we look

for Christ's coming again.

This is not to say that we must neglect the calling which Christ gave His church to carry out mission work and to preach the gospel where God would have us to go. But we must do this work in harmony with His Word. We pray tonight for the guidance of the Spirit and for instruction in His Word, so that our synod may make proper decisions, not such as would enhance our name, but that which must glorify the name of our God. The churches must be diligent and faithful according to the Scriptures.

That is a high calling. I am not here tonight to tell the members of synod what specific decisions they must make. I am here tonight to remind ourselves to pray earnestly for the guidance of the Spirit and for Divine direction that right decisions might be taken.

For servants (*slaves*, you understand, not just hired people) can expect at the same time a great blessing. Jesus said, "Blessed are those slaves, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching." Blessed! It reminds of the Beatitudes, does it not? There the church of Jesus Christ is called poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc. They are blessed, Jesus said. That blessedness is measured according to the standard of God's Word, not according to the judgments of men. People often mock children of God and charge that they only look for "pie-in-the-sky." Many would have us concentrate only on earthly things. These are they who consider the cross to be foolishness.

But Jesus said, "Blessed are those who watch, those who look for Christ's return."

There are many whose eyes stick out with fatness, who have more than their hearts could desire. But the Word of God says that they are cursed. "The curse of the Lord is in the house of the



wicked." But you, slaves of Jesus Christ, blessed are ye.

Of course, we know that blessedness. It is the blessedness of Calvary. Did He not come to suffer and die for us? Did He not give His life's blood; did He not bear the agonies of hell that His people might be blessed — now and eternally? Did He not send forth His Spirit to work in our hearts, turning us from darkness to light? Did He not bring us to the cross to cry out for mercy and grace? And does He not guide us by His Spirit and Word so that we walk that straight, narrow way of life? Does not our Lord prepare for us, even now, a place in glory? Does He not prepare for us that treasure which neither thief can steal nor moth or rust corrupt? Therefore, blessed are ye who watch!

The blessedness of faithful servants is portrayed again remarkably in the parable. The lord, at his return, finding his slaves watching, does what? Does he say to them, "You have done well. But now I want to sit at the table and eat. Prepare me a meal and serve me; make my bed ready so I can retire. And after I retire, you must clean the house"?

Look again at the parable. Christ said, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that *he shall gird himself and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*" It is thrilling, unbelievable, unimaginable! Certainly it is nothing that one would expect to happen between master and slave.

Christ, elsewhere, speaks of masters who could demand that their slaves work all day in the field and at night come and serve them at the table. They are unprofitable servants. They must do all that the master requires but they have earned nothing. They are slaves.

But here, the master, a rich and powerful man who had many

slaves, who had a great palace adorned with many lights, comes home and tells his slaves, "You sit down at the table. I am going to serve you." He girds himself and serves them. *One* serving *many* is itself remarkable. It took many servants, many slaves, to serve one master. But *one* master comes and says, "I am going to serve *many* slaves." If that really happened here on this earth, I suppose you would find it recorded in that old newspaper column "Believe it or not" by Ripley. But it *did* happen. The Master, the Word, the Lord of heaven and earth, the second Person of the Trinity, God of gods, entered into our flesh. He was born of a virgin. Through the power of the Holy Spirit He came, as He Himself declared in Luke 22:27, to serve. The Creator came to *serve*. The Master came into the midst of slaves and made Himself as the lowest of them. That is the wonder of the ages.

In His first coming, and at that last Passover Feast, He stooped down lower than any of His disciples were willing to go: He washed His disciples' feet. So low! So humble! The Master serving slaves.

Even Peter could not take it. "Thou shalt never wash my feet," he said. But Christ declares, "If I do not wash your feet, you have

no part in Me." He must be the servant of slaves.

Finally, and gloriously, He "serves" on the cross! There could be no lower position than that the Son of God in our flesh should bear the agonies of hell for all of His own. He must cry out, "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" so that His slaves might eat at the banquet feast of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now we await His coming again. We must be standing at the door, our loins girt, the lamps burning. And all this we do, not because we shall earn something now, not because we would demand that He serve us. The watching, the longing, the praying for His return is a fruit of His grace. *That* we watch is our calling. When He comes again He gathers to Himself His people of every tribe, nation, tongue, and language. He brings them to Himself in that day of judgment and declares, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Then He serves His people, serves them by leading them and guiding them into all the joys of salvation. He is our Head and King who came to serve. What blessedness indeed! When we, as synod, labor in that consciousness, then that word "blessed" will certainly be spoken of us and of the work which we gather to do. May God grant it. □

## Editorial

# PRC Synod 1996

The synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) met for seven days, from June 11 through June 19, at the Southwest PRC in Grandville, Michigan. Ten ministers and ten elders from the two classes of the denomination dealt with the matters that either could

not be finished in the minor assemblies or pertained to the churches in common. Delegates from the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore (ERCS), Pastor Lau Chin Kwee and Elder Tan Tor Swee, were seated as fraternal delegates and participated



in synod's deliberations. The PRC have a sister church relation with the ERCS.

The president of synod was Rev. James Slopsema, pastor of the First PRC of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The vice-president was Rev. Ron VanOverloop, pastor of the Georgetown PRC of Bauer, Michigan. The first clerk was Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Randolph PRC of Randolph, Wisconsin. The second clerk was Rev. Barrett Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville PRC of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Three matters stood out on synod's agenda: the examination of a senior seminarian at the Protestant Reformed Seminary with a view to his becoming a candidate for the ministry; the appointment of a new professor to replace Prof. Herman Hanko who has reached the age of 65; and a proposal from the Foreign Mission Committee of the PRC to begin a mission work in Ghana, Africa by calling a missionary to work in that country.

### Training Men for the Ministry

After oral examination over



Rev. Dale Kuiper, president of the TSC, awards diploma to Mr. Smit.



l-r: Revs. Key, Slopsema, VanOverloop, and Gritters

the better part of two days, Richard Smit, originally from the Lynden, Washington PRC, was declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the PRC. He is eligible for a call on or after July 13, 1996. The commencement exercises were held on the evening of June 17 in the auditorium of the Southwest church. The synodical delegates, fraternal delegates, and members of the Theological School Committee attended as a body. Also graduating was Cheah Fook Meng, a three-year, special student from the ERCS. Prof. Hanko gave the graduation address, "Redemptive-Historical Preaching and Preaching Christ Crucified." We will publish this speech in a later issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Remarks by fraternal delegate Tan Tor Swee were part of the program. Elder Tan expressed the gratitude of the ERCS for the help given by the PRC through their seminary in the training of ministers for the ERCS: "Your help to train our brother Fook Meng for the ministry is also something (for) which we felt very much indebted."

Rev. Russell Dykstra, pastor of the Hope PRC of Walker, Michigan, was appointed professor to replace Prof. Hanko according to the rule in article 4 of the "Constitution of the Theological School": "With a view to orderly transition in the seminary, a new professor shall be appointed when any of the active professors reaches the age of 65." Rev. Dykstra was ordained in 1986 and served as pastor of the

Doon, Iowa PRC until accepting the call to Hope earlier this year. Rev. Dykstra has three weeks to consider the call to the seminary. The alternate chosen by synod is Rev. Charles Terpstra, pastor of the PRC of South Holland, Illinois.

On the evening of June 13, synod held a dinner and open house to commemorate Prof. Hanko's 41 years in the ministry and 31 years in the seminary. Rev. Carl Haak, a delegate to synod and one of Prof. Hanko's students, gave a fitting speech. The speech will be published in a later issue of the *SB*. At the commencement exercises of the seminary earlier in the week, synod presented Prof. Hanko with a lovely plaque. Prof. Hanko will continue to teach in the seminary during the 1996/1997 school year.

