

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

February 1, 2023 • Volume 99 • No. 9

Loving one another

Rev. James Slopsema

My heart desires thy peace:

Go

Prof. Brian Huizinga

“Young, Restless, and Reformed” today (and more)

Rev. Daniel Holstege

Habakkuk:

The LORD is in His holy temple

Rev. Ronald Hanko

The lifelong bond of holy wedlock

Rev. Carl Haak



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

Postmaster

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

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Subscription price

\$33.00 per year in the US, \$46.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$20.00
esubscription free to current hard copy subscribers.

Advertising policy

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

Website for RFFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prca.org

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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Loving one another

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 13:34, 35

Jesus was with His disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem eating the last Passover supper. After dismissing Judas Iscariot to set in motion the events that would lead to Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus informed His disciples that He would be with the disciples only for a little while. And where He was going, they could not come—at least for the present.

In the verses we consider for this meditation, Jesus gave His disciples a parting commandment. He will have them love one another even as He loved them. This applied not only to the eleven disciples present but to the whole church, which the disciples represented.

That we love one another is above all what Christ expects of us in His absence. Jesus expects many things of us as our Lord. But that we love one another is His chief expectation of us. This is evident from the fact that this is the first thing He told His disciples after informing them of His departure.

“Love one another”

Love is the attraction that two or more people have for one another. Love is often based on what people have in common. Love is also based on qualities that people admire in each other.

Both apply to the love that Christ commands us to have for each other. There is something that all true members of the church of Jesus Christ have in common. They all possess by faith in Jesus Christ what Jude in verse 3 of his epistle calls “the common salvation.” From a natural, physical point of view the members of the church are very diverse from one another. They come from every race, nation, and social standing. But they all have in common the same faith so that they have one Lord, one Spirit, one baptism, one salvation. And possessing the common salvation, all

the saints have been transformed into the very image of God. They reflect in a human way many of the glorious virtues of God in Jesus Christ. The command of Christ is that we focus on that which we have in common in Jesus Christ and the admirable virtues each member of the body possesses, so that we are drawn together in a close bond of love.

When this love flourishes, it manifests itself in several ways. It manifests itself in a closeness in which we seek each other's company and companionship. It manifests itself in unity and peace. Those that love each other in Jesus Christ are able to look past each other's weakness and work out their differences to live in peace. This love also manifests itself in seeking each other's welfare and good. And it manifests itself in a laboring together for the cause of Jesus Christ.

“As I have loved you”

There are several things that characterize Jesus' love for us.

First, Jesus' love for the church seeks her salvation and eternal welfare. The church is comprised of the elect of God, whom the Father loves eternally and with whom He will live forever in covenant friendship. God has given this elect church to Jesus Christ so that as Mediator He may save the church from her sins and bring her to God. And so Jesus loves the church and in that love seeks above all her salvation.

Secondly, Jesus loves the church so deeply that He is willing to sacrifice anything for her salvation and welfare. The church of God's love has sinned and deserves eternal destruction. To save the church Jesus must endure all the punishment of hell that would otherwise come on the church. This Jesus willingly did in His love by His horrible death on the cross.

Thirdly, Jesus loves us, even though we are often difficult to love. Certainly, the disciples who represent the church were not always easy for Jesus to love. They were not much inclined to listen to Jesus when He had something to say contrary to their perspective and wishes. Selfishly some sought the place of preeminence in

Jesus' kingdom. Presently, they would all forsake Him. One would even deny Him. And we are no different than the disciples. Yet Jesus loved His disciples, even unto death. And He loves us the same way.

We must love each other even as Christ loves us.

That means that we are to love the brother and sister in the church even when we find them hard to love. There are the members with whom we have very little in common from a natural, physical point of view. There are members whose mannerisms and personality traits annoy us. There are those who disagree with us. There are those who have hurt us. We are much inclined to turn away from them, to despise them, and even hate them. But we are to love them. Jesus has loved us with all our frailties. We must then look beyond the idiosyncrasies and faults of our fellow saints to see the work of salvation in them. Seeing in each other the work of grace, we must be drawn to each other with cords of love.

But there is more. If we will love each other as Christ loves us, we must also be willing to sacrifice for the welfare and salvation of each other. Christ-like love means that we are concerned with the desires, wants, needs and salvation of the other members of the church. In love we must be busy in promoting the welfare and salvation of each other. And in love we must be willing to sacrifice for each other—our time, our energy, our resources, and even our life.

“A new commandment I give unto you”

That Jesus' commandment to love one another is a new commandment does not mean that it had never been given before. It had been given by God in the Old Testament. In Leviticus 19:18 we read, “Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.” Jesus even cited this love for the neighbor as the second great commandment of law (Matt. 22:37-40).

That this is a new commandment means rather that this commandment was new to the people. The nation of Israel had long ago departed from the word and law of God so that they had lost sight of the great commandment of the law to love. Their obedience to the law was only outward and formal. From that point of view the command to love was something entirely new.

This only demonstrates how easily we lose sight of the command to love and how difficult it is to observe it. Only in Jesus Christ is this love possible. In Christ we are born again, having received the salvation of God. Love is the inevitable fruit of God's work of salvation in us. However, the works of salvation are only begun in

us. We still have a sinful nature that is evil and selfish. That sinful nature makes it difficult for us to love one another. Easily we focus on the natural differences we have with each other, on the annoying traits that we see in others, at the faults and the hurts that easily surface in our life together. Consequently, instead of loving each other we pull away from each other and even fight with one another in hatred.

And so, if we will continue to love one another day by day, the new man created in us must be renewed day by day in the power of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus on the cross is the death of our old man. Jesus' resurrection is the quickening of the new man. Daily we must look to Christ to be renewed as new men and women to love one another.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples”

A disciple is one who is a student of a teacher. He sits at the feet of a teacher to be instructed. He also embraces the instruction of his teacher so that he also confesses what he is taught. Most importantly, he lives as his teacher has taught him to live, following the very example of his teacher.

All these things are also true of Jesus' disciples.

A true disciple of Jesus diligently studies all that Jesus has taught. These teachings are the content of the Bible. A disciple of Jesus also embraces His teachings and confesses them. And according to these teachings, a disciple of Jesus strives to order his own life according to the example of Jesus' own life.

In keeping with all this, Jesus informs us that the one thing that above all identifies us as His disciples is that we love one another. Love is the central teaching of Jesus. Jesus even gave us the pattern of love to follow. And so if we love one another, all men will know that we are His disciples.

Let us, therefore, love one another. Should we fail to love one another, we cannot claim to be His disciples. We may know the Scriptures, make a wonderful confession, and even proclaim the truth with great eloquence. But if we do not love each other, we have no claim to be Jesus' disciples.

What are you revealing about yourself in the community? Can the community recognize you as Jesus' disciples? God forbid that your life contradicts what you are saying about yourself. Let us all show the world that we are Jesus' disciples and do so by loving one another as He loved us.

Then God is glorified by our confession and walk!



Editorial

Prof. Brian Huizinga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Grandville PRC in Grandville, Michigan

My heart desires thy peace: Go

Peace in the church is enjoyed in the way of repentance and forgiveness, so that when members of the congregation sin against each other they confess their faults one to another (James 5:16; Matt. 5:23-24) and forgive each other (Matt. 6:12, 14-15; 18:21-22; Eph. 4:32). Therefore, when your heart desires the peace of the church, you pray that God's mighty grace will work in the church so that all those who have sinned against their neighbor will confess those injuries and wrongs, and so that all those who have been sinned against will forgive the neighbor his trespasses.

But how will this happen except something even more basic takes place? Brethren in the church must *go* to one another. Only when brethren *go* to one another, can they perform the speaking activities of confession and forgiveness, or through communication clear up any misunderstandings.

The point of this article then is very simple. It is as simple as its two-letter subtitle: *Go*. But often the simplest teachings are the most difficult to practice. To "*go*" goes against the grain of our sinful nature. Indeed, if there will be peace in the church, God must graciously give to us in the body of Christ a spirit of meekness and then cause us to *go* to one another, with the Scriptures, for the resolution of conflict.

Now what?

You believe your brother or sister in the church has sinned, either in general, or more particularly, against you. Or, you are convinced your minister was teaching theological error in his sermon or that he made a very wrong and harmful application. Or, you believe your consistory or school board has made a very bad decision. Now, maybe the individual or body with whom you have a great concern *has* done something wrong, maybe not. Maybe you are misreading actions, misinterpreting words, or hastily jumping to conclusions based upon incorrect information you heard secondhand. Regardless, you are convinced there is serious error. You are not merely temporarily

displeased about some little irritant or minor offence that may have been unintentionally committed. You will be able to overlook petty annoyances and cover them in love knowing your own imperfections and folly. Rather, you are truly aggrieved because you are convinced that great wrong has been done and that there may even be a pattern of disorderly behavior contrary to God's law. Your spirit is restless and you cannot stop thinking about it. In fact, you believe that your brother's soul is in jeopardy so that he must be gained, the wellbeing of the church is at stake, and God's wrath is kindled. You believe this sin stands between you and the brother so that fellowship is impossible and you will not be able to sit in the same pew as he on Sunday. Now what?

Scripture says "go"

The all-important and simple command of our Lord is "go." Go to the brother. Go to the sister. Go to the preacher. Go to the consistory. Go to the school board.

