

The Standard Bearer

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How many days?

Rev. Stephan Regnerus

My heart desires thy peace: Listening

Prof. Brian Huizinga

Medicine, aging, and assisted suicide

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A hole in the shape of a father

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Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims

Mrs. Cherith Guichelaar



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Meditation

Rev. Stephan Regnerus, pastor of Lynden PRC in Lynden, Washington

How many days?

How many are the days of thy servant? when wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?
Psalms 119:84

This text records the earnest cry of an individual who has endured many difficult experiences in life. It is the desire of one whose eyes have beheld numerous evils, whose name has been slandered, and whose flesh has been hurt. This is not the cry that normally comes forth from the lips of a child or even a teenager. The young person, filled with youthful optimism for the future, has little interest in knowing how many days he has left upon the earth, for he assumes that he has a great deal of time ahead of him. But the saint who has endured much—the elderly saint, the afflicted believer, the one wearied of the countless burdens of this pilgrimage, the one hurt by the words and actions of others, the one who confesses from personal experience that this earth is vanity of vanities—that saint looks ahead to the return of Christ and cries out with the psalmist: “How many are the days of thy servant?”

The psalmist's state

What characterized the state of the psalmist? We see at the outset that he was but a servant. He was not the ruler, but he was one placed under the Ruler; he was not sovereign in his own life, but he submitted to the sovereign “I Am.” God gave him his station and calling in life, and God strengthened him to be faithful in that post.

The whole life of the psalmist had been characterized as that of a lowly servant. If it is the case that king David is the human writer of this psalm, then we see already in his youth, positioned as a shepherd boy tending the sheep on the hillside, David was but a servant. And after David grew up and slew the giant and became king over Israel; after he matured in strength, in wisdom, and power, yet his status remained the same: he was God's servant. Such is the acknowledgment of every believer: “I am God's servant!” Whether young or old, whether one has attained great influence or occupies the lowliest position, whether one has health and

strength or sickness and lethargy, we are the servants of Jehovah.

But that the psalmist was a servant was not the only reason he cried out, “How long?” In addition, he cried out because he was oppressed and afflicted. He was a persecuted servant: “When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?” He was reproached! Hated! His name was slandered; his place on this earth made very small by those who opposed him. Evil threatenings were breathed out against him. And it was not because he had injured them that he endured these reproaches. But he suffered innocently: “All thy commandments are faithful; they persecute me wrongfully; help thou me” (Ps. 119:86). Indeed, he was hated and reproached exactly because he was God's faithful servant.

What stands out about the psalmist was his inability to change his condition or improve his lot in life. Oh, I suppose he could have. In fact, it would not have been difficult. All he would have had to do was stop confessing that he was God's servant. All he had to do was break God's commandments, rebel against the station that God had given him, and serve himself instead of Jehovah. Then the persecution would rapidly halt. Then the proud would no longer dig pits for him, and the evil man would no longer persecute him wrongfully.

But so long as he remained faithful, his lot would remain the same. For as long as he lived his life as a faithful witness of God and trusted God's Word, his position would be that of a persecuted servant. Is it not that we too are oftentimes struck with a sense of our own inability to change or improve the conditions of our lives? How helpless we are to change the position that God has given us!

But it is in that moment, when confronted with the reality of our own inability, that faith prompts us to turn to the God who is able. The psalmist did this in the questions of this text.

The psalmist's faith

Let us see that it was indeed faith that prompted the psalmist to ask “How many days?” It might appear

as if the psalmist had lost all hope and joy in this life. It might seem as if the psalmist was deeply dissatisfied with his lot, and he tried at first to internalize his dissatisfaction. Yet his feelings could not be contained, and eventually he burst forth in the grumbling of this text. Is this the hopeless complaint of the anxious, the faithless, or perhaps even one with an unholy desire to have the days of his life end as quickly as possible?

While it is certainly true that this text has application (and encouragement!) for the anxious and fearful, we must not charge the psalmist with unbelief. These are not the questions of the faithless, but the faithful; not the musings of the unbeliever, but the serious contemplations of the child of God.

Behold the psalmist's faith! Clearly seen in that he counted himself as God's servant. He stood at his station, willing to perform the work of the God who had called him—a stark contrast to the faithless, who are the servants of self and who seek self above all else. Faith brings one to see that "I am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 1).

Behold the psalmist's faith! Seen in the fact that he did not take the matter of executing judgment into his own hands! So different from the man of the world. How easily the faithless become angered at injustices dealt to them; how quick their minds are to concoct a plan of revenge. In distinction is the humble response of the faithful child of God. His heart is filled not with bitterness but with contented trust in Jehovah. His mind is filled not with the noisy thoughts of exacting personal revenge but with the quiet confidence that vengeance belongs unto the Lord (Rom. 12:19).

Faith directs our questioning, troubled, and often-times overwhelmed hearts to the God who is able. Faith in God does not mean that we must never speak of the difficulties that characterize this earthly pilgrimage. Strength of faith does not mean that one will never feel downcast, discouraged, or overwhelmed. At times, the faithful child of God cries out in anguish of soul: "How long, O Lord? How many are the days of this trial? How long must I bear up with this infirmity in the flesh? How many more days will I as a parent be challenged by the rebellious child? How many more days must I as an employee submit to the demands of an overbearing and impatient boss? How long, O Lord?"

Nor does strength of faith mean that we cease to care about justice and righteousness. Walking by faith does not mean that we are unconcerned about the presence of evil on this earth. We noted earlier that the psalmist, in an activity of faith, relinquished thoughts of exacting personal revenge against his persecutors. Not-

withstanding, he was still concerned about justice! He cried out to God, "When wilt thou execute judgment on them that persecute me?" As Christians, we care about justice. We seek it. We pray for justice. We must care about it, for our holy God is the God of justice.

And our trust is this: almighty God will execute judgment. His eyes see everything. He knows every evil committed. He is aware of every injustice dealt the members of the church. And the Christian trusts that God, for the glory of His name, will render to every man what is his due reward. Faith assures us of that.

How powerful is faith! Faith turns to God in the midst of the trial and causes me to know more fully my relationship with God. Faith gives me to behold that not only am I the servant of God, but I am the *friend*-servant of God. What a claim! God, for Jesus' sake, is my friend! The One who rules over me as the sovereign "I Am," the One who gives me my station and calling in life, He is my friend. He has proven His love to me in the incarnation, suffering, and death of His Son. On the third day when He raised His Son to newness of life, He gave the seal of His approval upon the Son's finished work. Because of Jesus Christ, through the operations of His Spirit within my heart, I may be assured that God is my friend. Faith gives me to know so!

The psalmist's inquiry

For what, then, was the psalmist asking? If the enquiry was not faithless grumbling and complaining, what did he want? Surely, it cannot be the case that the psalmist expected a miraculous revelation so that he could know precisely how many more days he would live on this earth. He already knew that "the days of our years are threescore and ten" and only "by reason of strength they be fourscore years" (Ps. 90:10).

Is it not the case that what the psalmist wanted, and about which he was inquiring in this text, was for the coming of Jesus? He sought the promised Messiah, the Star of Jacob, the Prince of Peace! As an Old Testament saint, he asked in faith: "How long until the Son of David will be born to set Thy people free?"

And as New Testament saints we join in asking: "How long until Christ comes again on the clouds of glory? How many are the days of God's church—His servant!—upon this earth? How long will Thy servants endure persecution at the hands of evil men? How many more years will there be wars and rumors of wars? Come, Lord Jesus, and execute judgment on those who persecute Thy servants. Come, make straight what is crooked, renew what is fallen, and take us to our heavenly home. Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."



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: Listening

Speaking is fundamental to the life of God's church. The speaking God creates us with a tongue and sanctifies that little member for service in His church. Thus you find in a faithful church the preaching of the whole counsel of God, the prophesying of Spirit-filled sons and daughters, cheerful and edifying discourse among the saints, open conversations to clear up misunderstandings, as well as the good instruction, wise counsel, brotherly admonitions, and sharp warnings from our brethren and all in authority over us. Speech is good.

However, there will never be peace in the church if all we do is speak. We must *listen*. God gave us a tongue to speak, but also ears to listen. If everyone is always a speaker and no one is ever a listener, we will haughtily consume ourselves with much speaking. Moreover, of what profit is a word of comfort to the weeper, a brotherly admonition to the wayward, or the preaching of the gospel to the worshiper if no one will listen and take the word to heart? And if everyone is constantly opening their mouth and stopping their ears, then who will hear the faint cries of the poor and oppressed? Or who will hear the calls to worship, to battle, to faith and repentance, and to love? Or who will hear the words of the poor wise man when the city is besieged by the strength of a great king? Or who will be still and know that God is God?

If you desire the peace of the church, then you pray for the grace of God to work humility in *you* and all the members of the church so that we *listen*. Listening involves more than discerning the sounds produced by a speaker. To listen is to be attentive to the speaker, striving to understand what he or she means.

We have no obligation to listen to all words that are spoken, even all words spoken about us personally. Let the scorner scorn, but do not be attentive to his madness and seek to understand it. Only a fool listens indiscriminately, as Ecclesiastes 7:21 instructs, "Also, take no heed unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear thy servant curse thee." However, Scripture does exhort us to be "swift to hear" the word of truth (James 1:19), to

hear what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev. 2:17), to hear the statutes and judgments of the Lord to learn, keep, and do them (Deut. 5:1), to hear the instruction of our parents (Prov. 1:8), and always to hear the words of the wise (Prov. 22:17).

