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Fathers in Christ

Rev. Steven Key

The PRCA and the true/false church (4)

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PRC missions in the Philippines: April 2022 newsletter

Rev. Daniel Kleyn



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Contents

Meditation

- 363 Fathers in Christ
Rev. Steven Key

Editorial

- 365 The PRCA and the true/false church (4)
Rev. Joshua Engelsma

All around us

- 368 Disney and the “Don’t Say Gay Bill” in Florida
Rev. Martyn McGeown

Search the Scriptures

- 370 The prophet Habakkuk and his message (Hab 1:1-4)
Rev. Ronald Hanko

When thou sittest in thine house

- 373 Prayer as a training school for confession
Abraham Kuyper

Pertaining to the churches in common— PRC missions in the Philippines

- 375 April 2022 newsletter
Rev. Daniel Kleyn
377 A testimony from Berean PRC

Bring the books...

- 379 *Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators:
Legal FAQs for Church Leaders*
Mrs. Cherith Guichelaar

News from our churches

- 380 Mr. Charles Terpstra



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Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado

Fathers in Christ

I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.... I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.

I John 2:13a, 14a

John's first epistle speaks about what it is to be a Christian. The essence of the Christian life is that of living in fellowship with the gloriously exalted and holy God. You and I who are united to Christ by faith are, by that living relationship, reconciled unto God and taken into His own fellowship. That is true of all the various age groups in which God performs His wonder work of grace. Of the three groups John addresses in verses 12-14 of I John 2, we now look at the *fathers*.

Their spiritual identity

In these verses John progresses from little children to fathers before going back to the young men. It seems that the reason for doing so is that little children look ahead, not merely to being young men but to being fathers. A little boy wants to be like dad. In our spiritual life we must also desire spiritual maturity.

The writer to the Hebrews confronted that abnormal situation of Christians who had not grown. They had not grown because they were "dull of hearing." They did not give proper regard to God's Word and to the faithful preaching of His gospel. The inspired preacher was called to rebuke them (Heb. 5:12). Those who have grown up with a healthy diet of spiritual food ought to be spiritually mature, able to nurture those who follow. That is the place of a *father*. The essence of fatherhood is found in the idea of a man being a progenitor. That such is not the idea on the foreground in this particular text ought to be evident because, when we speak about our spiritual life, God alone is our Father. An earthly father cannot cause spiritual life to spring forth in his children. That is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

So when John speaks of men as *fathers* in the spiritual sense of the word, he uses the term with reference to one who nourishes and protects those with whom he stands in such a relationship. Fathers are those who

nourish, protect, and provide for the spiritual enrichment and growth of those who follow them. So when we speak of *fathers*, we speak of persons of maturity, spiritual maturity. They are not just learning to digest the meat of the Word. They have long heard the gospel, embraced it, studied it, lived it, and continue to live by it. They are no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). The fathers are decided in their convictions and, therefore, not easily deceived by the philosophies that are continually trying to overthrow the faith. They are men of stability and spiritual strength. They will not stir beyond the "it is written" of Holy Scripture.

But there is more involved in this name *father*. The fathers are those with a heart for the souls of others. A father is the one who carries the weight of the household. He bears the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of those who surround him in the home. For that reason, and to God's glory, the father is always conscious of his responsibility toward the family gathered around him. He is a godly example. He is not self-seeking and self-serving, but serves God and seeks the blessedness of those around him. He cares for others much more than he did when he was younger. He looks at the household and desires above all to help their happiness and holiness. A father teaches; a father warns; a father leads by example, saying, "Be ye followers of me" (I Cor. 4:16). A father imparts lessons, leaving a legacy for those who follow him. How blessed is the church where God has given such maturity of faith that there are many who are fathers in Christ. These are the ones to whom John writes in the opening words of verses 13 and 14 of I John 2.

Their prominent characteristic

The prominent characteristic of these fathers in Christ is set forth in both verses, namely, their peculiar kind of knowledge. Notice once again the first part of verse 13: "I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning." Ye *have known*. What a contrast to those of whom we read in II Timothy 3:7, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge

of the truth.” These fathers are settled, established upon a sure foundation. It is not that they have gotten too big for that which is precious to the little children. The elementary truths of Scripture are still dear. After all, who could live without the knowledge of the forgiveness of sins? And which father—having the spiritual life of which John writes—becomes too big to enjoy even the simplest truths of Scripture? The fact is, those truths become even richer and more glorious!

This knowledge is bestowed by God Himself, a precious gift of His grace. The apostle Paul opens his first epistle to the church at Corinth with thanks to God “for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge.” That is the treasure that we possess even in these earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us (II Cor. 4:7). Christ, who is *the Word* sent from God, came with the message concerning Him who is from the beginning. And by the power of His voice—the Spirit working by the Word—you have believed.

“Ye have known him,” says John, “that is from the beginning.” The knowledge of these fathers in Christ, therefore, is that of the eternal and unchangeable truth of God Himself. A father rejoices to see God, to know Him more and more, to see Him in all His works and ways. We stand in awe before all that He has revealed to us. We have come to the realization that what is true of Him is also true of His works: “Behold, the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee” (I Kings 8:27).

But this knowledge especially comes to focus in that which God has done through Jesus Christ His only begotten Son. When we grow in grace, we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And He is *from the beginning*. He is so in the very counsel of God, being the Firstborn of every creature. All creation serves Him and His glory, the establishment of His church and kingdom. Through Christ we know God in a way that is profoundly beautiful. We see that by His Son all things were made, “and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). We see the Lord Jesus and behold the glory of His Person as Him “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Mic. 5:2). Our knowledge, therefore, is that of which Jesus spoke in His high-priestly prayer: “For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me” (John 17:8).

The one who is a spiritual father in Christ is one who has been enriched in spiritual understanding, growing in the knowledge of God’s everlasting covenant of grace

established by eternal election in Christ and realized by Christ bringing us into fellowship with the Holy One. It is a remarkably privileged place that we occupy in the fellowship of our Redeemer! When we know that and live in that knowledge, we are compelled to seek the spiritual welfare of those around us, and are used by God for the nurture of His church.

That this knowledge is a prominent characteristic of these fathers to whom John writes is evident from the fact that the apostle opens verse 14 repeating what he had written of them in verse 13: “I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.”

There are truths that bear repeating. What the apostle writes, he writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, with all the weight of its heavenly significance. He writes earnestly longing that those to whom he writes see the wonderful significance of the Christian life. But he hardly has the words down, when he apparently is struck by the fact that he is soon to be taken from them. John is an elderly man, the last surviving apostle. As he stands before the amazing truth that the Holy Spirit has given him to write, he realizes that even though he himself shall soon be taken to glory, the truth that he has written shall endure. It is the truth that abides throughout the generations of God’s church. And in the awareness of that abiding truth, the great faithfulness of Jehovah, John takes a different perspective. It is as if he looks down from that blessed place that he occupies now, so close to heaven, and he looks over the church and says, “I have written.” And to the fathers he repeats what he had said previously. It is such a beautiful truth, such a blessing, that “you have known him that is from the beginning.”

Our very lives as Christians, our testimony of Christ’s life in us, is dependent upon our realization that, under God’s great blessing and by the wonder work of His grace, we have known Him that is from the beginning. This knowledge is foundational because men throughout history have the same needs. They face the same dangers, the same spiritual conflicts; they suffer the same sorrows and struggle with the same sins. We are fallen creatures, in need of the same knowledge of the Savior. Life eternal is to know God, to know Him as our Father for Jesus’ sake. For that reason, the gospel preacher (or in John’s case *writer*) proclaims a consistent truth—God’s truth. “I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning.” Live, therefore, in that knowledge!

Their high calling

When He who is from the beginning has taken you

into the fellowship of His own covenant life, then your very life is His. All that John has written, and all that he writes, he writes to those who stand in this blessed covenant relationship to the living God. He writes to you who have life eternal, who live in God's fellowship.

That knowledge is to govern your life in all things. As fathers in Christ, your concern is the spiritual wel-

fare of the household of faith. For that reason, then, you also look to leave a spiritual legacy by the faithful instruction of and godly example to the church's children and the generations that follow. We will soon be gone from this earth, and shall take none of its fleeting treasures with us. Remember the lasting treasure that is ours in Christ Jesus.



Editorial

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois

The PRCA and the true/false church (4)

In the previous three editorials in this series, I set forth generally the distinction between the true church and the false church. The first editorial established the proper view of the distinction from the Belgic Confession and the Scriptures. The second editorial surveyed the history of Reformed churches generally and of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRCA) specifically to show that this view of the distinction was maintained in Reformed orthodoxy. The third editorial drew out some of the serious implications of a wrong view of the distinction before setting forth in summary view the proper view of Reformed ecclesiology.

Now I want to conclude in a couple of articles with some applications of this doctrine to the PRCA. In this editorial I want to consider whether the PRCA are true churches, or whether they are to be labeled “false,” “whore,” and “Babylon.”

In a sense, the question, “Are the PRCA true churches?” can be answered quite simply. Yes, they are. Any reasonable evaluator of the denomination would conclude that they are true churches. Having in hand the proper biblical and Reformed understanding of the true/false church distinction (laid out in the previous editorials), even critics of the PRCA would be forced to acknowledge that they still belong to the spectrum of true churches.

But in what follows I want to go beyond that simple question and answer. I want to evaluate the PRCA according to the three marks of a true church and consider whether they are running pell-mell down the road of apostasy or whether they are yet, by the grace of God, true churches that are faithful.

The PRCA and the mark of gospel preaching

In this evaluation, we must begin with the chief of the three marks of a true church: the faithful preaching of the gospel. If the PRCA pass muster here, none may question whether they are true churches.

The truth that has been maintained in the PRCA in the past is the same truth that continues to be maintained today. The PRCA maintains the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation, justification by faith alone apart from works, and the covenant of grace that is unconditional in establishment, maintenance, and experience.