### Preaching the Gospel to all Creatures

Following the direction of its Foreign Mission Committee, synod authorized the calling of a missionary to labor in Ghana, Africa, thus approving this country as a mission field of the PRC. It was decided that "volunteer lay person(s)" are to accompany a missionary "to minister to the physical and material needs of the missionary and the field." The Hull, Iowa PRC will be the calling church.

Another important decision regarding missions was the approval of the organization of the Covenant Reformed Fellowship (CRF) in Northern Ireland as a church.



This mission group of seven families and some eight individuals has requested organization as the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland. The basis will be the "Three Forms of Unity," the Church Order of Dordt, and the Reformed liturgical forms. Missionary Rev. Ronald Hanko will continue as missionary in Northern Ireland, making the new church the center of his work.

The CRF addressed synod by a letter that expressed gratitude for the "faithful labours in the preaching of the gospel in Northern Ireland" by the PRC. It voiced the hope for a "close relationship that will be mutually beneficial and profitably serve for the advancement of the gospel in Ulster and throughout the British Isles." The organization is scheduled for July 24, 1996 in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

### Manifesting the True Unity of the Church

Synod took several significant decisions bearing on the ecumenical task of the PRC. It declined an invitation to send observers to the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) meeting in Grand Rapids this summer on the ground that "member churches, particularly the GKN, had departed far from the Reformed faith in doctrine and walk." It "regretfully" declined an invitation from the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC) to send observers to the meeting of the ICRC in Seoul, South Korea in 1997 "because of the cost in light of our total synodical budget for 1997." It approved the proposal of its Committee for Contact with Other Churches to hold a conference with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPC) in January, 1997. The subjects to be discussed are the regulative principle of worship and its application, the relation between the church and civil government, divorce and remarriage, and eternal justification.

Synod also encouraged the EPC to continue to send their theological students to the seminary of the PRC. If invited, the PRC will again send observers to the 1997 meeting of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council).

Synod received a report of the fruitful work of Rev. Jason Kortering, minister-on-loan from the PRC to the ERCS. This work includes assisting the ERCS in their mission labors in that area. Synod scheduled a slide presentation by fraternal delegates, Pastor Lau Chin Kwee and Elder Tan Tor Swee, on the mission work of the ERCS in Myanmar (Burma).

Pastor Lau addressed synod, giving the official greetings of the ERCS. He spoke of the "golden opportunity for our . . . churches to express our unity in the faith and support of each other in this increasingly dark and sinful world of unbelief." He acknowledged the help of the PRC in the training of three men for the ministry in the ERCS: "The cost incurred in such acts of love on your part has been great, and we are not unaware nor unappreciative of it. The Reformed faith, which we have come to know and love through the ministry of your churches, we will uphold and defend with all our might in the Far East."

The official letter of greeting from the ERCS stated:

on our observation of you, we continue to notice, with great delight, your steadfast defense of the Reformed faith in all your publications. Your undaunted effort to clarify your fine theological position is helping the Reformed community more and more to develop in greater depth of understanding of the truth.... (We) can only encourage you to press on in what you are doing for the glory of God and the good of His people all over the world.

It closed with the prayer "that the presence and contributions of our

two delegates at your synod may serve to enhance a closer sister-relationship between us." The entire letter appears elsewhere in this issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

The Singapore delegates gave synod a "love-gift" of money that will be used in the new addition to the seminary building.

Synod will send a delegation to Singapore in 1997 to assist in and supervise the work of Rev. Kortering.

### Executing Everything that Pertains to the Denomination

The request by Rev. Bernard Woudenberg for emeritation was approved. Synod expressed its appreciation to Rev. Woudenberg for his 40 years of faithful labors in the church of Christ among us and communicated this appreciation by a specially appointed delegation.

Synod adopted the overture of First PRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan to schedule a denominational commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the PRC for the summer of 2000 and appointed a steering committee to present concrete proposals for this commemoration.

The synodical budget for 1997 was increased to \$650 per family (from \$595 in 1996).

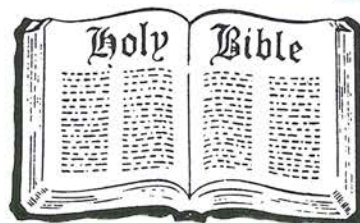
Synod 1997 will meet at the Grandville, Michigan PRC, the Lord willing.

The full account of synod's actions can (and should) be read in the "Acts of Synod and Yearbook 1996" of the PRC. These "Acts" are distributed without charge to all members of the PRC. They are available at nominal cost to all others from the stated clerk of synod,

Mr. Don Doezema  
4949 Ivanrest Ave.

Grandville, MI 49418. □

— DJE





## 1997 Graduates



*Mr. Richard John Smit*

Age: 27  
 Wife's Name: Tricia  
 Membership: Faith PRC, Jenison, MI, USA  
 Internship: Southeast PRC, Grand Rapids, MI, USA  
 Colleges: Trinity Western University, Langley, BC, Canada  
 Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC, Canada  
 Contact: 601 N. First St.  
 P.O. Box 163  
 Doon, IA 51235  
 (712) 726-3382



*Mr. Cheah Fook Meng*

Age: 32  
 Wife's Name: Lee Choo  
 Membership: First Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore  
 Internship: Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore  
 Colleges: Anglo-Chinese Junior College  
 Far Eastern Bible College  
 Contact: Blk 854 Woodlands St. 83,  
 #05-82  
 Singapore 573854  
 telephone: 011-65-367-9163

### *Address to PRC Synod 1996*

*Rev. Lau Chin Kwee*

Dear Highly Esteemed Brethren in the Lord,

Called to serve Him who was and who is and who is to come, the Lord of lords and King of kings, the soon coming Judge of all, our wonderful Lord and Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Loving greetings in the Name of our Lord — from us who serve the same glorious Lord on the

other side of the globe, and who wish you well and prosperity in all your deliberations at this Synod.

We are thankful for your gracious invitation through your Contact Committee to attend this Synod and the graduation of Mr. Cheah Fook Meng. This indeed is another golden opportunity for our two churches to express our unity in the faith and support of each other in this increasingly dark and sinful world of unbelief.

We remain thankful to our Lord for having come to know you, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Ever since 1975, when the late Prof. Hoeksema visited our country, untold

blessings from the Lord have come our way through you.

In the ministry of the Word, these past twenty years have seen many of your ministers bringing us the Word of God. Two of them spent at least five years with us. Two of our pastors were trained in your seminary, and another will soon return to Singapore for his internship after having studied for three years in the PRC seminary. The cost incurred in such acts of love on your part has been great, and we are not unaware nor unappreciative of it. The Reformed faith, which we have come to know and love through the ministry of your churches, we will uphold and defend with all our might

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*Rev. Lau is a pastor in the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore. This address was the official greeting by the ERCS.*



in the Far East. We covet your continual prayers that we may remain faithful and steadfast in this task even as the "mammon of unrighteousness" makes its unprecedented onslaught upon our beloved country.

The life of our churches these past years was not without its trials and temptations. But the Lord has helped us through your churches. What a comfort it is to know that the Lord is able to carry us through all these trials. It gives us greater confidence and trust in Him. The ministry of your minister-on-loan, Rev. Kortering (and his wife), has been of great help to us the last few years, to stabilize our churches in time of confusion.