In the well known words of Matthew 18:15, which begin what we commonly refer to as "the way of Matthew 18," Jesus says, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." According to the 72nd Article of our Church Order, these words apply when there is a sin that "is of a private character, not giving public offense." If you have been injured by a brother or sister in the church, the first step to be taken is to go to him alone and tell him his fault. For the purpose of this article, I am not interested in a full exposition and application of the way of Matthew 18. Rather, I am interested in applying broadly the underlying principle of our Lord, namely, that when you have a problem with someone, when you have a concern about something, when you think someone has erred, and you cannot overlook it and move on,

then you must *go* to that person or party privately.¹ Quietly go to the *source*.

This underlying principle is found in other passages of Scripture, such as Galatians 6:1, “Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” How can we “restore” our brother except we *go* to him? Or, James 5:16, “Confess your faults one to another....” How can we make confession to our brother except we *go* to him? Or, James 5:19-20, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converted the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” How do we “convert the sinner from the error of his way” except we *go* to him? In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus teaches, “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift.” There it is again, “go.”

This principle also underlies the Reformed way of protest and appeal. If a member of the church is aggrieved by the decision of an assembly, then the member may and ought to *go* to that body and demonstrate that the decision of the body is in “conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order” (Church Order, Art. 31).

So simple

There is something so simple about this command and approach. From a certain point of view, the command “go” is common sense. Suppose you live in a residential neighborhood and your next-door neighbor has underground sprinkling. One of his water lines or sprinkler heads along the property line sprung a leak, and now there is a small geyser that is shooting into the air enough cubic feet of water to flood your patio in less than an hour. This is a problem adversely affecting you and your neighbor. What are you going to do about it?

Anyone with a little kindness and a little common sense knows that if there is a *problem* in life, you ought to address the problem by going to the *source*. Either you attempt to stop the leak yourself, or you knock on your neighbor’s door and tell him about his problem so that he can address it. You *go...to him*. You do not sit back and watch the geyser while fuming that your pa-

tio is being submerged. You do not call the local news media and ask them to come do a story on your neighbor. You do not go door-to-door and badmouth him to others, or vent on the neighborhood’s social media page. You go. You go *to him*. Wouldn’t you want him to knock on *your* door if there was a serious problem in *your* yard, especially a problem you did not even know about? Go!

The Dutch have a unique expression that embodies this simple command “go.” The expression is *iemand onder vier ogen spreken*. It can be translated like this: “to speak to someone in private.” A very literal translation is: “to speak to someone among four eyes (*vier ogen*).” This expression refers to a confidential conversation that takes place in private between two individuals with four eyes, only four eyes. This is not a biblical proverb written by inspired Solomon but a common expression understood by humanity in general. If you have a problem with someone, go to them privately, two eyes to two eyes, and talk.

What not to do

From our Lord’s instruction, which requires that we *go* to one another if we believe there are problems creating conflict, we learn what *not* to do. And what we are *not* to do is, regrettably, what all of us are all too often inclined to do. If you have a problem with your brother, do not boil in anger like a pot on the stove while you sit by the window watching and waiting for him to come to you. Do not go around griping about him to everyone everywhere in hope that they will take up your business. Do not go through the congregation gossiping about him (there is no gossip in go). Do not broadcast his faults under the guise of love for the church and hatred for sin. Do not write him one of those despicable anonymous letters. Do not have a bad attitude, harbor a grudge, sulk, and withdraw from congregational fellowship until someone finally asks “So, something is wrong, what is it?” Go! Go and talk to him. If it is a private sin, do not go to the consistory, but go to *him*.

If you have a problem with what your preacher said in his sermon, do not send out a mass email under the title “Listen to this!” condemning your minister with the hope that others will join you in your condemnation of him. Go to him. In fact, instead of going straight to the consistory, the body of elders that does have the oversight of your minister’s doctrine and life, begin by going to *him*. *He* is the source and spoke the words you find objectionable. If *you* were in his position, you would want anyone who has serious objections with your words to come to *you*. Besides, maybe there is

¹ See the recent, instructive editorials of Prof. Gritters (Sept. 15 and Oct. 1, 2022) explaining that some private sins, such as sexual abuse, are not to be kept private in following the way of Matthew 18 but reported to the authorities.

something you are missing that could easily be cleared up. Go!

If you have a problem with your consistory, do not attempt to stir up dissenters and raise discord the way Korah and company did with the 250 princes they won to their rebellious cause (Num. 16). Do not take your issue to the members of the congregation and seek to acquire as many signatures as possible so that you can bull rush your consistory and through strength of numbers intimidate and force their hand. Do not boycott the church, the worship services, and congregational life in order to make a point. Do not run around whispering in ears or shouting from rooftops, “My consistory is incompetent and does not know how to handle ____.” Do not write a letter of condemnation against your consistory and stuff it in everyone’s mailbox at church, signing off as, “For the love of the truth....” Go! Quietly go to your consistory with your concerns.

Love goes

In the heart of those who go is, or at least ought to be, love. Even if “go” turns into a long and arduous walk that involves multiple steps and includes the kind of confrontation and back-and-forth that makes the soul shrink back, love will do it.

First, if we truly love our brother or sister with whom we have some serious concern, then we will not talk *about* them but *to* them. If the person or body in question has truly done something wrong, what does it matter if the whole world knows, while that person or body does not? It is only when we address the *source* of the problem that the problem can truly be understood, addressed, and remedied. If we believe our brother has sinned, there must be repentance for that sin; but how can he repent if we do not go to him so that by the grace of God he can be convicted of his sin and turn?² Furthermore, by quietly going to the source instead of gossiping, backbiting, and slandering, we promote as much as we are able the honor and good character of our neighbor; and this is our duty of love according to the ninth commandment (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 43). Do you not highly respect that brother in the church who has concerns with you, and instead of talking *about* you, he comes to talk *to* you? Even if you disagree after talking, how can you not appreciate his willingness to come to you?

Secondly, if we truly love the church of Christ, then we will go to the person with whom we have a serious concern. If the wellbeing of the church is truly threat-

ened by what a person or body did or said, then it does not do the church any good to broadcast the fault to the whole world, without going to the source. If we truly love the church, we will go to the source of whatever it is that we believe is troubling the church so that the issue can be resolved.

Thirdly, if we sincerely love what is true, we will go to the source. For, understanding our own weaknesses, we recognize that our assessment of the situation could be wrong. Maybe what happened was unintentional. Maybe we did not have factual information and we rashly judged our brother or a consistory. Maybe there is an explanation we need to hear. In love for what is true, we go—quietly.

Conclusion

You see, one of the greatest threats to unity in the church is our inability or unwillingness to address sin or perceived sin in a biblically faithful way. Sin creates division in the church. Exactly because there will be no sin in heaven, there will be no division or threat of division, and thus no need to pray for the unity of the glorified church. However, as long as Christ tarries and we remain sinners on this earth, every congregation will always be threatened by sin within. Yet, the greatest threat to the unity of the church is usually not sin as such, but an inability or unwillingness to deal properly with sin or perceived sin. A wrong response to what we believe is a problem usually does far more to trouble the church than the problem itself.

The same is true in marriage, is it not? Probably every pastor says to the couple with whom he meets for pre-marriage classes, “You will sin against each other. I pray that it will not be in any significant way that creates deep wounds and lasting consequences, but there is sin in every marriage. Sin as such is not what will erect a massive wall of division between you so that you urgently need pastoral help in marriage counseling. Rather, what will finally cause you to cry for help is your unwillingness or inability to deal with sin, so that little problems become big and unmanageable problems. You need to communicate, prayerfully address your problems and concerns, and learn to walk in the way of confession and forgiveness. May God go with you and grant you His grace.”

So it goes in the church. Thus, for the peace of the church, let us go to one another.

² In Matthew 18:15, “tell him his fault” has the idea of pressing his sin home to him that he may be convicted of it.



All around us

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor of the Wingham PRC in Wingham, Ontario, Canada

“Young, Restless, and Reformed” today

A highlight of the PCA’s 49th General Assembly

“Young, Restless, and Reformed” today

Back in September of 2006, the year I started seminary, Collin Hansen wrote a feature article for *Christianity Today* entitled “Young, Restless, and Reformed.” That phrase became the watchword for a movement of young people who were taking a greater interest in Reformed theology, many of whom were from the Baptist persuasion. In 2009, even *Time* magazine noticed and spoke of “The New Calvinism” as one of the most influential movements in the United States at the time. The heroes of the movement include John Piper, John MacArthur, Mark Dever, R.C. Sproul, Tim Keller, D. A. Carson, and others. The movement was powered by organizations such as Desiring God, Ligonier Ministries, 9Marks, the Gospel Coalition, and others. It involved huge conferences with dynamic speakers such as T4G (Together for the Gospel).

In a November 2022 online article, Jeff Robinson, the director of news and information at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and pastor of Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, reflected on his two decades among the Young, Restless, Reformed (YRR) movement.¹ Positively, he lauded the movement for revitalizing the *preaching* of the Word that had fallen on hard times by the end of the twentieth century. He praised the movement’s commitment to *expositional* preaching that sees Christ in all of Scripture. He celebrated the movement’s revival of interest in Reformed *theology*, evidenced for example by the highly anticipated translation and republication of Herman Bavinck’s four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* from 2003 to 2008. I was among the many who purchased and began reading those worthy volumes when they first came out in English. Finally, he mentioned as a positive thing the commitment of the movement to communicate the doctrines of grace *graciously* and *joyfully*.