The denomination has been tested in this respect in the last years. Many are familiar with that history, but we do well to consider it again, albeit briefly.

At Synod 2017 protests were brought regarding a minister's sermon on John 14:6. The text teaches that Christ alone is the way to the Father, yet the sermon taught that our good works of obedience are part of the way unto the Father. The minister said, “The way unto the Father includes obedience,” and, “The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father,” and, “...He is the way, your way unto Me, through the truth which He works in your hearts, through a godly life....”¹

More sermons of the minister were brought before the Synod of 2018. Among other things, the man had said: “We do good works so that we can have our prayers answered”; and, “We do good works so that we can receive God's grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness”; and, “Obedience is required here, obedience that I must perform in order to enjoy fellowship with God”; and,

¹ Quoted in *Acts of Synod of the PRCA 2017*, 75-76.

“What do the creeds say about the relationship between obedience and fellowship? That there are requirements. That there is obedience required in order that we may have that fellowship, prayerful fellowship with God.”²

The man’s error was that he gave to the believer’s good works of obedience a place and function not in harmony with the Reformed confessions. The believer’s obedience was spoken of in language that placed it in the category of the *basis* of fellowship with God (which is Christ alone) or the *means* of fellowship with God (which is faith alone). Good works were made to be something other than the fruit of faith and fellowship with God. They were no longer the way of grateful conduct *in* fellowship with God, but were made to be the way of access *unto* that fellowship.

Synod 2018 judged the error of the minister to be serious: “The doctrinal error of the sermons then compromises the gospel of Jesus Christ, for when our good works are given a place and function they do not have, the perfect work of Christ is displaced. Necessarily then, the doctrines of the unconditional covenant (fellowship with God) and justification by faith alone are compromised by this error.”³

Synod that same year also passed judgment on a “Doctrinal Statement” written by a committee to help the consistory of the above-mentioned minister. Synod declared that the “Doctrinal Statement” was in error because it contained ambiguous language and the same doctrinal error.

Another sermon preached by a different minister was brought to Classis East of the PRCA in January 2021. In the sermon it was stated: “If any man will hear my voice...he is talking about not the condition to establish a union but he is establishing a condition that deals with communion. Not union, that’s grace, it’s all grace, only grace, but communion, fellowship.” Classis East judged that this sermon “does constitute teaching the error of conditional covenant theology.”⁴

There is no question about it: as churches, we erred. Ministers erred. Consistories erred. Committees erred. Classes erred. Synods erred. We sinned against God and His truth. We grieve over these sins! God forgive us and have mercy!

In addition to the fact that we acknowledge and grieve over these sins, we may not lose sight of this fact: *the PRCA have rejected these errors*. Synod 2017 rejected the sermon of the minister on John 14. Synod 2018 rejected many more of the man’s sermons, as well

as the “Doctrinal Statement.” Classis East rejected the sermon of the other minister. Would to God that the errors that necessitated these rejections never arose, but in the end they were rejected! Our assemblies, representing our churches as a whole, rose up and said, “This is wrong. We will not have this doctrine in the PRCA.”

In this respect, God has been merciful to the PRCA. Often in the history of the church, when a church takes wrong decisions with respect to doctrine, the church continues on in that way. But God spared us from such a departure through the decisions of our broader assemblies. He has shown us our errors, turned us from them, and made us more careful to guard against them.

If any wonders, then, what is the doctrinal position of the PRCA, let them reckon with this fact. The PRCA has repudiated the idea that our good works are the basis or instrument of our experience of fellowship with God, and reaffirmed that we experience fellowship with God only for Christ’s sake and by faith in Him alone. The PRCA has repudiated justification by faith and works, and reaffirmed justification by faith alone. The PRCA has repudiated a conditional covenant, and reaffirmed the unconditional nature of God’s covenant. Here we stand!

Some might object and say that, while the assemblies have not erred since 2018, there is an unofficial acceptance of false doctrine. In response, consider, first, that any error that is unofficially maintained so pervasively in a denomination must inevitably show itself in the official declarations of the denomination’s assemblies. That has not happened. Second, I would reiterate the “Conclusion” of the Canons of Dordt where the fathers urge individuals “to judge of the faith of the Reformed churches, not...from the private expressions of a few among ancient and modern teachers, often dishonestly quoted or corrupted and wrested to a meaning quite foreign to their intention; but from the public confession of the churches themselves.” Third, if anyone believes that a minister or consistory in the PRCA is preaching anything other than what the denomination has declared to be the truth, then demonstrate it to the churches. Remember, however, that this is not done in the court of public opinion, by way of a public letter or social media post. Speak with the minister in question if there is some uncertainty in what was said. Bring a formal objection before a consistory showing how there has been a clear deviation from the Reformed confessions. If you think a man denies the truth of total depravity, for instance, show how he has clearly deviated from Lord’s Day 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism and Head III/IV of the Canons of Dordt. If you think a man teaches what is false regarding assurance and good works, show how

2 Quoted in *Acts of Synod of the PRCA 2018*, 61-66.

3 *Acts of Synod of the PRCA 2018*, 70.

4 *Minutes of Classis East of the PRCA, January 2021*, Art. 41.

he has clearly deviated from Lord's Day 32 and Canons Head I.12 and V.10. If not satisfied with a consistory's judgment, make appeal to a classis or synod. You will be heard. And if you do not pursue this path, then it must be that there is no error, and you ought not to harbor suspicions about the man.

The doctrine of the PRCA continues to be the truth set forth in the Reformed confessions. My colleagues and I are bound to this (and gladly so), and are committed to preaching this truth, by God's grace. Elders are bound to see that we ministers do so. Preaching and teaching the truth of the gospel, rejecting the errors that militate against it, the PRCA are true, faithful churches.

The PRCA and the mark of Christian discipline

I want next to evaluate the PRCA in light of the third mark of a true church: the faithful exercise of Christian discipline.

I want to include in this category a consideration of church government more broadly. The polity of the PRCA is sound. Members ought not to harbor doubts about the functioning of consistories, classes, and synods.

The past years have shown that the assemblies of the PRCA are not broken. A broken system of church government is one in which the voice of the members is silenced, where protests and appeals are not heard. None may honestly allege this to be the case in the PRCA. I venture to guess that in no other time in the history of the PRCA has the voice of the members been heard more than in recent years. There have been numerous protests and appeals filed. Some have been declared not legally before an assembly, but this does not constitute a broken system. Certainly assemblies ought to try to declare a protest legal if at all possible, but there are certain biblical principles of church polity that factor in. An appeal might be declared illegal because the individual did not deal with his consistory first. For a broader assembly to enter into the matter would be to deny the autonomy of the local church. In that instance, entering into the matter would indicate brokenness, not declaring it illegal.

While some protests and appeals have been declared illegal, many others have been declared legal. Careful answers have been given to objections. In a number of key instances, the protests and appeals have been upheld. God used the protests and appeals of members to reveal the doctrinal errors mentioned above. As churches, we can give thanks for how God has used such protests and appeals. This is the furthest thing from a broken system. The system is healthy; it works. It may move slower than one might wish, but that is simply the nature of church work at times.

Neither is the system of polity in the PRCA hierarchical. A hierarchical system would be a system where the broader assemblies lord over the narrower. There is no proof that this characterizes the PRCA. Neither is it the case that a handful of ministers run the show and call the shots from behind the scenes. If that is going on, then I must be entirely in the dark, because I have never seen any evidence of it taking place.

In addition, the consistories of the PRCA are obviously exercising the key of Christian discipline. There have been a number of public cases of late that indicate this work is being carried out faithfully.

Under this point, it is also necessary to remember that ungodly living does not mark out a church as false. There are weighty discipline cases of serious sins in the churches, and undoubtedly things were done and said throughout the controversy by members and officebearers that were sinful. But these things do not determine whether a church is true or not. John Calvin warned against this idea: "Thinking there is no church where there is not complete purity and integrity of conduct, they, through hatred of wickedness, withdraw from a genuine church, while they think they are shunning the company of the ungodly." Calvin identifies the root of this: "Excessive moroseness (which) is more the result of pride and a false idea of sanctity, than genuine sanctity itself, and true zeal for it. Accordingly, those who are the most forward, and, as it were, leaders in producing revolt from the Church, have, for the most part, no other motive than to display their own superiority by despising all other men."⁵ David Engelsma concurs: "No one may despise, or leave, the church because wicked men appear in it; nor may anyone reject a church as false church because the members, including the officebearers, are sinful men."⁶

The mark of the faithful exercise of Christian discipline is clearly seen in the PRCA. They are, therefore, not false, but true and faithful.

The PRCA and the mark of the sacraments

I mention only briefly the second of the three marks of a true church: the right administration of the two sacraments. I mention this mark briefly, not because it is unimportant but because it has been raised as an issue only as it relates to the presence of the other two marks. If the mark of gospel preaching is evident and the mark

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.1.13, 4.1.16.

⁶ David Engelsma, "The Marks of the False Church," *Standard Bearer* 58 no. 11 (March 1, 1982): 257.

of Christian discipline is evident, then it follows that the mark of the sacraments is evident in the PRCA as well.

Conclusion

I have prayed that this article not be written or read in pride or sinful self-justification. I am under no delusion that the PRCA ever have been or are now perfect. We have erred. Weaknesses have been exposed. And yet, in what I truly believe is a fair evaluation of them, they must be judged as true churches of Christ. Jesus Christ is present savingly in the PRCA. He is present in the preaching of the gospel, present in the administration of the two sacraments, present in the exercise of Christian discipline. He walks among these candlesticks.

I do not write mainly to change the minds of the detractors of PRCA (though I would be glad if there were some who reconsidered). But I write this mainly to encourage the members of the PRCA. You and your children belong to true churches of Christ. You may come with confidence to church on the Sabbath to hear the gospel proclaimed. You may confidently receive the sacraments. You may confidently trust the government and discipline of the church.