The listening believer

Desiring peace in the church, we listen to each other, because God uses the words of our brethren to keep us in the way of truth and righteousness. We do well to listen to each other regarding all the matters of life. We all have blind spots. There are fellow saints who see dangers that we do not see—in society, in the church, in our home, and even dangerous attitudes emerging from our own heart. We must listen. In parenting young children, for example, we might have a bad practice or habit. Perhaps we are overbearing in our expectations and too severe in our discipline. But when in conversation with others our weakness is exposed, even unintentionally by the speaker, then we can humbly remedy the problem for the strengthening of peace in our home. But if we go through life overestimating our abilities and arrogantly imagining we never have anything to learn, then we know-it-all miss our shortcomings and the necessary corrections God provides, with the result that we behave unseemly and contribute to disunity in the church.

Without compromising the gospel, we do well to listen to fellow saints with personalities, perspectives, and positions that may differ from our own. Listening *only* to close friends and those who look through the same lens does not advantage us. Listening *only* to yes-men who tell us what we want to hear and flatterers who stroke our ego ruins us. Listening to many of our fellow believers, near and far, keeps us balanced. With only a little imbalance, a washing machine creates an obnoxious banging that disturbs the peace of the whole house. You and I are no different. If we only converse with those who see eye to eye with us, and we never engage someone who will ask questions and lovingly challenge us, then we are missing a valuable perspective that

could significantly alter and thus clarify our view of reality and keep us on course. We need to respect others and listen to them because, when we get imbalanced, we veer off course, making lots of noise that troubles the church, and holding in suspicion, avoiding, or even opposing faithful brethren who have a perspective different than our own.

But most importantly, we must listen to just (fair) criticism and admonition. Be open to constructive criticism. Painful as it is, the Lord uses it to teach us and cause us to grow in our faith and the fruits of faith, which then serves the peace of the church. Receive admonition, for how will there ever be peace in the church if we are walking disorderly and refuse to listen to the rebukes of the wise, and repent? Jesus says in Matthew 18:15, “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.” If we have sinned, and the brother comes to admonish us, we must *hear* him. We are the troubler in Israel when we respond to brotherly admonitions by bristling, and then snarling, “Who do you think you are, you self-righteous Pharisee? Get your nose out of my business!” For the sake of Jerusalem’s peace, *listen*.

The listening minister

A minister (a schoolteacher too) can be a frequent target and take many shots—cheap shots, cruel shots, repeated shots, and most disheartening of all, unexpected shots. They sting and sometimes make for a sleepless night. Moses felt them repeatedly and so did our Lord.

However, false accusations, cruel words, and unjust criticism may not allow the minister to become cynical, overly sensitive and fragile, bitter, defensive, and resistant to good correction. Worst of all, he may not become hostile so that he goes on the offensive and abuses his position or pulpit by seeking revenge and fiercely hurling insults against any in the congregation who reprove him. How can there be peace when the minister becomes unruly in the face of criticism, as if he is above criticism?

We ministers need to *listen*. Imagine the frustration of elders and church members if they see a flaw in us that needs to be addressed, but they keep silent for too long

because we are unapproachable; or, if they dare come to us, they cannot get through to us because we refuse to listen. We must listen to the legitimate concerns of God’s people on a wide range of topics, including their concerns with *us*. We must listen to the concerns, criticism, and correction of our elders whom God appointed to oversee us. As we promised at our ordination, we must also submit, in case we should become delinquent in life or doctrine, to ecclesiastical admonition. We do well to listen intently to the constructive criticism of us and our ministry brought by those who have proven to be the supportive, active, and faithful members of the congregation. Their words are valuable, and God speaks to us through them. Even if their concerns with us prove to be unwarranted and mistaken (do not come to that conclusion too quickly), we first must hear them out. Usually, we can learn something because we all have deficiencies. Then, by the grace of God, what we learn and implement can serve the peace and prosperity of the congregation—and that is what we desire! And even if there is a perpetually unhappy and im-

placable critic in the congregation, who demonstrates little charity and no tact, and whose expressed concern for us and the congregation seems to ring hollow, we must remember that God put him (or her) in our path, and then humbly self-reflect on whether there is anything in his (or her) constant negativity and badgering to which we ought to take heed.

When the concerns of elders or congregants address our *preaching*, we must listen and ask God to search and guide us. No work is more important and worthy of more care than the preaching of the gospel. Again, listening does not necessarily mean agreeing, because the objections may be baseless, and we may not displease our Master by compromising what is right and true in order to appease an objector. However, we must have a humble disposition and listen. Sometimes it can be difficult for the minister to listen because he spends himself in the preparation and delivery of sermons, and because he has formal training in the field of preaching, while the speaker probably does not. But no man is above critique. Most importantly, we must willingly open ourselves up to our elders, welcome their feedback, and be ready to stand corrected when necessary.

We ministers need to *listen*. Imagine the frustration of elders and church members if they see a flaw in us that needs to be addressed, but they keep silent for too long because we are unapproachable; or, if they dare come to us, they cannot get through to us because we refuse to listen. We must listen to the legitimate concerns of God’s people on a wide range of topics, including their concerns with *us*.

If apologies are necessary, genuine apologies must be given. The peace of the church requires it.

The listening assembly

For the peace of the church, the ecclesiastical assembly is obligated to listen to objections that properly appear before it.

The assembly to which protests and appeals come is fallible because it is made up of believing officebearers who, like all the members of the congregation, have sin yet residing within them. Therefore, assemblies can make decisions that are contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions, and thereby disturb the peace of the church. When the believer, who is anointed by the Spirit of Christ, has a serious objection to a decision of a consistory or broader assembly, believing violence has been done to the way of truth and righteousness, he has the responsibility to write a protest. In his protest he will use Scripture and the confessions, and seek to demonstrate the error of the assembly. If necessary he will press his case by appealing to the major assembly.

When this course is taken, then the *listening* ecclesiastical assembly will avoid many pitfalls. First, the assembly will not view protests as *opposition*. When that happens, then anytime an officebearer opens a protest, he immediately takes a confrontational stance, believes the protest is declaring war, digs in his heels, and gets defensive before he even reads the opening line. He does not listen. Second, the assembly will not adopt the arrogant attitude that it is never wrong. Third, the assembly will not possess and project an attitude of superiority that leaves the believer with the distinct impression that he is a bothersome peon before an unapproachable body. Fourth, the assembly will not *aim* to rule protests illegal on technicalities so that it does not have to treat them, but *aim* to treat them, if possible. Fifth, the assembly will not be prejudiced against a protest because of its author.

Assemblies must *listen* to legal protests, bearing patiently with any weaknesses in those who voice their objections, and striving to hear what the protestant is trying to communicate. Proverbs 18:13 teaches, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.” Before the assembly can answer the matter, the assembly must listen to the matter. The assembly does not have to agree and sustain the protest if the protest does not prove its case, but the assembly must listen. If proven wrong, the assembly must correct its error for the peace and unity of the church. The Reformed way of protest and appeal rests upon the belief that the assemblies will give a fair hearing and judge righteously.

If you are a protestant voicing a serious objection, you can greatly help your consistory hear you by taking heed to several directives. First, write your protest only after you have frequently, sincerely, and prayerfully asked yourself, and perhaps a trusted confidant or two, “Is this decision I am protesting truly detrimental to the wellbeing of the church, or am I just nitpicking and pressing a petty grievance, riding my hobby-horse into the assembly, taking something personal, forming subjective opinions, or exercising myself in matters I best leave alone?” Second, there are rules for writing proper protests; follow them.¹ If you have questions about them, ask your consistory for guidance. Third, endeavor to follow the rule of the 5-B’s: Be Brief Brother, Be Brief. Loads of extraneous material and irrelevant lines of argumentation do not advance but weaken your argument. Fourth, avoid hyperbole, inflammatory language, and *ad hominem* attacks against the members of the assembly. It is very difficult to take you seriously and *listen* when you state something like this: “If you do not sustain my protest, you hate God,” or “If you even raise questions about this protest, you are all unbelieving hierarchical lords.” Fifth, consider asking a trusted advisor to review your protest. The line of argumentation that is clear in your mind might be difficult or impossible for others to follow. Besides, your protest might have other glaring errors.

For the peace of the church, both the protestant and the assembly must always remember the conclusion to the “Explanation of the rules for Protests, Appeals, and Overtures” in the PRC: “Above all else, it should be clear on the very surface that the process is characterized by humility and mutual respect and motivated by love of the church and honor of its King.”²

Conclusion

The peace of the church depends upon the Savior of the church. Listening is a *heart* matter, and only Christ can move the heart. May His Spirit continue to give us a heart that desires the peace of His church—a heart that is willing to listen—so that God does not say of us, “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing...” (Matt. 13:15), but instead, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear” (Matt. 13:16).

1 The green binder with the abbreviated title, “The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches” includes a section entitled, “Explanation of the rules for Protests, Appeals, and Overtures.” Also be sure to consult Prof. H. Hanko’s “Notes on the Church Order and the Believer’s Manual for Church Order” (available on the prca website—prca.org—or from the PRC Seminary bookstore).