But in part two of his article, Robinson remarked that today “there remains a restlessness for some within

this movement that leaves me concerned.”² He listed six concerns, which I summarize in my own words. First, he sees a swing from a legalistic tendency in the church in his younger years to an over-correcting antinomian tendency today that abuses Christian liberty and has “led to numerous ugly moral failures of several well-known leaders.” Second, he notices a preference for intellectual prowess in theology over godliness and humility and reminds us that “sound doctrine should lead to sound living.” Third, he bemoans a tendency among many to try to appease the LGBTQ-affirming masses by wrongly viewing same-sex attraction as some kind of protected sin that forms part of the identity of certain people. Fourth, he criticizes the tendency of many to emphasize cultural transformation on the issues of race and social justice to the detriment of the church’s primary mission to preach the gospel. Fifth, he observes a weakening of complementarianism in favor of allowing women pastors in the church contrary to Scripture. Sixth, while he appreciates many of the parachurch organizations and conferences of the movement, he believes the emphasis on these has hurt the local church since people seem to “want the church to resemble a conference each Lord’s Day” but it’s “difficult for an ordinary church or an ordinary pastor to match that kind of firepower week in and week out.”

Having myself grown up in a conservative Reformed denomination (PRC), like many of you, I am not really a participant but more an observer of this YRR movement. As an outsider looking in, I found Jeff Robinson’s insider critique helpful for understanding some of the good and bad aspects of the movement, which he thinks is now in decline.³ But I would also echo the critique of the late Rev. G. VanBaren in his response

1 <https://christooverall.com/article/concise/my-two-decades-among-the-young-restless-reformed>.

2 <https://christooverall.com/article/concise/my-two-decades-among-the-young-restless-reformed-part-2>.

3 He cites as one evidence of the movement’s decline the fact that after 2022 the T4G (Together for the Gospel) conference that began in April of 2006 “is no more...for a number of reasons, including the divisions that have occurred among Reformed brothers.”

to Collin Hansen’s article in the fall of 2006 when the movement was just picking up steam.⁴ He wrote back then that “one can be encouraged in hearing of those who are not satisfied with ‘seeker services’ or ‘contemporary worship services,’ but desire rather instruction in sound doctrine....” But he also criticized the movement for downplaying differences on “historically difficult issues” like baptism, church government, eschatology, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Having forged interdenominational ministries and conferences by downplaying those differences on “historically difficult issues,” they now drift apart because of differences on contemporary issues.

I too have been encouraged by the positive aspects of the “Young, Restless, Reformed” movement. On the other hand, seeing it rise and fall so quickly causes me to thank God for His faithfulness over many centuries to preserve the unity of doctrine that is the Reformed tradition and to preserve Reformed churches that hold fast to that doctrine as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, including the church of which I am a member.

I cannot help but wonder, as this movement that brought Reformed theology into the foreground starts to fade, whether God might still use it to open “a door of utterance” for us as Protestant Reformed Churches to “speak the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3) outside our churches in North America. We have been given a goodly heritage of the truths of Scripture and a commitment to teach Reformed doctrine. May God grant us a door of utterance to proclaim the gospel of sovereign grace with joy near and far.

A highlight of the PCA’s 49th General Assembly

The 49th General Assembly (GA) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) met last summer. Reportedly, the enrollment was the largest ever, and one observer stated his opinion regarding the reason: “People in the pew are angry with the direction of the PCA.” The direction of the PCA has been troubling on a number of fronts, including the promotion of allowing ordination of homosexuals. But last summer, the GA considered “Overture 15” from the Westminster Presbytery to amend the denominational “Book of Church Order” (BCO) by adding the following paragraph: “Men who describe themselves as homosexual, even those who describe themselves as homosexual and claim to practice celibacy by refraining from homosexual conduct,

⁴ See “Young, Restless, Reformed” in the “All Around Us” section of the November 1, 2006 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

are disqualified from holding office in the Presbyterian Church in America.”⁵

Dr. O. Palmer Robertson addressed the assembly in favor of Overture 15. Dr. Robertson is a Presbyterian pastor and theologian, born in 1937, who was active in the establishment of the PCA in the 1970s. He spoke at its first General Assembly in 1973. He was teaching at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia in 1975 when colleague Dr. Norman Shepherd began injecting the heresy of justification by faith and works into the churches. He wrote the book *The Current Justification Controversy* to promote peace in the churches and the purity of the gospel of justification by faith alone. Most recently, he served for twenty-five years as a missionary in Uganda. According to a retired PCA minister,

The highlight of the [49th] Assembly was the appearance of Dr. O. Palmer Robertson who has been absent it seems for decades...he was like a man resurrected from the past who spoke a different language than what is heard today in seminaries and progressive churches. He spoke with intellectual passion and read Romans 1:26-28. He pointed to the word “perversion” and how words like “sodomy” and “sodomite” were not used any more. I believe his speech tipped the Assembly to approve Overture 15.⁶

The overture declaring homosexuals disqualified from holding office in the PCA was approved, but only by a narrow margin. However, it apparently still needs to be approved by 2/3 of the presbyteries of the denomination to be put into effect, but men close to the PCA do not expect that to happen.

The churches of Jesus Christ on earth today are in the midst of a titanic struggle to hold the line against the onslaught of the sexual revolution. May God strengthen us to hold that line. May God grant that, like the esteemed Christian gentleman who addressed the PCA general assembly last summer, we would speak a different language than what is heard in so many seminaries and progressive churches today and would be willing to call this sin what God calls it in His Word, and to call men urgently to the faith in Jesus Christ whereby alone we sinners can be righteous before God.

⁵ <https://theaquilareport.com/report-on-the-49th-pca-general-assembly>.

⁶ <https://theaquilareport.com/some-early-reactions-to-the-49th-pca-general-assembly/?swcfpc=1>. Dr. Robertson’s speech can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HB1KqTYa9cE>.



Search the Scriptures

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

Habakkuk: The just shall live by faith (7)

The LORD is in His holy temple

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2023, p. 175.

But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

Habakkuk 2:20

In Habakkuk 2 God is addressing the prophet's concern over God's sovereign use of wicked Babylon to punish Judah's sin. Habakkuk had complained that Judah's sin needed chastisement (1:2-4) and God had informed him that the Babylonians, a bitter and hasty nation, terrible and dreadful, were on the way (1:6-7). God would use them to punish Judah's sin.

God's answer only increased Habakkuk's concern, for though Judah had sinned grievously, the Babylonians were even more wicked. And so, when Babylon came, the wicked would be devouring those more righteous than themselves (1:13). Worse, the use of Babylon seemed to conflict with God's holiness. Was He not purer of eyes than to behold evil or look on iniquity (1:13)? God's use of Babylon to punish Judah would be a blot on His holiness, would it not? Surely, Habakkuk thought, God could have found some more appropriate way to chastise His people.

Habakkuk's concern reflects ours. We, too, see God using those who "come for violence" (1:9), those who are "bitter and hasty" (1:6) to chastise His people. We see the wicked "devouring the man that is more righteous than he" (1:13). We see that in our own denomination as well as in the history of the New Testament church. We will see it again when the last kingdom of man is established, no other kingdom in history comparable in violence, in bitterness against the church, in power to devour those who are more righteous. How can God's sovereign use of the ungodly be reconciled with His own purity? Serious sexual misconduct, violent schism in the church, heretics who lead others astray and gain a following in the church, the antichristian kingdom: surely God's use of such things and of those who perpetrate them to chastise His church is not in harmony with His holiness!

This has always been a problem for the faithful. Asaph complained of it in his day:

Thine enemies roar in the midst of thy congregations; they set up their ensigns for signs. A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof at once with axes and hammers. They have cast fire into thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of thy name to the ground. They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together: they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land. We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long. O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? (Ps. 74:4-10).

God's answer in Habakkuk 2:2-4 shows His concern for His people. Before any mention of Babylon, He assures Habakkuk and the faithful in Judah that their justifying faith would sustain them and bring them through the dark times ahead: "the just shall live by his faith" (2:4). Justified by faith in Jesus Christ, they would not come under the righteous judgment of God, though they shared in Judah's sins. Justified by faith, the coming of the Babylonians, though terrible, would be for them only the gentle rain of God's chastising love and never the storm clouds of His destroying fury. Justified, their faith would sustain them and bring them through the years of Jerusalem's destruction and their captivity, would bring them through washed and purified.

Now in 2:5-20, having reassured His people, God turns to the matter of Babylon's wickedness, pronouncing five-fold woe on that evil nation. Babylon, too, would be punished, and would be punished for laying Judah waste! Her punishment would correspond to her crimes and would come for Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and the temple: "And I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD" (Jer. 51:24).

Babylon would suffer but Babylon's judgment was not God's main concern. Judah had to see His glory and holiness as that of the LORD, the God of His people. And so the chapter ends with an assurance that God, even in His use of Babylon, is righteous and holy,

through fire and water the God who keeps covenant and remembers mercy: “But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.” God’s description of Babylon’s coming judgment is vivid and memorable, but the hope of seeing Babylon’s fall might not be the focus of God’s people. The faithful must look to Him, trusting in His sovereignty and perfect holiness as the LORD, their covenant God. Only then would they be able to live by their faith. Their faith could not rest in the coming judgment of the nations, but in God Himself, as the God of His people.