Pastor Kortering's ministry has also helped us to reach out in mission work to Myanmar (the present name for Burma). To date we have conducted two Bible Conferences in Yangon (present name for Rangoon, the capital of Burma). The conferences were attended by the locals as well as by some church leaders from the Chin States in the far north northwest corner of Myanmar. So far we have made four trips to Yangon and have seen the United Reformed Churches of Myanmar, which have grown from two congregations to the present 20. This is church reformation, as many Christians are dissatisfied with the ungodly ways of the nominal church! They are crying out for training and for other helps to meet the increasing demands accompanying church growth. Do pray for us as we are finding it not easy to help our brothers and sisters there in Myanmar, considering our limited resources and their unique need and situation.

The Chin people are only one of 16 ethnic groups in Myanmar. It is a minority group with its own language and dialects. More than 90% of Chin people are nominal Baptist Christians. Only about two years ago the Bible was translated into their own Falam dialect. They

are all excited about reading and understanding the Word of God for themselves, reading it in their own mother-tongue! We can all understand this excitement of a very close community. They are presently very open to all kinds of influences, and we are thankful for the opportunity to bring them the Reformed faith which they do appreciate and are asking for more.

More can be said about this mission work in Myanmar, but this is enough for our present purpose.

Our plan for brother Fook Meng in the near future is his six-month internship with our churches and his classical examinations in February 1997. Like you, we treat the calling of a minister of the gospel seriously. This will be the first time we are having a classical examination, the previous two being local church examinations. Having now a vacant congregation and a potential candidate, a proper system of calling a minister (much like yours) will be introduced next year.

Our hope and plan for the future (should the Lord tarry) is the establishment of a good Reformed Training School in Singapore, the hub of the Asia Pacific Rim. Every adult individual and every nation is engaged in trading. And Singapore is a world class trading center, according to the judgment of well-established institutions. It is an international market place. What better place is there to establish a good Reformed witness than Singapore if we are genuinely interested in reaching out to the world with the gospel of Christ? And what better witness is there than a church with a theological school? We can see that, but we feel unequal to the task. Pray for us that greater faith and ability may be granted from on high to meet the present need.

In our observation of you, we continue to notice, with great delight, your steadfast defense of the Reformed faith in all your publications. Your undaunted effort to

clarify your fine theological position is helping the Reformed community more and more to develop in greater depth of understanding of the truth. We cannot help you much in this area, but can only encourage you to press on in what you are doing for the glory of God and the good of His people all over the world.

The orderliness of your churches continues to attract us, even as it did when we first came to know you. If lawlessness is the hallmark of the Antichrist's kingdom, biblical orderliness must be that of the true church. Young people in the church of God, in their natural craving for independence, need not view such orderliness as restricting their freedom, just as a fish need not object to the limitation of the water. True maturity will see that soon, and we need not be ashamed in upholding orderliness in our families and churches.

We pray that the presence and contribution of our two delegates at your Synod may serve to promote a closer sister-relationship between us.

The Lord bless you and the churches you represent in all the proceedings of Synod 1996. Amen.

Yours in His service and love,  
w/s Pastor Lau Chin Kwee □



*Rev. Lau Chin Kwee*



## ■ Conditional Covenant, Conditional Salvation

Allow me a few words in response to Dr. Steve Spencer (*Standard Bearer*, Feb. 15, 1996). That the covenant contains a condition should be clear to all. Romans 11:22 states this clearly, that is, that God showed great kindness to the Gentiles (the wild branches) when they were grafted into the covenant tree in place of the disobedient natural branches, a place they will keep, "if you continue in His goodness." That is a condition!

Dr. Wm Hendriksen, in his commentary on this particular verse, puts it this way, "The manifestation of this kindness is, however, not unconditional. It requires genuine faith on man's part. Says Paul, 'toward you God's kindness, if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.' This must not be understood in the sense that God will supply the kindness, man the faith. Salvation is ever God's gift. It is never a 50-50 affair. From start to finish it is the work of God. But this does not remove human responsibility. God does not exercise faith for man or in his place. It is and remains man who reposes trust in God, but it is God who both imparts this faith to him and enables him to use it."

One more comment. When God made the covenant with Abraham he received "... the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith" (Rom. 4:11). He was commanded to circumcise all his sons and all who were bought as slaves. These all received the sign and seal of the righteousness of faith. Did all these have that faith? Were all those circumcised

elect? Was it impossible to break that covenant? Many people did in Israel and many do today. By unbelief they refused (and refuse) to accept the conditions of the covenant, that is, faith in the only Savior Jesus Christ.

As to Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:8-12, the new covenant in which God would put His laws in their hearts is that of Romans 11. The Jews refused to be led by God's hand (Heb. 8:9) and were cut off, but the Gentiles who believed were grafted in. The old covenant conditions were fulfilled in Christ and when the Holy Spirit was poured out the promises of the new covenant were fulfilled. As with the old covenant, the new is entered only by faith. But the children of all believers are declared by God to belong to that covenant. Are all of these elect? Hebrews 6:1-6 gives an answer. It spells out the condition for covenant children to remain faithful or be cut off.

(Rev.) Cecil W. Tuininga  
Edmonton, AB, Canada

### Response:

In the doctrine of the covenant defended by the Rev. Cecil W. Tuininga, a condition is an act of the child upon which the saving act of God in Jesus Christ toward that child depends. God promises to every baptized child that He will be the God of the child and that the child will be God's son or daughter. Thus, God promises to every child that He will save him or her. Whether God, in fact, does become the God of the child, thus actually saving him or her, depends upon the child's work of believing. The promise of God, given to all the children alike, is made effectual and saving to a particular child, in distinction from the other children, by that child's work

of believing.

Faith is a condition unto covenantal salvation.

This doctrine is fundamentally different from the teaching of certain older Reformed theologians that faith may be called a condition *in the sense of the necessary means by which God realizes His covenant and bestows His salvation*. Reformed theologian Francis Turretin points out this important distinction. Under the heading, "Is the covenant of grace conditional and what are its conditions?" he writes:

(1) Condition is used either antecedently and *a priori*, for that which has the force of a meritorious and impulsive cause to obtain the benefits of the covenant (the performance of which gives man a right to the reward); or concomitantly and consequently *a posteriori*, for that which has the relation of means and disposition in the covenanted. (2) A condition is either natural, flowing from the strength belonging to nature; or supernatural and divine, depending upon grace.... These things being laid down, we say first, if the condition is taken antecedently and *a priori* for the meritorious and impulsive cause and for a natural condition, the covenant of grace is rightly denied to be conditioned. It is wholly gratuitous, depending upon the sole good will (*eudokia*) of God and upon no merit of man. Nor can the right to life be founded upon any action of ours, but on the righteousness of Christ alone. But if it is taken consequently and *a posteriori* for the instrumental cause, receptive of the promises of the covenant and for the disposition of the subject, admitted into the fellowship of the covenant (which flows from grace itself), it cannot be denied that the covenant is conditional (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, P&R, vol. 2, pp. 184, 185).

In the language of Turretin,



"condition" in Tuininga's theology has the meaning of "impulsive cause and ... natural condition." Tuininga does not intend by "condition" merely a necessary "means." For in Tuininga's theology, the promise comes to all the baptized children alike, so that it is the condition of faith that causes the promise to become effective in some, thus saving them, in distinction from others.

Scripture's gospel of grace condemns this doctrine of a conditional covenant and conditional salvation. The salvation of the elect child of believing parents is not by God's grace and by the child's work, but by God's grace alone. The promise does not depend upon faith, but works and gives faith. Faith is not the basis of salvation ("because of faith") but the means and instrument of salvation ("through faith"). Faith is not the condition required of the sinner in order that he be saved (really, save himself!), but God's gift to him, saving him (see Rom. 9:16; 9:8; Eph. 2:8).