2 Found in the aforementioned green binder.



All around us

Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of Grandville PRC in Grandville, Michigan

Medicine, aging, and assisted suicide

The spirit of rebellion against God is manifested in every sphere of earthly life, one of which is the area of medicine and healthcare. What follows demonstrates this, as we consider three articles on the purpose of medicine, the goal of science, and the rise of assisted suicide.

The first article, found on *World Magazine's* website, is titled: "A Complete Divorce of Medicine from Healthcare."¹ It explains the implications, if passed, of proposed new non-discrimination regulations under Section 1557 of the Patient Protection Act. The basic idea of the regulations is that medicine no longer has as its purpose the good and well-being of the patient but is reduced simply to "pure technique, detached from any objective medical end or good." Upon first reading, this may not seem so significant. That is, until you consider what the implications of this would be, especially as it pertains to transgenderism. Brad Littlejohn, the author, clearly draws out the implications:

If the HHS [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services] gets its way, then the use of a mastectomy to treat breast cancer will be deemed medically indistinguishable from a mastectomy to turn a 13-year-old girl into a "boy." Any procedure formerly devised to treat some particular physical disease or condition now needs to be on the table to treat a wholly different—and purely psychological—condition.

This represents the complete divorce of medicine from healthcare, understood as the restoration of a body to its proper good. Instead, we have the new idea of medicine as pure technological power to achieve whatever results the patient—or his manipulative clinicians—desire. By the same token, a delusional patient identifying as a snake could be treated to a quadruple amputation, and any refusal to do so deemed unjust discrimination.

The author goes on to make clear that doctors would still reserve the right not to perform certain procedures.

However, the conclusion drawn from the proposed regulations is still serious. Littlejohn writes,

To be sure, the proposed regulations still allow doctors some discretion to refuse transgender procedures to a particular patient, but the language boldly declares that "a provider's view that no gender transition or other gender-affirming care can ever be beneficial for such individuals is not a sufficient basis for a judgment that a health service is not clinically appropriate." In other words, a doctor may just get by with deciding not to remove a particular patient's organs, but doing so on the basis that it is *never* wise or safe to amputate well-functioning parts of a healthy person's body is sheer bigotry.

Thinking about this from the viewpoint of practicing medicine, one wonders whether the time will ever come when government regulations preclude Christians from entering certain medical fields. There may be a day when this type of government regulation trickles down to the everyday doctor or surgeon, forcing those in the field to face serious ethical questions. And from the perspective of Christians who use medicine and procedures, take the time to consider why we do so. This article made me think: what is the God-given purpose of medicine? We do well to take the everyday reality of medicine, treatments, and procedures and view them through the lens of Scripture and God's purpose for our lives on this earth.

The second article comes from *cnn.com*, entitled "Old Mice Grow Young Again in Study. Can People Do the Same?"² Certainly, this is an article title that catches one's attention. I must admit that I do not understand all of the technical and scientific terms and ideas expressed in the article. But one need not be able to in order to grasp the main idea. This is how the article begins:

In Boston labs, old, blind mice have regained their

¹ <https://wng.org/opinions/a-complete-divorce-of-medicine-from-healthcare-1669380804>.

² <https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/12/health/reversing-aging-scen-wellness/index.htm>.

eyesight, developed smarter, younger brains and built healthier muscle and kidney tissue. On the flip side, young mice have prematurely aged, with devastating results to nearly every tissue in their bodies. The experiments show aging is a reversible process, capable of being driven “forwards and backwards at will,” said anti-aging expert David Sinclair.... Our bodies hold a backup copy of our youth that can be triggered to regenerate.

It should be noted that it is likely decades before any experiments of this nature could be safely performed on humans in clinical trials. It should also be understood that the science explained in this article may, in the future, be legitimately applied to treat specific diseases. However, the overarching point is clear, reflected in the title’s article: science employed to reverse the process of dying. And again, some questions: When considering the use of medicines and procedures as Christians, is staving off death and continuing life at all costs the primary or the only consideration? Or do we use medicines and surgeries in thankfulness to God for what they do to restore health, while always remembering who we are as pilgrims and strangers passing through to our eternal home in glory?

The third article is a striking contrast to the previous one. It is titled “Scheduled to Die: The Rise of Canada’s Assisted Suicide Program.”³ The beginning of the article is heart-wrenching. It relays the story of a 46-year-old mother who learns that her 23-year-old depressed son had applied for and been approved

for “medical assistance in dying (MAiD).” Canada is one of the most liberal countries in the world when it comes to euthanasia or assisted suicide. Assisted suicide has been constitutional in Canada since the passing of the Medical Assistance in Dying Act (MAiD) in 2016, which made anyone who could demonstrate that their death was “reasonably foreseeable” eligible for assisted suicide. Canada is not alone in this regard. Many other countries, including ten states in the United States, have similar legislation.

Canada’s liberal law has become even more godless. The article states: “The government amended the original legislation, stating that one could apply for MAiD even if one’s death were not reasonably foreseeable. This second track of applicants simply had to show that they had a condition that was ‘intolerable to them’ and could not ‘be relieved under conditions that they consider acceptable’.” It is under this provision that a 23-year-old depressed man could legally be killed in Canada.

I say again, the second and third articles form a striking contrast, the one employing science to prevent death and the other allowing man, for seemingly any reason, to choose death. In this contrast, there is also a similarity, for both articles reveal what is fundamentally true in the heart of unbelieving man: to be God. It is to take upon oneself the prerogative and power that belong to God alone, who is sovereign over both life and death.

And so, in conclusion to an article that ponders these subjects, we confess with Christians throughout the ages what we know to be the truth: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

3 <https://www.thefp.com/p/scheduled-to-die-the-rise-of-canadas>.



Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

Mr. Kyle Bruinooge teacher of New Testament history at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, Michigan and member of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan

The commendation of Phebe

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

Romans 16:1-2

Lists of names in Scripture have great value and importance. We often have the tendency to view these lists as laborious and insignificant, but the opposite is true. Examples include the lengthy lists recorded in Ezra and Nehemiah, where names of returning captives point us to a faithful God who keeps His covenant promises.

An extensive list of names in the New Testament is found in the greetings of Paul in Romans 16. A grand treatise on the doctrines of grace in Romans concludes with Paul's demonstration of care to all churches and their members through *Christian* greetings (Acts 19:21; II Cor. 11:28).

For this reason, the names recorded in Romans 16 are significant. Because travel was common in the Roman empire, Paul could be well acquainted with many members of a church of which he was not directly involved in establishing.

Thus, too, our confession of the inspiration of Scripture by the Spirit means that our God knows *precisely* what the church needs *for all ages*.

And this final chapter of the letter that declared the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) began with a simple commendation of a woman named Phebe, the one who delivered this powerful letter.

Paul "commends" her to the church at Rome. This means that she was approved by the apostle for the important work of being a letter-carrier, but also because of her spiritual example in the church at Cenchrea.

As the map indicates (cf. next page), Cenchrea was on the eastern side of the isthmus of Corinth, a prominent city in the Roman empire as the center of commerce and trade. Ships and goods were transported across the isthmus, a distance of about four miles.

As was often the case in Paul's missionary work, a local hub was established by which the gospel would go forth into other communities. This was true for Paul's work on his second missionary journey in Thessalonica and Philippi (I Thess. 1:7), as well as his expansive labors in Ephesus on his third journey (Acts 19:10). The same was true for Cenchrea, in which a small church was established through Paul's eighteen-month labors in Corinth on his second journey in AD 52.

The only other reference to Cenchrea in Scripture is Acts 18:2, where Paul shaved his head as he took a vow prior to his return to Jerusalem at the conclusion of the second journey.

In His providence, and from this small community, the Lord used Phebe for the important task of delivering the original manuscript of Romans in AD 57.

Paul asked the Roman Christians to "assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you" (Rom. 16:2). The word "business" used here could be translated as "matter" and is similar to the idea expressed in I Corinthians 6:1 where Paul rebuked the Corinthians for taking their "matters" (petty squabbles) to the Roman authorities through official lawsuits.

Nonetheless, something related to Phebe's work prompted her visit to Rome, and God may have used

even this to prompt Paul to sit down and write his letter.¹ This indicates that her involvement in a lawsuit proves she was not only someone of influence, but also likely a widow in the church at Cenchrea.

And Paul calls her "our sister." What a beautiful description he gives to her! The testimony of Scripture is that the church is a *family* with Jehovah God as our Father. We have our blood lines and generations, but let us be cautioned not to forget our church family with its members being brothers and sisters in the Lord. The church of Christ is so named because our faith *in Him* unites us and can never be severed, while family can forsake (Ps. 27:10; Matt. 19:29). Phebe may not have known the Roman Christians personally, but *together* they were known by the Father in eternity, for in His good pleasure He elects a body of believers as His church.²

Now, as Phebe ventured to the largest city in the empire, she had Paul's commendation, through this simple greeting, that she was *one* with the Christians in Rome. This would have sustained and encouraged her on her journey into an unfamiliar place.

Paul also calls her a "servant of the church." It is possible that the word "servant" here in Romans 16 could create some challenges for Christians who maintain that God's design is for men to hold the special offices in the church of Christ. The reason is that the word "servant" can be translated as "deaconess," and some cite this as proof for having female deacons in the church, for Phebe was a "deaconess" in the church at Cenchrea.