By the time God punished Babylon, Jerusalem would be destroyed and abandoned and the people for whom Habakkuk prophesied would be captives in Babylon. The temple would be desolate and it would still be some years before God kept His promise to bring them back to their own land. Many of those who believed God’s word through Habakkuk would not even live to see Babylon’s fall. Yet God would still be in His holy temple, the covenant God and justifier of His people.

This has application to us. We wonder what will happen to those who misuse and persecute God’s church and people. That is not our first concern. Our calling is not to wait for God’s judgment to come on those who trouble His church, or to delight in their downfall. We can leave their punishment in His almighty hands, though we may be sure that He is “of purer eyes than to behold evil” and that He will always punish evildoers. We must look in faith to Him, believing that even when His ways are not our ways, He is in His holy temple, enthroned in majesty and righteousness, far beyond our questioning or even our understanding, and always the LORD, Jehovah, who saves His own with an everlasting salvation.

There is disagreement over the reference to God’s temple. Some believe that the reference is to the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Others believe it is a reference to heaven. Psalm 11:4, using the same language, refers to heaven: “The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’s throne is in heaven” (cf. also Jonah 2:4, 7). The verse, then, is about God’s revelation of Himself in heaven as the God of His people. There He has chosen to live with His people forever as the LORD, Jehovah, the God of the covenant, and it is there His people find Him. The temple of Solomon, the place where God lived with His people in the Old Testament, would be destroyed by the Babylonians, but even then He would be in His holy temple as the covenant God of true Israel.

The silence enjoined is the silence of worship, of contemplating the majesty of God in faith. The whole earth is commanded to worship Him and to turn from their idolatry, but God has in mind His own people especial-

ly. They by faith will worship Him, and in worshipping Him, find that He is all their hope and their peace. God says here what we sing in Psalter #126, stanza 5,

Be still and know that I am God,
O’er all exalted high;
The subject nations of the earth
My Name shall magnify.
The Lord of Hosts is on our side,
Our safety to secure;
The God of Jacob is for us
A refuge strong and sure.

It is notable that God never explains His use of Babylon to punish and chastise Judah. He only, having spoken of Babylon’s coming judgment, assures His people that He is the LORD in His holy temple, and exhorts them to be silent before Him. What He says of His use of Babylon is similar to what He says of Pharaoh in Romans 9:17, “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.” No more than with Babylon does He bother to explain the mystery of His ways with Pharaoh but says in Romans 9:20, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” Be silent!

And faith, finally, is silent. It does not tie itself up in knots through foolish efforts to explain God’s ways or to instruct Him, but lays its hand on its mouth and says, “Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further” (Job 40:5). That does not mean that faith remains troubled and distressed by questions it cannot answer. Faith rests in the sovereignty of God, as the justifier of His own. Faith rests when it enters God’s holy temple, and finds that His majesty and glory are the answer to all questions; that *He* is the answer to all our doubts and fears and questionings.

How we need to learn from God’s word to Habakkuk! We are usually so deeply troubled by circumstances in our lives and in the church that we cannot rest. But, instead of looking to Him, we focus on those who have troubled us, waiting for God to deal with them, and delighting in every indication that is He is doing so. Rather than resting in the truth that He is the Lord and is in His holy temple, we restlessly run hither and thither with our concerns, thinking of nothing but our own immediate need. Instead of silently remembering who He is, we continue to ask, “Why this? Why that? How can such things be?” And finding no answers to our questions, remain troubled.

Habakkuk 2:20, then, is the most important verse in verses 5-20. It tells us how the just “live by faith.” They

live by faith when they believe in Him who justifies the ungodly. They live by faith when their faith is founded on God as its confidence and comfort. When they live by faith, they do not always have their mouths open, filled with questions and complaints, but in silence contemplate His majesty and sovereignty and grace. Living by faith, they do not engage in what someone has called “spiritual belly-button watching,” but by looking away from themselves to Him who sits enthroned on high. In Him, though they cannot answer for His mysterious ways, they find one in whom they can trust, for He is their justifier. Calvin says,

But there is another kind of silence, and that is, when we willingly submit to God; for silence in this respect is nothing else but submission: and we submit to God, when we bring not our own inventions and imaginations, but suffer ourselves to be taught by his word. We also submit to him, when we murmur not against his power or his judgments, when we humble ourselves under his powerful hand, and do not fiercely resist him, as those do who indulge their own lusts.¹

Faith is silent in that it does not question God’s ways or complain of them, but faith is not silent in praising Him who sits enthroned in majesty. Faith always says, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail,

1 Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 132.

and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Hab. 3:17, 18).

Amazing that this word of God was given before Babylon even appeared as Judah’s chastiser. What a testimony to God’s sovereignty, and proof that “he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:35). Through fire and water He is the God of His people: “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer” (Is. 54:8). He chastises, but even that is proof that He has freely forgiven them their sins. He alone does wondrous things. In Him alone we trust.

That is the heart of God’s answer to Habakkuk and through him to Judah. It is His answer to us when all things seem to be against us. When we are compelled to sing of the church, “Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed, By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed” (stanza 3 of “The Church’s One Foundation”), then we remember that the LORD is in His holy temple. Then, in humble silence we remember how He from His holy temple visited the sins of His people on a hill called Golgotha, and proved Himself there to be the LORD their God.



When thou sittest in thine house

Rev. Carl Haak, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches, member of Georgetown PRC, and former radio pastor for the Reformed Witness Hour, on which this message was aired (June 28, 1998)

The lifelong bond of holy wedlock

Marriage is a permanent bond—for life. When God joins you in marriage to your husband or wife, He forms a bond that cannot be dissolved except by God Himself in death. Not even divorce dissolves a marriage so that you are free to be married again to another while your spouse lives. When God joins you to a wife or husband, He makes for you a lifelong bond.

And He calls you to glorify Him by living with each other in the true love of God, which is faithful, sacrificial, and enduring—a love that seeks not your own but seeks the good of the other. You are to view this Word

of God not as if you are now prisoners in the same cell. You are not to be bitter against each other or to allow distance to form between yourselves. You are to live with each other in forgiveness and to grow in the intimacy and the experience of the love of God that does not put away.

What I have been saying is the teaching of Jesus Christ the Lord, the teaching that Jesus Christ Himself gives in the holy Scriptures. We read in Luke 16:18 these words of Jesus Christ: “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever

marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” It is Jesus who is teaching in that verse of Scripture that marriage cannot be broken—that the marriage tie is a lifelong bond which is to reflect the faithfulness of God to His bride, the church.

To understand these words of Jesus Christ, let us look for just a moment at the context in which the Lord spoke these words.

Christ, in this chapter, had been insisting on the dignity and inviolability of the law of God—of the Ten Commandments of God. He had been teaching that the law of God remains in effect and cannot be overturned or circumvented. Sometimes the Lord Jesus Christ in His ministry defended the law of God against man-made additions. The Pharisees, for instance in the fourth and fifth commandments, would make their own additions to the law of God and pass them off as God’s law. At other times Jesus defended the law of God against the Pharisees’ attempt to circumvent, to get around, to evade the force of the law of God.

That is what the Lord is doing here in the context of Luke 16. He is exposing the Pharisees for their attempt to set aside the requirements of the law of God by teaching that a man may divorce his wife by giving her a writing of divorcement, and for many reasons. The Pharisees, in this chapter, had just heard what Jesus said about covetousness, about a person’s attitude toward material possessions. The Pharisees were lovers of money, and they tried to get around the tenth commandment, which said, “Thou shalt not covet.” When they heard the Lord’s instruction concerning that commandment, that it pressed even into the heart of a man, that he could not even lust after material things in his heart, they sneered at what He said. So the Lord, in verse 15 of Luke 16, said, “You Pharisees are ones who pass yourselves off before men as those who are living in harmony with the law of God. But it is only a facade. God has your number. He knows your religion is a sham. You think that you can enter into heaven by circumventing the law, by trying to get around its demands. But the Master says, regardless of your evasions, the law of God retains its force. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the law to fail.” A tittle is just a little hook or line that would distinguish one letter from another in the Hebrew alphabet. Jesus says, “Not in the slightest respect will the law of God ever be invalidated. Understand,” He says, “that belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who fulfilled the law of God, does not mean that you can go around the Ten Commandments and ignore them. Rather, belonging to Jesus Christ will mean that you will be eager to obey God’s law out of a heart of love.”

Then, to give an example of the permanence of the law of God, Jesus points to the seventh commandment, which upholds marriage and forbids adultery. This was a commandment that the Pharisees made all kinds of attempts to set aside by putting their own ideas of divorce and remarriage in its place, by allowing for remarriage—to marry another while one’s first spouse lives. Jesus says that this is to commit adultery, it is to violate God’s law in the seventh commandment. He says, “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” Whether one puts away his wife to marry another or whether one marries her who was wrongly put away (the woman from her husband), this, says Jesus, is to commit adultery.