If the salvation of the children of believers in the new covenant depends upon a condition by which they make effectual in themselves the promise of God given to all, salvation in the new covenant is by works.

Jeremiah 31:33, to which Rev. Tuininga appeals, is conclusive proof of the unconditionality of the new covenant. For the obedience of faith, with the faith from which this obedience springs, is itself part of the promise. It is not a condition upon which the promise depends. "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts...."

Does Rev. Tuininga, a Reformed minister and subscriber to the fifth head of doctrine of the Canons of Dordt, really want to appeal to Hebrews 6:1-6 in support of his covenant doctrine? Does he really want to say what he says when he writes, "But the children of all believers are de-

clared by God to belong to that covenant. Are all of these elect? Hebrews 6:1-6 gives an answer. It spells out the condition for covenant children to remain faithful or be cut off"? What he is saying is that all the covenant children are alike in the covenant, not only by receiving the promise but also by receiving the covenantal grace and the covenantal Holy Spirit within. But because some fail to fulfill the condition for remaining in the covenant, they fall away from this covenantal grace and salvation. This is bold, bald teaching of the real possibility of the falling away of covenantal saints.

The Reformed confession that is binding for Rev. Tuininga expressly denies, and nowhere affirms, that faith is a condition unto salvation:

The Synod rejects the errors of those ... who teach ... that (God) chose out of all possible conditions ... or out of the whole order of things, the act of faith which from its very nature is undeserving, as well as its incomplete obedience, as a condition of salvation ... (Canons of Dordt, I, Rejection of Errors/3; cf. also I, Rejection of Errors/5; II, Rejection of Errors/3, 4; III, IV/14).

Rev. Tuininga has written before on these pages, I think, defending his conditional covenant. If he writes again, he must begin by answering these questions:

1) Does the promise that, according to Rev. Tuininga, is made by God to every child of believing parents express God's covenantal love for every child?

2) Does this promise indicate that God sincerely desires to save every child of believing parents?

3) Does this promise rest upon and flow from Jesus Christ's death for every child of believing parents? Did Jesus Christ shed His blood for every baptized child of believing parents?

4) Among the benefits included in the promise to every child, is

faith included? Does God at baptism promise to give every child faith?

5) With regard to the second principal part of the doctrine of holy baptism in the Reformed "Form for the Administration of Baptism" that Rev. Tuininga uses, is it Rev. Tuininga's understanding:

a) that God the Father witnesses and seals to every baptized child that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with the child and adopts him or her for His child and heir, on the condition that the child will believe;

b) that God the Son seals to every baptized child that He washes the child in His blood from all his or her sins, incorporating the child into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, on the condition that the child will believe;

c) and that God the Holy Ghost assures every baptized child that He will dwell in the child and sanctify the child to be a member of Christ, applying unto the child that which he or she has in Christ, on the condition that the child will believe?

— Ed.

## ■ An Open Letter Proposing a Book on the Gospel-Call

Professor David J. Engelsma,  
Editor  
*The Standard Bearer*  
Grandville, MI

Reverend Maurice Roberts, Editor  
*The Banner of Truth*  
Ayr, Scotland

Dear Brothers in Christ:

I have benefited immensely in my own personal knowledge of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of elect sinners by both the Banner of Truth Trust and the Reformed Free Publishing Association. During the previous year I have found numerous references



to the difference these organizations sustain toward each other in both the *Standard Bearer* and the *Banner of Truth*. This difference, of course, centers on the issue of how the external call of the Gospel is to be extended by the Church. Both parties deny the validity of a "hyper-calvinism," which refuses to obey the command to proclaim the Gospel to every creature, regardless of their election or reprobation (which God alone determines and exhaustively knows). What seems to be at issue is *how* we understand God's *intent* in commanding us to preach the Gospel to every creature, and *how* we formulate our language to the unsaved in accordance with our understanding of God's revealed intent.

In the April 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer*, Prof. Engelsma suggests some kind of conference to discuss this issue as Reformed believers. May I make a suggestion, which could have the potential of being used by our sovereign Lord for greater clarification and unity of mind and purpose? Perhaps a book could be written by two of the more calm and articulate exponents of both positions? Such a book would be of great value and fill a great need in the Reformed world, and would surely pay for itself because of a growing interest in this subject in many circles. The real expense

would be in the time and trouble that two busy men would have to exert to prepare such a book. It would however be a real labor of love for the churches and ministers who desire to understand and follow Christ's Word as precisely as possible.

What I have in mind is along this order. (This is, of course, only a suggestion.) Each representative of the two camps could write approximately a fifty-page presentation of their own position. This presentation would be, for the most part, "positive" in that it would primarily explain that camp's view of what the Bible teaches in regard to the external call of the Gospel and God's intent in commanding the church to extend that call by the preaching of the Gospel to every creature. After both of these presentations there could be a twenty-page response to the other position by each spokesman. After this there could be a five-page "final clarifications and summary" article by each writer. Whichever camp has the first presentation, the other would have the final (in accordance with formal debate procedure).

I do not believe that God's truth should ever be debated for entertainment or out of anger or for any reason other than to help true believers come to a better understanding of that truth and,

hopefully, to help them come to a greater visible unity of faith. I hope this suggestion-request is not perceived as impertinent. It is out of a sincere love for like-minded brothers that I have written. Thank you.

Sincerely in Christ's service,  
(Rev.) Allen Tomlinson  
First Congregational Church  
Merrimack, NH

## ■ Insights in Apologetics

When I read your review of John Frame's book on Cornelius VanTil in the latest *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* I was very impressed with your analysis of Frame's apologetics. Then when you reprinted your review in the May 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* ("John Frame on Cornelius VanTil") I was doubly impressed! I think you have touched on some critical matters that need to be better addressed by Reformed scholars who are writing on apologetics.

Those who speak of the Bible being full of paradoxes (a polite term for contradictions) are not doing the cause of God's truth any service. Please write more in this critical area of biblical thought. We need your insights.

(Rev.) Norman Jones  
Pierre, SD □

*A Cloud of Witnesses*

*Prof. Herman Hanko*

# Hendrik De Cock: Reformed Reformer (1)

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

## Introduction

The times when true reformation comes to the church of Jesus Christ are not often. But when

those times, according to God's clock, actually come, they come in strange and surprising ways.

Already in the Old Testament



God had reminded His people of this. He had emphatically impressed upon the mind of the moody and depressed Elijah that He did not work through stirring events such as took place on Carmel (God was not in the earthquake, nor the fire, nor the wind); rather God worked quietly and unnoticed by His Spirit in the hearts of the 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. And to Zechariah the prophet, who worried about the building of the temple after the return of the captives, God had laid down a fundamental principle: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

The great reformation of the 16th Century, while eventually it shook Europe to its foundations, began with the quiet nailing of 95 theses on a chapel door by an obscure monk out of the forests of Saxon Germany. The Reformation of 1834 in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands began in a dark and smoke-filled Consistory room of a country church of no importance where five men gathered to sign a single sheet of paper to protest what had happened to their minister.

It is in that reformation of 1834 that many Reformed churches throughout the world find their roots.

The man who is called the father of the Secession of 1834 is Hendrik De Cock (pronounced Cok), the pastor of the small church in Ulrum whose elders and deacons protested what the churches had done. Here God began His work.

It would be forever evident, as it always must be evident, that the care of the church is God's work and His alone that He may receive all the glory.