And if you judge the denomination to be slipping, she is not nearly so far gone as to give up on her. Fight for her!

Having shown that the PRCA are true churches, I want to conclude this series in a final editorial with two warnings to the denomination.



All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI

Disney and the “Don’t Say Gay Bill” in Florida

The Florida bill

On March 28, 2022 Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida signed HR-1557 into law, a bill dubbed by the liberal media as the “Don’t Say Gay Bill,” but whose actual title is “The Parental Rights in Education Bill.” The point of the Florida law, which comes into effect on July 1, 2022, is to give parents more control over their children’s education. This is a hot topic politically in the USA, where the instruction in many public schools includes lessons on critical race theory, gender studies, and the like, not only against their parents’ wishes but also without their parents’ knowledge. A child, for example, in some public schools can receive abortifacient drugs, undergo an abortion, or be referred to a psychologist to treat his “gender dysphoria” without a parent’s consent or knowledge. The new law seeks to change this.

I quote from HR-1557, a bill of only seven pages:

The procedures [adopted by school districts in Florida] must reinforce the fundamental right of parents to make decisions regarding the upbringing and control of their children by requiring school district personnel to encourage a student to discuss issues relating to his or her well-being with his or her parent, or to facilitate discussion of the issue with the parent. The procedure may not prohibit parents from accessing any

of their student’s education and health records created, maintained, or used by the school district.... A school district may not adopt procedures or student support forms that prohibit school district personnel from notifying a parent about his or her student’s mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being.... School district personnel may not discourage or prohibit parental notification of and involvement in critical decisions affecting a student’s mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being. This subparagraph does not prohibit a school district from adopting procedures that permit school personnel to withhold such information from a parent if a reasonably prudent person would believe that disclosure would result in abuse, abandonment, or neglect... (<https://www.flsenate.gov/session/bill/2022/1557/billtext/er/pdf>).

Critics of the legislation in the media have labeled the Florida legislation as the “Don’t Say Gay Bill.” The reason for this epithet is one sentence:

Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards.

It is well known that American public schools—and

schools in other Western nations as well—teach children about sexual matters, and, increasingly, about homosexuality, lesbianism, and transgenderism, as well as the whole spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities. The acronym LGBTQIA+ is getting longer. The provision of the Florida law, which is not as sharp as I would like to see, simply restricts such instruction to *fourth graders and older*. Depending on how you interpret the “or” after “grade 3,” this legislation does not actually prohibit classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity to children between the ages of five (kindergarten) and nine (third grade), but only requires that such education be “age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate.” Who decides what is age or developmentally appropriate—public school teacher unions, professional educators, psychologists, the department of education? If a kindergartner called Ben identifies as Belinda, and wears a dress and makeup to class, this legislation does not prohibit the teacher talking to the children about it and encouraging (even requiring) that the rest of the children address the child with the preferred pronouns (she, her) and name (Belinda), as long as it is done in an “age appropriate” way. If a child in first grade has “two daddies” or “two mommies,” this legislation does not prohibit a classroom discussion or even a celebration of that fact. It probably does not even forbid the classroom reading of *I Have Two Mommies* or other books aimed at children.

Despite that, the legislation has been labelled hateful and discriminatory. U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi tweeted on March, 28 2022: “This cruel legislation is an affront to our Nation’s cherished values and sends a harmful message to our children. @GovRonDeSantis and Florida Republicans have chosen to needlessly bully, isolate, and demean LGBTQ students.” She then touted the Equality Act about which I have written before and which has, thankfully, still not been passed by the U.S. Congress (see *SB*, vol. 95, issue 19; Aug. 1, 2019). The official White House Twitter account sent out a tweet by President Joe Biden on February 8, 2022: “I want every member of the LGBTQIA+ community—especially the kids who will be impacted by this hateful bill—to know that you are loved and accepted just as you are. I have your back, and my Administration will continue to fight for the protections and safety you deserve.”

Remember that the only thing that the legislation forbids is classroom instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity *in a way that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for children between the ages of five and nine!*

Disney’s reaction

Walt Disney (1901-1966) co-founded the Disney

Brothers Studio with his brother Roy (1893-1971), a company famous for creating animated pictures such as “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” and adaptations of other fairy tales, and internationally recognized for its company mascot, Mickey Mouse. The Walt Disney Company is now a multinational media and entertainment conglomerate headquartered in Burbank, California, and it includes the so-called “happiest place on earth,” Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida with some 80,000 employees.

You might expect that Disney, known for its family friendly amusement parks and entertaining cartoons aimed at children, would welcome, or at least not oppose, legislation that shields impressionable young minds from sexual matters in Florida’s public schools, but you would be sadly mistaken. Disney, like many large multinational companies, promotes the LGBTQIA+ agenda.

The current CEO of Disney is Bob Chapek, who initially declined to make a public statement about the matter. He quickly changed his message following walkouts from staff in protest against the Florida legislation, supposedly in solidarity with Disney LGBTQIA+ employees and their children. In response to the media’s mislabeling of the bill, Disney employees chanted “Gay! Gay!” and demanded its repeal. On February 24 Bob Iger, the former CEO of Disney, tweeted, “If passed, this bill will put vulnerable, young LGBTQ people in jeopardy.”

In early March, Chapek distributed a memo to Disney employees apologizing for his lack of advocacy on the issue. He also met with Governor DeSantis to try to persuade him to veto the bill. Chapek’s memo is revealing: “Our company has a long history of supporting the LGBTQ+ community,” he reminds his disappointed colleagues. “I and the entire leadership team unequivocally stand in support of our LGBTQ+ employees, their families, and their communities,” he reassures his staff. He then lists a number of productions—movies or cartoons, I assume; I have never heard of them so I will not list them here—and remarks, “These and all of our diverse stories are our corporate statements.” “We have provided,” he adds, “nearly \$3 million to support the work of LGBTQ+ organizations; and we have a long history of supporting important events like Pride parades.... All this is why we have earned a 100% rating from the Human Rights Campaign for 16 years in a row.” The Human Rights Campaign is the largest LGBTQ advocacy group in the USA (<https://variety.com/2022/film/news/disney-ceo-bob-chapek-support-lgbtq-1235197938>).

On March 28, shortly after DeSantis signed the bill, Disney tweeted, “Our goal as a company is for this law

to be repealed by the legislature or struck down in the courts, and we remain committed to supporting the national and state organizations working to achieve that. We are dedicated to standing up for the rights and safety of LGBTQ+ members of the Disney family, as well as the LGBTQ+ community in Florida and across the country.”

Disney might have a friendly Mickey Mouse face, but the company has an agenda, which was recently revealed in leaked footage from Disney conference calls. Vivian Ware, Disney’s Diversity and Inclusion Manager, explained to her colleagues how Disney is in the process of eliminating gender specific language at its theme parks. No more “Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls,” but “Friends” and “Dreamers of all ages.” Does your *son* want to be a Disney Princess? Presumably, Disney can accommodate his wishes. Kar-ey Burke, president of Disney’s General Entertainment Content, and a mother, she says, of two queer children, one transgender and another pansexual, lamented that there are so few LGBTQ characters in Disney productions, and she committed to increasing that number significantly—50% of racial and sexual minorities. Others remarked that LGBTQ characters are often only in the background and their stories need to feature more prominently in the plots of Disney productions. Another executive producer, Latoya Raveneau, boasted about

her “not-at-all-secret gay agenda.” “Wherever I could, I was just basically adding queerness,” she admitted with obvious glee, adding that the company was very open to it. In fact, it was recently announced that an upcoming animated movie called *Lightyear* (a spinoff from *Toy Story*) produced by Pixar Studios, a subsidiary of Disney, will include two female characters kissing, a scene which had been cut, but which has been reinstated in opposition to the Florida law.

Parents, you have been warned. The “Happiest Place on Earth” is turning into a nightmare for your children, and Disney is not producing content that you want your children to consume. What children see, whether in their parents, siblings, friends, and relatives; or on screens, children do. What children see and hear in their favorite cartoons they begin to view as normal and acceptable. Do not allow your children to be glued to screens, but pursue with them more wholesome activities for the good of their physical, psychological, and spiritual development. Disney has progressed from seemingly harmless fairy tales and is now spinning yarns about sexuality and gender identity.

How blessed we are to have good Christian schools or the option of homeschooling where the impressionable children of the covenant can be shielded from this ungodly, sin-promoting world!



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA

The prophet Habakkuk and his message

The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

Habakkuk 1:1

The first verse of Habakkuk’s prophecy is introductory. It identifies the author of the prophecy by name and as a prophet, and describes his message as a burden. We know little about Habakkuk beyond what is recorded here. He was a prophet, likely a professional prophet, and possibly a Levite and temple singer. He prophesied, as we know from the content of his epistle, at the same time as Jeremiah and Zephaniah, just before the Babylonian captivity.

That Habakkuk “saw” his prophecy means that it came through visions, as did many other prophecies of the Old Testament (Amos 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zech. 1:8,

18). It was in those visions that he carried on the dialogue with God that is recorded in chapter 1, that he received the six woes of chapter 2, and that he was inspired to song in chapter 3. By grace and inspiration we see what he saw, especially the wonderful truth, vividly illustrated in the case of the prophet himself, that always and in all circumstances “the just shall live by his faith” (2:4).

That his prophecy was a burden means that it was heavy, especially with judgment, as the Word of God always is. Calvin says, “The burden, then, which the Prophet Habakkuk saw, was this—That God, after having exercised long forbearance towards the Jews,

would at length be the punisher of their many sins.”¹ Heavy with judgment, to be sure, both for Judah and for Babylon, whom God would use to punish Judah. But heavy also with reassurance and comfort, though not an easy or light comfort. The comfort Habakkuk brings is the weighty truth that only the righteous have any comfort, and that only by faith in God and in His promises.