Note that. The Lord does not speak in this passage of any reason why a man may put away his wife. In another place he speaks of fornication. And He teaches that divorce is permissible on the grounds of fornication, that is, of marital unfaithfulness; but even then a man or woman who divorces for fornication may not marry again. But here the Lord adds no qualifications. He speaks only of putting away one’s wife. And He says that whosoever puts away his wife and marries another, this is to commit adultery—literally, “is committing adultery” (a present, active state). And He goes on to say that for another man now to marry her who was put away, even put away falsely and wrongly, is to commit adultery. Again, the word is “is committing adultery.”

The teaching of Jesus is plain. When taken in the light of all the Scriptures, Jesus is saying, to marry another while one’s spouse lives is to commit adultery. The Lord says that the marrying of another woman or another man, so long as one’s first spouse lives, is adultery. That means that divorce, even for the reason of adultery, can never be understood as the end of the marriage bond, so that one is free to marry another. Only death breaks the tie of marriage. And the woman who is put away from her husband is still considered to be his wife, so that he may not marry another, nor may she. To do so, says Jesus, is to commit adultery. There may be no remarriage as long as one’s spouse lives. That is the teaching of Christ.

Is this some cold, unfeeling legislation from God intended to make us suffer in an unhappy marriage? We ask the question, Are not there exceptions? What if one did this before his conversion? Are not some marriages doomed to failure? Would it not, perhaps, be better to find another and to be happy? Does the Word of God, we ask, does Christ here in this verse, have no feeling for the circumstances that God’s children can

find themselves in? Is this Word ignorant of how it can be sometimes? Is it not better at times to start over and to enjoy a good marriage with someone else? This word will bring heart-rending suffering. Where does mercy and forgiveness fit in?

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, I intend to answer those questions in a moment. But right now I want to caution you and me for just a moment. Can you, can I, ever say that Jesus Christ is unfeeling? Are we going to put our way over God's way? What does the Word of God say? What is the teaching of Jesus? Will we put our ideas over God's and say that our feelings are truer than God's Word? Will we accuse Christ of being cold and insensitive and giving a teaching intended only for suffering? No. We may not say that! This word of Jesus Christ is a hard saying. But it is not a cold saying. Yes, there is a cost in following Jesus—a great cost at times—such a cost that would make us shrink back of ourselves.

But there is a truth here. There is a way revealed here that is right and pleasing to God. Why is marriage a lifelong bond? The Scripture answers, because marriage is given of God, not, first of all, for us. That is the most fundamental thing you will ever hear about marriage. Your marriage is not given, first of all, for you and for the sake of your happiness. But marriage is given to be a reflection of God, of the covenant bond, of the marriage bond that God makes between His elect and redeemed church in Jesus Christ. And that marriage bond which God has made with His children in Jesus can never be broken. Marriage is given to be a picture of the relationship between God and His church. And that bond is permanent. The picture, marriage, is therefore a lifelong bond to reflect the truth of God's unchanging, never-failing covenant of love and grace with His people.

There is no passage in the Word of God that gives such a beautiful picture of this as we find in Hosea 2:19, 20. There we read, "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD." The prophet Hosea was called by God to proclaim to a rebellious people the truth that God's covenant with His church and people is unbreakable. He pleads with the people of God with eloquence and tenderness. And He says, "The Lord's bond to His people is like a marriage. He hath betrothed us to Himself. And He hath done that in faithfulness."

That is a very rich truth and we could spend much time explaining what that means practically for our own marriages. The fact that our marriages are to be

a picture of God and His people, of Christ and His church—that has everything to say about the daily practice of your own marriage. Husbands, you are to reflect God. As God deals with His people, so must you deal with your wife. The faithfulness, the wisdom, the lovingkindness, the judgment, the mercies of God revealed to His church in Christ must be seen in you. Did you ever think about that?

And wives, you are to be a loving picture of the love that the church returns to God for her salvation. Did you ever think about that? Do you picture, in your life with your husband, the church's love for Jesus?

But right now there is only one point that is at issue, that is most important. That point is this: The covenant bond of God that He makes with His people, His church, with those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ, is permanent, unchanging. That is the truth of God's Word. God does not break His covenant, though we do. God stands fast. His marriage to His church is never broken. It is established forever in His eternal counsel of election and it is sealed with the blood of His own Son upon Calvary's cross.

We could refer to many passages of God's Word. Look at Jeremiah 3:1, 14, or Psalm 89:33, 34. In Psalm 89 we read: "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips." That truth, that God does not break His covenant marriage with His redeemed people in Christ, is the basis of everything! Do you see that? If that is not true, if it is not true that God's covenant is sure and that His love is faithful and unchanging, then I, personally, would hang it all up. There is no sense in preaching. Then there is no message to bring to you, unless I could join the world and say, "Well, I've got a possibility. I'd like to talk to you about a chance—a reasonably good chance—that God will continue His work of grace and, once saved, you might possibly remain saved, hopefully." That is no message! That is the same message as the world which has no sure hope. If God's love to His people whom He foreknew is broken, if that is so, then what is the use? Then all hope is crushed! I cannot understand how anyone would ever want to deny that truth. This is the truth of the Bible. With all the power that God gives to me, I declare to you in God's name this truth: God will not cast away His people whom He hath chosen in Jesus Christ, whom He has redeemed with the blood of His Son. Evermore the love of God is changeless! His covenant sure, no change can know. You may cling to that today! You are not grasping at straws. You are not building upon the air. But when you believe that, by the grace of God,

you stand upon the pillar of time and eternity. And that means exactly this: Marriage is an unbreakable bond till death because it must serve God's purpose to reveal His unchangeable love towards His children in Jesus Christ.

God had one purpose in uniting you in your marriage. That purpose has not changed. That purpose was to show His never failing love, His victorious and powerful love. That purpose has not changed after one year or five years or ten years of marriage; and now you see how opposite, weak, selfish you are. Now you see that side of him that you never knew before. God's purpose has not changed when the other partner becomes sick and decrepit. God's purpose has remained the same in your marriage since day one. It never really centered in *you*. Oh, yes, God is concerned about your happiness. And you will find it in obeying Him. But His purpose was not first your happiness. His purpose in your marriage was to give a picture of the one sure thing: the love of God that does not change.

I would like to take that one step further and explain to you then (and I hope that young people are listening) why God has given to marriage the intimate bond of sexual union. That intimacy of sexual union in marriage is given to reflect the truth that God has taken a people to Himself in Jesus Christ in all the wonder and all the thrill of His lovingkindness and infinite mercy. Outside of marriage sexual intercourse is sin. It is not good, it is not right, it is not love. But it is pure selfishness and lust. Despite all the glamour and acceptance today, it is a horrible, destructive sin. Oh, do not sin so against God. That is why adultery is not a fling. It is not an affair. But adultery is an arrow dipped in the poison of hell to destroy a marriage and to strike to the heart, to destroy trust and love and intimacy. You turn your head (as a man) and look at another woman? You do that? You allow your mind to entertain lust-filled thoughts? Though apparently adultery and sexual uncleanness are little thought of today, it remains the most damaging sin that can be committed. No sin will put more distance between God and ourselves and destroy the assurance of God's presence and rob us of the enjoyment of a walk of joy and peace with the holy God more than will adultery. "Keep yourselves from fornication is the Word of God."

Bride of Jesus Christ, those who belong to the Lord Jesus, young people, husbands and wives, in the vibrancy of your body and of your youth, keep yourselves holy unto your Master Jesus Christ and unto the wife or husband whom God will give to you. Do not put away your wife. Do not do that in act and do not do that in your heart. Do not be bitter against your wife, says the

Word of God in Colossians 3. Do not have a marriage that becomes little more than a cease-fire, a stand-off between two proud sinners who are not going to bend. But cling to each other in the love of God. When the world blows on you as a hurricane trying to sweep you away from each other, and when your flesh is as a raging torrent, cling by faith in all humility and strength to the love of God! That means that the love of God must actually be placed in our hearts by a wonder of God. That is why you must marry in the Lord. And that is why your marriage needs the pure preaching of the holy gospel Sabbath after Sabbath if you are to be preserved in the love of God.

The answer to marital problems is not to put away. The answer is not to walk away. The answer is not to wait stubbornly until the other one bends or gives in first. The answer is not to quit and to say "we made a mistake," and to marry someone else, thinking that that will be happiness. If the church allows that, then she has lost the most dear and precious picture she ever had—the picture of the never failing love of God. In all this world of woe and pain, of sin and change and hatred, we in the church have one thing: the love of God that changes not. That is the truth at issue behind marriage as a lifelong bond.

Hold to that truth and you will be blessed. For some, it may mean suffering. It may bring a cost that you fear is too much. It may mean a life of loneliness now because you are deserted by an unbelieving spouse. It may mean loneliness now, but Christ is your portion and fullness of joy. And abiding in Christ will bring you blessedness both now and eternally.