### Need For Reformation

That the church of that day needed reformation could hardly be debated. Although the church

of which we are speaking was the church of the Reformation and of Dordrecht, it had become only a shell of what it formerly was. Even the great truths of Scripture were denied by many in the universities, seminaries, and pulpits. I refer to the truths of the virgin birth of Christ, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord on the cross, and His bodily resurrection from the dead. In the place of the religion of salvation by grace alone through Jesus Christ had come a religion which was interested in little more than living a good life, walking morally, and contributing to society's good through upright ethical conduct. The confessions were ignored or denied; hymns had been introduced in the place of the Psalms of the church; church government after the principles of the Church Order of Dordrecht was long forgotten and the church was ruled by boards which had total and decisive power.

All this apostasy did not mean that there were no people of God anywhere to be found. They were there, scattered about, starving spiritually, groaning beneath the tyranny of apostate preachers, desperately casting about to find places to feed their souls. Many of them gathered in small "conventicles" which were little more than groups of believers who would meet in private homes to read the old Reformed writers, study the Scriptures, discuss the sad state of the church and what could be done about it, and listen to an "exhorter" (if they had one) explain from Scripture the ancient truths of the faith.

Hendrik De Cock was a perfect example of the sad situation in the Reformed Churches. Born in Veendam on April 12, 1801, he was brought up in a home where the only religion that was taught was the worldly and quasi-religion of living a decent life. Nor did the churches or schools he attended do any better. His minister in Wildervank (where the fam-

ily moved shortly after his birth) and his teachers in school had no idea of what the Reformed faith was all about; and if they did know anything at all about it, they failed to teach it.

The University of Groningen where he went to prepare for the ministry of the gospel did no better. He graduated and entered the ministry as a thoroughly modern minister equipped only to preach a modern gospel of Jesus the good example whose life could serve as a pattern for us. But of sin, salvation, and grace, De Cock knew nothing.

This did not mean that already during these years God was not working in His own mysterious ways to prepare De Cock for greater things. Already as a boy he received some catechetical instruction from one of his teachers who insisted that a man is saved only by the sovereign grace of God. And while such teaching made no apparent impression on Hendrik, God used it to put ideas of a different sort in his soul even though these ideas would not come to fruition till later.

So at ordination he was little more than a mediocre modernist minister destined to serve in a series of modernist congregations of no use to God or man — though his denomination still bore the proud name of "Reformed."

Both the church and De Cock were in need of reformation.

### Reformation in De Cock's Soul

Little changed in De Cock's first two charges. About three years in Eppenuizen and two years in Noordlaren did little to alter his views. He was, in fact, so thoroughly under the influence of the modernists in his church that he made no use of the *Statenvertaling*, the translation of the Bible authorized by the Synod of Dort and filled with important marginal notes which would have helped him understand the Reformed faith. He had never read



the creeds. He paid no attention to the old Reformed writers. And he did not even know that such a book as Calvin's *Institutes* existed.

Perhaps the only influence on his life at this time which was of any value was the influence of a godly and pious wife whom he married shortly before his ordination to the ministry. Her name was Frouwe Venema, and while we do not know the extent of her knowledge of the Reformed faith, she was a pillar of strength to Hendrik throughout his life when troubles all but overwhelmed him.

It was in the small country church in Ulrum, however, that God changed De Cock into the man whom God would use to bring reformation to an apostate church.

De Cock had come to Ulrum because of the influence of an old university friend, a modernist like himself, a predecessor to De Cock in Ulrum, an influential man by the name of Hofstede de Groot.

In Ulrum were people who were starving for biblical and God-centered preaching and who would not be put off with moralistic sermons about doing good. They had not been happy with de Groot; they were not happy with De Cock. In fact, de Groot had viewed these people as odd and in need of special pastoral care. He had urged De Cock to pay special attention to them.

But, though De Cock did this and attempted to show them that the key to living a good life lay in education, they were not persuaded. One common laborer, a faithful visitor at the parsonage to be catechized by his pastor, had not dared make confession of faith under de Groot because of his unease with de Groot's teachings. He kept telling De Cock that his instruction did no good because, "Should I be required to contribute a mere whisper to my salvation, I would be forever lost." The man's name was Klaas Pieters Kuipenga, a simple, uneducated

saint whose soul thirsted for salvation in Christ, but who had none to give him drink. The sad part was that thousands like him could be found throughout the Netherlands.

But De Cock was a serious pastor and longed to help these troubled sheep. How to do it, that was the question.

As De Cock searched for answers, he was in the study of a fellow minister in a neighboring village when the minister turned to Calvin's *Institutes* to prove a point which had come up in the conversation. So impressed was De Cock that he asked to borrow the copy, and, having done so, proceeded to read it through several times in amazement and growing consternation.

During this period of drinking at the fountain of Calvin's great work, De Cock also became acquainted with the Canons of Dort, writings from earlier Reformed Dutch theologians, and the more devotional writings of a more recent writer, Cornelis Baron van Zuylen van Nijveldt. The latter had written a pamphlet entitled *De Eenige Redding* (The Only Salvation), a pamphlet which opened De Cock's eyes to the truth that all godly living is rooted in doctrine.

It is not surprising that De Cock's preaching began to change radically. And the more he came to understand the great historic doctrines of God's sovereign and particular grace, the clearer became his sermons as they set forth salvation by grace through faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice. It is not surprising that as the word of this kind of preaching spread like wildfire through the surrounding countryside, people starving for the Bread of Life streamed to Ulrum to hear De Cock preach.

All this does not mean that De Cock now became a conquering hero. He was opposed, sometimes strenuously, by those who cherished the modernistic and liberal

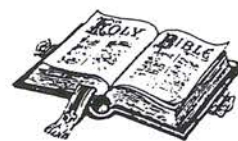
preaching so prevalent in the state church. His colleagues in the area made every effort to dissuade him from the path he had chosen to follow and ridiculed the people who hung on De Cock's preaching as more ignorant than cattle in the cowshed.

His own close friend and predecessor in Ulrum came especially to visit him and try to alter De Cock's thinking. But De Cock had found peace for his own soul and was not about to turn from that which was the heart of Reformation truth and the faith of the fathers. Hofstede de Groot wrote De Cock in chagrin:

De Cock! De Cock! Such a bitter and unchristian writing (The reference is to another brochure by C. Baron van Zuylen van Nijveldt entitled *De Hervormde Leer, Reformed Doctrine*, HH) contains your confession of faith? How deep, deep have you fallen, and how dark is to me the counsel of God that such a doctrine is now being taught the congregation that once was mine. I have prayed to God many a time that He would grant me the spirit of moderation in order that I might exercise truth and love and avoid Van Zuylen's abusive tone.

But De Cock would not budge. We sing in our versification of Psalm 8 this line: "Weakest means fulfill Thy will." So it was that the obscure and [by human standards] mediocre minister of a small country church became a stubborn defender of the truths of sovereign grace and a mighty reformer in the church of Christ.

The story of the reformation God wrought through him will have to wait till next time. □





# SYNOD 1996



*Southwest PRC, Grandville, MI*



*Synod in Session*



*Committees of Pre-Advice at work*



*Working coffee-breaks*







*Laptop technology*



*Professors confer*



*Elder Tan's address*



*Examination of Mr. Smit*



*Rev. Slopsema presides*



*Enjoying pictures of Singapore*



*The VanBarens express appreciation to the Hankos*



*Table of honor at banquet for Prof. Herman Hanko*



# Reaching the Nations with the Gospel of Grace

**An Evangelism Seminar in Houston, March 30-April 4, 1996**

The Word of God in Mark 16:15 calls us to "preach the gospel to every creature," that is, to proclaim the gospel to all who will hear without distinction, wherever God is pleased to send His Word. We are called to reach the nations with the gospel of grace. This calling we seek to carry out both here in North America and abroad as God gives us the means and opportunity, both by local church extension and as a denomination of churches through our mission work.