However, without too much difficulty, we can see that this same word "servant" is used in several other places in Scripture. An example is John 12:26 where the Lord says, "If any man serve me, let him follow me, and where I am there shall also my servant be." It clearly would not make sense to translate this word "servant" as a "deacon."³ In addition to the testimony of other Scripture passages stating otherwise regarding the role

1 Don Doezema, *Upon This Rock*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Protestant Reformed Sunday School Teachers Association, 2003), 312.

2 Herman Hoeksema. *Wonder of Grace* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021), 13-14.

3 Herman Hanko. *Phebe: An Example for the Christian Woman* (sermon date unknown). Sermon transcribed into pamphlet form by the Hope Reformed Witness Committee, date unknown (<http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/pamphlets/item/594-phebe-an-example-for-the-christian-woman>). For further study, the reader is encouraged to read this pamphlet; for it expands on some of the ideas in this article. It provides a beautiful explanation on the different roles of men and women in the church, but more specifically the high calling that God gives to women.



of women in the church, Christians must confidently maintain that the special offices are for men (Acts 6:3; I Cor. 14:34; II Tim. 2:11-12).

While Phebe may not have been an officebearer in the Cenchrean church, she played a necessary role in the church as she ministered and showed compassion to her church family.

To ensure that the Romans treat her as a fellow saint and recognize her ministering spirit, Paul asks them to “receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints” (Rom. 16:2). Phebe had further confidence that she would be well received by the church. The apostle Paul, as the leader of the missionary program, used the closing chapter of this letter to specifically greet these fellow Christians, and testify to *Phebe’s* position as *one* with them in the faith.

For this is what saints are called to do. It “becometh” them. As a family of brothers and sisters with our elder Brother, we must care for one another in whatever means the Lord is pleased to use, and in whatever diverse circumstances we identify in others. For Phebe, it was traveling a long distance to Rome with assurance that these Christians would welcome her as a member of their own spiritual family.

The final description of Phebe is that she was a “succourer of many, and of myself [Paul] also.” The word

“succourer” could have any number of meanings for Phebe’s role in Cenchrea, but it certainly has the idea of a “patron,” someone of influence and wealth.⁴ Like Lydia in Philippi, Phebe showed hospitality to the missionaries that was of both physical and spiritual significance. In addition, Phebe’s home in Cenchrea may have been used for home worship, as was common in other places of the New Testament (Acts 16:40; Rom. 16:5; Col. 4:15; Phile. 2).

As was the case with so many in the life of Paul, God used faithful men and women to support his mission of spreading the gospel. The Lord uses *means*, and Phebe was powerfully used in both Cenchrea and Rome for the spiritual well-being of *those* churches. And her example is powerful for the church of all ages, too.

She was faithful to her task of delivering the letter to the Romans. The Spirit used this means, too, to bring such important clarity and distinctiveness of the doctrines of grace to this relatively young church living in a wicked and perverse city.

And now imagine this scene in AD 60. Paul’s perils on his journey to Rome were over. He arrived as a prisoner through shipwreck and adversity. He came to

⁴ Holmes Rolston. *Personalities Around Paul* (John Knox Press, 1954), 95.

appeal his chains to Emperor Nero. But he also came to fulfill a desire that Rome be a new hub for future mission work (Acts 19:21; 23:11; Rom. 15:24, 28).

And upon his arrival he was received with open arms by the church at Rome (Acts 28:15). No doubt immediately within their fellowship they discussed the power of the gospel unto salvation as developed by inspiration through Paul's letter to them.

"And what of Phebe our dear sister?" Paul may have asked, for not to be forgotten was this faithful letter-carrier.

Their response? "We received her in the Lord, for

through your powerful commendation we recognized the work of Christ in her. We took her in as a member of our own church family, and mutually received rich, spiritual benefits."

For it is faith, our bond *to* Christ, that unites us together as one family *in* Christ (Eph. 2:6; 4:5). Sin affects the cords of our earthly relationships, but our relationship with our covenant God stands firm and secure, and can never be severed!

Phebe: a faithful servant of the Lord, *our* own sister—an example for *all* Christians for *all* ages until our Lord returns.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of Pittsburgh PRC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Years of trial: Missions threatened, 1947-1953 (6)

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2022, p. 230.

The morning of June 6, 1951 was a typical summer day. Very few are alive in the Protestant Reformed Churches who remember the events that began on this day some 70 years ago. Sixteen men met in Fourth PRC (now Southeast PRC) to conduct the business of the synod. Tensions were running high. The adoption of the famous (or infamous, depending on what side of the issue one stood) "Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Churches" was to be decided at this synod. Since the 1950 Synod, ministers, consistories, and members of our churches were divided on whether what was taught in the Declaration was indeed the truth concerning God's covenant. Many of the protests that came to the Synod of 1951 attempted to skirt the issue by claiming that it was wrong for a synod to adopt a doctrinal position brought by one of its committees (Mission Committee) rather than being born out of the heart of the churches. This, they claimed, was hierarchical. But the Synod of 1950 had given opportunity for the churches to study the Declaration and give their advice regarding the doctrinal issue involved. What lay at heart is whether a person agreed with the doctrine taught in the Declaration or not.

The churches in Classis West were for the most part against the adoption of the Declaration, while most of the churches in Classis East were in favor of it. This

was reflected in those who were chosen as delegates to the Synod of 1951. The eight delegates from Classis West were decidedly opposed to the Declaration; the eight from the East were firmly in favor of it. A split synod did not bode well for the adoption of the Declaration. A tied vote to adopt the Declaration would mean that it would fail. Moments after the president of the synod appointed the Committee on Committees,¹ a motion was made and supported "that the material relative to the Declaration of Principles be treated on the floor of Synod rather than in a Committee of Pre-advice." The president ruled this motion out of order. It was immediately challenged. When brought to a vote, the synod sustained the ruling of the president. We mention this simply to reveal the determination of those who opposed the Declaration that it not be adopted.

It is not my purpose in the writing of these articles to enter into all the proceedings of the synod. It must be mentioned, however, that God in His providence was directing the affairs of this split synod. Rev. M. Gritters, a delegate from Classis West who was openly op-

¹ At the start of every synod the president of the synod appoints a Committee on Committees that divides all the material in the agenda among several different committees of pre-advice that will study the material and come to synod with direction and advice on the various matters.

posed to the Declaration, took sick and was unable to fulfill his duties at synod. He was replaced by his alternate Rev. Peter DeBoer from the West, who was openly in favor of the Declaration. By means of his vote the synod adopted the Declaration *by a vote of 9 to 7*. The request of the Mission Committee for such a declaration was now fulfilled. The Protestant Reformed Churches had decisively grounded themselves in the truth of God's unconditional covenant established only with His elect people in Christ. The missionaries were now required to teach, preach, and organize churches on the basis of God's Word and the Confessions as further explained by the Declaration of Principles.

One could only pray, as I am sure many did, that this decision of Synod 1951 would settle the rift that had developed in the denomination. But it did not. The breach only developed further. It was already too deep. Since the Synod of 1951 had been adjourned to finish its work in September of that year, those who desired to protest the adoption of the Declaration were given permission to do so at the Synod of 1953. Now, another year and a half of turmoil and heated debate would go by before the protests against the adoption of the Declaration were voiced at the Synod of 1953.

Fierce opposition to the now settled and binding² doctrinal view of the unconditional covenant openly continued after the Synod of 1951. This opposition, no doubt, was preached from the pulpits of those churches in the West where the consistories were in agreement with and supported their pastors. But to preach the conditional covenant in one of the churches of the East would be disastrous—especially if this were done in First PRC of Grand Rapids where Rev. H. Hoeksema and Rev. C. Hanko were ministers and Rev. G. Ophoff was an elder! But Rev. Hubert DeWolf (another pastor in First PRC) was bold

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enough to insert statements into two different sermons that taught the error of the conditional covenant. These sermons were protested and First PRC's Council was divided. When the matter was brought to Classis East, the classis agreed with the protestants. This ultimately would need to be settled by the Synod of 1953, along with the protests against the Declaration. The details of the meeting of the Synod of 1953, and what led up to it are recorded in *For Thy Truth's Sake*, by Prof. Herman Hanko and in *Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant*, by Prof. David Engelsma, books well worth the reading. All of this ended in the split (and this truly was a split) in the denomination that resulted in losing over half of the members, ministers, and churches.

All this because of a simple request by the Mission Committee to write up in pamphlet form a declaration to be used in our mission work of what we believe concerning God's covenant!

The mission work of the churches took a blow due to the internal struggle the denomination experienced both before and after the split. The number of missionaries was reduced from three to one. Rev. W. Hofman and Rev. E. Knott both accepted calls into the churches in the West prior to 1953. Rev. A. Cammenga deserted his work as missionary during the split in 1953. Prof. H. Hanko describes the impact of the controversy on the Protestant Reformed Churches:

The history of the split of 1953 was an extremely traumatic history of the churches. The

inability of the churches to engage in the work which the church is called to do because of distractions of doctrinal controversy, the severe decline in the membership of an already small denomination, the pain and suffering in the congregations and in families that necessarily come with a church split, make one face the question: was the controversy worth it?³

The answer to this question has revealed itself in our subsequent history as we now look back across the 70 years that have transpired. What a blessed truth we

2 When a broader assembly makes a decision for the churches, it is "settled and binding," that is, it may not be militated against. It may be protested to the next meeting of that assembly, but in the meantime a person and a preacher must acquiesce to the decision.