Marriages in the church are a picture of what awaits us when our Husband will take us up in His arms and wipe away all tears from our eyes. Sin shall be no more and we shall have perfect fellowship with God. And we shall enjoy Him for evermore. It is Christ who speaks, not I. He says, "Your marriage is a lifelong bond, the purpose of which is to show the faithful and unchanging love of God." Believe this word of Christ. Embrace it and live all your life resting upon and supported by nothing else but the unchanging love of God in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Father, we have heard Thy Word. Keep us in the love of Christ. Amen.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. Justin Smidstra, pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan

Tree

On the third day God clothed His new world with living green (Gen 1:11). Standing tall among these plants are the “trees of the Lord,” full of sap and fruitful (Ps. 104:16). God gave the trees “several offices” (Belgic Confession, Art. 12). He created them to yield life-nourishing fruit, “good for food” (Gen. 2:9), to supply the needs of man and beast. “Behold, I have given you,” God told Adam, “every tree...to you it shall be for meat.” God made the trees to serve as shelter for His creatures. In the trees the birds build their nests (Ps. 104:17). Under the trees man takes his rest (Gen. 18:4). From the trees man gathers wood to build his home; the sturdy fir and scented cedar for the palace for a king (II Sam. 5:11) and the temple of the Lord (I Kings 5:10). Such was the peace and prosperity of Solomon’s reign that the people dwelt safely “every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (I Kings 4:25). God made trees useful but also beautiful: “pleasant to the sight” (Gen. 2:9), delightful both to God and man (Gen. 1:12). Even the wisest man studied and spoke of trees (I Kings 4:33). As part of creation’s choir, “the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord” (Ps. 96:12-13). The trees even clap their hands when God delivers His people (Is. 55:12).

In Eden God planted two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:9). Of the first God said “thou mayest freely eat” (Gen. 2:16). With its fruit God was pleased to perpetuate man’s earthly life (Gen. 3:22). Concerning the second tree God said “the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). With this tree God drew the antithesis sharply so that each day man might serve his God willingly from the heart. Thus with two trees our first parents were taught to love the Lord their God. In Him alone true life was found. To live apart from Him is death. But then, “the commandment of life, which he had received, he transgressed” (Belgic Confession, Art. 14). Lured by Satan’s lie, and coveting divinity, man ate from the forbidden tree. Man fell into sin and poisoned his whole nature. Our first parents fled and hid from God among the trees (Gen. 3:8). They sought shelter of another sort that no tree can give: escape from the

all-seeing eye of the Holy One. They sought covering for their guilt and shame no fig leaves can provide (Gen. 3:7). Sin brought God’s curse upon mankind. Death and decay, sin’s bitter wages, beset all living things. Exile from Eden. Banishment from the tree of life. What ruin and misery came of man’s treachery!

But God, in boundless grace, promised to provide another tree. Human wisdom little esteems this tree, for it is an offense, an instrument of cruelty most unpleasant to his sight. A crossbeam of dead wood. What life-giving fruit could ever come of that? But this tree God ordained to be the altar whereupon the Lamb of God would die and bear God’s curse away. The tree of Calvary! In the fullness of time, God sent His Son into the world to save His people from their sins. Christ accomplished salvation by hanging upon a tree. For it was written, “he that is hanged is accursed of God” (Deut. 21:23). To bear our curse, the Christ yielded Himself to be crucified upon a tree. Upon that cross Christ was made a curse for us, that we may never be accursed (Gal. 3:13). Now, for every child of God, the cross has become our tree of life. Behold, believer, this tree God gave! What blessed fruit it bears to nourish your soul to everlasting life! To the eyes of faith Calvary’s tree is indeed “pleasant to the sight,” for the cross is our salvation! Dear believer, find your rest under the shade of Calvary’s tree. All the days of Solomon Israel had rest every man under his fig tree (I Kings 4:25). That was but a faint shadow of the rest you have beneath the cross of the true Prince of Peace. Abide there. Eat daily of its fruits. Rejoice in what Christ has done for you.

Now, believer, how should you respond? Thus: with *fruitful thankfulness* for Calvary’s tree! Live out of Christ’s cross; it is your tree of life, the power whereby you walk in newness of life! Bring forth the fruits of the Spirit to His glory! For, by saving grace, He made you, who were dead, a living and fruitful tree (Matt. 7:17). God Himself, by His Spirit, is “as the dew unto Israel” so that our “branches shall spread” and our “beauty shall be as the olive tree” (Hos. 14:5-6). Through Christ alone, we are made “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be

glorified” (Is. 61:3). So shall we “be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Ps. 1:3).

That is only a foretaste of eternity. Christ has purchased you a home far better than Eden. New Jerusalem, where, as a pure river, the water of life flows from the throne of the Lamb, and the tree of life on either side

bears twelve manner of fruits, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2). There every believer shall be forever planted, drinking from the water of life freely, bringing forth fruit abundantly, never withering, ever prospering, eternally, in the joy of the Lord. For there shall be no more curse (Rev. 22:3). The tabernacle of God shall be with men (Rev. 21:3).

Only because of Christ and Calvary’s tree.



Pertaining to the churches in common **Sister churches—Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, Singapore**

Prof. Russell Dykstra, pastor of Byron Center PRC in Byron Center, Michigan

In memoriam: Elder Leong Fai Chong (1957-2022)

When the Lord determined to establish a Reformed church in Singapore, He chose the men and women who would be members in that church. And in His wisdom, He determined wise and gifted men to lead and guide the church. None have been more instrumental in God’s work in the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church than Leong Fai Chong.

The First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore was organized in 1982. In 1987, a daughter congregation was organized and adopted the name Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. One of the first men elected to the office of elder was Leong Fai Chong, who was part of the original group of young Singaporeans that met to study God’s Word in the 1970s. He would serve in the office of elder in Covenant the next thirty-four years with only one year off. His life was devoted to the church. God used Elder Leong powerfully to lead and guide the congregation in the truth for over three decades. In June of 2022, the dear brother was diagnosed with cancer. A few weeks later, on July 27, 2022, the Lord took him to his eternal home.

I would like to give the readers a sense of the man that God used for the work of serving His church in Singapore. Elder Leong was a cheerful and personable man. He had that rare ability to make everyone feel that he or she was important, no matter what station or calling the individual had. He was equally attentive to ministers as he was to widows, young adults, and children. He listened to troubles with a sympathetic ear, and had an amazing ability to lift the spirit and bring the hurting one to a smile if not a laugh. God

gave the brother a wise and understanding heart. He was patient, loyal to a fault, and amazingly longsuffering. He told me once that he could be “ferce,” but by the time I came to know him well, he by God’s grace demonstrated tremendous restraint and Christian love to all. He was full of life and joy, but he lived for others not for himself.

The key to all of that is the Christian virtue of humility with which God abundantly endowed the man. He lived out of the consciousness that he was a sinner, saved by grace. This genuine humility was accompanied by the twin virtue of meekness. He could endure vicious attacks and not respond in kind. He served the Lord, not himself. Touch the glory of God, and brother Leong would immediately rise to defend. But his own honor was unimportant. Such a man God gave our sister church in Singapore. It was impossible for a believer not to love this dear Christian.

Elder Leong was a devoted father and a doting grandfather. He regularly stopped in the home of his married daughter and son-in-law and made meals for them and played with the younger ones while his daughter homeschooled the other children. He lived to serve.

He had a particular love for children and endeared



Elder Leong Fai Chong

himself to many of them in Singapore, in the United States, and in India. His gentle nature enabled him effortlessly to come to their level, connecting and building a bond with them through his “magic” tricks and intriguing games. Just one personal example illustrates this amazing ability to connect with children. Once, in his only trip to the PRC Synod, he stayed for a few days in our home. We invited our children and grandchildren to visit us on that Sunday and visit with elder Leong. After a time of visiting, he slipped away from the adults and unbeknownst to us, went downstairs to visit the children. This Chinese man, a total stranger to the children, one they probably had difficulty even understanding, won their hearts completely. Some came running up to show us the tricks he had taught them. The next Sunday, a seven-year-old granddaughter asked hopefully, “Will Papa John be there, too?” (John was the Western name he employed for non-Singaporeans.) His love for children was genuine and they could feel it immediately.

God led brother Leong through personal trials and sorrows. He was married to Sum Kwai Peng, a dear, vivacious, and cheerful saint who loved to show lovely, Christian hospitality. The Lord blessed them with four children in a time when the government of Singapore put great pressure on their citizens to have no more than two children. But then came great sorrow as the Lord struck Kwai Peng with cancer. She died in October of 2001, leaving her husband with four young children. He had no good Christian school to assist him, and he lived in a land full of idolatry, not at all conducive to raising a family with four children in the Christian faith. By God’s grace, brother Leong reared them in the fear of the Lord and they all confessed their faith in the Lord Jesus. God eventually blessed him with grandchildren who are faithful members of CERC. For some time, he was the only member to have grandchildren in CERC, a congregation that consisted almost entirely of first and second generation Christians.

By that same grace of God, elder Leong was a steady, guiding hand through many trials in Covenant ERC. As elder, he participated in the ordination or installation of four different ministers, many of which ministries did not end well. The congregation endured many lengthy stretches without a pastor of their own. Elder Leong cheerfully welcomed, entertained, and instructed many PRC ministers who came to help CERC, whether for a few weeks or a longer time.