When we think of this calling we are perhaps inclined to categorize it either as work among those around us in North America or Europe who may have had the gospel in their generations, and who are in many respects a remnant, or as work among those who have never heard the gospel in heathen lands. Our "Form of Ordination of Missionaries" makes such a distinction, and it is a valid one when we consider the work and influence of the gospel in history among the nations.

There is a difference between laboring among those who have heard the gospel in their generations and those who have not. It is not an essential difference, for

the gospel which is to be preached is one and the same to all, but it is nevertheless a very real difference. Where the gospel has gone we are often confronted with small groups of believers who have had a form of the Christian gospel in their generations. They have come to or yet hold the pure gospel of the Reformation and are a remnant in the midst of a largely apostate post-Christian community.

This situation confronts us here in North America. Our society as a whole, by its European descent, has long known the Christian gospel and been shaped by it. It has also turned from it to its own imagination in willful unbelief and now in enmity seeks to suppress the truth of the gospel. It is a society of which Paul speaks when he says, "For 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; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:3, 4).

We must see that God is working in a process of judgment in this apostasy in North America just as He did in the history of the church in North Africa, Asia Minor, and more recently in Europe. As He did with the natural branches of the Jews, God is also cutting off through unbelief those who have long stood in their generations in the olive tree of salvation as wild

olive branches of the Gentiles (Rom. 11:9-21). It is but a remnant which are kept in their generations. Yet God is also sending the gospel to those who have never heard.

The result of this apostasy in the life of the Christian church also in the Reformed and Presbyterian community in North America is that we often meet those who are confused, misled by false doctrine, and spiritually drifting in their generations. They hold a form of the Christian faith mixed and confused with serious sinful errors of which they are unaware. They are not unlike the sheep of Israel of Jesus' day over whom our Savior was moved with compassion, "because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). Reaching the nations with the gospel of grace means that we have a serious calling to bring the gospel also to such wandering sheep who are departing in their generations and to labor to gather the remnant. This we are doing as churches in our mission labors with many scattered contacts, not only here in southern Colorado where I am based as home missionary, but also in the eastern U.S. in Cincinnati and Pittsburgh where I have also had opportunity to work on behalf of the churches this year.

We must not conceive of this calling, however, as merely the work of missionaries or ministers

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*Rev. Miersma is home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches.*



or the churches and evangelism committees. It is that to be sure. God gathers His church by faith through the Word preached. The church as the body of Christ is called to let its light shine in the world. But God uses the personal confession and witness of His people to draw men under the preaching of the Word to be saved. It was the personal confession of the Samaritan woman: "Come see a man, which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29), which led the people out of the city and drew them to Christ to hear the Word preached (John 4:30). There is a living organic connection between that personal witness and its fruit in faith in Christ (John 4:39-42). Evangelism is the work of the church, but as such it is also the concern of every living member thereof, and that not only in prayer and support but also in personal witness. It is bound up with living a sanctified godly life in all gratitude that "by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 32, Q/A 86).

To return to that opening distinction, while we may distinguish, as we are called to reach the nations with the gospel of grace, between those who have known the gospel in their generations, as nominally Christian nations, and those who have not, the heathen, our mission work today does not. The recent labor in Myanmar, by the ERCS and Rev. Kortering, were with Christians seeking to know the Christian faith better, a remnant in a heathen land. Yet here in North America there are enclaves of immigrants from heathen lands who have never known the gospel with whom we must work.

This was vividly demonstrated at a recent evangelism seminar sponsored by Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Houston. The theme of the seminar was "Reaching the Nations with the Gospel of Grace." As part of its official work

of church extension as a congregation, our church in Houston has been given an opportunity to preach the gospel to the Hindu community of Sindhi descent in Houston and to the Chinese immigrant community as well. While many today who have had the gospel in their generations will not hear, and will shrug off the Word in indifference, God has given Trinity an open door to speak His Word among those who have never heard the gospel in their generations. Some are recent converts who are just coming to know the historic Christian gospel of the Reformed faith, who have been taught the errors of the Arminians and Baptists or Roman Catholics. Others are yet heathens who have idols in their homes. But God has opened the door to preach among them the gospel of sovereign grace.

This was also the purpose of the seminar sponsored by the Christian S.I.N.D.H.I. outreach of our Houston church, as well as of my presence as missionary. While senior members of our churches up north who winter in Houston have been involved in aspects of this work, the purpose of the seminar was also to give some of our young people from Georgetown PRC an opportunity both to experience the work being done and to assist by their witness in it. (Houston has essentially the same weather as Florida in the winter, the same beaches in Galveston, and should be a destination for more of our senior members who must flee the cold, as it is a place where we have a church.)

The seminar consisted of preaching and teaching by Pastor Mahtani and me in the church, directed both to our young people and to the Sindhis invited to the meetings. It also consisted of our young people staying in groups in the homes of the families who are being worked with, both heathen and nominally Christian. It consisted, further, of going into the Hindu and Asian communities to

meet with contacts and leave a witness by the presence of the young people with them.

The Lord also used the seminar to open doors to bring His Word both by the pastors present, whether in a shopkeeper's office, in the presence of his idols, where the Word was proclaimed, or in after-recess discussions following the speeches and sermons. The young people by their group devotions in the homes in which they stayed were likewise given occasion to confess their faith. The families often sat in on their devotions, and these became discussions lasting into the late evening. Opportunity was also provided to confront error, as when what was supposed to be strictly an evening of recreation with one of the families became an occasion to confront the error of an Arminian "altar call."

Several things stand out from the seminar. It is the Lord who opens the door both to preach and leave a witness. He has given such an open door to our Houston church. If we seek opportunity and fit occasion to confess our faith to others, God will give those occasions, according to His wisdom and in ways we had not necessarily foreseen. Our young people also have a place in such work. God is truly reaching the nations who have not known Him with the gospel of grace, also here in North America, not only in heathen lands. As the leaders gathered for prayer before the last meeting on Thursday night to bring the gospel to the Sindhis this was underscored. The nations of the Gentiles were represented in that gathering for prayer — Christian Sindhis, diverse European descendants, Afro-American, and Chinese. Seeking to reach the nations with the gospel of grace. This is the Lord's great work. □



# Order

The several words that are translated *order* in Scripture have the meaning of placing in a certain arrangement, to assign a place, to appoint, or to ordain. The reason that great emphasis is placed on order in the Bible is that God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:23), but the God of order. The life of the Triune God is a life of harmony and order. The order of His eternal decrees is logical and clear. His covenant with David was ordered in all things (II Sam. 23:5); His covenant proceeds in an orderly fashion with believers and their seed (Gen. 17:7). When God saves His elect, He does so following the order of salvation (regeneration, calling, faith, conversion, justification, sanctification, preservation, and glorification) that is suggested in Romans 8:30. He grants the gift of faith to as many as were ordained (ordered) unto eternal life (Acts 13:48).

The worship that pleases God is orderly worship. In the old dispensation the equipment of the temple was set in order before Him (Ex. 40:4); the priests were arranged in order and served according to orders (Luke 1:8); Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110:4). In the new dispensation all things should be done decently and in order in the church (I Cor. 14:40). Preaching is not a hit and miss proposition, but is an orderly presentation of the truth (Acts 11:14; 17:2, 3). Paul rejoiced in the good order manifest in the life of the church at Colosse (Col. 2:5). He himself walked orderly, keeping the law (Acts 21:24). Thus he is a good example to Christians because he did not behave himself disorderly (II Thess. 3:7).

The church today, guided by Scripture in worship and life, pays attention to good order. We have an order of worship which prevents the unexpected, the chaotic, and the inappropriate. We have a Church Order which spells out practically every aspect of congregational and denominational life. At our meetings we have agendas, and only a motion "to depart from the order of the day" allows us

to proceed differently. Scripture calls us to withdraw ourselves from every brother that walks disorderly (II Thess. 3:6-11). A life of confusion is equated with every evil work (James 3:16).

Family life ought to be well-ordered life. Manoah asked the angel who had promised him a son (Samson), "How shall we order the child, and what shall be done with him?" (Jud. 13:12). Isaiah told King Hezekiah to set his house in order, for he shall die (II Kings 20:1). That this does not refer merely to the writing of a will and disposing of property is clear from Genesis 49, where Jacob gathers his sons around his bed, commanding his sons before he died. Dying parents speak in faith of their God and His good ways, give final instructions and encouragements, perhaps must sound some warnings and give dire prophecies. All the life of the family, the conduct of the members, the very appearance of the home, ought to reflect good order, sound management, and regular schedule.

The personal life of the saints is to be a life that is well-ordered. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (Ps. 37:23). We are taught to pray that our steps are ordered in God's Word (Ps. 119:133). When the child of God is in doubt, he feels full of confusion (Job 10:15), his confusion is ever before him (Ps. 44:15), and he fears being put to confusion (Ps. 71:1). He fears this because he knows that Scripture calls final destruction "everlasting confusion" (Jer. 20:11). But he that ordereth his conversation aright shall see the salvation of God (Ps. 50:23).

Today confusion reigns in society at large, in government, in the churches, homes, and schools. None of this is pleasing to God. Although the charge is brought against the church, that it has turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), this charge is false. The hearing, believing, and living of the gospel brings peace, causes uproar to cease, and establishes good order in the kingdom of heaven. May that good order be evident in our churches, homes, and schools. □

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



May 8, 1996  
Grandville Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, May 8, 1996 at the Grandville PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. Doug Kuiper had the privilege and challenge of serving as chairman for the first time in his ministry. Present at classis also were the delegates *ad examina* from Classis West.

The burden of this classis was to consider a request from Covenant PRC to release its pastor, Rev. Richard Flikkema, from his ministerial duties. Considered in this matter were the reports of the special committee of classis appointed to assist Covenant PRC, the welfare of the congregation there, and the welfare of Rev. Flikkema and his family. Since this matter was treated in closed session, further comment about this matter would not be judicious. Classis did approve this request and approved the financial ar-

rangements for Rev. Flikkema proposed by his consistory. Covenant PRC was instructed to inform the churches about their decision and Rev. Flikkema's eligibility for a call.

An overture from Rev. R. VanOverloop concerning the place in the classical agenda of the asking and answering of the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order was adopted. The questions will now be asked right after the reading of the minutes of the previous meeting, rather than at the end of the meeting. The grounds for the overture were as follows (summarized): 1) There is no historical precedent in our churches for placing the questions of Article 41 early in the agenda, but there is precedent in the very earliest of meetings of Reformed churches and in the Christian Reformed Church to place these questions early in the agenda, rather than at

the end as is now the custom in Classis East. 2) One of the fundamental purposes for the questions of Article 41 is to insure unity within the churches. Questions of unity ought to take precedence over other matters in the agenda. 3) Placing the questions early in the agenda would allow classis to appoint a committee of pre-advice if, for example, a consistory needed the advice of classis according to question #4.

Covenant requested, and was granted, classical appointments — two Sundays a month — from May-October, 1996. The schedule adopted has been sent to the churches.

The expenses of classis amounted to \$2,063.61. Classis will meet next on Wednesday, September 11, 1996 at the Faith PRC.

Respectfully submitted,  
w/s Jon J. Huiskens  
Stated Clerk □

## News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

### Evangelism Activities

Typically most requests that come to the evangelism committees of our various churches are for literature or tapes. However, the evangelism committee of the Randolph, WI PRC received a request recently that included more than these usual items. Having seen the sketch of Randolph's church on one of their bulletin covers, an individual asked about the possibility of getting more information, complete with drawings

and plans of their church building for possible use by their own church (Orthodox Presbyterian). Randolph's building committee chairman gladly granted that request.

The evangelism committee of the Edgerton, MN PRC sponsored a special evening worship service on May 19. A special invitation to the greater Edgerton community was extended by way of the paper and by word of mouth. Rev. A. Brummel, pastor at Edgerton, brought the Word that evening in a sermon based on Psalm 29:2 (the text that appears on the cover of their introductory brochure — see May 1 SB), and entitled "Worshipping in Holiness." Rev. Brummel

also noted that there were some 30 visitors at that service.

In other evangelism news from Edgerton, we learn that they are making plans for a four-to-six week Community Bible Study sometime later this summer. They are also looking into the possibility of video-taping their services for airing on the local public cable channel.

The members of the Pella, IA PRC, through their evangelism committee, have extended a warm welcome to their community to share some time together this summer to study God's Word. Plans call for Pella to host a six-part seminar series entitled, "Genesis 1-11: The Foundation of the Faith."

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



The first seminar was held June 13 at Pella PRC and was entitled, "In the Beginning God."

On Sunday, June 2, the congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC made a special effort to invite visitors to their evening worship service. Visitors were able to hear Rev. Doug Kuiper, Byron's pastor, speak from God's Word concerning the lawlessness that is evident in the world today. This sermon found its basis in Matthew 24:12 and II Timothy 3:1-5 and promised to answer questions such as: How does lawlessness serve as a sign of the times? And do we see an increase in lawlessness in the world and church today?

#### Minister Activities

Since our last "News," the congregation of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada extended a call to Rev. R. Miersma of our sister church in New Zealand. We can follow that up by saying that he has accepted that call. The Miersmas will be arriving in the U.S. on June 26 and hope to take up residence in the Lacombe parsonage during the week of July 14.

Our vacant Doon, IA PRC has extended a call to Rev. G. VanBaren. With him on the trio for that call were the Revs. R. Cammenga and A. denHartog.

#### Congregational Activities

On May 19, after their evening service, the congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted a farewell for Mr. Cheah Fook Meng and his wife, Lee Choo. As many of you know, Fook Meng has now completed a special three-year course at our seminary and will by God's grace soon be ordained as a pastor in the Evangelical Reformed Churches in Singapore. Following a light supper and an opportunity to say good-bye, Fook Meng presented a program entitled, "Mission Opportunities of the ERCS: Past, Present, and Future."

For this summer, the bookstore

run by the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA has decided to feature books for children and young people — a move no doubt intended to give Hope's younger generation something to do over summer vacation. I include this here to encourage us all to spend some time this summer with a good book.

#### Mission Activities

The weekend of May 12 saw Rev. Ron VanOverloop, pastor of the Georgetown PRC, along with Elder Don Doezeema, a member of the Domestic Mission Committee, traveling to the Pittsburgh, PA area to make a follow-up visit to a group of interested families that Rev. T. Miersma, our home missionary, visited in February.

#### Denominational Activities

We also want to extend our congratulations to Prof. H. Hanko of our seminary, as he commemorated forty years in the ministry of the Word in our churches. This evidence of God's faithfulness to Prof. Hanko and his wife, as well as to our churches, was marked with an open house on June 13 at

the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI.

Many of you have seen announcements in your church bulletins inviting you to order either a tape or CD from the Protestant Reformed Psalm Singing Choir. Let me say that if that recording is as good as the concert they gave in early May at the Grandville, MI PRC, it will be well worth having. You may remember from a past "News" that this choir started meeting just last fall, and that this was their first public concert. The choir was made up of 21 men and 21 women, and each one of our west Michigan churches was represented. What a thrill it was to be part of the program that night. Tapes (\$6.00) and CDs (\$11.00) may be ordered from Mrs. Rebecca Kleyn, 8510 Clyde Park, Byron Center, MI 49315.

#### *Food for Thought*

"To this end we should ourselves call our sins to remembrance. For the more we remember them, the more God forgets them; the more we forget them, the more God remembers them."

— W. Bradshaw □

### PRAYER FOR OUR GRADUATES

Lord, as they enter a new phase of life  
May they retain what they have now been taught;  
Not so that earthly gain and wisdom be their aim,  
But that they love and serve Thee as they ought.

May their perspective not be mammon's goals  
Of fame and wealth and seeking earthly pleasure.  
But give them grace to fix their eyes of faith  
On heav'nly joys — the true unfading treasure.

The skills they've learned, may they apply aright;  
May they be fitted for the awesome task  
Of being stalwart members of Thy church.  
This is the goodly blessing that we ask.

*Thelma Westra*



## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On June 18, 1996, our dear parents,

#### **REV. and MRS. MEINDERT JOOSTENS,**

celebrated 25 years of marriage. We, their children, would like to take this opportunity to thank them for years of Christian love, instruction, admonition, and guidance in the ways of the Lord. Each day we are grateful to our heavenly Father for giving to us such God-fearing parents. They have been an example and an inspiration of how we must strive to live unto the Lord. May God bless and keep them in the way that is before them and give them many more years together.

- ✿ Daniel and Faith Bult
- ✿ Timothy Joostens
- ✿ Steven Joostens
- ✿ Joy Joostens
- ✿ Paul Joostens

Lynden, WA

### NOTICE:

Immediate change of address for Rev. Thomas Miersma.

102 Price  
Alamosa, CO 81101-2728

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On May 14, 1996, our parents,

#### **MR. and MRS. JOSZEF POSTMA,**

celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. We, their children, are thankful to God for their many years together and their Christian example and upbringing. It is our prayer that the Lord continue to keep them in His care.

- ✿ Philip Postma
- ✿ David Postma
- ✿ Daniel Postma
- ✿ Steven Postma

South Holland, Illinois

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to our Triune God, our parents,

#### **DAVE and SUSAN ZYLSTRA**

will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary on July 13, 1996. We, their children and grandchildren, are thankful to the Lord for His sovereign care in these years, and our prayer is that they may be blessed in the years to come.

"Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:6).

- ✿ John and Hilda Zylstra  
Adam & Jen, Rachel, Mark,  
Aaron, Joshua
- ✿ Martin and Adeline Zylstra  
Vanessa, Darren, Daniel,  
Sharmain, Angeline, Craig, Whitney
- ✿ Herman and Geraldine  
Klaassens  
Michael, Sara, Rebecca,  
Heather, Pamela, Alison,  
Jeremy, Chantelle
- ✿ Clayton and Jacqueline  
DeGroot  
Clinton, Heidi, Laura, Jeffrey,  
Ryan
- ✿ Richard and Arlene Schmidt  
David, Beverly, Wilfred
- ✿ Edward and Patricia Huizing  
Jonathan, Justin, Stephanie,  
Kevin, Aaron
- ✿ Richard and Marsha Span  
Robert, Matthew, Maria,  
Rachelle, Melissa, Patricia
- ✿ Timothy and Jill Zylstra  
Joel, Cameron, Megan, Steven,  
Amanda
- ✿ Joe and Valerie VanGelderren  
Nathan, Lianne, Vanessa
- ✿ Peter and Rhoda Hendricks  
Julie, Jocelyn, Mitchell

Ardrossan, AB, Canada

### **1996 Young People's Convention** *"Godly Friendships"*

Hosted by:

**South Holland Protestant Reformed**  
Young People's Society

to be held:

**July 29-August 2**  
on the campus of Wheaton College

Speakers:

Rev. Bruinsma:

*Church Friendships*

Rev. VanOverloop:

*Personal Friendships*

Rev. Gritters:

*Friendships in Dating and Marriage*

Plan now to attend

Anyone interested in being a chaperon, please contact:

Jann Bruinsma  
(708) 672-5634

This is not a function of Wheaton College

### NOTICE!!!

Bethel PRC has changed the starting time for their evening service to 5 P.M. We ask that all visitors please take note of the change.



#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Men's and Ladies' Society of the First PRC of Holland, MI express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Lubbers in the death of his brother,

##### **MR. PETER LUBBERS.**

May they find comfort in the knowledge that "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee" (Isaiah 43:2).

Allen Elzinga, President  
Mrs. Vern Casemier, Secretary

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Southwest PR Mr. and Mrs. Society express their sincere Christian sympathy to Rod and Evonne Kreuzer in the death of her father,

##### **MR. JOHN WONDERGEM.**

May they find comfort in the words of Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Al DeYoung, President  
Joyce Noorman, Secretary

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Martha Ladies' Aid Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church express their Christian sympathy to their fellow member Mrs. Joyce Kooiker in the loss of her step-mother,

##### **ALICE MULDER.**

May she and her family find comfort in these words from Isaiah 49:13, "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted."

Rev. R. Moore, President  
Judy Brummel, Secretary

#### **NOTICE!!**

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet at the Randolph Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, WI, on Wednesday, September 4, 1996 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk thirty days before Classis convenes.

Rev. Steven Key,  
Stated Clerk

#### **NOTICE!!**

The Board of the Reformed Heritage Christian School Association of Kalamazoo, Michigan is inviting applicants for a full-time teacher/administrator position which will begin in August of 1996. Our school, now completing its second year, has two full-time teachers and one half-time, with 30 students in grades K-8. This position involves teaching the upper elementary (grades 5-8) class. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith, biblical inerrancy, 6-day creation, male headship, the antithesis, and covenantal theology. Teacher certification and experience are strong pluses. Salary: low to mid 20's; health insurance. Those interested only in teaching and not in administrative responsibilities are also encouraged to apply (salary: \$14 to \$22K w/ health ins.). Applicants should send a letter and resume to:

Tom Nagel  
18230 Michigan  
Three Rivers, MI 49093  
Phone: (616) 279-7373  
FAX: (616) 279-6207  
E-mail: DAKloost@aol.com

#### **NOTIFICATION OF CANDIDACY**

All Protestant Reformed consistories are hereby informed that the 1996 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America has declared Mr. Richard Smit a candidate for the gospel ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Candidate Smit will be eligible for a call on or after July 13, 1996.

Mr. Smit's address is:

P.O. Box 163  
Doon, IA 51235  
(712) 726-3382

Don Doezeema,  
Stated Clerk

#### **NOTICE!!**

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 11, 1996 at the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk no later than August 12, 1996.

Jon J. Huisken,  
Stated Clerk

#### **RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY**

The Council and congregation of the South Holland PRC express their sincere sympathies to Don and Patheresa Haak in the death of her sister,

##### **MRS. CLARICE HOVING,**

on April 24. May our sovereign Father give comfort to them in our risen Savior. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

Pastor C. Terpstra, President  
Mr. Bert Worries, Clerk