3 *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: RFP, 2000), 313-314.

share together as churches! We are comforted and encouraged in the truth that God has established with His people in Christ a relationship of love and fellowship. We are held within His almighty arms. He will care for and protect us in all of life's circumstances. And He will do so unconditionally! The blessings of God's covenant belong to us not on the basis of what we do or even on the basis of our faith. God's covenant is rooted in our very election and grounded upon the cross of Jesus Christ alone. That, we believe, is the gospel of grace that must be proclaimed to every creature in our mission work.

Between the Synod of 1951 and the upheaval that took place at the Synod of 1953 the mission work of our churches limped on. In fact, some of the proposals brought by the Mission Committee to synod would have been significant for the future of missions in the Protestant Reformed Churches. But these proposals ended abruptly with the split.

One such adopted resolution as recorded in the Mission Committee minutes of November 1951 was this, "It is the sentiment of this gathering that the policy of labor is to bring the truth as we believe it to all to whom we find opportunity to bring it, whether the church or the unchurched." This decision went beyond church reformation, as was the emphasis in the past. In a subsequent meeting it was decided to publish tracts for distribution among the unchurched. These decisions fell into oblivion for a length of time after 1953.

Another proposal, which was raised in 1952, was to begin searching out a foreign mission field in which to labor as churches. This had been put on hold since 1946. Now the Mission Committee decided to recommend to synod that the committee be given permission to investigate China and Japan for possible work. Later, Alaska and the Philippines were added to the list. Also, it was planned that a proposal be sent to synod that a call be published in the church papers for young men who desired to prepare themselves for foreign missions in the seminary. After the split, our churches were too small and ill-equipped to carry on a foreign mission work.

A third matter treated in 1951 and 1952 was creating a denominational radio broadcast. Radio had already been used extensively by individual congregations (such as the Reformed Witness Hour). The PRC twenty-fifth anniversary booklet reported on several different radio broadcasts being used, but the Mission Committee was now toying with the idea of an official radio broadcast of the PRC. Again, after the split, this idea disappeared for a time.

Then, too, there was a novel concept that was actually adopted as late as October of 1952 while sharp

divisions over the doctrinal controversy were already appearing in our churches and in the Mission Committee itself. A 'missionary-at-large' was proposed by the Mission Committee to First PRC of Grand Rapids. A missionary would be called to labor in a certain area rather than in one particular field. At this time Rev. H. DeWolf, who was a member of the Mission Committee, had already preached his sermons that were being protested. This late proposal of the Mission Committee never saw the light of day.

All of these proposals—foreign missions, domestic missions among the unchurched, a denominational radio broadcast, and a missionary-at-large—would resurface later on in the history of missions, but at that time they ceased. Certainly, these years of division and strife severely threatened the mission work of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

On a positive note, amazingly, during this time of turmoil we learn in the minutes of the Mission Committee of November 1, 1951, "A group of five families and one individual from Lynden, Washington request organization. The group totals 35 souls, twelve confessing and 23 baptized members." The Lynden PRC was organized in December 1951. The ministers that presided over the organization were Rev. H. DeWolf, Rev. A. Petter, and Rev. A. Cammenga, three ministers who were openly criticizing the Declaration of Principles. Despite this, the little church in Lynden (through the controversy) remained faithful to the cause of the PRC. In fact, the Mission Committee reported to the Synod of 1952, "Although this group consisted of only six families and two individuals at the time of organization, their number has almost doubled since then. This remarkable growth is due mainly to the fact that other families from our churches in northwest Iowa have moved into the community after the congregation was organized."⁴

Just a quick note about this last-mentioned item: *families from our churches* were willing to move to a place where they were needed to establish Christ's church. A wonderful testimony! Lynden PRC today, despite the threats upon its own existence, thrives as a congregation.

The last several articles (which are now buried in past issues of the *Standard Bearer*) give us only a small purview of the events that transpired in missions during the years of 1947-1953. They are a part of our history as churches. Mission work was threatened, but it did not cease. This we will find in future articles, the Lord willing.

4 PRC Acts of Synod, 1952, p. 35.



Ministering to the saints

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

A hole in the shape of a father

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

I John 2:13

A Christian novelist whose books I enjoy reading once in a while made the striking comment that a child is born into this world with a hole in his chest in the shape of a father. That hole needs to be filled, but only a father can fill it. In other words, a child has a profound need for a loving relationship with a father. If that need is not met, he will be left with a hollow emptiness and desperate longing in his heart. He will spend his life trying to stuff other things into his heart to fill the void. But, like the baby who cries in frustration when he cannot fit his toy triangle into a square-shaped hole, so also the individual who does not have a loving father groans in frustration when he cannot find anything to fill the father-shaped hole in his heart. To change the metaphor, a child whose soul was battered and bruised by his father, is exceedingly vulnerable to the wiles of the devil who beguiles a man to dull the pain in his broken heart with evil things that ensnare and enslave, such as drunkenness, drugs, or pornography.

How is your relationship with your father? Fathers, how is your relationship with your children? Do you strive diligently to teach the Word of God to your children and train them up in the way they should go by word and example (Deut. 6:7; Prov. 22:6)? Do you comfort and exhort them when they are hurting or afraid, as fathers are meant to do (I Thess. 2:11)? Do you show compassion to forgive them when they sin, after you chasten with the rod, as Jehovah does toward us (Ps. 103:13; Prov. 3:11-12)? Do you obey the exhortation not to provoke your children to wrath through the sort of “immoderate harshness” that “would excite hatred” in them toward you, the sort of “hard and unkind severity” that “rouses them to obstinacy, and destroys their dutifulness,” as Calvin put it (commenting on Eph. 6:4 and Col. 3:21)? Do you rather bring them up in the loving nurture and admonition of the Lord, as Paul exhorts?

There are no perfect fathers in this world, or in the church. But whereas some of us will say, “I had a godly

and faithful father for whom I am very thankful,” others will say, “I cannot say that about my father.” Most of you will not want to criticize your father for the way he raised you, which is commendable because God commands us to honor our father and mother and patiently bear with their weaknesses and infirmities (see Heidelberg Catechism, LD 39). Nevertheless, many people live knowingly or unknowingly with real emotional wounds caused by their father or mother (or someone else) and try to fill the void in their soul by drinking, drugs, pornography, or something else that makes them feel good, even if just for a moment. No, we must not blame our fathers for the bad choices we have made, the sins we commit, and the idols we serve. We must humbly acknowledge our sins before God and seek the forgiving and cleansing grace of Christ. Yet, we can be helped when we realize what is going on in our souls. Some sinning takes place because one lacks something extraordinarily important in his heart: the love of a father.

My fellow fathers, if we neglect, ignore, belittle, mock, or do other harm to the tender souls of our children while raising them in our homes, we cause an astonishing and profound amount of pain that could cripple them emotionally to some degree or other for the rest of their lives and leave them more vulnerable to the wiles of the devil. We *have* something that they desperately need: a father’s love. When we love them and tell them that, listen to them and spend time with them, discipline them without pride or wrath, encourage them and teach them the truths and ways of the Lord, God uses us to give our children a sweet foretaste of the emotional wholeness that comes when the father-shaped hole in the heart is filled. God uses us to strengthen them emotionally and spiritually, which leaves them well equipped to run the race that will be set before them in their careers, marriages, family, and church life.

My fellow believers, you might have had a father who was more interested in making money and having fun than he was in you. You might have had a father who kept you in line with strict rules and harsh punishment but rarely if ever spent quality time with you in the warmth of friendship. You might have had a father who

constantly criticized you for your failures and loudly railed on you when you missed the mark. You might have had a father who drank too much and took out his anger on you or hurt you in ways that caused you profound confusion, or even inexplicable shame. You might have had a father who oppressed your mother, or forsook her and married another woman and walked out of your life. Your memories of your childhood home might be dark and painful. Or you might have suffered the loss of your father through a tragic incident when you were a child, leaving you fatherless, about which the Scripture says, “A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation” (Ps. 68:5). Or you might be cringing as you read this because none of this was your experience, and you struggle to comprehend what some of your fellow believers sitting in the pew with you on Sunday have suffered with regard to their fathers.

Whatever God willed for you in regard to your human father, the gospel says that God sent His Son to “heal the brokenhearted” and “set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). He sent Christ into the world to die on the cross and rise from the dead so that we might have a loving relationship with God as our Father through adoption. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:4-6). “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (I John 3:1)! Whether or not God gave you a faithful and loving father in this life, weary Christian pilgrim, God loved you so much that He spared not His own Son but gave Him up for us all in order to make us His sons and daughters for all eternity. God alone, who created us with that father-shaped hole in our hearts, can truly and perfectly fill it. God proclaims in the gospel that Christ died for our sins so that we might receive the free gift of adoption and experience the heavenly blessedness of having God as our Father forever.