None of the troubles compared to the ecclesiastical turmoil he faced in the early 2000s when the small denomination was torn apart by the controversy over divorce and remarriage. Elder Leong’s own pastor and

one other elder supported remarriage after divorce. The Session was divided 3-3. Elder Leong held his ground, and yet wisely did everything he could to hold the small congregation together, while at the same time seeking to preserve unity in the denomination. When the Lord suddenly took CERC’s pastor through a totally unexpected illness and death, the Session voted 3-2 to reject remarriage. Because the other congregation, First ERC, stood officially in favor of remarriage, the small denomination divided. Many members left CERC, but more members came from First ERC to Covenant, including the long-time pastor of FERC, Pastor Lau Chin Kwee. The elders faced the monumental task of melding this congregation into one body. Subsequently, they worked to reestablish a sister-church relationship with the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The history supports the reflection of one of elder Leong’s fellow elders (in response to my request for the same), “He thought deeply, and independently.” Another noted

his steadfast trust in the Lord to care for and provide for CERC, through all her trials, some very severe, since her inception back in 1987. While he sacrificed and pressed on in serving in the office as an elder through all the difficulties, he never failed to remind the Session that the church belongs to God and it is HE that will ultimately preserve His church, not any man. Fai Chong signed off many of his emails and letters with the phrase “He cares,” which to me is a reflection of this trust in the Lord’s unfailing care, both for himself personally as well as for the church, in all things.

The toil, trouble, and sorrow of this division can scarcely be grasped. But God has blessed the faithfulness of brother Leong and many others with him. CERC embraced the doctrine of the unconditional covenant of grace that undergirds the truth of marriage. The congregation loves and lives out of this doctrine. God has given to the congregation many marriages of godly young men and women and many children as well as covenant-maintaining singles who refuse to marry an unbeliever. All this runs counter to the culture of their country which esteems the wealth of a two-income family and a wife who pursues a career, not mothers who stay home raising children.

In spite of the many serious concerns and labors for family and congregation, elder Leong was also outward looking. He freely witnessed to many in Singapore of Jesus his Savior. He had a great love for missions and often spent himself visiting the mission fields, first in Penang, Malaysia, and more recently Kolkata, India. He was especially enthusiastic about the Kolkata mis-

sion field, and developed a close bond with the saints there. He was to them as a godly and wise father and grandfather and his passing brought deep sadness to all in the fellowship.

Elder Leong was a sympathetic friend, counselor, and teacher of many. Many of his efforts were unknown to other members of the congregation. His work was done without fanfare. His efforts to help arose spontaneously out of the love of Christ within him. In the last year, after he declined to serve as elder because he was not feeling quite up to the work, he continued to assist many members of CERC with advice and instruction.

Elder Leong was not perfect, of course. Surely people could write and tell me of his failures and sins. He confided some of the same to me. But he was a man that God used for good. That is the point of this article: not to glorify man but to see God's great work in

and through him. Elder Leong stood steadfastly for the truth of God when it was attacked, and worked energetically for the preservation of the congregation and the well-being of her members which he loved. God sustained him, and God used him.

Thus he left behind a godly example for the saints and especially the officebearers of CERC to follow. The example includes a determination to defend the church and to hold fast to the truth, all the while demonstrating love for God and for His people. Those who were privileged to know him, thank God for him and his many years of faithful service. I can think of no more fitting way to end but to quote Revelation 14:13: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."



Remembering the days of old

Mr. James Holstege, member of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan and administrator at Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Kalsbeek/DeJong family

What is published here and in the next issue are part of the history Mr. Cal Kalsbeek wrote originally and primarily for the benefit of the descendants of his father, the late Mr. John M. Kalsbeek (1913-2005). We thank him for sharing some of the history he has researched and written concerning his family.

Cal offered the following explanation to his family members: "It will soon become obvious to the reader that 'Dad' is the focus of what I have written. This happened largely because the vast majority of the material I had at my disposal was obtained from him in written or recorded form.... Readers should keep in mind that what you read is written from my perspective; thus when you read the words 'Dad,' 'Mom,' 'Unc,' etc., they are referring to those who are connected to me by that relationship."

The Kalsbeek family's Frisian roots are found in the deep, dark forests of Northern Europe. In the Lord's wisdom, for many centuries our descendants were left in their gross idolatry. They worshiped gods named Woden and Thor. But the Lord in His infinite mercy sent them Christian missionaries. At first these messengers of the gospel were rejected. One such messenger, Boniface,

and fifty-three of his companions were killed by the Frisians near the present city of Dokkum in 754. Yet in time the pagan Frisians were defeated by the irresistible power of the gospel. Thus the Frisians would be but one of many pagan peoples to fulfill what the psalmist foretold in Psalm 87. Psalter number 237 verses 2 and 3 express it this way:

Heathen lands and hostile peoples
Soon shall come the Lord to know;
Nations born again in Zion
Shall the Lord's salvation show;
God Almighty shall on Zion's strength bestow.

When the Lord shall count the nations,
Sons and daughters He shall see,
Born to endless life in Zion,
And their joyful song shall be,
"Blessed Zion, all our fountains are in thee."

Read, or sing, those words again and consider what a merciful God the Kalsbeeks have! He could have just as well left us in our paganism. He certainly did not need us. Yet He dealt with us according as He has elected us in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks and all praise be to Him!

Immigration to America and early years in the Zeeland, Michigan area

While America may have been glamorized as a land of promise or a “land of opportunity,” it would not prove to be so, at least at first, for the Kalsbeeks.

After the trip across the Atlantic, Dad’s grandparents and mother (Anna Dantuma) traveled by train and settled in North Dakota where Anna’s sister lived. It is likely that as immigrants they needed a sponsor so they needed to live with or near their sponsor. For whatever reason, their stay in North Dakota was a brief one. Within a year they moved to Zeeland, Michigan, where Dad’s Uncle Jake Kalsbeek had settled in 1910 when he moved to America at age 17.

Sadly, Dad’s father, Jan, was not able to come with his parents and future wife since he had to complete his service as an infantry sergeant in the Dutch military. Shortly before his parents came to America, Jan became engaged to Antje Dantuma (Anna), and it was decided that she would come to America with her future father and mother-in-law. Jan would join them in Zeeland the following year.

Soon after Anna’s arrival in Zeeland, Jan arrived, and on March 29, 1913 they were joined in holy matrimony during a regular church service in the First Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, Michigan. Later that same year Dad was born on December 13. Dad’s father was quick to demonstrate what he believed to be important by joining the Christian School Society (even before the actual school was in existence) and by becoming a member the Men’s Society in the Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland.

Jan found work as a cabinet maker at the Michigan Star Furniture Company, and it looked like this young married couple were off to a happy beginning to life in America. However, before Jan even had time to learn the language of his newly adopted country, the Lord called him home. On his first anniversary (March 29, 1914) when his young son, John, was only three and a half months old, he died at the age of 26 and was buried in the Zeeland Cemetery. While his death certificate indicated that he died of “intestinal obstruction,” the family later concluded it was likely a burst appendix.

We can only speculate about how the young 26-year-old widow (Anna) and her infant son (John) coped with the tragic death of her husband. Certainly they had the support of Jan’s parents and Jan’s brother Jacob as well as the congregation of the First Christian Reformed Church of Zeeland, but no doubt it was a great trial for Anna.

At this time, in the Lord’s wisdom, the town of Zeeland also was home to Hessel DeJong, whose occupation was, according to his marriage license, “Rubber in

Factory.” Hessel was married to Tettje Roosje and on December 27, 1914 the Lord gave them a son, Teddy Syske DeJong. However, on January 7, 1915 (less than two weeks after her son Teddy was born) the 25-year-old Tettje died of childbirth complications, leaving Hessel a widower. Then, on June 12, 1915, at less than six months old, Teddy followed his mother to the grave.

During the trying circumstances of having a young son to rear without a wife, Hessel hired the widow, Anna Kalsbeek, as his housekeeper, and within a year the 27-year-old Hessel married her on February 16, 1916. From this union three children were born as half siblings of Dad: Chuck, Jennie, and Grace.

When Dad was 4 years old, the Hessel DeJong family moved to Vriesland to live with his Uncle Nick (Dad’s mother’s brother, Nick Dantema). Dad remembered that their house was by M-21 near the railroad tracks and that they attended Zutphen Christian Reformed Church. Then in 1919 they moved “north of the muck” and went to Beaverdam Christian Reformed



Hessel DeJong family
Back row, left to right: Dad (John, married Henrietta Knoper),
Jenny (married Henry Veltman),
Chuck (married Ruth Hoffmeyer); Front row, left to right Anna,
Grace (married John VanBeek), Hessel

Church. Here they raised celery on a farm owned by a Mr. Vander Meulen. While living there, Dad attended Beaverdam Christian School with an older classmate named George Lubbers (the later Rev. George Lubbers).

Dad's Byron Center years

In the Fall of 1921 when Dad was seven, they moved to Byron Center, Michigan where Hessel and Anna DeJong bought a farm on 92nd Street. It appears that a certain Mr. Van Solkema convinced Hessel that pastures were greener in the Byron Center area. Their subsequent years on 92nd Street would suggest however, that if the pastures were indeed greener, they were not *much* greener.

Dad's family spent the next 16 years in the Byron area; from the time that Dad was 7 until he was 22. At his 1998 birthday party Dad had a few things to tell his grandchildren about his school years at Byron Center Christian School:

In 1921 we moved to a celery farm in Byron Center. Grandpa was in second grade that spring. At school we had an outhouse for the girls and one for the boys. A pitcher pump near the front entrance, with a tin cup for drinking water; and of course we walked to and from school. Two families lived near Dorr, five miles from school. These children came to school by horse and buggy. The horses were kept in the church barn during school hours. We carried our lunch to school in a Karo syrup pail or wrapped in a newspaper. The boys played ball, pom pom pull away, prisoner's goal, bull in the ring, shinny, and when there was packing snow, chose up sides for snowball fights. The girls often played jump rope, hop scotch, or ball and jacks. Grandpa was one of four graduates for the 8th grade in 1927.