Habakkuk’s plea in verses 2-5 that God take notice of Judah’s sin and deal with it is “heavy.” Few would willingly take such a burden on themselves. Few would have the spiritual strength to shoulder the burden of praying for God to visit His church in judgment. Habakkuk, commissioned by God to do so, carries that burden, but his difficulties in carrying it are immediately evident in the prophecy. Habakkuk himself found the Word that God gave him heavy and struggled to carry it. The prophecy, though intended for Judah, is mainly a conversation between the prophet and God in which the prophet struggles with the burden of God’s Word. Calvin says:

He had then by experience found that the people were extremely perverse. When he saw that there was no hope of amendment, and that the state of things was becoming daily worse, burning with zeal for God, he gave full vent to his feelings.²

Such is always the case with the Word of God. Heavy with what God has to say, it is often found too heavy by those who are called to carry and bring that Word to others, so heavy that they replace it with a burden of their own which both they and their hearers will find much easier to bear. They find certain doctrines, certain judgments, certain laws, certain descriptions of sins too heavy and discard them for a burden of their own manufacture, a burden made up of their own words. They pretend, then, that the burden they bring is heavy, but the words of men are light and without substance, while the Word of God truly is heavy and burdensome to the flesh.

Jeremiah, a contemporary of Habakkuk, had to deal with priests and prophets who claimed they were carrying the burden of the Word of God but were only carrying their own words:

And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even

forsake you, saith the LORD. And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house. Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken? And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man’s word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God. Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the LORD answered thee? and, What hath the LORD spoken? But since ye say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD; Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence: And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten” (Jer. 23:33-40).

The preacher who does carry the burden of God’s Word will often struggle with it as Habakkuk did, and so will the people to whom he brings that burden. Nevertheless, those who carry it faithfully, both preachers and hearers, will find the bearing of that burden salutary. They will find for themselves the same truth Habakkuk found, that the burden can only be carried by faith, and will learn the lesson of Habakkuk’s prophecy, that the just shall live by faith.

The prophet’s complaint of Judah’s wickedness

O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

Habakkuk 1:2-4

Verses 2-4 of Habakkuk 1 record some of Habakkuk’s struggle with the burden of God’s Word. Remembering that Habakkuk in his prophecy carries on a conversation with God, we see that the first verses are a lament to God over the wickedness of Judah. Habakkuk was much burdened with the iniquity, spoiling, violence, strife, and contention that he witnessed in Judah (v. 3). He saw disregard for the law and for justice and persecution of the righteous by the wicked (v. 4).

Habakkuk was especially concerned that God seemed to have turned a blind eye to Judah’s sin in spite of all his crying: “O LORD, how long shall I

1 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 15, 16.

2 Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4, 16.

cry, and thou wilt not hear!” (v. 2). Even worse, God seemed to have forgotten His people in Judah and did not save them from their oppressors: “How long shall I cry...out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!” (v. 2). Having long prayed for God to visit Judah and seen no answer, having read and heard the cries of the former prophets, his cry has become “How long...?” He echoes the complaint of Asaph in Psalm 77:7-9, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?”

Speaking for God’s people who were waiting for God’s salvation in those evil times, he sounds like Jeremiah:

When I would comfort myself against sorrow, my heart is faint in me. Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people because of them that dwell in a far country: Is not the LORD in Zion? is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities? The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered? (Jer. 8:18-22).

The word Habakkuk uses in verse 3, when he says that God showed him iniquity and caused him to behold “grievance,” is a word that expresses his weariness and discouragement in the face of God’s seeming indifference.

Indeed, it often seems that God delays when judgment is necessary. That is the case both when we see the wickedness of the world and also when we see the church departing from the truth and from obedience to God, as Habakkuk did. The temptation, then, is to collapse in a spiritual heap or take matters into our own hands, as though we can solve the problems of the church, bring about church reformation by our own efforts, and resolve matters in that way. Habakkuk does better, does what we ought always to do, by bringing his troubles to God in prayer.

Habakkuk’s cry “how long?” is different from Job’s in Job 19:7, though almost the same language is used. Job’s cry was a demand for an explanation of God’s ways, while Habakkuk’s, similar to that of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:10, is no more than a plea that God will come quickly and execute justice and judgment in the salvation of His own. “Since prayer is provided specifically as the framework in which all the burdens of God’s people may be poured out before the

Lord, prayers expressing perplexity are appropriate so long as they are offered in a context of trust.”³

Habakkuk’s concerns were two. He was concerned for the glory of God first. That comes out especially in verse 4 where Habakkuk says that the law, God’s law, was slacked (v. 4). It was as though the law and the God who gave it were grown feeble. He complained as well that “wrong judgment proceedeth” (v. 4), something unthinkable if God is indeed the Judge of heaven and earth. Only in the last verse of chapter 2 does he finally acknowledge that, in spite of appearances, the Lord is in His holy temple even when everything seems to have gone wrong. Here, at this point, he is still troubled. “He could not endure,” Calvin says, “the law of God to be made a sport, and men to allow themselves every liberty in sinning.”⁴

Habakkuk’s second concern was the salvation of God’s people. He says in verse 4 that the righteous were compassed by the wicked, the same complaint Asaph raises in Psalm 74: “O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased of old; the rod of thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed; this mount Zion, wherein thou hast dwelt” (vv. 1, 2).

Habakkuk understood that in times of apostasy and wickedness God’s people are not only an oppressed minority, but also that they suffer in other ways. They are corporately responsible for the sins of the church, and they are themselves affected by those sins. They see their children go astray when sin is tolerated in the church and they find themselves catering to and affected by those sins, becoming indifferent to them and tolerating them. Verse 2 is especially striking: “How long shall I cry...unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!” It was not only judgment for which he was waiting but through judgment the salvation of the righteous, though that, too, did not seem to come in a timely manner. It must have seemed, as it often does, that the church would be ruined before God came for judgment and for salvation.

There is, then, in these opening verses a sense of aloneness on the part of Habakkuk and those few whom he represented. It must have seemed, as it did to Elijah under his juniper tree, that there would be no one left if God did not answer his prayers and come. In

3 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 138.

4 Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4, 19.

such circumstances it is easy to panic and either fall into despair or run ahead of God. Habakkuk does neither, but commits himself and the remnant in Judah to the Keeper of souls (I Pet. 4:19).

He does that believing already here, though almost without realizing it, that God who justifies His people will also preserve and protect them, that “the just shall live by his faith” (2:4). And so already here he refers to God’s people as the righteous (v. 4). It was certainly evident to him as it had not been to Elijah when he thought he was the only one left, that God still had His people in Judah, and that they were His—not because they were not guilty of the same sins as the rest of the nation, or not guilty by association, but that they were

righteous by the justifying work of God who would never forsake His own work. These righteous would never, could never, come under the just judgments of God because of their righteousness, and would find forgiveness, when the rest of the nation perished, through their righteousness.

Habakkuk might have sung the last verses of Psalm 1 after registering his troubles with God:

The Lord will guard the righteous well,
Their way to Him is known;
The way of sinners, far from God,
Shall surely be o’er-thrown.

Psalter #1, stanza 5



When thou sittest in thine house

Reprinted from *Implications of Public Confession*, by Abraham Kuyper, 7th ed., Byron Center PRC Evangelism Committee, 2020. Used by permission.

Prayer as a training school for confession

I prayed...and made my confession.

—Daniel 9:4

The seed of faith which it frequently pleases God to sow within the heart of a child does not grow and flourish of its own accord. Imagine, for a moment, that a child within whose heart this seed had been planted had been kidnapped soon after its birth by a tribe of savages, that it had been taken far from its father and mother, and far from the blessed influences of Christ’s church. Do you suppose that child’s faith would have developed? By no means, though he were now a man of thirty years of age. If the seed of faith in any child is to sprout, grow up, and burst into bloom, that child must be kept in contact with the church that baptized it, must be kept familiar with God’s holy word, must, in short, be *prepared* for making its confession.

That emphasis does not mean to imply that external means alone can ever succeed in causing faith to develop and to flourish. External means cannot cause that. All external cultivation will avail nothing unless God the Holy Ghost causes that seed of faith to germinate and unless He supports that tender growth by His divine power. If the divine influence were wanting, that seed of faith would be as unproductive as that which falls upon

stony places, and all external attempts to cultivate it as effective as plowing a bed of rocks.

A farmer sweats at his labor and expends great care and tireless energy at tilling his fields. But unless his efforts be accompanied by the life-imparting rays of the sun, he will reap no harvest. It is equally true that the internal operations of the Holy Spirit must accompany the external means of preparation for confession if ever a child’s confession of his Lord is to be genuine. That is not saying that God’s omnipotence is limited or that it is dependent upon external means to bring faith to its full fruition. A child who dies as an infant can be saved even though it has never comprehended the word of God. God has other means of saving such as he, other means of educating such infants from a state of unconscious innocence to that of a full appreciation of their Savior. The arm of the Lord is never shortened. But for those of us who grow into consciously responsible maturity, it has pleased God to fix this law: The internal work of the Spirit and the external means of grace serve as complements to each other.

It is obvious, therefore, that preparation is necessary for making public confession.

Of what should that preparation consist? Of home and catechetical training merely? Does an accumulation

of knowledge, a committing to memory, a familiarity with various facts and particulars suffice to prepare the child for a true confession? Indeed not. To “make confession” is a much weightier matter than to “recite a lesson,” and actively to join God’s church involves much more than to be able to repeat the tenets she embraces and the canons she professes. True, study is necessary, indispensable, in fact, and committing to memory is invaluable. Much time and attention must be devoted to giving the child a vivid impression of Christ and of His word. But these means do not, to use a figure, exhaust the curriculum in the school for the preparation for confession. If they did, one could with as much hope for success attempt to prepare pagan and Jewish children for making their confession of faith. To suppose that such means sufficed would be assuming that confession is an intellectual matter merely, and that the heart does not enter into it at all. Such an assumption, surely, is quite unwarranted.

It is for that reason that the preceding meditation [published in the March 1, 2022 *SB*] emphasized the fact that a child must be constantly confessing Jesus among his companions at school if ever his “public confession” is to be a true one. To confess is to “show one’s colors” for one’s King, to be loyal to Jesus, to allow oneself to become incorporated into Christ’s battalion, and in that way to be active for His majesty and kingdom.

That child will never become an audacious soldier who, as a child, does not exhibit courage and daring among his fellows. But it is even more true that no decisive confession was ever made by an adult whose eyes, when he was a child, had not sometimes lowered with indignation at every reproach heaped upon his Savior.

However, one other thing is needful for one’s preparation for confession. It is a requisite which generally is not sufficiently emphasized. The Bible names two kinds of confession: a confession of one’s Savior, and a confession of one’s sins. These two kinds should co-exist in the heart of a Christian, be he an adult or a child.

Your confession of your Savior and Lord before the congregation must include a confession of your personal wretchedness. A confession which desires Jesus but which is not characterized by a profound conviction of personal sin and guilt is false. Paul would call that a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Indeed, it would be a weak and flimsy confession. That is self-evident. Why a Redeemer if there be no need for redemption? How yearn for a Savior except there be a consciousness of the bonds of death? And again, why should you seek the Physician if you do not sense that your soul is sick? Yes, there should be a consciousness, a poignant, painful conscious-

ness of personal sin and guilt. That does not mean that you must have the full and profound consciousness of your depravity in the moment you say “yes” before the congregation. Those who profess the necessity of that, drift toward emotionalism and depart from the meaning of the word of God. But it is unequivocally true that he who confesses his Savior must confess his wretchedness also. He must, to a degree and in a way appropriate to his age and experience, fully sense that he is lost, and that therefore he, together with all God’s children, is taking refuge under the Savior’s wings.

If one is to make one’s confession in that way, one must be prepared for it from youth up. Then the child must be educated according to Daniel’s rule: “I prayed unto the LORD my God...and made my confession” (Dan. 9:4).

A child must learn to pray. You must teach him to do so. Does that mean that you must convert him into a little preacher by having him display his cleverness at making prayers? No, for that would be destroying the tenderest qualities in the child’s soul. Children should, in fact, be kept from all attempts at ostentation. A child must learn to pray in a childlike fashion: modestly, shyly almost. There is a custom in some homes to have four or five children “rattle off” their “Lord, bless this food, Amen” successively, after the father has completed the family prayer. That custom ought to be discouraged. It thwarts fervent, heartfelt prayer in the soul of a child. Perhaps children cannot enter into the petitions of the father. Perhaps they need their own intercessor. If that be true, let one of the older children be that intercessor. Teach him to pray slowly, reverently, so that his praying may be true prayer.

And as for the rest, let their morning prayers at arising and their evening prayers at going to bed be their quiet training school for confession. In that school you must be the teacher. Hence, you must give them a model, but in giving it you must pray. Then they must pray it with you. In that way they will reach the stage at which they can pray alone. Their prayer may be a formulated one sometimes, provided it be discreetly chosen and infrequently used. Formulated prayers are to be used only when the spirit is too dull to shape its own petitions. Personally engendered prayers should be the goal, the ideal. Each child should pray in his unique, individual way; he should pray not in the language of adults, but in that of children. He should express his thanks for what has made him glad, his petitions for what troubles him. And he should give his praises just as he might give them if his Jesus were present to receive his embraces.

Above all, teach your child to pray on special occasions. The bidding “in all thy ways acknowledge him”

(Prov. 3:6) is a fountain of riches for prayer. Mornings, at noonday, evenings—yes, indeed. But these occasions do not suffice for prayer to attain its own true value. True prayer attains its richest quality when every obstacle that life presents causes the soul to send a cry of help to God, when every joy that throbs at the heart engenders a note of praise and sends it up on high. Your child must know intimately that prayer is that. Nothing is too trivial for God's attention. A difficult lesson at school perplexes a child as much as a difficult campaign annoys a general. And the Lord God wishes to be acknowledged in all things. Hence, teach your child to pray not because you ask it, not because he knows you will observe and be pleased, but because he knows he needs the peace it gives his heart.

In that way a child should also pray for the forgiveness of sins. It is very easy to change a child into a little Pharisee. He can repeat the words "I am wretched, Lord, and deserve to die," very sanctimoniously. Yet, after he has cheated, or lied, or wounded his mother's feelings, he has not the least personal conviction of guilt. Nevertheless, your purpose in teaching him prayer should be to augment a conviction of guilt in him. He

should sense that, in a childlike way, of course, but in a heartfelt manner, and should ask God to forgive him. You know how your child reacts when he has injured you. He regrets it later, comes to you ingratiatingly, sincerely, whispers into your ear that he is sorry and that you must not be angry any more. His confession to God should be as real, as sincere as that. He should confess his guilt in specific terms, should name his naughtiness as he himself appreciates his sin in them. If he does so, he prays sincerely, and in a heartfelt manner. Then he is learning what justice is, and is learning what it means to live honestly and uprightly before his God.

A mother has an especially responsible and holy calling in this matter. She cannot fulfill the responsibility which is hers unless she herself knows and has experienced the reality of prayer in the sense in which it has been defined. She must share with her children a sure and a quiet trust in God. Mothers, older sisters, housemaids—these have a holy calling and a precious privilege in teaching children to pray. Christian education is a sacred matter and a beautiful privilege. And it costs the soul many an exacting effort.



Pertaining to the churches in common— PRC missions in the Philippines

**Rev. Daniel Kleyn, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America,
stationed in Manila, Philippines**

April 2022 Newsletter

Dear fellow saints in the Protestant Reformed Churches, greetings from across the Pacific. We think of you all often, pray for you daily, and trust that you enjoy, as we do, the Lord's care and blessing.

No doubt your weather is gradually warming up as Spring arrives and God's creation comes to life again. We have entered our dry season here and temps have slowly climbed from daytime highs in the low 80s to highs in the mid-90s. This makes our periodic "cool offs" at the Faith Academy pool most welcome and enjoyable.

Speaking of Faith Academy, the school the Smit children attend, we are very glad that after almost two years of online instruction, face-to-face classes started up again this past March. This has not happened yet for the public schools, but we are grateful the government has at least approved it for some private schools. At first the children attended only two days per week, but now they attend from Monday through Thursday,

with Friday being an at-home study day. This is a significant and encouraging development for us all.

We are also once again teaching face-to-face seminary classes. While the first semester of the current school year was a hybrid of online and face-to-face instruction, since January we have been able to meet in class. That comes after at least one and a half years of "virtual" instruction. Rev. Smit and I provide the instruction, and the classes are held in the guest house behind our (the Kleyn's) home. The PRCP has one seminary student, and he is currently taking five courses: Hebrew, Dogmatics, Church Polity, NT History, and NT Isagogics. To save travel time, the classes are all taught on two days each week. And what a difference face-to-face makes! It certainly underscores how inadequate virtual instruction is. Please pray that the Lord blesses this work and that He might raise up more young men to study for the ministry. The need here, as is also true for you, is indeed great.



Now that covid restrictions are lifting, we should soon be able to visit the pastors and churches in Southern Negros Occidental again, specifically the three who have expressed a desire to be Protestant Reformed and eventually, the Lord willing, to join with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP). Our last visit there was in February of 2020. In the meantime, we continue to send them copies of the *Standard Bearer*, *Beacon Lights*, *PR Theological Journal*, and other literature. They are eager for us to visit again and to resume our regular work among them. The Lord willing, we plan to visit them in May.

The PRCP churches have continued to experience some struggles and disappointments, especially on account of covid and of the schism in the churches, but

by God's grace they are doing well. Most of the regular church activities have returned to normal, such as catechism classes, Bible studies, and Classis meetings. And apart from a six-week period in August and September of 2021, the churches have also been able to hold face-to-face worship each Sunday. Rev. V. Ibe preaches most Sundays in the Berean PRC, and the two missionaries provide the preaching in Provident PRC, in Provident's outreach work in Guiguinto (about one hour north of Manila), and as needed in the Berean PRC.

One of the recent disappointments for the PRCP (as also for us missionaries) was that the emeritus pastor, Rev. L. Trinidad, withdrew from the denomination. A few others in the PRCP have also left. In spite of these departures and the harsh accusations leveled against the PRCP and PRCA, we and the saints here are confident that the Lord uses also these events for the building up of His church as well as for our own personal growth and good.

This past March the Philippine government again opened the country to foreign visitors (tourists). This means that a delegation of Doon, the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC), and the PRC Contact Committee will be able to visit us and the churches here again. Both we and the saints here look forward to this and pray it will be possible, the Lord willing.

With the approval of Doon's Council and the FMC, both missionary families plan to take furloughs this year—something that has been on hold for a few years. The Smits hope to take theirs in June and July, and my wife and I from mid-July and into August. We have scheduled our furloughs so as to minimize the overlap (it will end up being about two weeks). We hope to see and fellowship with many of you soon. Until then, may the Lord watch between us and bless each of us in his/her unique place and work in His kingdom.

In the love of Christ,
Rev. Daniel Kleyn

A testimony from Berean PRC

This edited testimony was published in Berean PRC's March newsletter and is used by permission.

We welcome to our church family Bro. David and Sis. Nida Birse. They started attending our church early last year and are now attending the pre-confession class in Essentials of the Reformed Doctrine, in view of joining our church as confessing members. Bro. David beautifully penned their testimony of God's sovereignty in their lives and so I encourage you to read on (Rev. V. Ibe, pastor of Berean PRC).

~ The Sovereign Hand of God~

Greetings! It is a pleasure to relate to the brethren at BPRC our spiritual journey. We are David and Nida (Batayan) Birse, candidates for membership at BPRC.

Nida is a native of Apayao, the eldest of nine children. She remained there in the far North Philippines until she decided to move to the NCR [National Capital Region, i.e., Manila] for work. ...Nida attended various churches in a heart quest to seek the Lord more earnestly.

Nida worked a few jobs as a domestic worker for missionaries in Manila, then the Lord led her to a challenging but rewarding ministry at Christian Compassion Ministries [CCM] as a house mother for 17 years before retiring five years ago.

My precious wife is nurturing, selfless, and kind. These are qualities displaying God's magnificent grace fleshed out in the soul of one of His elect. I am so blessed the Lord led us to one another.

This segues nicely into my mini-biography. Only the Creator of the Universe could orchestrate two people from literally opposite ends of His earth to converge in a given place at a given time under divinely arranged circumstances, then arrange that they would marry both after years of singleness!

For myself, I am the grandson of Scottish immigrants.

I was born in Boston, [and] raised in Littleton, Massachusetts in the northeastern USA.

I was raised as a strict Roman Catholic, my mom's influence on us four kids. Dad was Congregationalist as were his parents, both in Scotland and in Somerville, MA. Ever the loner who was quiet and reflective, I was drawn to religion and thoughts of God, seeing life as pointless because death would snatch us all. No escape. In high school I recall reading my Catholic New Testament, fearful of judgments. I viewed God as austere, heavy handed, and angry all the time. I was coerced to attend RCC catechism classes.

Forty years ago this May, I graduated from Eastern Nazarene College. I had exposure to non-Catholic teachings via television and radio. I preferred Protestant Churches to the formalism and vain rituals of Rome. I hated the RCC and its stained-glass corruptions. I knew it was bad, not of God, and that I must not look for salvation within its walls or under its aegis. I was single all my life, preferring solitude, quiet times of Bible reading, and running.

I had always sensed the hand of God on and over me. I may have set a record for the most churches visited in my life. I would always make it a point wherever I was to attend a different place to worship each Lord's Day. I wanted to compare. I knew nothing of Reformed theology, and nowhere near as much Bible as I thought I knew. I preached for the first time in 1982, the autumn after May's graduation. I read my sermon in retrospect. I knew so little and thought too highly of self. Old age teaches us we know nothing in our youth. Nothing.

...It was on the radio I got most of my theology, for better or worse (mostly the latter). The teaching of John MacArthur gripped me. He was serious and challenging, causing me to look deeper and cause me to self-examine. I see now how it is only God who guides His

elect and patiently shepherds all lost, lonely, and wandering lambs—like myself—back to Himself.

In the 1990s I began hearing Harold Camping and Family Radio. Here is where I first learned of Reformation Theology. American media is largely dispensational, decisionistic, superficial, and man-centered. Calvin, as we all know, is universally hated. I thought God had to be awfully mean to choose whom He would save. I rejected election for the longest time. Double predestination may be the last doctrine we swallow. Like most others, I preferred to have both God and the world; the result was confusion, anger, heartache.

...Gradually the Lord turned me from an Arminian viewpoint (in all its deception, narcissism, and misery) to one that recognized my true state before God, how wretchedly sinful I was. I...saw God as the thrice holy Creator He is, worthy of all worship and service (Rev. 4:8, 11). Now only the true and living God could ever lead someone to such truth, reality, and consciousness. I find it all comes into focus more and more as I look back to where I was, and where I am now.

It is not about me. Not at all. I am a chosen partaker of His grace, born from above only because in His sovereignty, He chose me to be so by His mercy and grace (Titus 3, Ephesians 2). This can only humble me.... When at last we grasp salvation is fully monergistic (not synergistic), we can only stay silent, marvel, worship and serve out of gratitude and love. None of this was present before. Now these things are daily in my thoughts.

Nida and I met when I was commissioned a missionary from a Reformed Baptist church back home ...in Massachusetts...in September of 2014. Even since youth, this had been a yearning. God made it happen.

In May of 2015 I arrived in the Philippines. The culture shock which I had been warned about in Bible college was a reality.

...I had the chance to minister in the slums, teach Sunday school, conduct devotionals, and lead Bible studies. I also attended Grace Ministerial Academy (as did Pastor Ibe) for one semester at Cubao Reformed Baptist Church. The turning point was a 3-week trip to Cagayan Valley and Ilocos Norte, and other provinces in the rural north Philippines. How radically different it was from Manila. The tribal, agrarian rural nature appealed to me. I was able to bring the gospel to many. I saw two different Philippines.

Small churches, residential studies, and recipients of the Three P's program for the poor were the target audiences. I loved it. I sensed purpose. We have also made 15 trips to Ilocos Sur from 2015-2020, where a Reformed

mission church is, and many more times where God opened the door to bring Christ-centered messages I labored on; this is why I felt I had been born: Bringing the true gospel of Christ to souls He placed in my path. This was the turning point. God had changed my heart attitude (Ezek 36:26).

How the Lord brought Nida and me together was miraculous. A friend and I visited Ate Nida, a woman who was a devout Christian and committed house mother at CCM. She conducted a Bible study for children faithfully every Saturday, with a fair number of attendees. An adult study which I led was held at a neighbor next door for a woman who is partially paralyzed. But early December came [2015], and it was time to bid adieu to the Philippines. Good experience but no way I'd ever go back. I wanted only to go home!

Thrilled to return to American soil, I sought pastoral vacancies once again. In South Grafton, MA I was one of eight selected to candidate for the opening. It went well. ...But [in the end] I was the runner-up. I was heartbroken.... But the Lord's hand again then opened the door for another trip to the Philippines.

Nida had written me when I was back. Had she not emailed, I doubt I ever would have continued communication. I was not wild about returning to the poverty, hardship, traffic, pollution, heat, overpopulation, climate challenges, bad economy, and uncertainties that were part of the package deal. It was easier by far to live in comfort and ease in the States. Here again we see we do not control our own destinies or desires. Almighty God brought His plan to fruition, not mine.

So in the summer of 2016, off I went back to Manila. Nida and I were married in CRBC in a traditional Pinoy wedding. Neither of us had been married before. God led me to a Proverbs 31 woman. I find that true every day.

We live a simple life. Prior to the pandemic, we were active missionaries, with all those trips to Ilocos Sur and 12-hour bus rides. I loved teaching Sunday school at GPBC in Tondo as well as guest preaching elsewhere when invited at 3 area churches in Montalban; attending classes both in person and online at William Carey School of Theology; and day-to-day living here in our crowded subdivision. But the past 2 years have been health, economic, and other challenges. Mainly Nida's bout with cancer, from which God delivered her.

Our ministry is stunted and stalled, and this weighs heavily upon us. But we look not at the circumstances, but God's purpose in it all.

...Now it appears I may be retiring. Nida and I both agree it is the Lord's will we want not our own. Our desire is to be faithful unto the end. Daily we can easily see

God's guidance and provision. The word *sovereignty* cannot be overused. Again, we experience this in how the Lord led us to Berean Protestant Reformed Church.

It was the first Lord's Day of 2021, when we first saw a service of the PRCA. It was Rev. Smit. We loved the exposition, serious approach, orderliness, regulative form of worship, and the Psalter singing. They are serious here, I thought. No games. No folly. That is what we crave.

So we visited Provident as well as Berean, and were blessed to hear in subsequent weeks the adept preaching of Rev. Kleyn as well as Pastor Ibe. Of course, 2021 brought several interruptions of corporate worship. We became very pleased with the Christ-centered nature of the PRCA. That is so hard to find in such days of unbridled apostasy. We had no desire to change our church affiliation when this began. But the sovereign Lord of the universe worked in our hearts.

We seek purity in worship, a sober attitude, and to live God-glorifying, holy lives to match. Relinquishing preaching of the Word, teaching Sunday School, and bringing the communion devotional to our brethren in Tondo is very painfully difficult. It is what I do and love to do. There is nothing that has given me greater satisfaction than ministry. Our desire as a couple is to utilize our abilities to bring glory to God.

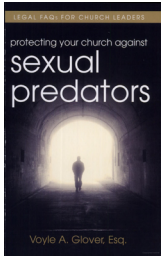
But we must yield to what God desires. His will not ours. So we are confident after much prayer and contemplation that the right decision at this time of our lives—entering the early twilight years—is to shorten our commute, transfer our membership to Berean from Tondo, be the salt and light we are called to be, and contributing members, to be assets and not liabilities, to reflect the light of our beloved Lord Jesus in our lives. We yearn to finish our race strong, just like Paul.

God Himself led us to the narrow road on which we find ourselves now. We wish only to please the Lord, live a life that honors Him, love the brethren, and serve in whatever capacity He deems fit.

We are very flawed, and yet the Lord is tender, compassionate, and gentle with all His little ones. So it is that we begin our formal association as prospective members of Berean Protestant Reformed Church. We thank God for His love. May He sanctify us in any way that makes us conform more to the image of Christ. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Sincerely,
In Christ,
David & Nida Birse

Bring the books...



Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators: Legal FAQs for Church Leaders by Voyle A. Glover. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005. 133 pages, paperback. \$15.99 [Reviewed by Cherith Guichelaar, pastor's wife and mother in Randolph, WI].

I first heard the name Megan Kanka while reading *Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators* by Voyle A. Glover. Before you read any further, if you are able, I ask you to pull out your computer or phone and search that name. Do you see her? Do you see her squinted eyes peering out at you? Eyes that seem ready to let loose laughter at any moment. Her tanned cheeks gather upward in smile; her button nose sits so beautifully. Those teeth of hers remind me so much of my own daughter. The two middle pearls beam prominently and proudly—clear evidence of a baby just growing to be a child. Her hair wisps its way out of the photo, breathing childhood at me. But this little girl would not live to see the start of 2nd grade. When Megan went missing, police discovered that her neighbor had lured her into his home with the promise to show her a puppy. Once inside, he raped Megan, and then strangled her to death as she fought off the attack. Following this brutal assault, her precious body was stuffed in a toy chest and driven to a county park where her assailant sexually assaulted her a final time before disposing her body in the weeds. When the neighbor finally confessed to police, he told them he had been watching Megan for months.¹

You may be asking “What’s the point in bringing this up?” While trying to spare the heinous details, yet at the same time seeking to comprehend the horrific realities a scared seven-year-old girl went through, I bring this to your attention because her parents did not know. They were completely unaware that their neighbor had two previous convictions of sexual assault. This violent rape and murder brought forth “Megan’s Law,” which orders local officials to make public in whatever way their state judges the names of known sexual offenders. So, it’s simple really. I do not want our families to be the ones weeping, saying to themselves, “If only we had known.”

Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators is written from a legal perspective, setting the author

up to give leaders guidance on defending their churches from the horrors of abuse. His aim “is not to provoke irrational fear, but rather to promote a more watchful attitude” (p. 25). He calls us to acknowledge that sexual abuse dwells in our midst and to appreciate the danger it poses. Churches are often filled with children and lack proper monitoring, and, therefore, are targets for abuse. Along with this, we have the tendency to want to see the best in people, and perhaps are even inclined to minimize or cover a crime by saying to ourselves, “But by the grace of God, there go I.” Although molestation can occur anywhere, the book lists some of the more common areas, which can include nursery, special outings, Sunday school, sleepovers, counseling, and bathrooms. Glover takes a firm stance prohibiting males to help in nursery.

Glover’s approach is to “create an environment in the church that is decidedly hostile to sexual predators” (p. 64). He emphasizes the growing awareness we must have, and that church leaders must take strides to assure their congregants they are serious about protecting the sheep. “The process begins when the pastor and other leaders realize that they themselves are not above suspicion. Every pastor ought to want to demonstrate to the congregation that he is willing to place his ministry ‘in the open’” (p. 76). He makes clear that precautions and policies must be made and implemented, spelling out distinctly for the congregation what is appropriate and what is not.

Two precautions he gives are avoiding single teacher environments in Sunday school classes and forbidding a man to counsel a woman alone. Strikingly, sexual sin involving pastors occurs more in counseling than in any other setting. Glover advises that pastors involve their wives and/or another mature woman in the counseling to provide protection as well as a feminine touch that Titus 2:3-5 encourages. He bluntly states, “I believe it is often pride that prompts a pastor to believe he has to counsel alone.” Where he realizes that some may be critical of leaders taking such a hard stance on these issues, he warns not to waiver in your precautions, and that “as people become accustomed to the good reasons why everyone should be held to a high standard, there will be new confidence in the church as a safe place with prudent leaders” (p. 79).

Regarding offenders, Glover admits that where data indicates that pedophiles are wired differently in their psychosexual makeup and, therefore, it is generally believed they do not change, that research does not consider God’s ability to change the heart. However, the

¹ Information regarding Megan’s rape and murder was accessed from the following website: <https://www.bulbapp.com/u/megan-kanka-when-justice-changed-all-1> (accessed Jan. 24, 2022).

reality remains that even if change is present, we cannot know the heart of a man. Consequently, even with confession, the church must not place unrestrained, implicit trust in an individual. He states, “To ignore the strength of pedophilia addiction, even in changed pedophiles, is to court disaster” (p. 27).

Glover takes care to distinguish between sorrow over sin as opposed to sorrow over sin’s consequence, and when one has molested, it is to be assumed that “this sin will always be a temptation to him,” and he “will no doubt do what all Christians do in life: stumble, fall, fail, and exhibit weaknesses and doubts. There is a very substantial likelihood that, for this man, stumbling means he will commit an act that harms a child” (p. 28). Therefore, “as a church leader, you have a responsibility to ensure the safety of the flock as well as a responsibility to see to it that the congregation has a true understanding of the difference between loving the fallen sinner and loving him responsibly” (p. 19). Where the grace of God must be included in our reasoning, he says “leaders must act with wise restraint and discipline, as opposed to unqualified, blanket acceptance of such a person under the rubric of love” (p. 31).

This love must make clear to the offender that he will be constantly monitored and “certain actions will not be permitted, and even one infraction will be grounds for dismissal” (p. 32). Glover explains, “Under no circumstance is he to be alone with children nor is he in any way to solicit their companionship, their favor, or to even entertain them in any way. This would include giving them candy or doing little tricks for them” (p. 32). He advises that stipulations and prohibitions should be written, signed, dated, witnessed, and filed. He states that this does not mean that leaders will continually think the worst of someone, or that the man is lying about his spiritual growth. But what it does mean is that they as leaders, along with the convicted molester, must candidly look at reality. “If the man is honest with himself and others, he should be open to guidance and

accountability and agree with the need for close attention” (pp. 28-29).

He concludes his book by saying,

A leader in a church cannot afford to ignore the counsel given in these pages. If you are in the church where the leadership insists on breaking the rules or refuses to follow some of the advice given in here, then you have a choice: stay and suffer the consequences or stand up and insist on accountability. It’s hard to believe that any leader would be so arrogant as to expose his church and members to harm, but history shows there have been such leaders and will be more to follow. Please don’t be one of those. I trust you will pay heed to the counsel given here (p. 96).

As I end this review, I go out of my comfort zone, struggling to determine if it is more review or more plea. Those of you who are educating and looking to make policies—thank you. To those who have not done much, whether church leader or pew sitter—it is with you that I plead: Please read. Please listen to those whose spirits have been intimately bowed down with the burden brought on by different degrees and varieties of abuse. They do not come in bitterness, but with the burden of sharing, praying you comprehend the brokenness they share with you, hoping you will believe and proactively protect the sheep.

The little girl who sparked the making of “Megan’s Law” was no different than your friend, cousin, or niece. She was no different than you. There are numerous names among us that hold abuse on their hearts—names that have taken the damage to the grave, names that speak up, and names that sit with sealed lips and hearts. Names of abusers must be known so that more innocent names do not fall victim to their prey. What is one name worth to us? Let us not be churches that utter, “If only we knew.” Let us take heed to the words Jesus spoke unto Peter, “Lovest thou me? ...feed my sheep.” One day we will meet our Savior face to face, and He will ask of us, “Did you love me? Did you protect my sheep?”



News from our churches

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

Trivia question (a double one!):

How many resources does the PRC Seminary library have as of this writing? And how many boxes of

archived materials were added to the PRC archives in the last year? (This information will be in the 2022 PRC Synod agenda, specifically, in the Theological

School Committee report, but you get the answer sooner.)

PRC news (denominational)

Rev. D. Kleyn, currently missionary to the Philippines, was recently given calls from Hudsonville PRC and Doon PRC. On April 10 he declined both calls, believing that it was the Lord's will that he and his wife Sharon remain on the mission field at this time. We are thankful for the Lord's leading and for their shared commitment to this labor. May He continue to use them for great good in that place.

Rev. E. Guichelaar has also been led by the Lord to continue his ministry at his current charge, Randolph PRC, having recently declined calls to First PRC-Edmonton (March 27) and Peace PRC-Dyer, IN (April 3).

On April 10, Grace PRC voted to extend a call to Prof. B. Gritters (PRC Seminary).

From the Consistory's new trio of Revs. S. Regnerus (Lynden, WA), R. Smit (Philippines), and A. Stewart (Covenant PRC, Ballymena, N. Ireland), the congregation of First PRC-Edmonton called Rev. Regnerus on April 17.

Peace PRC's Council formed a new trio of Revs. M. DeBoer (Edgerton, MN), J. Marcus, and J. Smidstra (First PRC-Holland). The congregation voted on April 27 at a special congregational meeting.

On April 24, Doon PRC called Rev. J. Smidstra from a trio that included Revs. J. Holstege and N. Decker.

Seminary news

As of this *SB* issue, the seminary has concluded its semester with exams on May 13. But that does not mean there is no news to report.

On Friday April 29, the high school students from Heritage Christian HS (Dyer, IN) paid a visit, sitting in on classes, receiving a tour of the building, and enjoying a pizza lunch. Coming up on Friday, May 20, the junior church history students from Covenant Christian HS have made plans to visit the seminary, including lunch (pizza!) and presentations on the history and work of the seminary and on the archives. We are always appreciative of these visits and hope that some of the young men who come will begin to consider the ministry. Yes, the need is great.

Prof. B. Huizinga submitted his thesis to Calvin Theological Seminary on April 20 and is scheduled to sit for its defense in mid-May. Prof. D. Kuiper plans to teach a summer evening course on early PRC history in July and August at the seminary. Watch for details on that in church bulletins.

Senior Marcus Wee (Singapore) and special three-

year student Isaac Peters (Australia) have completed their seminary training and will graduate, D.V. on June 16 in a program to be held at Zion PRC, during the PRC's week of synod. We will greatly miss the presence and fellowship of those men, their wives, and their children! And Matt Koerner, an upcoming senior, will begin his internship on July 1 at Randolph PRC under Rev. E. Guichelaar. May the Lord use this for his continued preparation for the ministry.

Missions/evangelism news

From an April Georgetown PRC bulletin comes this update on the labors of Pastor Paul Raj in southern India (Vellore):

Both the English (VCC) and Tamil (PRCV) congregations held special services during the Lenten season. Pastor Paul Raj was invited to preach in different CSI churches, including his hometown of Periyakulam. A combined service of the PRCV and VCC was held on Good Friday on the Eden Campus. The India Committee has sent... RFPA books to the PRCV for use by the officebearers and children of the GFH. Construction continues on the first floor of their new church building.... The Indian government has extended the right of the GFH to receive foreign funds for another three months (end of June). Pray for the Lord's blessing on these labors in His kingdom.

First PRC-Holland: On Sunday evening May 4, the Evangelism Committee planned a workshop on evangelism for her members. Rev. J. Smidstra gave a speech on personal evangelism, and afterward the EC gave an informational presentation on its plans to begin an outreach Bible study in the Zeeland area.

PRC news (congregational)

The Dutch—among other folks—are known for their cleanliness, and spring cleaning is always a large item on the agenda when the weather turns warmer—at least in these northern parts. So, it is not surprising that churches too hold some spring cleaning and clean-up bees—inside and out! Crete recently asked members to sign up for her annual church cleaning. First PRC-Holland held a clean-up on Saturday May 7, focusing on “freshening up” her landscape. Faith PRC held two, on April 26 and May 4, focusing on the inside of the building, including the cleaning of Bibles and Psalters. Can you smell the freshness and cleanliness?!

Byron Center PRC (MI): The Children's Activities Derby Race was held at the church from 10 A.M. until noon on Saturday, April 23. The congregation was invited to attend and to enjoy ice cream afterwards. Saturdays this spring in West Michigan have not been great,

weather-wise, but I believe this one was a beautiful day for the event—and perfect for ice cream (upper 70s)!

Crete PRC (IL) hosted the combined Adult Bible Study for the area churches on April 26. They studied the topic of forgiveness as found in Psalm 32. A special invitation was extended to the Crete Junior Adult Bible Study, and of course, refreshments and fellowship followed. A wonderful way to close out the Bible study season.

Edgerton (MN) PRC's Adult Bible Study had a special program for their last meeting of the year at the end of April. They gathered to watch the speech that Rev. R. Hanko gave at the March Classis West Office-Bearers' Conference, entitled, "A Proper View of the Church—Mother or Whore?"

On Sunday evening April 24, **Faith PRC (Jenison, MI)** welcomed Professor Boris Giesbrecht (a Swiss Reformed Christian) to their fellowship. After the evening service, Prof. Giesbrecht gave a presentation of his work on behalf of the Academy of Reformed Theology (ART) in Giessen, Germany. Faith PRC also invited the members of Zion PRC to attend the presentation and to stay afterwards for refreshments and fellowship. You may remember that Faith PRC has been assisting and visiting the BERG congregation in Giessen and Dr. J. Klautke of the ART for several years. And the PRC Committee for Contact with Other Churches has also been involved in sending delegations to and receiving delegations from the BERG.

Grace PRC: Don't lose track of this event coming up this Fall! "The Grace Church Senior Retreat Committee is getting excited for our retreat in Shipshewana, and we hope you are looking forward to it also. We look forward to seeing you September 20-23. Please look for the registration forms in your churches starting May 1. Please consider registering as soon as possible."

Grandville PRC's women's fellowship group (post high school and up) held a unique activity on May 10. They enjoyed a canvas painting night taught by Kathi Holstege. All paint supplies and the canvas were included in the small fee. Appetizers and dessert were served afterward. We hope someday to witness the fruits of this class in some creative paintings!

Kalamazoo PRC's Activities Committee planned a trip to the local Binder Park Zoo on May 7. That included all ages of the congregation. The only variable was rain, for then the event was to be canceled. We sure hope that Saturday turned out to be a nice day.

Randolph PRC's Evangelism Committee hosted a Spring Presentation on Friday night, April 29. They invited Dr. Brendan Looyenga to speak on "Fleeing from

Cultural Conformity and Seeking Biblical Transformation." While the presentation was for all ages, they especially encouraged high school students, college students, and the parents of school-aged children to attend. We trust they had a good crowd and heard a profitable speech.

Finally, in an April **Southwest PRC** bulletin was a note about the completion of another catechism season, and it is fitting for all of us to hear, with humble gratitude: "With the conclusion of another season of catechism instruction, we give our thanks to our God for the word of His promise which is to us and our children. Thank you also to both students and parents for the diligent preparation that was evident throughout the year."

Young people/ young adult activities

The young people of Loveland PRC (CO) sponsored an Easter singspiration on April 17, with a collection taken to help them with the costs to attend this year's PRYP's Convention in Kentucky.

And the young people of Lynden PRC (WA) did the same, holding a singspiration for the congregation on Easter evening. They also served refreshments afterwards.

Pittsburgh PRC's young people also hosted a singspiration on April 17 to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. The collection taken at that event was to help cover costs for a trip this summer to the Creation Museum. We hope they're coming to the YP's Convention too!

For the first time since 2019, an Easter Mass Meeting was held for the PR young people. It was held at Zion PRC (Jenison, MI) on Sunday afternoon, April 24, with Rev. J. Smidstra (First PRC-Holland) speaking.

And in the evening of that same Sunday, the Young Calvinists hosted another workshop on personal evangelism for young people and young adults at Trinity PRC, which involved a question-and-answer panel. We understand that the interest and participation in these workshops has been high—a good sign that our PR YP and YA want to "show and tell" their faith in Jesus Christ.

Registration for this year's PRYP's Convention (Faith PRC) at Camp Cedarmore in Kentucky (August 1-5) ran until the end of April. As of this date (April 20) over 350 young people had registered! We hope the young people are as excited as Faith PRC is for this big event!

PR Christian school activities

"A 330-voice choir!" That's the way the announcement began in the Siouxland area bulletins. And those 330 voices were those of covenant young people from six Protestant Reformed Christian high schools, whose

choirs—individually and unitedly—gave a beautiful concert of sacred music on Thursday, April 21 at Centerpoint Church of Sioux Center. The six high school choirs were from Covenant (MI), Faith (WI), Heritage (IN), Hope (CA), Loveland (CO), and Trinity (IA), and I have no doubt that it was a “God-glorifying evening of psalms and hymns.”

Trivia answer:

The PRC Seminary library now has over 24,300 resources and over 50 boxes of material were added to the PRC archives in the last year. Keep the books and PRC history items coming!

Special minister feature—Rev. M. McGeown

Last year we asked Rev. McGeown if he would be willing to tell his story of finally arriving in the U.S. and taking on his duties at Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI after a long pandemic-driven delay. The following is that story in his own words.

For approximately eleven years I served as the missionary-pastor of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF) in the Republic of Ireland, a mission work of our sister church, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) of Ballymena, N. Ireland. On March 22, 2020, shortly after the CPRC announced that the LRF would disband due to its unviability as a mission field, Providence PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan called me to be her next pastor, a call which I joyfully accepted on April 4, 2020.

Providence had to wait, however, for I could not come to the USA until August 19, 2021, just over 500 days, or sixteen and a half months later, because of delays in U.S. immigration. During that time, I ministered to a handful of souls in Limerick under COVID-19 restrictions. One of Providence’s elders described it as an “unusual vacancy,” for I had accepted Providence’s call, but I could not be with the congregation.

The congregation of Providence was enormously supportive while my wife Larisa and I waited in Ireland. They prayed for us, we enjoyed video chats with members, they shared pictures and videos of congregational gatherings, and they sent us a poster with photos of all the members so that we could get to know them from afar. We also watched their services on YouTube every Sunday so that by the time we arrived we “knew” the people.

In addition, from September 2020 to March 2021 I taught the two youngest catechism classes on Monday afternoons via videolink (finishing at 10 P.M. Irish

time), which gave me a wonderful opportunity to get to know at least some of the children. I also wrote a book while I waited—*The Savior’s Farewell: Comfort from the Upper Room*—which should be available this summer, D.V.



On August 19, 2021, a few days after my visa finally arrived, and we had given our farewells in both Northern Ireland and Limerick, Larisa and I flew to the USA. Some members of Providence PRC met us at the airport and others came to the parsonage in Hudsonville, where the words of Psalm 126:3 were chalked on the driveway and a poster “Welcome to the USA” greeted us. A few days later, after we had recovered somewhat from jetlag, we had a welcome at the church building.

On September 5, 2021, I was installed as the pastor of Providence PRC with Prof. B. Gritters officiating the service. He preached on “The Service of the Lord’s Servant” (II Tim. 2:24-26) and the children and young people gave a beautiful program afterwards. That evening I preached my inaugural sermon on “Pastors: Gifts of the Ascended Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

Providence PRC is small by West Michigan standards (20 families and just over 100 souls), but much larger than the Limerick Reformed Fellowship had been. My ministry among them is very enjoyable and rewarding

and, since Providence is a close-knit, unified congregation, my wife and I have felt at home from day one.

Since I arrived, we have had the joyous occasion of two baptisms and two young people making public confession of faith. We are also a very active congregation. The members enjoy being together, so we organize a lot of activities for young and old: Bible studies, discussion groups, fellowship dinners, youth outings, ladies' book

club, games nights, and more are regular items on our calendar.

Many people tell me, since our church building is located on a main road (1569 44th St., Hudsonville, MI), "We often pass your church and we think about you." To them I say, "Visit us some time—you will enjoy our fellowship, and, I trust, be edified by the preaching."

Announcements

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2022 appointed Zion Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI the calling church for the 2022 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2022 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 14, 2022 at 8:00 A.M., in the Zion Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI.

The Pre-synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 13, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. Kleyn, president of the 2021 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Mike Potjer, potjerm@gmail.com.

Consistory of Zion PRC
Mike Potjer, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Protestant Reformed Theological School Committee and the seminary faculty and staff express our sympathy to Mrs. Joanne Huiskens and family in the death of their dear husband and father, **Jon J. Huiskens**.

Jon's influence on the seminary and our students since 1973 cannot be underestimated. For 44 years, Jon served regularly as the secretary of the TSC. We thank God for Jon's gifts that were used to guide the seminary in her work in many areas, but particularly in creating the "transition plan" for professor replacements and the creation of the Academic Affairs Committee.

May the Lord preserve his widow especially and comfort her in this time of great loss with the words of Jesus in John 11:25: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

TSC Secretary,
Joel Minderhoud

Reminder

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* will be published only once each month during the summer months: June, July, and August.