God fills the hole in our hearts by drawing us into His holy arms and holding us gently and securely, calming all our fears, as a father is meant to do for his children. God fills it by dwelling with us in the warmth of His covenant, like a father who sits with his children in the family room just to have friendly and intimate conversation with them. God fills it by showing and telling of His everlasting love for us who are more precious to Him than the whole of the vast creation. God fills it by doing good and only good to us, being faithful and

true to His Word at all times, and turning all evil to our advantage, so that I have the comfort that “without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head” (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 1; Matt. 10:30).

In short, the love of the Father through Christ—with all that issues from it—is the only thing that can fill the emptiness in our souls, satisfy the longing of our hearts, and give us lasting peace and joy. That steadfast love of God in Christ can heal the broken hearts of those whose fathers neglected or abused them, and it can set them at liberty from the slavery and futility of trying to fill the void with sinful things that do not fit. As we sing in a moving versification of Psalm 27:10: “Though earthly friends no pity take, yet Thy compassion knows no end; e’en though my father shall forsake, e’en though my mother’s love shall break, the Lord will be my friend” (Psalter 73, stanza 4). As we sing too in a beautiful versification of Psalm 103:13: “His love is like a father’s to his children, tender and kind to all who fear His name, for well He knows our weakness and our frailty, He knows that we are dust, He knows our frame” (Psalter 283, stanza 3).

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ,

I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God (Eph. 3:14-19).

Therefore, too, “These things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (I John 2:1). Do not try to fill the void in your soul by drinking, drugs, or sexual immorality. Do not try to dull the pain of your bruised heart in the ways the world does. “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (vv. 16-17). But if you fall back into your sin, remember what John also says in verse one of this chapter, “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” Turn to Christ and behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us in Christ, that we should be called the sons and daughters of God! Remember that God is love, and He has manifested His love toward us in Christ, and His love for us is everlasting and unchanging. Find healing for your broken heart in Him. And, “little children, keep yourselves from idols” (I John 5:21).



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 (concluded)

What is published here and in the previous issue (Feb. 1, 2023) is part of the history Mr. Cal Kalsbeek (retired Christian school teacher and member of Hope PRC, Walker, MI) 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 Consistory minutes of Byron Center PRC from 1927 to 1937 demonstrate that Hessel's move there resulted in a lot of work for him. Time and time again he was elected elder and would serve either as clerk or vice president. Dad's diary of this period records many instances in which Hessel led reading services and served as a delegate to meetings of classis. For example Dad's June 2, 1935 diary entry reads, "Pa (Hessel) is going to leave early tomorrow morning (about 3 A.M.) for Orange City, Iowa where he must attend classis." Another entry informs the reader that a certain [worship] service was the first time Hessel sat with the family in eight years. Apparently, they did not have enough qualified men to serve as elders to make a rotation of officebearers possible, so Hessel served as elder for eight consecutive years and sat with his fellow elders.

Hessel was not the only one of the family involved in the life of the church. Dad religiously reports in his diary of "...attending both services at the Hall," "...went to the Hall twice for church. Sat close by the stove and almost roasted," and "Went to the Hall to both English and Holland services" (cf. photo). Apparently they walked to church until Sunday, October 21, 1934. On that date Dad wrote: "Went to the Hall twice today

with the car and it sure seemed great that we didn't have to hoof it." (On the previous Friday Dad's folks came home with a 1929 Ford, for which they paid \$115.) Also religiously recorded was his catechism attendance on Wednesday evenings in the parsonage basement. On one occasion they lost power and "...had catechism using a kerosene lamp." On another occasion the catechumens "...received a good bawling out and lecture from the Reverend [George M. Ophoff] for failing to learn our questions better," to which Dad added, "and I admit we certainly deserved it."



*The building ("the hall") in which
Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church met
when John Kalsbeek lived in the Byron area.*

*It can still be seen in Byron Center
at the intersection of Harlow and 85th.*

But things were changing for the members of the Hessel DeJong family. They had lost the farm, and by 1937 factory work had been obtained in Grand Rapids: Hessel at Berkey and Gay Furniture, Chuck at Keeler Brass, and Dad at General Motors. While it was common for them to be laid off from work for limited periods of time, it was better than farm work in Byron Center. Also this worked out much better for sister Jenny who was a nanny for someone in Grand Rapids, where she would stay for the week and would sometimes come home to Byron Center on weekends. Consequently, a move to a new home in Grand Rapids was expedient and along with that they moved to a new church home.

The Byron Center Consistory minutes of June 1, 1937 tell the story: “Mr. Hessel DeJong has asked for his and his wife’s and children’s membership papers to be sent to Roosevelt Park Protestant Reformed Church.”

Dad’s Roosevelt Park years: 1937-1939

On April 30, 1937 the Hessel DeJong family spent their first night in their ‘new’ home on 652 Hogan Street in Grand Rapids (near Clyde Park and Chicago Drive). Dad and his brother Chuck contributed \$200 dollars for a down payment on the house which cost \$2,600. To help us understand the activities of the Hessel DeJong family as they begin their sojourn on Hogan Street, we note their ages: Hessel, 48; Anna, 49; Dad, 24; Chuck, 20; Jenny, 19; and Grace, 11.

During these years the Great Depression was very much affecting everyone in the Grand Rapids area, including the DeJong family. Thus we discover from Dad’s diaries that their work was very uncertain. Lay-offs were common. Looking for and finding work during these layoffs was part of their everyday life.

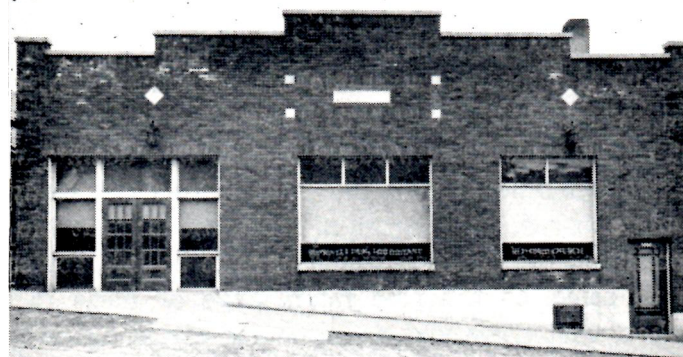
For Dad, an indefinite layoff at GM on May 18, 1937 meant finding work for Arie Ponstein in the Hope area “pulling radishes.” Then, on July 12, it was back at GM, riding to work with Bud Knoper (Dad’s future brother-in-law) “working in the press room smearing grease on the pieces of sheet metal before they are pressed.” Then, beginning in early 1938, he was laid off once again at GM and was left to look for work through various “employment bureaus,” but with no success. So it was back to work for Ponstein, or odd jobs for a certain Mr. Hogan, or working for Mr. Kooienga in the muck on Wilson Ave., or Ben Bosgraf in Hudsonville, or John Lanning clearing land on Wilson and Hall. Finally, on October 5, 1938, GM called him back to work for the 4 P.M. to 12:30 A.M. shift. But this only lasted until May, 1939, when he was laid off once again, this time for 4 months. Despite “union rumblings” at GM during this time, work remained quite steady in part due to the increasing war economy. The last Dad records regarding work is that “#5567 enters the play,” and as that number he is on the day shift working in “the electrical maintenance department.”

Work for Hessel and Dad’s half-brother, Chuck, followed a similar pattern. Keeler Brass was Chuck’s main place of employment, but layoffs also sent him to the farms with Dad. However, at one time they both applied for unemployment. For Hessel, layoff at the furniture factory meant working at Woodlawn Cemetery and finally for the WPA.¹

¹ The Works Progress Administration was a social program of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to get people back to work during the Great Depression.

In 1939 Dad’s half-sister Jenny quit her nanny work for the Hall family in Grand Rapids and began working at the Veltman Cookie Company. And last, but certainly not least, Dad’s half-sister, Grace, was still in school. After moving from Byron Center Christian School, it is likely that she attended Southwest Christian.

To understand some of what was involved in the church life of the Hessel DeJong family while living on Hogan Street, we need to relate a little of the history of Roosevelt Park PRC (later Second PRC and presently Southwest PRC). About the time the DeJongs began attending Roosevelt Park, the landlord of the church building (located on Chicago Drive near Clyde Park, cf. photo below), Mr. London, (also a member of the congregation) made some extraordinary demands of the congregation. That included the demand that they purchase the building for \$15,500 and make payments higher than the congregation could afford during these Depression years. Consequently, the Consistory did some investigation and came up with an alternative plan in which Mr. William Kooienga would build them a new church at the intersection of Ellen and Rathbone Streets for \$9,000. By adopting the Kooienga plan, however, it was necessary for the congregation to declare bankruptcy to get from under their contract with Mr. London, in whose favor the Michigan Supreme Court earlier had ruled, requiring the church to purchase the London-owned building and pay overdue rent. One result of rejecting this decision and declaring bankruptcy was expressed in the consistory’s follow-up letter to Classis East: “The corporate state of Roosevelt Park Protestant Reformed Church was dissolved. The present membership is now incorporated as the Second Protestant Reformed Church.”



Roosevelt Park PRC building on Chicago Dr.

The congregational approval of the church building program explains numerous entries in Dad’s diaries regarding his work in helping build the church. For example, on August 22, 1939 Dad wrote: “Put in another day at the church. Sat on the roof all day nailing on roof boards; Dick Kooienga, Arie Ponstein, Bud Knoper and myself. Was quite weary at 4:30 P.M. quitting

time.” Apparently, they made good progress, because on November 13 Dad helped install seats in the new church and on November 16, 1939 the church was dedicated. This means that for the first two years on Hogan street they worshiped in the Chicago Dr. building and the rest of the time at the new church on Ellen Street.



Second PRC building on the corner of Ellen Street and Rathbone

Dad’s early years at Roosevelt Park/Second PRC involved a number of significant changes in his spiritual life. Most significant was his attendance at catechism under his new pastor, Rev. Richard Veldman, and his subsequent confession of faith. About that event Dad wrote on March 27, 1938, “This morning the following made public confession of faith in our church. Mr. and Mrs. C. Cnossen, Katherine Cnossen, Henrietta and Bud Knoper, Mart Bult, Bernard Elzinga and John Kalsbeek. I stood between Bud and Bernie, both over

six-feet tall, and of course I felt small beside these giants. May we all by God’s grace always in principle live up to what we confessed this morning.” Dad later recorded partaking of the Lord’s Supper for the first time on May 1, 1938.²

There are other indicators that suggest spiritual growth in Dad’s life at this time. For one, he joined the Choral Society. In Dad’s words, on Wednesday, October 6, 1937, “...the unbelievable has happened, for John M. Kalsbeek was also there (Choral Society) tonight and expects to meet with them all winter. Figured on singing tenor at first, but changed to bass as soon as I heard the tenor voices in action. Though very unsteady at first, I got a little braver toward last and really sang out loud when I was positive that I had the right note. Am sure I wasn’t doing any worse than Mart Bult who sat next to me, which is encouraging.” Shortly after this, Dad joined the newly organized Young People’s Society, which met on Friday evenings.

Clearly, church life was very much an important part of Dad’s life during these years. He attended three worship services on Sunday (two in English and one in Dutch), Choral Society on Wednesday evenings and Young People’s Society on Friday evenings. On one occasion he even attended a worship service in Frisian at the Fourth Reformed Church, about which Dad wrote, “I enjoyed it very much.”

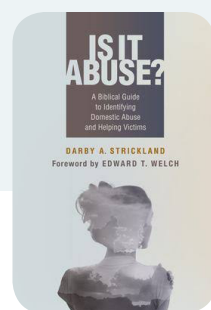
Thus we end this account whence it began; with the Frisians.

² Dad was 24 when he made confession of faith. It seems back then they did this at an older age than we commonly do today.

Bring the books...

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

The following book is reviewed by Mrs. Cherith Guichelaar, pastor’s wife and mother in Grace PRC in Standale, Michigan.



Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims by Darby Strickland. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2020. 352 pages, paperback. \$19.99.

There is a light shining on sexual abuse. Scandals continue to leak. Not just from “other churches,” but from within our own. Articles have been written. Videos, podcasts, and books are being watched, listened

to, and read. Churches are talking about and pursuing policies. Where there is still much room for growth and change, there are glimmers of hope for the spirits of those that have been scarred by the fires of sexual abuse. Yet, after hearing the desperation, hopelessness, and shame of an abused wife bleed before me, I continue to believe more must be done regarding other forms of oppression, such as spousal abuse, as well. Although there are many challenges surrounding cases of spousal

abuse that can make it a difficult and intimidating topic to approach, they cannot deter us from speaking up against this sinister oppression.

Coming highly recommended by those specializing in the fields of trauma and abuse, *Is it Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* by Darby Strickland, has proven to be one of the most comprehensive books on the subject I have read thus far. Drawing from both statistics and personal experience, Darby's writing is geared toward wives as the targets of oppression, although she realizes husbands can be victims as well. The author aims to aid her readers in driving out sin and protecting the vulnerable. Throughout the book, Darby is purposeful in her use of the word *oppression*. She explains, "I like to use the term *oppression*, since it provides a framework for this behavior that is addressed in Scripture and captures the domination that it involves. No matter what form oppression takes, its intended outcome is the same: to punish and wound a victim so that an oppressor gets their world the way they want" (p. 24). Because abuse is easy to miss and even easier to minimize, Darby stresses the necessity of understanding the dynamics of abuse before attempting to rebuke oppressors and come alongside victims.

Darby's work describes the deceitful, self-justifying, and prideful hearts of abusers. She states, "When we are trying to detect abuse, we cannot rely upon outward appearances, or what we *think* we know about someone" (p. 33). She then goes on to explain,

What complicates matters is that our culture has bought into varying myths about why men abuse.... He was abused as a child. It's just the liquor talking. He can't control his anger. He can't communicate and express emotions. He was hurt by his last girlfriend and now fears intimacy. He's so in love that he's afraid he will lose her...each of these excuses casts the abuser as being helpless. They imply that his abusive behaviors are reactive—that he is out of control. Nothing can be further from the truth. Oppressors are not of control; they *seek* control...oppressors do not oppress because they are wounded or weak; they wound so that they can make their world the way that they want it (p. 34).

Darby identifies toxic entitlement as the core of oppression, saying oppressors ultimately have a worship problem. They "see themselves as the center of their world; their hearts say, 'I was created to be worshipped, not to worship'" (p. 71).

Strickland lays out physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, and financial abuse as five areas of oppression. I especially appreciated her sections on uncovering sexual, emotional, and spiritual abuse, as these can be more difficult to pinpoint.

Sexual abuse includes "heinous and exploitive acts that involve sex being demanded, required, or taken by force" (p. 346). Also falling into this category are the unwanted intrusions and implements of pornography into sex, undesired sexual activities, peeking, and spying. With statistics revealing the occurrence of sexual abuse in 40-45 percent of marriages that involve physical and verbal abuse, Darby expresses deep concern "that many in the church remain unaware that sexual abuse even occurs in Christian marriages" (p. 163).

When it comes to emotional abuse, Darby points out that it is one of the most subtle and difficult forms of abuse to recognize, and it should not come as a surprise that it can be more damaging than physical oppression. Therefore, we must take the same amount of care in protecting wives from it. "While physical abuse is marked by violent incidents, emotional abuse bleeds through an entire relationship. It invades almost every conflict in the marriage and distorts the sufferer's perception of herself and reality. But more than that, it shapes how a victim thinks about herself" (p. 187).

Regarding spiritual abuse, Strickland urges us to be diligent in our attempts to uncover if a husband controls and dominates his wife using Scripture, doctrine, or his "leadership role." Since this oppression is easily masked as religious practice, victims rarely report it. Spiritual abuse is profoundly wounding as it isolates victims from God and can even cause them to doubt their salvation.

Darby does an excellent job of describing the effects and trauma that abuse bring, and gives sound advice on how best to interact with victims. She says, "The most important thing for us to do is simple: listen.... We listen well when we feel something of what victims feel—when we suffer with them.... As we listen, the stories that she tells should change and move us" (p. 52). Darby indicates that many women do not even know they are being abused, and often rely on those around them for direction and diagnosis of the problem. She emphasizes the importance of believing a wife when she finds the courage to come forward.

Victims are more likely to cover up or downplay abuse than to make it up or exaggerate.... In time, you will be able to verify the details of her story—but when she first starts to tell it to you, it is not the time to ask questions that focus on your disbelief or doubt. Remember that victims tend to tell repetitive, sometimes incoherent, and circular stories. This is an effect of trauma, so be careful not to discredit what they are saying by judging the way that they are saying it (pp. 112-113).

She also mentions the importance of having an advocate walk with victims to help them process the experience and provide an element of comfort during meet-

ings. Although it will take pain and patience to disentangle an oppressed wife from an abuser, Darby encourages helpers never to tire of bringing a victim truth and hope. She insightfully says, “I have grown to realize that the oppressed learn about the heart God has for them both experientially and propositionally—through both relational care and theological knowledge, as precious truths of Scripture are delivered through the warm words of a friend” (p. 44).

Importantly, highlighted in the book is that “*Oppression is so much more than an anger problem or a marriage problem. Oppression is about coercive control.* Oppressive behavior is not provoked. It is behavior that accomplishes something for the abuser. It is an expression of pernicious entitlement” (p. 63). Darby cautions against the temptation to fall for false repentance and gives wise counsel as to what true sorrow looks like. When measuring a man’s repentance, we must keep in mind “that his wife needs to verify whether it has occurred as well, so we need to involve her input when we are making our assessments” (p. 298). She writes that wives long for their husbands’ sorrow, and that although unbridled repentance is rare, it is not ultimately impossible. Quoting from Chris Moles, Darby writes, “We ourselves do not need to answer the question, ‘Can abusers change?’ We must only seek to know ‘Will *this* abuser change?’ Each case requires you only to assess if a particular abuser is earnestly engaging in the process of change and is demonstrating growth and repentance” (p. 301). The author also says, “It is important to note that husbands I have seen repent fully of abuse have had a team of people around them who all mir-

rored the same concern for the husbands’ hearts. These teams worked hard to bring the husbands insight and to keep them focused on their sins. They did not allow them to play the victim or to control the narrative of the process” (p. 300).

Other strengths of the book include its many appendixes (including one on detecting red flags during dating, as well as one on a premarital assessment), case studies, screening questions, and a chapter on how to care for children. Darby also references her small pamphlet *Domestic Abuse: Recognize, Respond, Rescue (Resources for Changing Lives)*, with which churches would do well to acquaint themselves.

The fact is “there are many—too many—domestic abuse victims sitting in our pews” (p. 27). Where we cannot solve oppression, we can be used by our loving God, who always stands on the side of the oppressed. The calling Darby sets before us is urgent:

God imparts to us clear and direct commands: give justice, maintain rights, rescue, and deliver. These are not small things he is asking us to do.... Victims should not be left without help and hope because we fail to see the unseen or do not know what to do. God calls us not only to confront oppression but also to provide protection and care for the vulnerable...As the body of Christ, we simply cannot allow abuse to go unaddressed in our midst (p. 29).

Her book is a must read for church leaders and members alike, as it will assist in bringing oppressors proper admonition, and profitably tune our ears to care for the Shepherd’s wounded and bleating sheep—sheep who are worth everything.

Report of Classis East



January 2023

At 8:00 A.M. on January 11, 2023 thirty-eight delegates from the nineteen member churches gathered together in Grandville PRC to conduct the business of Classis East (CE).

The meeting began with Rev. J. Maatman, chairman of the previous meeting, reading I Peter 5 and opening with prayer. He read the names of the delegates from the credentials sent by their consistories and asked for a motion to accept the credentials. After the motion carried, Rev. Maatman declared classis properly constituted and turned the chair over to Rev. J. Mahtani (next in line alphabetically).

Rev. Mahtani presided over the rest of the routine

matters that often take place at the beginning of a meeting of classis. He called for the first-time delegates to sign the Formula of Subscription (five elders and one deacon signed); led classis through the approval of the minutes of the September 14-15, 2022 meeting of CE; asked the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order; asked for reports from the Stated Clerk (secretary) of CE, the Classical Committee, the Church Visitors, and a committee to investigate a sexual abuse case. CE approved the work of each of these functionaries/committees.

Two consistories of CE asked for advice in the exercise of Christian discipline. One consistory reported on their labors with a confessing member who remains impenitent in sin. Classis advised the consistory to proceed to announce the member's name before the congregation in accordance with Article 77 of the Church Order. The other consistory reported on their labors with a baptized member who continues to walk in sin without turning. Classis advised the consistory to proceed with the erasure of this member.

Rev. Mahtani completed the final routine matter of Wednesday morning by appointing nine committees of pre-advice.

Committee One treated an appeal by a woman who disagreed with a consistory about how it handled her case as a victim of sexual abuse she suffered as a minor. CE treated the appeal in closed session. Classis declared the appeal legal and made significant decisions regarding the appropriate treatment of an abuse case. Classis ruled that when dealing with cases of confirmed sexual abuse, the consistory must provide sufficient warning to the congregation about the full nature and extent of the sexual abuse committed, disclose to the congregation the safeguards they have adopted to protect the members of the congregation, and work closely with victims in the handling of their case. Classis also approved the appointment of a committee of two elders and two ministers to be available to assist the consistory in this case.

Committee Two advised classis regarding a letter from First PRC of Grand Rapids informing classis of the resignation of Rev. Rodney Kleyn from the ministry of the PRCA and the end of his membership in the PRCA. Classis approved the decision of the consistory "in granting Mr. Rodney Kleyn a 'Ministerial Certificate of Dismissal,' and also their work of admonishing him about his responsibility to uphold the vows he made at his installation into office."

Committee Three's task was to provide advice regarding an overture from Providence PRC. The overture proposes that our denomination commission an organization (GRACE; Godly Response to Abuse in the

Christian Environment) "to perform a full, independent, third-party investigation into her [the denomination's] handling of abuse." Providence sent the overture to CE for its approval to forward it on to Synod 2023. Classis adopted three significant recommendations as proposed by Committee Three:

A. That Classis East appoint a special committee to give more definition to the overture in order to submit it as a classis to Synod 2023. The work of the committee shall include:

1. Clearly define a scope of work.
2. Research and vet third-party organizations and bring a recommendation to classis.
3. Address possible church political matters concerning implementation of the proposal.

B. That the committee be composed of Elders Mike Potjer, Bernie Kamps, Tom Bergman, and Mike Gritters and Revs. G. Eriks, J. Maatman, M. McGeown.

C. That Classis reconvene March 15, at which the committee shall bring its proposal to classis to forward to Synod 2023.

Committee Four recommended that CE give Grace PRC (Standale, MI) permission to distribute a letter providing clarification of a statement made in a document previously distributed in the denomination. CE granted permission, and Grace PRC distributed the letter on Sunday, January 15, 2023.

Committee Five presented a classical appointment schedule for helping the vacant churches of First PRC of Grand Rapids, Georgetown PRC, and Hudsonville PRC in CE, and for Hull PRC in Classis West (CW) on two dates in February. CE will likely provide more help for the western churches in the coming months, where five of the fourteen churches do not have pastors.

Committee Six provided advice for the expenses of the meeting of CE and for the subsidy requests of three needy churches in CE. The expenses of the meeting totaled \$1,629.87. CE approved subsidy requests for 2024 in the amount of \$50,000 for Kalamazoo PRC, \$90,000 for Pittsburgh PRC, and \$45,000 for Providence PRC. These requests will be forwarded to Synod 2023 for its consideration.

Committee Seven served classis by counting ballots for various elections. The results of the elections follow:

• *Primi Synodical Delegates:* Elders Randy Dykstra, Joel Minderhoud, Tim Pipe Jr., John VanBaren, Dan VanUffelen and Revs. N. Decker, G. Eriks, W. Langerak, J. Mahtani, C. Spronk.

• *Secundi Synodical Delegates:* Elders Andy Bylsma, Josh Hoekstra, Steve Kuiper, Peter VanderSchaaf, Dirk Westra and Revs. W. Bruinsma, R. Dykstra, M. McGeown, D. Noorman, J. Smidstra.

- *Primi Synodical Deputies* from the East: Revs. N. Decker, J. Mahtani, and C. Spronk
- *Secundi Synodical Deputies* from the East: Revs. J. Holstege, J. Smidstra, and D. Noorman
- *Classical Committee*: Revs. D. Lee, J. Smidstra, and J. Holstege
- *Primary Church Visitors*: Prof. R. Dykstra and Rev. W. Langerak

• *Alternate Church Visitors*: Revs. G. Eriks and C. Spronk

Committee Eight presented advice to proclaim a day of prayer, which CE adopted. The decision is worth quoting in full: Recommendation: That Classis call a special day of prayer on Tuesday, January 31, 2023, in response both to the recent and past cases of abuse in our denomination with a threefold purpose as requested.

Grounds:

1. Article 66 of the Church Order allows that in times of “great afflictions, the pressure of which is felt throughout the churches” it is “fitting that the classis proclaim a day of prayer.”
2. Sexual abuse (as well as every form of abuse) is a horrible evil that affects not only individual members against whom it has been perpetrated, but deeply affects entire families, entire congregations, and indeed our churches as a whole.

3. Having our churches gather for prayer and lament is one tangible and meaningful way that we can with one voice, communicate care and compassion to those who have been wounded by abuse, as well as seek the Lord’s help in dealing with the terrible sin.

Committee Nine did not have opportunity to report to this session of CE, but we expect that when CE reconvenes on March 15, chairman Mahtani will report that he thanked the Grandville PRC kitchen committee for its faithful service in providing coffee, snacks, and meals for the delegates.

Classis recessed around 7:30 p.m. on Thursday January 12, 2023. The delegates plan to return to Grandville PRC on March 15 at 8:00 a.m. Until then, we pray for God’s blessing on the special committee as it works to prepare a report for the delegates to consider at the meeting. We also pray to God expressing thanks for the unity He has given our churches in the work of serving Jesus Christ and asking that He will use the decisions already made for the welfare of our churches.

Rev. C. Spronk
Stated Clerk of Classis East

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC of Redlands expresses Christian sympathy to our society members Nancy Hendriks, Mary Gaastra, Beth Potjer, Lauren Z. Feenstra, Brooke Huizing, Emily Gaastra, Mikaia Potjer, Linda Smit, and all their families, in the death of their mother, grandmother, and aunt, **Betty VanMeeteren**. May the family be comforted by the hope we have in Christ. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1).

Marlin Feenstra, President
Mary Ferguson, Secretary

Resolution of sympathy

The Council of Hope PRC of Redlands expresses their Christian sympathy in the death of **Mrs. Betty VanMeeteren** to her family, including current and past officebearers: husband Charles VanMeeteren, children Randy and Nancy Hendriks, Gary and Mary Gaastra, Steve and Beth Potjer and to grandchildren Joel and Amy Hendriks, Casey and Kristina Meelker, Scott and Emily Gaastra, Adrian and Elisabeth Gaastra, Zach and Lauren Potjer, Sam and Brooke Huizing, Charles Potjer, Luke and Mikaia Potjer, great grandchildren and sister-in-law Beverly Feenstra. May the Word of God in Philippians 1: 21, “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain,” be a comfort to the family.

Rev. Matt Kortus, President
Peter Smit, Clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in continuing session on Wednesday, March 15, 2023 at 8:00 a.m., in the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

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.

Reformed Witness Hour reformedwitnesshour.org

Prof. Cory Griess

February 5—Religion Defended (1)
Isaiah 48:11
February 12—Religion Defended (2)
Isaiah 48:11
February 19—Unconditional Election (1)
John 6:37-40
February 26—Unconditional Election (2)
John 6:37-40

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

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.