It is interesting to note that Dad was known as John DeJong while attending Byron Center Christian School; in fact, DeJong is the name on his 5th grade report card. Apparently, once Dad's mother married Hessel DeJong Dad was called DeJong. Sometime before Dad graduated from 8th grade Dad's step dad told him that he needed to take back his biological father's name and start calling himself John *Kalsbeek*.

There can be no doubt that the church and church membership were front and center for the Hessel DeJong family. When they moved to Byron in 1921, they joined the Christian Reformed Church.

Just a few years later a controversy over the doctrine of common grace began to simmer in Grand Rapids over Herman Hoeksema's rejection of this doctrine in Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church. At his 1998 birthday party Dad had some things to tell us about that:

Now we must call to mind a most important event; one that explains the fact that we are a Protestant Reformed family today.

...The first indication grandpa (Dad) had of something unusual happening in Grand Rapids, was when his pa and ma (Hessel and Anna DeJong) seemed unusually interested in an article in the *Grand Rapids Herald*. It had to do with a certain Rev. H. Hoeksema whose picture was on the front page. But being only 11 years old it didn't mean anything to grandpa (Dad). However, over the next couple of years, he began to hear much talk concerning the ousting of Rev. Hoeksema as minister of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church by his classis. Not only that, the Protestant Reformed Churches¹ were being organized, also one in Byron Center.

It was in the latter part of 1926 that things pertaining to the church came to a head in our family. Grandpa (Dad) was 13 years of age and in the 8th grade at the time. One evening we received a visit from the consistory of our church (Byron Center CRC). In fact, it was the minister and one of the elders. Pa DeJong was asked why he had not presented his baby daughter for baptism. On November 12, grandpa's (Dad) sister Grace was born. Probably several weeks had gone by and no request to schedule a date for baptism. What was the reason for this neglect? That was an important question. It was only proper according to the Church Order for the consistory to look into the matter. Pa DeJong had some explaining to do, there could be no beating around the bush. Pa DeJong answered to the consistorial committee that it was impossible for him to give an affirmative answer to the second question of the baptism form. The 2nd question asked of parents at baptism reads as follows: "Whether you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught in this church to be the true and perfect doctrine of salvation?"

...it was grandpa Hessel DeJong's conviction regarding the important question in the baptism form that explains why we are here tonight as members of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

Hessel DeJong could not in good conscience answer "yes" to the 2nd question of the Baptism Form because the Christian Reformed Church had adopted common grace as an official doctrine of the church and Hessel DeJong was convinced that it was false. Consequently, Hessel moved his family to the recently organized Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center where a short time later Grace was baptized.

(to be continued)

¹ The three (3) congregations that were removed from the CRC in 1925, namely Eastern Avenue, Hope, and Kalamazoo.



News from our churches

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

PRC news (denominational and congregational)

With all the vacant churches in the PRC, numerous calls have been made and responded to in the last few months. We only provide the most recent here.

Back on November 20, 2022, Rev. J. Laning accepted the call from Zion PRC to serve as home missionary. On January 1, 2023 he preached his farewell in Hull PRC, and on February 5 he is to be installed as home missionary. He plans to take some special missions classes and do some writing as Zion determines where best to have him begin his labors.

Also on January 1, Rev. S. Key's emeritation became effective (ordained in Sept. 1986). He and his wife plan to stay in Loveland, CO and help the congregation yet, while also serving the denomination in various ways. We thank the Lord for his faithful ministry and pray that God will continue to give him health and strength to serve the churches.

On January 8, Rev. J. Smidstra (First PRC-Holland) declined the call from First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) and the call from Hull PRC (NW Iowa).

Rev. C. Spronk was to answer his call from Hudsonville PRC on January 15.

In summary, eight churches—Doon, First PRC (Grand Rapids), Hosanna, Hudsonville, Hull, Loveland, Randolph, and Georgetown PRCs—are all calling.

The need for pastors has increased even more in the last year, so let us remember to pray for and encourage the sons of the church to consider God's call to the ministry.

Annual church visitations by the PRC to her sister churches have been taking place. In January (11-24) Rev. W. Bruinsma and his wife along with elder D. Kregel and his wife made a visit to Singapore to visit Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church.

Also in January, Doon PRC with the Foreign Mission Committee sent a delegation of officebearer C. Woitwood and D. Brands (FMC) and his wife to the Philippines to visit the churches there.

On January 19, a delegation from the Contact Committee, consisting of Rev. and Mrs. Martyn McGeown

and Mr. Sid Miedema, also traveled to the Philippines for their annual visit with the PRC in the Philippines. This delegation had some overlap with the delegation from the FMC (cf. above). The delegation met with the PRCP's Contact Committee, with the missionaries, and with as many of the PRCP members as possible. Rev. McGeown preached in their churches where possible.

We pray that the Lord will bless these visits for their good and for the good of the PRC.

Seminary news

Between semesters, Prof. B. Gritters taught Reformed Christian Ethics from January 9-18. Besides the three seminary students who took the course, a good number of auditors participated as well. The second semester began on Tuesday, January 24. Remember the seminary in your prayers!

Sem. Matt Koerner and the seminary's secretary, Sharon Kleyn, were joined in marriage on January 13. Sem. Koerner has entered his final semester of training—and his new bride will be in her last months, too!

Prof. C. Griess has completed his course work and is now busy working on his ThM thesis, which is to be completed this spring.

Library feature—Kalamazoo PRC

My thanks to Pastor Dennis Lee for providing this brief report and photo of his church's library.

Having just started last summer, the KPRC Library is almost certainly the newest—and the smallest—in the denomination.

It all started when an initial donation of books was received and made available for borrowing in the Council Room in early June. From there, slowly but surely, one good thing has led to another. Books started being borrowed. More book donations came in. Some funds were approved for an RFPA Book Club membership to be purchased. Bookshelves were ordered and assembled. Members have come forward to offer their help in organizing the library. Interest in the library has grown over the summer in accord with the growth in

the number of books: from about half a shelf at the beginning to two sets of shelves at the time of this writing.

This is because the congregation understands the value of a good library as a shared resource for all her members—especially her young members. As it stands today, a third of the congregation are between eight months and eight years old; and there is a strong desire here for these children to develop the godly habit of reading good religious



books and magazines from their youth. There is also an ongoing, strong need and desire for good resources to help develop young, growing families. Finally, there is a felt need for more good books and variety than the current selection.

It is our earnest prayer that the Lord Himself will continue to give increase to the use and size of our fledgling library, and cause it to be a great blessing to our members!

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Jerry and Bonnie Kuiper, to John Hoekstra, and to the Kuiper and Timmerman families in the passing to glory of **Isaac (Ike) Kuiper**. We pray that they may receive comfort and assurance from the Word of God in Revelation 14:13 “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.”

Jordan Engelsma, Vice-President
David S. Miedema, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Randolph, WI extend our Christian sympathies to Connie Vroom, George and Renae Vroom, Dani Vroom, Nick and Erica Vroom, and Dylan and Patricia Vroom and their families in the death of their husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, **Mr. George Vroom, Sr.** who was taken to glory at the age of 92. Psalm 48:14: “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.”

Jeffrey Krosschell, clerk

Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving to the Lord our God, we congratulate our parents and grandparents, **Nicholas and Ina Kleyn**, on the occasion of their 60th wedding anniversary on February 1, 2023. We acknowledge the Lord’s goodness to them throughout the years of their married life, and also His goodness to us through the gift of such godly parents. May God continue to bless and keep them in the years ahead, according to His good will. “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

Cornelis and Rebecca Kleyn
Daniel and Sharon Kleyn
Nick and Deb Kleyn
Arthur and Andrea Kleyn
Peter Kleyn (in glory)
Rodney and Liz Kleyn
Steven and Sarah Kleyn
Steve and Maria Lotterman
Phillip and Kristin Kleyn

Wally and Nikki Kleyn
Michael and Heidi Klaassens
Joseph and Heidi Kleyn
Tim and Betsy Kleyn
Nick and Lydia Gleason

58 grandchildren
18 great-grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Announcements continued

Teacher needed

Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed Churches for teaching positions in the 2023-24 school year. There is a particular need in the areas of English, Social Studies, Health, and Physical Education but applications will be accepted from those with secondary certification in other subject areas. Those who are interested in these positions are encouraged to contact Mr. Rick Noorman, Administrator at ricknoorman@gmail.com, or call 616-453-5048; or Mr. John DeVries, Education Committee, at westmichiganrealestate@gmail.com for more information.



Coming March 2023 rfpa.org

Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2023-2024 academic year should make application at the March 16, 2023 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

Accompanying the application must be a testimonial from the prospective student's Consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the Seminary's website (prcts.org/admissions).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 16 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the
Theological School Committee,
4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
Joel Minderhoud, Secretary

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.

Classis West

Classis West will meet in regular session on Wednesday, March 1, 2023, at 8:30 A.M., in the Lynden Protestant Reformed Church, Lynden, Washington. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Lynden's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk