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Editor's Notes

PRCA100, the centennial celebration of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America held June 2-6, 2025 on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, MI, was enjoyed by nearly 2,000 registered attendees. The week was unforgettable, and for many of us one of the most enjoyable and spiritually enriching weeks of our lives. God has been humbling us through challenging times approaching our centennial but also causing us to cherish more deeply the faith, holiness, and unity of Christ's church. Abundant thanksgiving goes to the Lord for giving us this week and all the reasons to celebrate.

We who were able to attend PRCA100 enjoyed it "together." In his opening remarks on Monday evening, the chairman of the steering committee rightly called our attention to the repeated use of "together" in the verses preceding our theme text of Ephesians 2:8-9. We are quickened *together*, raised up *together*, and made to sit *together* in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (vv. 5-6). For me, the highlight of the week was not a particular event, not even the climactic music night with 2,500 singing saints in the packed DeVos Performance Hall. It was the *togetherness* that no pictures or words can capture. The atmosphere of warm fellowship and the heavenly spirit of unity that pervaded the campus all week was a unique foretaste of heaven. To enjoy fellowship in the Lord with so many people, of so many ages, from so many places (even around the world), during so many different hours of the day, in so many settings (meals, devotions, sectionals, tours, games, speeches, free-time, and more) was heart-expanding and made many of us wonder, "Will we ever get to experience something of this scale on earth again?" I hope so. In this increasingly dark and hostile world, we walked away reinvigorated in our loving service of Christ and the churches He has given to us now for 100 years, determined to go *together*.

Before introducing the contents of this special issue of the magazine, a few comments about PRCA100 are in order.

1. The heartiest of thanks goes to the steering committee and all the men and women who selflessly staffed the events of the week. PRCA100 was an organizational masterpiece, brilliantly planned and superbly executed. On behalf of the denomination, Thank you, steering committee! Readers can find a picture of the committee on page 452.

2. Calvin University and Calvary Church were terrific hosts, and their properties memorably served as the perfect venue for our activities.

3. The morning devotions in the chapel led by ministers and schoolteachers were edifying and an appropriate beginning to each day. The morning sectionals were outstanding. All the men and women who carefully prepared and led them gave us something valuable to chew on, discuss, and take home for further contemplation or implementation.

4. The guided historical tours were hugely popular, especially the Wednesday Grand Rapids tour of important Protestant Reformed sites. The attractive and informative seventy-page tour booklet is a collector's item for sure, if you can get your hands on one.

5. To all the many, many mothers with young children in arms or strollers, or babes still in the womb, thank you for coming. Your presence, resilience, and cheer were encouraging to everyone. The sight of so many children, including the bigger ones zipping around campus all week, inspired hope for the future and renewed petitions that God will create in the hearts of this upcoming generation a love for the heritage we cherish. Did you hear them sing at the Kids Camp? I have never heard a sound like that!

6. Finally, on a lighter note as a reflection from the dining hall, we now know that among us, for everyone from a toddler to a senior, no line—even if it must weave through a food line, fountain-drink line, dirty-dish return line, and seating-access point—is too long for soft-serve ice cream.

In this current issue, you will find:

- A condensed and modified version of each of the three speeches delivered the first three evenings of the anniversary. To hear the full speeches, see <https://www.prca.org/resources/series/prca-100th-anniversary-speeches>
- Reflections from attendees
- Photos from the week, most of them taken by Jen Kalsbeek
- Content from three of the sectionals that focused on the history of the PRC and could be formatted for print
- A "Thank You" from the steering committee

Thanks be to God for 100 years and an amazing week of commemoration!

B. Huizinga



TEACHING GRACE

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INTRODUCTION

Grace is God's attitude of undeserved favor in Jesus Christ toward elect sinners, and His power to make them beautiful like Christ.

The topic for this opening article of our centennial is "Teaching Grace." How do we *teach* grace? I am interested in the *content* of that instruction rather than the *manner* of teaching. Certainly, we must be gracious in our teaching of grace, but *what* do we teach? The answer to that question is simple for anyone who knows the Heidelberg Catechism (HC). Whether you are trying to teach a child or an adult, a believer in the church or an unbeliever on the sidewalk outside or on a distant mission field, the HC shows us how to *teach* grace with its threefold division.

Picture three boxes. One is called "Sin," another, "Salvation," and the third "Service." Under the first box, "Sin," we could write "Law," since we know our sin by the law. Under the second box, "Salvation," we could write "Gospel," since the gospel reveals our salvation in Christ. Under the third box, "Service," we could write "Gospel-powered, thankful living, according to Law."

In this article, I will explain "*teaching* grace" by opening the first two boxes, "Sin" and "Salvation," while leaving the third box alone since Prof. C. Griess will explain "Living Grace." For perspective, I will also draw a big circle around the three boxes and explain it. Finally, I will put a heading above that circle to help give the full picture of the grace we teach. As we proceed, let us keep in mind the words of Romans 5:20, "...But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

SIN

"Sin" is a little word, but an enormous concept. The more you understand how big sin really is—in your own heart and life, in the church, in the world, in the history of Adam and his race of totally depraved sinners, and

in the coming kingdom of the antichrist—the more you understand the amazing grace of God that abounds to us in Christ.

Distinctions

First, we can make a multitude of *distinctions* to try to understand the full reality of sin. There are distinctions between:

- *Original* sin in Adam and *actual* sins of thought, word, and deed.
- The *guilt* of sin and the *pollution/power* of sin.
- *First table* sins (against God) and *second table* sins (against God and the neighbor).
- Sins of *omission* (failing to do what we ought to have done) and sins of *commission* (doing what we were commanded not to do).
- *Private* sins (known to one or a few) and *public* sins (known to many or all, including some sins that by their nature must be treated as public).
- Sins of *presumption* (deliberately committed) and sins of *ignorance* (one was not aware he was sinning).
- Sins of *infirmity* (a sudden flash of anger or lust) and *great and heinous* sins (Aaron and Israel building a golden calf at Mt. Sinai).
- Sins of *age* (the sins of older sinners) and sins of *youth* with its youthful lusts (sins of younger sinners).
- *Corporate* sins (of the whole body of people) and *individual* sins.

Aspects

Sin is such an enormous reality we could consider its many *aspects*. There is the *foolishness* of sin, the *deception* of sin, the *pride* of sin, the *selfishness* of sin, the *hatred* of sin, the *unbelief* of sin, the *slavery* of sin, the *misery* of sin, the *sensuality* of sin, the *hurt* of sin, the

rebellion of sin, the *consequences* of sin, the *hardening* of sin, and the *deservedness* of sin. The enormity of sin in all its aspects is reflected in all the different biblical words for sin, such as: transgression, trespass, iniquity, rebellion, evil, corruption, guilt, perverseness, mischief, vanity, wickedness, and treachery.

Degrees

Third, so big is the concept of sin that we can speak of *degrees* of sin. Some sins are worse than others.

Some sins are more severe in *personal impact*. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without [outside] the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” Fornication is uniquely destructive, even when compared with other sins of the body like gluttony or drunkenness. Fornication is the unlawful joining of two bodies and it damages those bodies in a way no other sin can.

Some sins are more severe due to *the damage done to others*. Mark 9:42 instructs, “And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.” Certain sins perpetrated against little ones who are defenseless and vulnerable inflict wider, deeper, and long-lasting damage.

Some sins are more severe in *culpability due to the sinner’s knowledge*. Jesus made a distinction between Sodom, that notoriously wicked city of homosexuality, and Capernaum which rejected Him and His miracles. He said it will be worse for Capernaum in the day of judgment because its inhabitants heard and saw something Sodom never did: the Son of God and His works (Matt. 11:23-24, see also Luke 12:47-48). Sin committed by a member of the PRC who has been taught God’s Word his whole life is worse than the same sin committed by an unbeliever. We *know* better.

Some sins are more severe due to the sinner’s *level of responsibility and influence*. James 3:1 states, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” Do you want to be a teacher and stand up among God’s people and say, “Listen to me. I have the mastery of this subject. Come, sit at my feet and I will teach you?” Beware! You will be judged more strictly.

Some sins are more severe because they give *enemies occasion to blaspheme*. Nathan said to

David, according to 2 Samuel 12:14, “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.” When we sin by living like the wicked world, and the world hears about it, sniffing out hypocrisy...beware! With glee the ungodly will reproach God and His Word and Christ and His church! We do *not* want the godless world to learn of disgraces in the church, because God will be blasphemed! “Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph” (2 Sam. 1:20). Yet, who is to blame when the world blasphemes? The world? Certainly! But who gave the occasion? There lies the greater blame. Nathan said to David after his adultery, “*You* gave occasion. *Your* child shall die.”

Who among us will point the finger and cast stones at others? We have a solemn responsibility to warn others, but the arrows of God’s law must first stick fast in our own heart. Who will be puffed up as a member of the PRC? Who will say, “I am without fault,” and then apply the doctrine of sin to others? Each one of us individually and all of us together as members and friends of the PRC are sinners, unworthy of the least of God’s blessings, and we deserve to be cursed.

SALVATION

Hallelujah for the gospel that reveals the grace of God in His wonderful salvation for sinners! To understand and teach the content of the second box, “Salvation,” we must think along three main lines. This is a basic Reformed distinction according to which the Canons of Dordt are organized: Salvation Decreed, Salvation Accomplished, and Salvation Applied.

Salvation Decreed

Saving grace goes all the way back to eternity, so that in our system of Reformed theology we begin with the *decree* as the Canons do in Head I. God’s will to lavish a wretched sinner with unmerited glory does not begin in time as God’s response to man’s sin. Grace for you does not begin at your conversion, at your birth, at the incarnation of Jesus, or with the mother promise of Genesis 3:15. Saving grace originates in eternity in God’s decree of election.

Election is God eternal choice, in Christ Jesus, and according to His sovereign good pleasure, of a certain number of people whom He appoints to salvation in Christ. After defining election, the Canons in Head 1, repeatedly speak of the “free” or “unmerited *grace* of election,” and that includes the statement that sovereign *reprobation* “peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to us the eternal and unmerited grace of election” (I.15).

Only when we trace salvation back to the gracious and sovereign will of God in eternity can we begin to understand the magnitude of God’s amazing and abounding grace. He *chose* me! He chose *me*! He did *not* choose, but reprobated others, justly in the way of their sin! He could have done the same to me, but He chose me, and others, from eternity! Amazing!

When you think “salvation,” first think “salvation *decreed*,” for as the Canons teach (I.9), God’s decree is “the fountain of every saving good.”

Salvation Accomplished

The salvation that God eternally decreed must be worked out and accomplished as reality in time, and so we must think of salvation secondly as “salvation *accomplished*.” This is the 2nd Head of the Canons (“Of the Death of Christ and the Redemption of Men Thereby”).

The salvation of all the elect was *accomplished* by Jesus on the cross when He declared, “It is finished.” Then God raised Jesus from the dead as His own divine seal, confirming the once-and-for-all accomplishment of salvation.

To describe this work, Reformed theology uses terms like *redemption*, the *atonement*, or *propitiation*. Arguably the most significant term is *satisfaction*. God’s justice has been satisfied because Jesus suffered all the punishment that God’s law threatened for the sins of all the elect, and Jesus gave all the loving and perfect obedience that God’s law required of us and that we never gave or could give. Salvation *accomplished*!

When we think about Jesus accomplishing our salvation at the cross, we may not overlook His *life* from the manger to Golgotha, and not only the suffering of it, but especially His *obedience*. He is the new Head of perfect and eternal righteousness who is holy in every thought, word, and deed. With all His heart He kept the first and second tables of the law, He omitted nothing, and He fulfilled everything, not only of the moral law,

but also of the ceremonial and civil laws. He was pure in public *and* private, as a child *and* as an adult. He never gave anyone occasion to blaspheme God, even though His enemies accused Him of blasphemy. As we confess in our Lord’s Supper Form, “He hath fulfilled for us all obedience to the divine law and righteousness, especially when the weight of our sins and the wrath of God pressed out of Him the bloody sweat in the garden,” and He went to the cross “where...He was innocently condemned to death that we might be acquitted at the judgment seat of God.”

Salvation is accomplished by *Jesus*, not by Adam or you or me or any would-be savior. Salvation is in *Jesus alone*.

Salvation Applied

Third, when we think of our gracious salvation, we must think “salvation *applied*.” This refers to the idea that the salvation that the triune God *decreed* for the elect, and that the Mediator Jesus *accomplished* for the elect, the Holy Spirit as the agent of salvation sovereignly *applies* to the elect so that they become conscious partakers of God’s grace in Christ. Salvation *decreed* is decretal; it happened in eternity. Salvation *accomplished* is objective; it happened in time but outside of us. Salvation *applied* is subjective; it happens in time, *to* you and *within* you. This is the remainder of the Canons (Heads III-V).

The first and principal work of the Spirit is to unite the elect sinner to Jesus Christ at the moment of regeneration with an unbreakable, spiritual bond. Then through the remainder of the sinner’s life, the Spirit will apply all the benefits of salvation in an orderly way from regeneration to glorification in heaven. *All* of this is *salvation*. We do not save ourselves with respect to the *decree*, the *accomplishment*, or the *application*. *All* of salvation is *God’s* work and *all* of it is *gracious*.

Two activities will be present in your life if the Spirit applies salvation to you: repenting and believing. The Spirit always works through the preaching of the gospel with its call to repent and believe (see, for example, Canons I.3).

If you are the object of God’s amazing grace, then the Spirit will and does bring you to repentance, so that when you hear of the awful reality of sin, *your* spirit breaks and *your* heart is contrite and *you* smite *your*

breast crying, “God be merciful to me the sinner!” If you do not repent of your sins, but stubbornly persist in them, you must know that you are on the road to everlasting destruction. Repent!

Furthermore, if the Spirit has united you to Christ and made you a believer, then you will fly for refuge to Jesus Christ and cast yourself wholly upon Him, believing that His precious blood covers in God’s sight your hideous sin (with all its distinctions, aspects, and degrees) and that He is your righteousness before God and your security now and forever. Believe!

How wonderful to be reared by faithful PR parents, instructed in a good PR school, catechized in the blessed doctrines of the now 100-year-old PRC, and to worship in a PR congregation every Sunday. These are amazing benefits that many from other continents would love to have and that we often take for granted, to our shame. However, if you do not know Jesus personally as your Lord and Savior, you in the PRC with all these benefits do not know the grace of God. Believe in Him!

If you claim to have a wonderful and vibrant relationship with Jesus and a soul lavished with the grace of God, but you do not know doctrine and even disdain doctrine, and catechism, and gospel preaching, and worship in the Lord’s house on the Lord’s Day, then your confession of Jesus is empty. Jesus is not known through an immediate encounter or mere emotions, but through the truth. He *is* the truth! Believe His Word!

We can be confident that all those whom God chose, and all for whom Jesus died, are those whom the Spirit will unite to Jesus; and when the Spirit brings them to conscious faith so that they say, “God, my God, the God of grace!” they will repent of their sins and trust in God’s Son. They will feel the beginning of eternal joy now already, and one day be taken into the new world of everlasting glory in Paradise. Where sin abounds, saving grace does not merely take sin away and restore to Adam’s Eden, but grace brings a new Head who delivers us to unmeasurable heights in a new world.

CONCLUSION

Having considered “Sin” and “Salvation,” I want to complete the picture with two more elements.

Covenant

First draw a big circle around those three boxes and call it “the covenant of grace.” There are many people

who talk of grace, but if they do not frame grace in terms of the *covenant* of grace, they are not Protestant Reformed, and they are not Reformed. To be Reformed is not only to teach grace according to the structure of the Reformed confessions, but also from the perspective of the *covenant of grace*. And you know, dear friends, there is nothing more precious to us in the PRC than the understanding of God’s covenant as a gracious relation of intimate communion and fellowship between the triune God and His chosen people in Christ Jesus, those chosen people consisting of believers and their spiritual seed sealed with infant baptism.

The whole Bible is divided into the old and new covenant. How can anyone teach grace without teaching the one *covenant* of grace! Our *sin* is sin against the *covenant*, and that more than anything makes it so treacherous, for we sin against a loving and faithful Father. Our *salvation* is covenantal salvation, designed by a God of eternal fellowship in Himself, accomplished by the last Adam as Head, and applied by a Spirit who is the very breath of the living and loving God. Our *service* as our part or duty in the covenant is *friend-service* joyfully rendered to our Friend-Sovereign.

We come to know the abounding grace of God when we consider that He takes us and our children, organically considered, into the bonds of His covenantal love, and sovereignly and unconditionally maintains that bond into all eternity. This is not the covenant of original righteousness with Adam—a losable righteous—but the new and everlasting covenant of abounding grace in Christ!

God

Secondly, above that big circle write the heading “GOD’s Grace.” To teach grace is to teach *God*, crying “Behold your God!”

We do not celebrate grace as an abstraction, but to adore and honor *God* as the God of all grace! Celebrating the centennial of a denomination of true churches is a celebration of the *God* of those churches! Our heritage and reward in the covenant is *God*!

To be Protestant Reformed is to say from the heart, “God is God, so let God be God!” And nothing shows that God is God and God *alone* like His amazing, abounding, saving grace in Christ Jesus for unworthy sinners like you and me.

The infinitely and inherently beautiful God must

have all the glory, and be worshiped by us, not casually (the trend these days) but reverently, and not coldly (our inclination by nature) but warmly. For, *of* God, and *through* God, and *to* God are all things to whom be glory forever.

I count it a privilege of grace to be a spiritual son of Herman Hoeksema, because God made that man theocentric (God-centered) in all his doctrine and preaching. It is my conviction that the single most impactful work ever produced in the history of the PRC is *The Triple Knowledge* (TK), Herman Hoeksema's exposition of the HC. Every line in those books converges and leads to God, as anyone who has ever read or reviewed those volumes knows.

Do you know that the theology of TK has been imbibed by generations of faithful PR ministers who carefully read TK their first time preaching through the HC? It profoundly shapes their thinking, and then they preach (and teach catechism) so that PR congregations have been taught the theology of HH, especially as

found in TK. There is no work that has had or could have had this kind of wide and generational impact upon the PRC, and we are all the better for it. Biblically grounded HC preaching that teaches grace by teaching sin, salvation, and service, from the viewpoint of the unconditional covenant of grace with all its comfort in Christ Jesus and as the revelation of God is the best HC preaching.

As the late Rev. Gerrit Vos once said about Rev. Hoeksema, he “has been used by our covenant God to make us more God-conscious.”¹ There is nothing we need more in the second century of our existence than to be more God-conscious. When you and I are conscious of the abounding grace of God toward us, then we should be the most gracious people in the whole world, able and willing to teach others His grace.

¹ See Gertrude Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken: A Biography of Herman Hoeksema* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 264.



LIVING GRACE: THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

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INTRODUCTION

Holiness is a concern to the Protestant Reformed Churches. The fathers of the PRC saw that Abraham Kuyper's common grace doctrine theoretically destroyed the spiritual difference between church and world. There were concerns about the effects that Kuyper's doctrine was clearly having in the lives of the people of God, concerns that many of the leaders of the CRC shared with the fathers of the PRC even if these men did not see the doctrinal root of the problem. The very first issue of the *Standard Bearer* contained an article by Herman Hoeksema on the two trees in the garden, by which trees, “the antithesis was introduced in man's life. His calling as God's covenant friend now was not only to

serve the one master, but also to reject the other, to love the light and to hate darkness, to choose Good and to reject evil.”¹ This calling to live antithetically continues for the people of God, and thus is regularly preached in PRC congregations. Concern for holiness of life is the now 100-year heritage of the denomination, and it must remain so until the Lord returns.

There is the danger that teaching on holiness becomes cold, abstract, and rule-oriented. To be sure, there is law in holiness. But holiness must ever remain gospel-driven holiness that obeys commands in the context of the

¹ Herman Hoeksema, “The Antithesis in Paradise,” in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1924), 9.

covenant love-bond God establishes with His people in Christ. One way to enter into that truth is by seeing the relationship between holiness and beauty—the observing of which is also the heritage of the PRC.

BEAUTIFUL HOLINESS IN SCRIPTURE

Scripture relates “holiness” and “beauty” among other ways in its use of the phrase “the beauty of holiness.” This phrase is found four times in the Bible. 1 Chronicles 16:29, “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD *in the beauty of holiness*.” Psalm 29:2, “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD *in the beauty of holiness*.” Psalm 96:9, “O worship the LORD *in the beauty of holiness*: fear before him, all the earth.” Then, the fourth and final text is 2 Chronicles 20:21, “And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise *the beauty of holiness*, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth forever.”

In the first three texts, believers are called to worship God in the state and condition of holiness, which holiness is beautiful to God.² We are called to come to the gatherings of public corporate worship consecrated to the Lord, that we might truly “give unto the Lord” (1 Chron. 16:29; Ps. 29:2). How can there be true “giving unto the Lord” in worship without this holiness? We must be *consecrated to God* from the heart when we gather in order to truly worship. And when we are, that is lovely to God. If you ask, what does God think is beautiful when we gather on Sunday morning and evening? The answer is not the stained glass in the church building, our clothes, or our hair. What is beautiful to Him is *holiness*.

This theme of *beautiful holiness* recurs throughout Scripture. In 1 Peter 3:4, inner *holiness* is described as

2 John Gill, for example, comments: “The Lord is only to be worshipped...and in true holiness, in which there is a real beauty: holiness...is the beauty of saints, it is what makes them like unto Christ, and by which they are partakers of the divine nature; and in the exercise of holy graces, and in the discharge of holy duties, should they worship the Lord; unless this is to be understood of the place of worship, the sanctuary, or holy place in the tabernacle; or rather the church of God, which holiness becomes; but the former sense seems best.”

the true *beauty* of a godly woman. Isaiah 61:3 speaks of Christ giving His people *beauty* in place of ashes, a beauty encompassing both justification and the *holiness* of sanctification. Isaiah 62:3 compares the returning *holy* Israelites to a *beautiful* crown in God’s hand. In addition, throughout the Old Testament things deemed *holy* are also described as *beautiful*: the *holy* and *beautiful* golden furniture of the tabernacle (Lev. 24:4), the high priest’s *holy* garments designed “for glory and for *beauty*” (Ex. 28:2), and *holy* Jerusalem itself, which is *beautiful* for situation (Ps. 48:2). The church too is pictured as the *holy* bride of Christ—so *beautiful* that “the king shall greatly desire her *beauty*” (Ps. 45).

When God looks at your life and mine does He see this beauty of holiness?

WHAT HOLINESS IS

Holiness is consecration to God. It is to be spiritually set apart from the world unto service to Jehovah. There were many candlesticks among the Israelites, but one was set apart unto Jehovah in the tabernacle. There were many garments in Israel, but only some were set apart for the priests’ service to God. There are many people on the earth, but only some are separated out from the common race of humanity to be consecrated to the service of God. All of God’s people are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an *holy nation*, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Holiness begins in regeneration, where the stranglehold of sin is broken and a person is set apart positionally and definitively unto God (1 Cor. 1:2). As the life of regeneration unfolds, holiness is progressively worked out in the believer’s thoughts, motives, words, and deeds.

SEVEN CHARACTERISTICS OF HOLINESS

We can mention a number of characteristics of holiness. First, holiness shows in the actual *life* an individual lives. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it in Q&A 91, holiness is *performed*. Lord’s Day 32 says Christ renews us by His Spirit so that we may testify by the whole of our *conduct* our gratitude to God. Actions, behavior, priorities, what a person does with his time, what he does not do, the choices he makes (not just on Sunday), reveal his devotion to God or lack thereof.

Second, that life reveals holiness when it is a life well ordered by God's moral *law*. The holy Christian "orders his conversation aright," as Psalm 50 puts it. As everywhere you look at the creation you see evidence of God's order, so when you look at the people recreated by God, the mark of His creative work is life rightly ordered. That right order of life is determined by the moral law. The law shows forth life the way it is supposed to be lived. The law is not merely one possible pathway among others, but the will of the Maker of life who says, "This way, and no other way." The church in her witness within and without may not blunt that law, therefore, in all that its commands intend to touch upon: regulated worship, human sexuality and marriage, the Lord's Day, and so on. Rather, the church declares that law as the authoritative description and command regarding the life ordered aright, so that even though the world disregards and defies the law of God, the child of God conforms himself to it.

The third characteristic of holiness is that it produces a life *lodged* against the world. It is *antithetical*. The unregenerate assert a pretended sovereignty over their own lives. The regenerate strive to submit to God's will. As H. Hoeksema said in his description of the two trees, the difference is between being submissive to God as His child, or going about to establish yourself as god like the world. Holiness looks very different from the way of life in the world.

Fourth, holiness issues forth from a heart of *love*! It flows from the heart of a person who knows that by nature he seeks to make himself god along with the rest. But God in the gospel has redeemed his life from the pit, and now he lives for this God out of love for Him. "I will run in the way of thy commandments when thou hast enlarged my heart" (Ps. 119:32).

Fifth, because holiness is rooted in the heart of love, this holiness goes *lower* than what is on the surface of life. It is also in the parts of life that others do not see. Unlike the superficial light of a Thomas Kinkade painting—created to mask inner dysfunction and sin—God's light shines deeper than the painted surface, reordering even the parts of life hidden from view.³ God's sanctifying

Spirit takes the heart that loves all the wrong things or the right things in the wrong way, and begins to order the heart's loves aright and, from there out, the seen and unseen life. If there is anyone reading this who is trying to cover up a life of darkness given over to the world by painting light over the surface for all to see, you are not safe. Admit you are not whole and stand in need of the Physician and come honestly before the Savior who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. This Savior does not say to you, "Order your life aright, and then come to Me," but, "Come to Me broken, humble, submissive, confessing rebellion and need, and I will heal you, ordering your life in My love." And for all of us reading this who have hidden sins, let us do the same, bringing those hypocrisies honestly to Christ for forgiveness and for healing.

Sixth, holiness is both *laborious* and *light*. It is not the case that coming to Christ broken and needy will mean that growing in holiness will be a breeze. Rarely does God zap errant desires out of His people immediately and altogether. Rather, God works in them with the result that they have the spiritual will and strength to fight against those desires in His power, (Phil. 2:12). Holiness is a gift that enables us to fight. And yet, for all the striving, His yoke is easy and His burden is *light*. We labor in the freedom of the gospel that exonerates us from the guilt of all our sins, past, present, and future. And we are able to see that the life He calls for is a life that is both God-glorifying and good for us.

Finally, the seventh characteristic of holiness is that it is *limited*. It grows and is growing, but it is imperfect in this life. Far from that being a joy to the Christian, remaining sin is a grief to him. Yet, he sees this too is the Lord's will until Christ returns to grace His people with full holiness.

HOLINESS IS BEAUTIFUL

Part of the motivation for the child of God in his striving against sin is that he knows that holiness is *beautiful* in the sight of His God. The child of God is legally beautiful by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but he is also beautiful by the impartation of that righteousness to him which gives him holiness of life.

Beauty is somewhat difficult to define. But we can say this much, true beauty is rooted in God. God

3 For information about Thomas Kinkade and his attempt to paint over and hide the rot of a sinful life, see here: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20250326-why-the-quaint-paintings-of-thomas-kinkade-divided-the-us>

Himself is beautiful. Augustine especially spoke of God as beautiful, calling God “the unchangeably beautiful One.”⁴ Protestant theologians did not so much follow Augustine in this, at least not in their dogmatic works.⁵ Herman Hoeksema, however, taught that grace—meaning first loveliness or attractiveness (Prov. 22:11)—originates in the beautiful God. Before grace is ever shown to man, it exists eternally within the Trinity. The Father delights in the beauty of the Son, the Son in the beauty of the Father, all in the communion of the Spirit.⁶

This beauty of God, said Hoeksema, is not superficial, however. It is the beauty of ethical perfection.⁷ That is, it is *the beauty of holiness*.

Holiness is beautiful in us precisely because it is beautiful in God. In the first three verses quoted at the beginning of this article, the phrase is the same: “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.” In the last verse (2 Chron. 20:21) it is a bit different, “And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that *should praise the beauty of holiness...*” In the first three verses the reference is to our holiness. In the fourth verse, “the beauty of holiness” is God! In fact, it is a *name* for Him. He *is* the Beauty of Holiness! For that reason it is the case in the Bible that for His people to be *holy* is for us to be *beautiful*. For us to be holy is for us to be a reflection of true beauty as found in our God! As God Himself marvelously says in Ezekiel 16:14, “And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD.”

If holiness is beautiful, then sin is hideous. In fact, sin is described in Scripture as a “spot,” an ugly blemish that ruins what should be beautiful—like leprosy on a man, a blemish on the sacrificial beast, or a stain in the

bride of Christ. James calls sin the “spot” of the world that has rubbed off on us (Jam. 1:27). It is repulsive, shameful, and ugly.

Holiness, in contrast, is beautiful.

Do you want to know then what is beautiful in this world? Beauty is a husband and wife who have had struggles, but who keep working on their marriage, keep repenting and meeting at the foot of the cross, going forward to the glory of God and the good of their home—as a reflection of God’s own beautiful faithfulness. Beauty is a father’s tear-filled embrace of his prodigal son who returns—a reflection of the beautiful forgiveness of Father. Beauty is faithfulness to a friend who has turned his back on you in wicked spite—because Father is beautifully faithful to you. Beauty is a cup of cold water given in Jesus’ name—as a reflection of the beautiful grace of God. Beauty is putting every block on your device so that you are not tempted by the smut—as a reflection of the beautiful purity of God. These and much more are lovely in this world, for they are God’s beautiful holiness reflected in His people.

As a pastor for fifteen years in the PRC I have seen this beauty in God’s people in our denomination, as I have seen it in other believers throughout the universal body of Christ. To be sure, I have seen spots as well. Individual spots and corporate spots, some of which are very ugly and shameful, and that need addressing, not painting over: sexual sins, violent sins, abuse of alcohol. We *must face* these honestly and come before Jehovah repentant, seeking forgiveness and strength to grow. But there is beauty, real beauty, true spiritual beauty God works in us, praise be to Him.

THE POSSIBILITY OF BEING BEAUTIFULLY HOLY

The possibility of this beauty is only a marvelous working of sovereign, irresistible, transforming *grace*. “But by the grace of God I am what I am,” says Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10. “I am not ugly as once I was, I am something else now, and *grace* has made the difference.” The grace that begins in God as the beauty of His ethically perfect character, when God looks outside of Himself, becomes a power to deliver a sinner from the ugliness of sin and make him more and more the image of our beautiful Father.

4 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 254.

5 H. Bavinck, 254. Bavinck says the Reformed dogmatists spoke of God’s glory *in place of* speaking of His beauty. Hoeksema spoke of both.

6 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 159-160. Others before Hoeksema pointed out that the word *grace* means loveliness, beauty, and splendor first of all. However, I have not found another Reformed dogmatist who has explained that grace is an attribute of God in this way. If there is one, I would like to know it.

7 H. Hoeksema, 159.

This is the truth of adoption. Does not a child definitively bear the natural image of his father in his birth? And yet is that resemblance not worked out more and more in that child as the child develops, living his life in father's house under father's influence and rule? So too God's people, by a marvelous work of adoption! Having been chosen to be a part of His beautiful family though naturally a part of the ugly family of Adam; having the legal right to be in His family by the work of the beautiful Christ bearing our ugly sins away on the ugly/beautiful cross, He rebirths us into His own family. God's own life worked out in a human life by Christ, is taken by the Spirit and placed inside of His people. God's own holy beauty! Grace uses preaching of the law and the gospel and the law again, discipline, and providence, to shape us into reflections of our Father's holiness. As God's children, we increasingly desire to resemble Him. "Father, I do not want this ugliness—make me beautiful!" And one day, when we see Him as He is, we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2). Fully transformed, we will worship the Beauty of Holiness in the beauty of holiness.

AN IMPORTANT DISPLAY OF THIS BEAUTY

What a gift purchased by the Savior for us—not only our forgiveness, but our transformation! He desired that we have the beauty of holiness so much He died to purchase it for us. Do you think you deserve it, child of God? Do you think you merited this in the past or merit it going forward even by your progressing in holiness? It was and is, and always will be the grace of *undeserved favor*.

Because holiness is a gracious gift, will we not bear *this* beauty of God too, that we are gracious to undeserving others as He has been gracious to undeserving us? This is a principle: We will be to others what we believe God has been to us. He has not compromised truth with us. Do not compromise truth. But He has been so gracious to us poor, ugly, undeserving sinners. Let us be gracious to others, lovely like Him.

How merciful is our God to give us to share in the beauty of His holiness. Let praises ring out to Him for the next 100 years, and for all eternity.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4—DEFENDING GRACE



DEFENDING GRACE

REV. JOSHUA ENGELSMA

pastor of Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois

INTRODUCTION

I was asked to speak on the subject of "Defending Grace." I understand this to be a reference to the calling of God's Word that Christ's church on earth engage in polemics. This subject is related to "Teaching Grace" and "Living Grace" as the necessary defense of them.

I think it is fair to say that one of the things that the PRCA is known for is our commitment to polemics. This has been the case for 100 years. Our churches had their origins in 1924 in the polemics of Herman Hoeksema, Henry Danhof, and George Ophoff as they

contended with the error of a common grace of God to all men, supposedly evident in a well-meant offer of the gospel. Our churches underwent a painful split in the 1950s, in part because we contended with the error of a conditional covenant that God establishes with more than the elect. In our recent controversy we have engaged in polemics against errors on both sides. And in between these major controversies we have contended with countless errors both of doctrine and life.

To say that one of the characteristics of our churches has been our polemics is not to say that we have always

engaged in polemics in the proper way. Undoubtedly there have been instances throughout our history where we have engaged in polemics in an unholy, proud spirit. Undoubtedly there have also been times when we have not engaged in polemics when we should have.

In light of this history, it is appropriate that we reflect as churches on our calling to be polemical. We need to hear the warnings about engaging in polemics in the wrong way. But we also need to hear the calling of God's Word that we continue zealously to defend grace.

THE CALLING

If we are called to be busy in the work of defending, it makes sense to say something first about *what* we are to defend. We are called to defend *grace*, that is, the gospel of the grace of God in salvation.

This is the emphasis in the New Testament. It is clear in Ephesians 2 that we are defending the truth of salvation by faith and not by works. In Romans and Galatians Paul is leading the church in her defense of justification by faith alone apart from works. So vehement is Paul on this point that in Galatians 1 he calls the teaching that denies the grace of God in salvation “another gospel” and pronounces a curse upon whomever preaches that false teaching.

What we are to defend is the truth that the salvation of sinners is entirely due to the work of God in His sovereign, particular grace. At its heart, this is the defense of the doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works. This includes all the other doctrines of grace: unconditional election and reprobation, limited or particular atonement, the total depravity of the natural man, the irresistible grace of God in conversion, and the certain preservation of the saints.

This is why the PRCA have been so concerned to oppose common grace, a well-meant offer of the gospel, and a conditional covenant established with more than the elect: we believe these errors touch on important truths of the gospel of grace.

If we can distinguish between primary and secondary matters of doctrine, then the truth of salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone is the primary matter.

But that is not to say we do not defend the other truths of God's Word. We must also be busy to defend

the other truths that God has revealed to us in His Word. This would include a defense of the doctrines of the Trinity, the creation of the world, God's providence, the person and natures of Jesus, the identity and gathering of the church, the second coming of Jesus, the resurrection from the dead, and so on. The whole of God's Word is a sacred trust that has been given to the church, and she must guard it all jealously.

We are called not only to defend *doctrines* but also the teachings of God's Word as they relate to our *walk of life*. There are plenty of instances in the New Testament where God's Word warns against those who were using false teaching as the excuse for ungodly living (for example, Jude 4). The faith we are to contend for includes what the Word of God says about godly living in personal life, in marriage, in the family, in the church, and in the workplace.

It is the calling of the church to *defend* grace.

God's Word is clear that this is the church's calling. Jude 3 says, “...and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” The words “earnestly contend” translate just one word in the original, a word that conveys the idea of exerting oneself strenuously in defense of something. This calling is implied in Ephesians 2:8-9 (and elsewhere) by the word “not”: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; *and that not of yourselves*: it is the gift of God: *Not of works*, lest any man should boast.” The Word of God not only sets forth the truth positively, but it also defends the truth against error.

When we talk about the church defending grace, we are talking about her calling to engage in polemics. Our word polemics comes from a Greek word that means fight, battle, or war. Polemics refers to the calling of the church to fight in defense of the truth of God's Word by exposing, condemning, and refuting all errors that are contrary to God's Word.

The church on earth is the church militant, the church at war. This has been the case ever since the fall into sin, when God proclaimed in Genesis 3:15 that He would put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. This bitter struggle between the forces of darkness and the kingdom of God's Son has continued down through the ages until today and will continue until Christ returns as the victorious King. This means that the church is called to fight. There are many

different aspects to this fight. Certainly the individual child of God is called to fight against his own sins. But the church is also called to fight by engaging in polemics against doctrinal and practical error, whether that is being promoted in the world, in the broader Christian or Reformed church world, or in our own midst.

Exposing and refuting error is *necessary* in the interests of the truth. For one thing, showing the errors helps clarify and sharpen our understanding of the truth. Also, refuting error is necessary for the preservation of the truth; if the lie is permitted to take hold, then it will choke out the truth.

Defending grace is the church's sacred calling. This is certainly the calling of the church through her ministers and elders in their preaching, writing, and discipline work. But this is a calling that comes to all the members of the church; every believer has been entrusted with the faith, and every believer in his own station of life must be earnestly contending for the faith.

THE MANNER

There are two dangers of which to be aware in the manner in which we defend grace. First, there is the danger of engaging in this calling with a radical, unholy spirit.

There are many ways in which this radical spirit can show itself. Sometimes this is done by unnecessary attacks on persons; there is a time for "naming names," but this is merely attacking persons, including sinful name-calling and judging of another's eternal salvation. Sometimes this is done by misrepresenting the position of another person, usually by making a straw man that is easy to pummel. Sometimes this is done by ascribing to a person all sorts of implications that they do not hold; there is a place for showing someone the implications of their view, but a person might not be consistent and hold to those implications. Sometimes this is done by making non-essential matters on which there is room for different opinions into essential matters about which no one may disagree with us.

Usually this behavior is excused by saying, "It is for the truth!" But what becomes evident is that there is knowledge without love, zeal without wisdom and discernment. Such behavior is like that of a battle-crazed soldier who swings his sword wildly only to cut down his own men.

God's Word forbids this unholy manner of defending

grace. Frequently the Bible says that officebearers may not be *brawlers*, that is, fighters in the wrong sense of the word who fight simply for the sake of winning or for personal glory. 2 Timothy 2:24-25 says, "But the servant of God must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves...." In our polemics we must always speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We may never violate the ninth commandment and bear false witness against another, falsify another's words, or judge and condemn another rashly or unheard; instead, we must love the truth and speak it uprightly, and defend and promote the good character of our neighbor as much as we are able (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 43).

This is a warning that we need to hear as churches. One of the criticisms lodged against us as churches is that we have not always engaged in polemics in a holy way. There are certainly instances of fighting with foolish, proud spirits. We confess that before God, and plead the grace of God that we confess as the covering for these sins and the power to engage in holy warfare.

A second danger in the manner of polemics is that the church in weakness and fear fails to defend grace.

There are different ways in which this spirit of fear can show itself. A person might wrongly conclude that every defense of the faith is inherently proud and self-serving, that to do so is merely to prop up and protect the institutions of men, or to make it seem like we are the only ones saved. A person might have the attitude that false doctrine is really not worth fighting about or the promotion of ungodly living is not worth calling out; they want to be only sweetly positive. A person might have the attitude that it really does not matter what church a person belongs to and that differences between churches are just a matter of semantics.

One of the reasons for this weakness may be that a person becomes weary of fighting that has gone on for so long. Another reason may be that he has seen polemics done in the wrong way. And he overreacts by not being willing to defend the truth at all.

There is a danger in this regard for the PRCA. We have been through years of painful fighting. We have seen instances of fighting done in the wrong way. This can easily lead to a spirit in our churches that is so weary of fighting that we begin to weaken and soften in our polemical calling.

But this may not be! For 100 years we have fought to defend grace, and the calling to this and any future generation remains the same: defend grace!

THE URGENCY

The urgency of defending grace is the fact that we are living in perilous times when false teachings and teachers seek to lead God's people away from the faith.

The church certainly has to be on guard against the unbelieving world that seeks to influence the church (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1ff.). But the church also has to be on guard against enemies within the camp, that is, some who claim to be Christians but in reality are denying core truths of the gospel and by their false teaching attempt to lead God's people astray into the bondage of sin. Jude 4 warns against "certain men crept in unawares" (cf. also Gal. 2:4; 2 Pet. 2:1). The idea of creeping in unawares conveys that the false teachers were men who belonged outwardly to the church. Their creeping in does not necessarily mean that they were outside the church and then tried to join; it does not exclude some who grew up within the church. For a time they gave the appearance of being true believers. The idea of their creeping in unawares is intended especially to convey the manner of their working. They sneak around secretly and work subtly, seeking bit by bit to influence others and lead them astray.

Such false teachers are a threat to the church of Christ today. There are false teachers who in various ways teach that salvation is of man's willing and working rather than God's mercy. There are false teachers who try to justify ungodly living, such as unbiblical divorce and remarriage or homosexual behavior.

We also need to be on guard against errors of doctrine or life in our own churches. We certainly ought not look at one another with suspicion, but at the same time we ought not think that the Bible's warnings apply to everyone else but us.

This is what lends urgency to our calling. The grace of God is under attack! Therefore, as churches we may not be silent but must defend grace!

THE MOTIVATION

As we defend grace, we must always keep in mind what we are fighting *for*. Think of this in terms of a military illustration. In the early part of World War II, it looked like Hitler's Germany had overrun all of

western Europe and was about to swallow up Britain. The people of Britain fought back in what is called the Battle of Britain. But they did not fight merely to fight. They were fighting tooth and nail to defend something they loved: their home, their families, their way of life. It meant tremendous effort and suffering, but the cause they were defending was worth it. The same must be true for us. We fight not simply because we like to fight, but we must always remember what we are fighting for. Defending grace will mean blood, sweat, and tears, but the cause is what makes it all worth it.

There are especially two things that must be the driving concern of the church in defending grace.

First, the church's concern is for the honor of God. The child of God who has been entrusted with the faith knows that at the heart of that faith is a God of grace who loves me and the Lord Jesus Christ who died for me. Knowing God and knowing what Jesus has done for me, I cannot bear the thought of God's name being besmirched and the cross of my Savior being disparaged. If someone unjustly criticizes us or runs down our family, we are quick to defend ourselves or our family; how much more ought we to be ready to defend the name and honor of our God and our Savior! For the sake of God's glory, for the sake of the honor of Jesus Christ, we must defend grace!

Second, our concern in defending grace is the good and salvation of the church and her future generations.

We want to defend the truth of God's grace because it is by the faithful preaching of that grace that God is pleased to continue to save His people, including the future generations of the church. If this truth is corrupted by false teaching, then others, including our future generations, will not hear of the grace of God in salvation. And how can they be saved if they are not taught the truth of salvation? By this means also the misled are convinced and those who are already gathered are built up in faith.

Our motive in defending grace is not self-seeking and proud. Our motive is not simply to come out on top and win the argument. Our motive is not our own glory and honor. But in our hearts is a desire for the glory of the God of grace, for the exaltation of the cross of Jesus, and for the good and salvation of the church. With that living in our hearts, let us *teach* grace, *live* grace, and *defend* grace!



REFLECTIONS FROM PRCA100

compiled by **PROF. BRIAN HUIZINGA**

Below you will find responses from various individuals and couples as they reflect on what they enjoyed most about PRCA100 and what was most impactful to them. Names are omitted so that the focus is more on *what* is said rather than *who* says it. Each contributor is identified 1. as male or female (or couple), 2. by age if provided (specific ages are given for children, while for adults, categories are used: 20s, 30s, 40s and so on), and 3. home congregation. Thanks to all who submitted responses!

Female, 30s, Hudsonville PRC (MI)

As a mom of young children, my focus was for them to find their way to Bible camp, the craft cove, Lego room, pool, age-oriented games, and cafeteria. In this busy stage of life, the thing I enjoyed most was seeing them find friends and familiar faces everywhere. While they kept busy, it was wonderful to be able to talk with my friends, catch up with those I haven't seen since high school, and to many others.

What was most impactful to me was experiencing the communion of the saints on such a grand scale. It's one thing to talk about it in our local schools and churches, but to experience it with the whole denomination is a rare gift of God! It's wonderful to see families choose to take the week to come here, even traveling from across the world. Around every corner, I was able to say "hi" to someone I knew. It was an environment in which we could have meaningful conversations in person, show care for the hurting, and keep an eye out for each other's kids. I experienced an end to this spiritually uplifting week by listening to hundreds of kids sing praises to God from their little hearts to end Bible camp and then being surrounded by fellow believers singing and playing the most beautiful music together at the DeVos Place.

Couple, 50s/60s, Covenant ERC, Singapore

We enjoyed the renewed fellowship between us and

the saints in our sister church. Many ministers have come to help us in Singapore and we are thankful for them and extremely happy to see them at PRCA100. We think the unity in the faith is even more precious to us after the controversy.

One thing impactful to our souls is to see the beautiful scene of this gathering as a foretaste of our future meeting in heaven. In this celebration we see the joy when we meet each other and the underlying reason for this joy is God's faithfulness in keeping the PRCA through recent and past controversies. This reminds us that our hope in God is precious and He is our strength as we live our pilgrimage on earth.

Male, 50s, Hope (Redlands, CA)

What I enjoyed most was the music night—the crown jewel of the week—at which we were able to respond to all we saw and heard at PRCA100. I was able to sing in the mass choir words from the book of Revelation. It was a "rehearsal for heaven," as was remarked, and an unforgettable experience, yet not worthy to be compared to the glory of the heavenly choir.

Most impactful for me was that for four days I was surrounded by family—my church family, whom I trust and love, with whom I delight to speak, and about whom I have every confidence that I will see them in glory.

Females, 10 and 12, Grandville PRC (MI)

I really enjoyed Bible Camp, especially being with our small group. We learned about God's grace in the story of Daniel in the lion's den and how God took care of him. It helped me remember that God is always with us, even when things feel scary.

I enjoyed Teen Camp, on the last day in our small group we all built a paper chain to teach us how to work together. I also really enjoyed the singspiration at DeVos and that everyone was able to participate in praise, and experience God's glory as one body.

Female, 70s, Hull PRC (IA)

I enjoyed the tours, singspiration, speeches, and singing. PRCA100 was a time for refreshing, renewing old friendships and making new ones, and putting aside our hurts and troubles of the past few years or more and reflect on what we have and hold so dear. May God continue to give us grace to live what we believe and embrace it. We are so blessed. Great is His faithfulness.

Couple, 80s, Georgetown PRC (MI)

We enjoyed seeing and talking to many couples, families, and individuals, all coming together in a spirit of love and unity. We especially saw the beautiful unity of God's church when people from many other countries joined us in person or messaged us during the celebration. Throughout the week we felt a confidence that God will continue to preserve His church on earth of which we are a small part. Finally, we were impressed each day with the tremendous efforts that standing committees and volunteers put forth to make this week a memorable one for all.

We feel so blessed to have spent the week with hundreds of others, being reminded in the fellowship, the speeches, sectionals, and the music night of what a blessing it is to belong to God's church on earth. We also were reminded of how grateful we should be that our grandparents had a vital part in the beginning of our churches. The evening speeches were such a blessing to us as we were reminded repeatedly that even though we as individuals and as a denomination have many sins and shortcomings, God has blessed us in giving us the leadership of men who fought for and maintained salvation by grace alone, for God's own chosen people. We pray that God may continue to preserve His church. To God alone be the glory!

Male, 50s, Southeast PRC (MI)

I enjoyed meeting new brothers and sisters in Christ from across the U.S. and the world. The whole week was uplifting in all its aspects. I would not have appreciated the week as greatly had our denomination not gone through the trials of the past several years. In my conversations with so many, the underlying theme was a deep sense of humble gratitude for God's continued faithfulness to us as individual believers and as a denomination. The singing at Eastern Ave. and (the original) First PRC was

pure joy! I learned the great sacrifice and unbelievable work of so many individuals who have gone to glory. How God used men like Hoeksema and Ophoff to do great things is humbling. All the sectionals were beneficial in their own ways.

Female, 20s, Loveland PRC (CO)

I enjoyed spending time with fellow believers, but especially the two bus tours of historic sights. Both tours provided helpful and interesting information about the history of our churches and allowed me to see some of the significant places in person, bringing our history home to me. It was amazing to see God's hand in all the details bringing us to where we are today.

This event was a huge encouragement to me in my spiritual walk and love for the church. I was often moved to tears when a group of us were singing to God together, whether at the evening speeches, inside the historic church buildings, or at the night of music. Each time I was overwhelmed by God's goodness to us His children. It was a blessing to have fellow saints from many areas of the world there, and I was thankful for the event's focus of praising God for His grace to us. Praising Him together with so many saints (really only a small number of God's people) renewed my longing for heaven, where all the elect will praise God in His presence perfectly unified, not separated any longer by time, distance, sin, or difference. I was also reminded of my love for God's people and renewed in my desire to serve them as God gives me opportunity, to the glory of His name.

Male, 13, Wingham PRC (Ontario, Canada)

I really enjoyed exploring, learning, and playing games and stuff. It was fun to just explore the Calvin campus, as it is a huge property. I think it is a great place for a denomination-wide celebration. I liked going on the bus tour and seeing historic sites, as well as listening to the speeches on grace. And, of course, I had fun doing things with friends, like sports and outdoor games.

I learned about things that have happened in the PRC's history, especially on the bus tour. During the speeches, I learned many different aspects of the reality of grace, but I especially can remember the difference between particular and common grace. I didn't know of the belief that even unbelievers can receive grace through daily items they receive.

Couple, 30s, Cornerstone PRC (Dyer, IN)

What we enjoyed most about PRCA100 could be summed up in one word: fellowship. Whether we were meeting saints we had never met before or connecting with familiar faces once again, it was a time of sweet fellowship with God's people. Many great memories were made during the week through activities, speeches, sectionals, and games. However, looking back, we were deeply moved by the night of music. It was indeed a small preview of eternity with God, and it left our hearts desiring more.

Male, 60s, Grace PRC (MI)

What I enjoyed most were the sectionals and wished I could have gone to more. I really enjoyed the rich history of "Voices from the Past" (both eras), and "1953: History and Doctrine of the Covenant." They showed the abundant grace God has bestowed on our denomination through the many decades of our existence. "A Century of Numbers" was quite insightful as to how vacancies and the lack of ministers can impact the growth of our denomination. This just reiterates the need for young men in our seminary.

The most impactful and moving event had to be the singspiration at DeVos. Singing praises to God with fellow saints surrounded by friends and family was amazing. Enjoying beautiful music from the orchestra was great. To God be the glory!

Couple, seniors, Loveland PRC (CO)

It was very enjoyable for us to gather with beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord. Renewing and enjoying old friendships and meeting other saints even from around the world. What a testimony to God's faithfulness, calling His people from every nation, tribe, and tongue. The communion of the saints was uplifting and encouraging.

To us the 100th anniversary was very timely considering the troubles and trials of the past few years in the denomination. Gathering for devotions each morning was a wonderful way to start each day. The sectionals were informative and enjoyable. The speeches, Teaching Grace, Living Grace, and Defending Grace, were very appropriate and edifying. The theme text, Ephesians 2:8-9 was very moving and beneficial. Exactly what we need to hear as God's people! What

a joy it was singing with a loud voice, to the Lord, with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. The Grand Rapids tour was very interesting and informative. Prof. D. Engelsma's speech was a highlight along with the beautiful singing in both churches.

The final night at DeVos with 2,500 saints singing glorious praises to God was the end to a fabulous and edifying week. Along with the orchestra and choir, it was spiritually overwhelming. A small picture of what heaven will be. All praise and glory to God!

Male, 12, Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD)

I liked Teen Camp because I got to meet new people and make some friends. We got to make some arts and crafts. We also got to learn more about God's grace. I also liked playing in the Lego room. On the first day of Teen Camp we learned about the beauty, power, and undeserved love that comes from God's grace. During the evening speeches I learned more about God continuing to bestow His grace upon the PRCA. We also saw a double rainbow outside after the last speech. This was a great visual reminder of God's faithfulness.

Female, 30s, Hope PRC (Redlands, CA)

Here are my 3 main joys from the week.

1. Fellowship. Rekindling friendships from even 10+ years ago, encouragement in our Christian walk, and even sharing pain from current situations that pressure the church. It was remarkable that nearly every conversation ended in a verbal confession that God sees us and all is in His providential care. Those conversations renewed my spirit!

2. Growth. Each day we were able to attend sectionals and speeches. The topics were educational but also thought-provoking so that my husband and I took the time to deeply assess our life and our priorities. Is our family living the way we know it should, and what can we implement going forward to live more aware of the grace we have been shown?

3. Praise. So many people and so much singing, incredible!

But I was most moved by something I didn't expect—the little video clips from saints around the world. They all have endured incredible burdens, but I saw clearly that when viewed through the lens of God's grace, the burden is light! It's a joy and honor to bear.

The saints had a beautiful testimony and expressed zeal for God, and an appreciation for the Reformed faith. Those letters and videos overwhelmed me in the best way, and it was there that I was able to confess from the heart that this recent path for our church is good for His people. How grateful I am to be drawn into God's family and maintained here in the PRCA!

Male, Provident PRC, the Philippines

Being part of the 100th anniversary of the PRCA was one of those experiences that quietly stays with me. It wasn't just about attending services or meeting people, it was something deeper. I came away feeling thankful, moved, and reminded of what really matters. The theme was "Teaching Grace, Living Grace, and Defending Grace." That wasn't just a slogan. I saw it in the preaching, in conversations, and even in the quiet ways the brethren served one another.

What struck me most is that this whole celebration happened only because of God's grace. Without it, none of it would exist. We didn't come together because we're strong or deserving, but because our God is faithful and we can only pray that He continues to show grace to us in Christ.

I met a lot of people. I've forgotten most of their names, but I remember the kindness and warmth. I know we'll meet again, if not here, then one day when our Savior returns.

Couple, 80s, Crete PRC (IL)

PRCA100 was very well organized. The tours were very informative and we especially liked the Wednesday tour and seeing where our heritage started. We thought it was very special how each day was finished with the gathering of people to hear the history of our churches. We liked how it was brought out, not with boasting or pride, that the Lord has preserved us 100 years. We liked the history given in the sectional from 1924-1953-2024. The last night was awesome—songs by the orchestra, the choir, and audience singing all to the glory of God. Our hope is that our denomination never loses sight of the Psalter because it speaks directly to us as a comfort when we are dealing with sickness and our

sins. We were thankful we could attend the celebration. The accommodations and food were also great.

Couple, 30s, Peace PRC (Dyer, IN)

This week was one to remember. Looking back, there are so many highlights that it is hard to pick just one. They include meeting, fellowshiping, and getting to know both new and old believers of the same faith, attending the encouraging and educational morning discussion groups, hearing our little boys sing praises to our God with several hundred other children, being reminded of God's faithfulness to our churches in the nighttime speeches, and being able to attend in person the surreal experience of worshiping and praising our God through the gift of music with DeVos filled to the max. We ended the week filled with thankfulness for God's saving and preserving grace shown to us and our denomination. We left feeling spiritually renewed and encouraged to be *in the word* and in our calling to "train up our children in the way that they should go." What a blessing the week was for our spiritual growth!

Male, 40s, Hope PRC (Redlands, CA)

I enjoyed the tours of Eastern Ave. CRC and the old First Church as well as rekindling so many old friendships and making new ones.

Attending PRCA100, I have gained a renewed zeal and joy to glorify our great God. So often we are bogged down in the day to day and tend to focus on ourselves or the problems and trials that we face either individually or as churches. To take a step back and see God's covenant faithfulness so clearly displayed over the past 100 years in the generations that were in attendance, in remembering our history, in the encouragement that comes with talking, worshiping, and singing praises to God with thousands of like-minded believers is almost too much to put into words. Even now it's hard to describe what a great week it was without saying, it was awesome. Not because we did something so special (it was indeed special and many gave a tremendous amount to make it a reality), but because we could see God's wonderful work on display in His people. By His grace we can press on with confidence knowing that He will continue to preserve us His covenant people.







A STORY TOLD THROUGH A CENTURY OF NUMBERS

KYLE KOOIENGA

INTRODUCTION

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, it is a fitting time to pause and reflect on where we have come from and where we are going. One way to do this is through the lens of data. By examining the annual yearbook statistics and synodical records, we can uncover meaningful trends that reveal not only our growth and challenges but also the Lord's faithfulness throughout the decades.

The PRCA yearbooks record basic statistics for each congregation: church name, minister, number of families, catechism enrollment, number of office-bearers (recently broken out by elders and deacons), total members, and communicant members. This data, taken together, provides insight into broader denominational trends.

Earlier records (1924–1946) are more difficult to obtain, as synod meetings began in the 1940s and yearbook publication began in 1947. Comprehensive analysis of those early years would require reviewing original church membership records, so this review focuses on the data from 1947 onward.

HISTORICAL MEMBERSHIP TRENDS

The Impact of Controversy

Church controversies have left deep marks on our history, often reflected starkly in the numbers. The split in 1953 and the recent controversies are reflected very differently in overall membership trends.

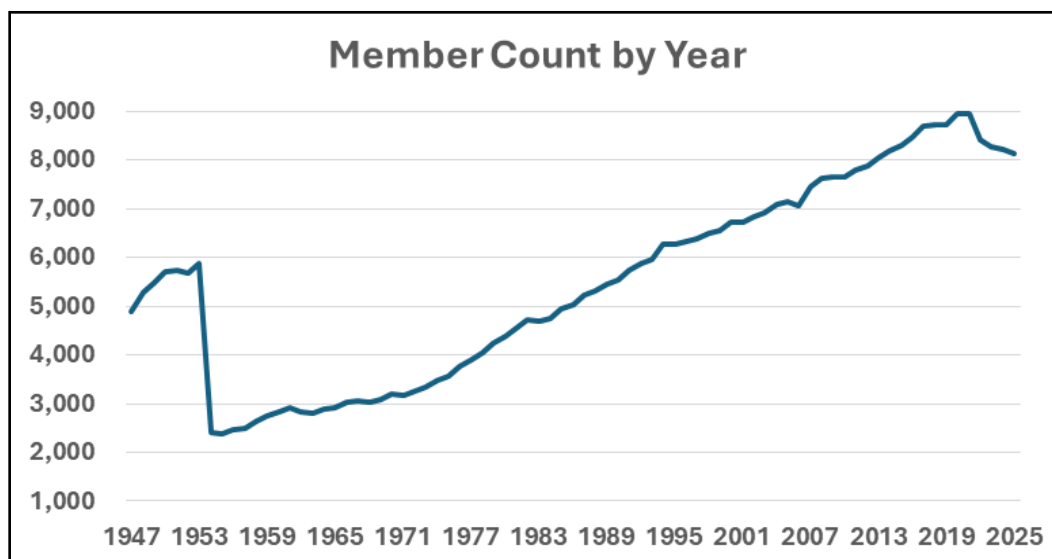
The most dramatic example came in 1954, following the split of 1953, when the denomination saw a one-time significant drop in churches, ministers, and members. The PRCA lost 59% of its members. It

took nearly 40 years to return to pre-1954 membership levels.

More recently, the controversies and struggles beginning around 2018 have produced the first sustained membership decline since the 1950s. The PRCA reached its peak membership of 8,955 members in 2020, but that number has declined each year for the past five years. Total membership from 2020-2025 have seen a reversal in the average annual growth rates, which now show average annual decline rates of 1.9% for those years.

Sources of Growth

Average annual growth rates from 1954-2020 were 1.9%. Where has past growth come from? Primarily from internal growth within families. While domestic missions have played a role, they have not been the main engine of expansion. In this way, covenantal



families remain the foundation of the denomination's development.

Family Size and Demographic Shifts

God's covenant promise is to us, our children, and

our children's children (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39). As we look ahead, one question arises naturally: Can we expect this pattern of internal growth to continue? Anecdotally, it seems that family sizes are smaller now than they were a generation ago. The data confirms this trend.

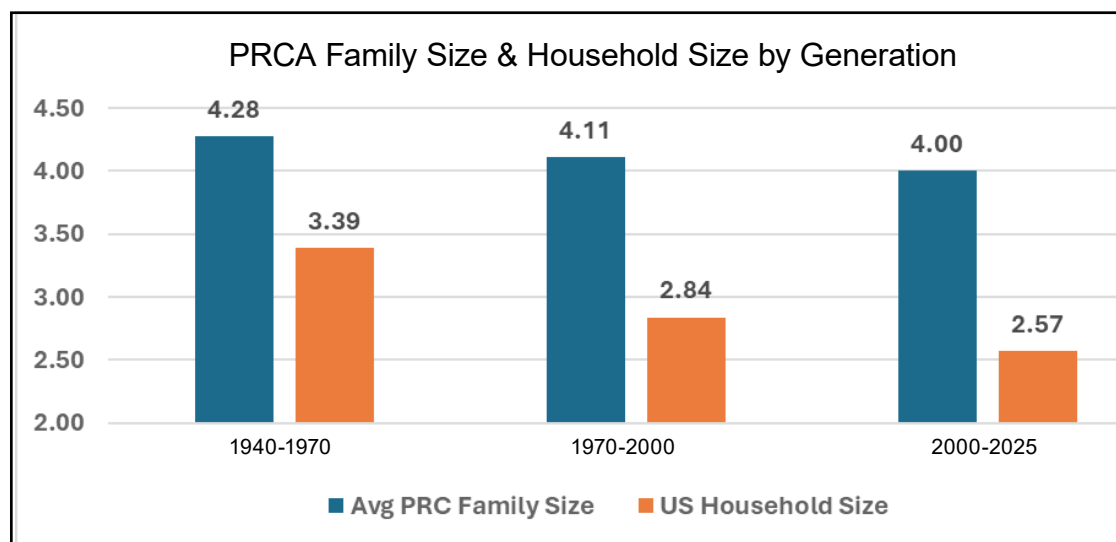
Catechism Enrollment

To explore further, we can examine catechism enrollment as a percentage of total membership. This gives us a helpful proxy for the relative age of denomination membership.

From 1947 through 1970, over 30% of the total membership was of catechism age. That number

declined to around 28% through the 1980s and 1990s, and in the 2000–2025 period, it has dropped to approximately 25%.

Some of these changes may be attributed to increased life expectancy. However, U.S. life expectancy today is about 76 years—roughly the same as in



By calculating a rough average family size (total members divided by number of families), we see a noticeable generational step down in each 30-year period. Compared with national trends from the U.S. Census Bureau, PRCA family size has held up significantly better, but the direction is the same. U.S. household size has dropped dramatically; our family size declines are slower but still measurable. These trends also seem to be accelerating in more recent years. In the last four years the average PRCA family size dropped to 3.93. The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) recently published a report in which the fertility rate in the U.S. dropped to an all-time low in 2024 with 1.599 children being born per woman.

While a direct comparison between U.S. households and PRCA family size is not an apples-to-apples comparison (as PRCA family count is defined differently), the broader trend is clear. In today's society, having four or more children is increasingly rare. Are we slowly mirroring broader cultural shifts (1 John 2:15)?

the 1990s—so that factor alone does not explain the recent steeper decline. The data suggests that families may be starting later, having fewer children, or both.

This raises difficult but necessary questions. Are economic pressures delaying marriage and childbearing? Has the pursuit of dual income affected how families grow? While these questions require deeper study, the scriptural mandate remains unchanged: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen. 1:28). As a denomination, are we faithfully responding to that calling?

Church Vacancies and Ministerial Needs

Growth also comes from the preaching of the Word and the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the good news of the gospel (Matt. 28:18-20).

Anyone engaged in church life is aware of the urgent need for more ministers. But historical data shows that the current shortage is not just concerning, it is almost unprecedented.

In 2023, 31% of our total membership was in churches without a minister. That number has improved to around 25%, but it remains historically high.

Data suggests that vacancies extending beyond two

years often correlate with membership decline. While causation cannot be definitively claimed, the correlation is notable. For example, Hudsonville PRC, now over five years of vacancy, has experienced a 26% decrease in total membership during that time.

Vacant churches can typically maintain stability in total membership for a year or two, but prolonged vacancies appear to affect member retention and stability.

We do well to remind ourselves that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few (Matt. 9:37-38). Continue to pray for ministers, to encourage men to spend time considering if the Lord is calling them to this work. We see the truth of that looking back. Since 1947, there has only been two years, 1949 and 1983 without any church vacancies.

The church vacancy data not only affects membership counts. Ministers themselves feel these effects. Our ministers are moving more often. The last 4 years (2022-2025) show the average tenure of a minister at their current church is only 3.95 years. This is at near historic lows, although the early 1980s were slightly lower.

Communicant Membership

Another area of interest is the percentage of communicant members within the total adult membership. This figure has remained relatively steady over the 80 years of data available, typically hovering in the high 70% range.

There is no strong evidence of a growing gap between adult non-communicant members and those

who have made confession of faith. This consistency is encouraging and reflects ongoing commitment to public profession and church membership (Matt. 10:32-33).

Officebearer Trends

Another area that can be looked at is the number of officebearers over the years. We see similar results to the communicant member trends in that it has held relatively steady over the denomination's history to around 27-28 members per officebearers (see chart below).

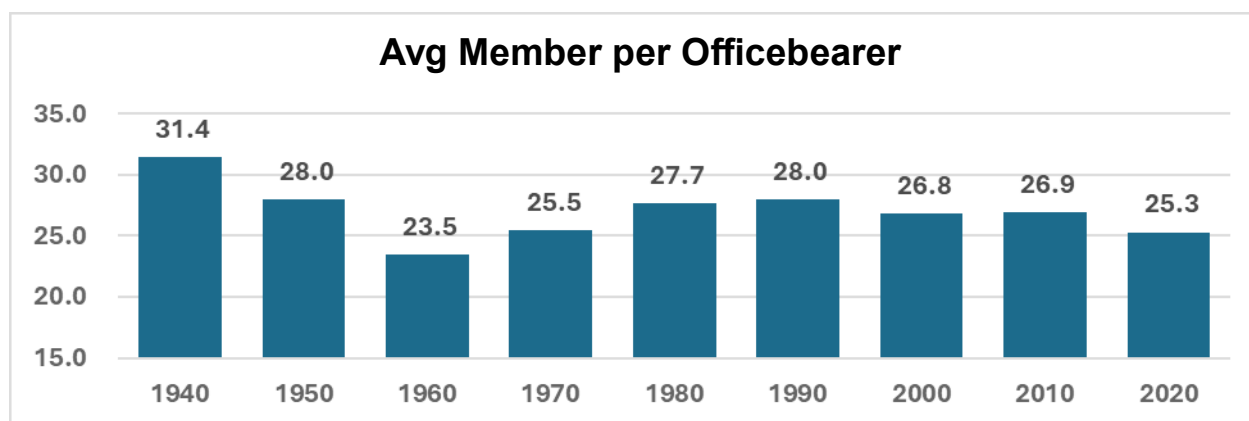
The recent decline in the average member per officebearer can be attributed to total officebearer count remaining relatively constant during a period of total membership decline.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the data from the past 80 years provides a window into the historical development of the PRCA. While the statistics show many signs of God's sustaining grace by continued growth through families and stable confession of faith rates, they also raise sobering questions about our future.

Are we passing the faith on to the next generation with the same zeal? Are cultural influences slowly shaping our behavior, priorities, and family life? What else can we do proactively to address the ministerial shortage?

The Lord has preserved our churches for a century. May we continue to rely wholly on His grace as we look forward with humility and hope.



PRCA MINISTERS 1925-2025

PROF. DOUGLAS KUIPER

And he gave some...pastors and teachers—Ephesians 4:11

This article recounts the gift of 111 pastors, soon to be 112, that God gave the Protestant Reformed Churches of America (PRCA) over the last century. Of those 111, 31 are still active in the ministry, and 14 are retired.

God who gives, also takes away (Job 1:21). Of the 111, He took away 21 in death, 12 by deposition from office, 3 by leaving the ministry for secular vocation, and 30 who left the PRCA for various reasons. Some of the latter continued in the ministry in other denominations, and some did not.

The article's primary goal is historical and informative: to put names with faces, and present facts. All pictures will correspond to names in bold font, and will follow left-to-right in the order that they were named.

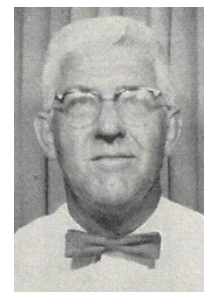
1924-1953

The first three ministers were those whom the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) deposed: **Henry Danhof**, **Herman Hoeksema**, and **George Ophoff**. In 1925 the combined consistories approved **Benjamin Danhof's** ordination to the ministry. These are four of six ministers who have the distinction of never having attended the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

In 1926 the two Danhofs left the PRCA. By 1927 the denomination numbered ten churches but had only two ministers. That year **William Verhil** and **Gerrit Vos** entered the ministry and served western churches; two years later these men returned to West Michigan to finish seminary while remaining in the pastorate. These are the only two PRCA ministers who were ordained before they graduated.



Six more men graduated in 1929: Andrew Cammenga, John DeJong, **Cornelius Hanko**, Bernard Kok, Richard Veldman, and Leonard Vermeer. They were joined in 1932 by Peter DeBoer, Martin Gritters, **Henry Kuiper**, John VanderBreggen, and **Herman Veldman**. Now the eighteen churches had fifteen ministers.



And the Lord added more! **George Lubbers** was ordained in 1934, J. G. Kooistra and Andrew Petter in 1935, **Hubert DeWolf** and **Marinus Schipper** in 1936, and John Blankespoor, Lambert Doezeema, and Peter Vis in 1939 (see next page for pictures).

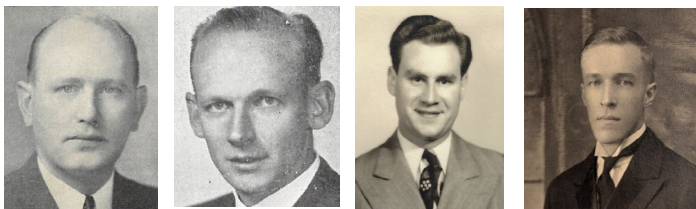




The next decade saw the ordination of John Heys (1940), Sebastian Cammenga and Walter Hofman (1943), James VanWeelden (1944), James Howerzyl (1946), and Homer Hoeksema, Edward Knott, and Gerald VandenBerg (1947). These, and all seminary graduates since, were examined by the *synod* of the PRCA; previously the churches had only one classis, and either it or the Theological School Committee performed the examinations.

But the 1940s also saw the first instances, since the Danhofs left, of God taking away. J. G. Kooistra left the denomination in 1941, William Verhil died of a heart attack in 1943, and John VanderBreggen was deposed in 1945.

During these years, several men served as missionaries. **Bernard Kok** began that work in 1936, eventually leading to the organization of Edgerton, MN PRC; **Walter Hofman** and **Edward Knott** began in 1947, and **Andrew Cammenga** in 1950. The latter three labored especially among the Dutch post-WW II immigrants, many of them from the Liberated (Klaas Schilder) churches of the Netherlands.



Three men received advanced training after seminary during these years. **Lambert Doezeema** (Herman Hoeksema's son-in-law) was the only Protestant Reformed minister to graduate from the Free University in Amsterdam, while both **John Heys** and **Homer Hoeksema** did post-graduate work in the USA for one or two years. When Synod 1949 called a third professor to serve full time in the seminary and help

develop a pre-seminary curriculum, it called Doezeema first and **Peter DeBoer** as his alternate; both declined, and the idea of a third professor was dropped until the late 1960s.



Three more unique features of the history of ministers through 1953 are worth noting. First, during this era four men were declared candidates but did not receive calls. Two of them, John Griffioen (1927) and John Piersma (1943) left the PRCA soon after their graduation and pursued the ministry in other denominations. And two others, Ed Borst (1936) and Marvin Koerner (1953), remained in the PRCA for the time being but never received calls, by which God and the churches made clear that these men were not, in fact, called to the work of the ministry.

The second is the labor of an ordained minister who also never received a call in the PRCA. **Dirk Jonker** was ordained in the CRC in 1918 and deposed in 1926 for his sympathy for the PRCA. The PRCA received him as a member, honored his ministerial credentials, and declared him eligible for a call in the PRCA. Though he never received a call, he kept busy providing pulpit supply, serving as stated clerk of the Classis and Synod of the PRCA, and serving on various denominational committees.



Finally, one PRC minister was unjustly deposed in 1951. Herman Veldman served the church in Hamilton, ON, for about a year before that church's consistory, ardently supportive of the Liberated churches, deposed him. The consistory did not follow due process, and Classis East had not given its advice to depose; in fact, it had rejected a request from Hamilton to release Veldman from its service. The PRCA did not honor the deposition, and Hamilton left the denomination.

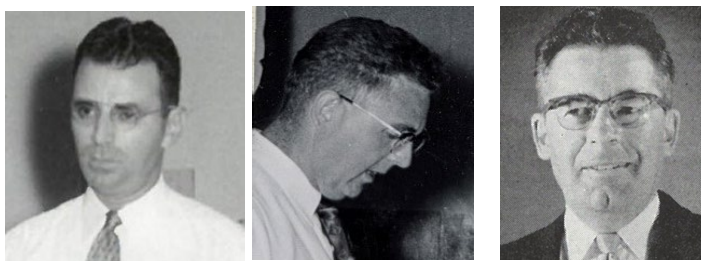
1953-1962

The largest withdrawal of PRCA ministers took place

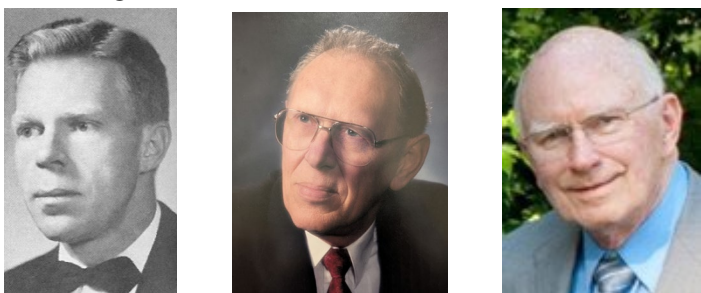
in the decade beginning with 1953, in connection with the controversy regarding conditions in the covenant.

The bleeding began with the deposition of Hubert DeWolf (First PRC), Bernard Kok (Holland), and John Blankespoor (Second), all ministers in Classis East, and with the advice of the Classis. Withdrawing from the PRCA to join these three and form the Orthodox Protestant Reformed Churches were Andrew Cammenga (missionary) and Edward Knott (Kalamazoo) in Classis East, and the following in Classis West: Sebastian Cammenga (Rock Valley), Peter DeBoer (Edgerton), John DeJong (Hull), Lambert Doezenia (Bellflower), Martin Gritters (Pella), Walter Hofman (Orange City), James Howerzyl (Oskaloosa), Andrew Petter (without a charge since 1951, when Chatham, ON withdrew), James VanWeelden (Sioux City), Leonard Vermeer (Redlands), and Peter Vis (Manhattan). Sixteen ministers left; twelve remained.

Yet the Lord who took away also added. In 1954 Emanuel Emanuel and James McCollam were added to the ministry, and in 1955 Robert Harbach. These had been ordained already in the Reformed Episcopal Church, had heard about the PRCA, went to our seminary for further instruction, and pastored PRCA congregations.



Two other students for the ministry during 1953 remained faithful and soon entered the ministry—George Lanting in 1953 and Herman Hanko in 1955. These were followed by Gise VanBaren and Bernard Woudenberg (1956), Alvin Mulder (1957), and Jason Kortering (1960).

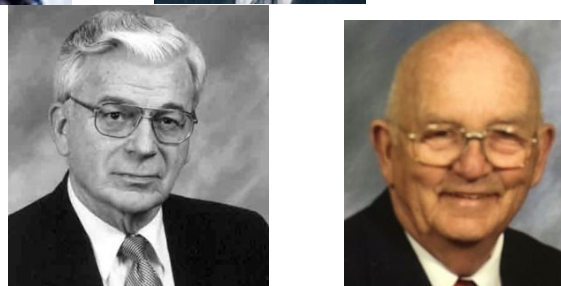


Again, the Lord who gave, took away. Emanuel Emanuel and James McCollam left the PRCA for the United Presbyterian Church in 1959, and Alvin Mulder and Richard Veldman for the CRC in 1962, about the time that the ministers in the Orthodox Protestant Reformed Churches were also leaving. Several ministers—at least Peter De Boer, Ed Knott, and Richard Veldman—would later leave the CRC for the United Reformed Churches.

1962-1990

Only one man who entered the ministry during this era and stayed in the PRCA is still active in the ministry: **Russell Dykstra**. The rest are dead or retired.

In the 1960s, in addition to Jason Kortering, the Lord added David Engelsma (1963), Robert Decker (1965), Dale Kuiper (1967) and Richard Moore (1968).



Sixteen men were added in the 1970s, and eight in the 1980s. These were decades of much growth. No men were deposed from the ministry, only two left the PRCA ministry to labor in other churches (Gerald VandenBerg and Jon Smith), and one (Mark Hoeksema) was released from the ministry to labor in a secular vocation. But the old guard was retiring, and even dying: Henry Kuiper died in 1961, George Ophoff in 1962, Herman Hoeksema in 1965, Gerrit Vos in 1968, Marinus Schipper in 1985, and Homer Hoeksema in 1989. These were the first deaths of active PRC ministers since Verhil's death in 1943.

That leads to this observation: of 111 men whom the Lord has given us in the last century, only three died before the age of 70. William Verhil was 51, Henry Kuiper was 56, and Homer Hoeksema was 69. The Lord has been pleased to take many men from PRCA ministry on account of gross sin, desertion of office, and other factors, but most who have stayed faithful to the PRCA have served thirty-five or more years in the active ministry. For this we can be thankful. Keep praying for your pastor, that he have both spiritual *and* physical endurance for the work of the ministry for many years!

1990-PRESENT

Most of our active ministers joined the ministry in this era. Eleven ministers were ordained in the 1990s; eleven more in the 2000s; fifteen in the 2010s; and two in the 2020s, with a third soon to be added, God willing.

In this era, five men joined in unusual ways. Two men (sharing a distinction with the first four ministers of the PRCA) never graduated from our theological seminary. **Peter Breen** was ordained in the RCA in 1952 and **Audred Spriensma** in the CRC in 1981. Spriensma joined the PRCA in 1992 and Breen in 1993, both by a *colloquium doctum*—a classical examination similar to that of a candidate, with a view to permitting a man

to receive a call in the PRCA. Breen holds a second distinction with Dirk Jonker and Angus Stewart: these were ordained ministers whose credentials were held in the PRCA, but they never actively pastored a PRC congregation. In Breen's case, the reason is that he entered the PRCA as a retired minister.

Three other men graduated from our seminary with a view to serving sister churches of the PRCA, and at some point in their ministry accepted calls extended by PRCA congregations. Jaikishin Mahtani left Singapore to pastor in Houston, TX in 1993, and Martyn McGeown left Northern Ireland to pastor Providence, Hudsonville, MI in 2021. Angus Stewart took the call to the Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland in 2001. When the congregation disbanded in 2002, Hudsonville PRC called him to be a missionary to help the remnant in Northern Ireland grow and reorganize. When it did reorganize, Stewart became its pastor again.

This era saw two men released from the ministry for secular vocation (Art. 12), eight men deposed, and eight more men withdraw from the PRCA while serving as ministers. Advanced to glorious heavenly service were Robert Harbach (1996), Herman Veldman (1997), John Heys (1998), George Lubbers (2001), George Lanting (2004), Cornelius Hanko (2005), Dale Kuiper (2014), Peter Breen (2015), Wayne Bekkering (2018), Gise VanBaren (2019), Jason Kortering (2020), Bernard Woudenberg (2020), Robert Decker (2021), and Herman Hanko (2024).

Today we have 31 active ministers (this number includes Angus Stewart, but not the ministers of our other sister churches, because only Stewart was once a PRCA minister).

We also have fourteen retired ministers. Four of them are unable to preach any longer: **Arie den Hartog**, **David Engelsma**, **Steven Houck**, and **Rodney Miersma**.



Two of them do the work of the ministry as much

as they can, but are limited in their ability: **Thomas Miersma** and **James Slopsema**.



As of today, eight others have the strength to labor more actively in their retirement. These are **Wilbur Bruinsma**, **Ronald Cammenga**, **Michael DeVries**, **Carl Haak**, **Ronald Hanko**, **Steven Key**, **Kenneth Koole**, and **Audred Spriensma**.



CONCLUSION AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Some matters of interest cannot be covered in this article. This includes specialized ministries: which men served as domestic or foreign missionaries or chaplains,

and when and where; which men served as professors; and which men declined the call to be professor (there have been nine declines in the history of the PRCA, and ten acceptances, not including the original instructors, Herman Hoeksema and George Ophoff).

Another matter of interest that cannot be covered in detail is how many of these 111 were or are related to each other, and in what way. That subject could take another article.

The article's primary goal is historical, but the facts related should lead us to prayer.

First, we can thank God for the men He has given us. Whether they served many years or few, and whether their gifts were greater or lesser, and whether they were more or less prominent, each was and is a gift. He “*gave* some...pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).

Second, let us pray that God add *many* men to the soon-to-be-112 men that He has given us. We need many more Reformed, committed men who love the church of Christ, who will endure hardship, and who will devote themselves full time to the cause of Christ's church.

Third, let us pray that our current ministers remain faithful in doctrine and in walk and, if God wills, serve the PRCA for many years. Of the 111 men God has given us, 41% left PRCA ministry for one reason or another before they retired, and three died before they were of retirement age. God can take His gifts away entirely, or remove them to other spheres of labor in His church. We ministers must remember this, and pray for ourselves and our colleagues as well.

Picture of a PR Seminary class in the basement of First PRC, taken from the 25th Anniversary booklet (c. 1950), Pictured, front row (l-r): J. Hofman, M. Koerner; middle row: G. Lanting, H. Hanko, J. Kok; back row: B. Woudenberg, H. Mensch.



RECOLLECTION OF THE PRC IN 1953

MR. GORDON VINK

In the spring of 1953, I was 8 years old, going on 9.

My dad was in the consistory of First Protestant Reformed Church (Grand Rapids, MI).

I remember many bits and pieces of events, too many to mention them all. The following is a dialogue corresponding to pictures.

Churches in the Grand Rapids area in 1953 looked very different from today. In alphabetical order:



Creston PRC located on Leonard and Lafayette (disbanded in 1962).

First PRC located on Fuller Ave. and Franklin.



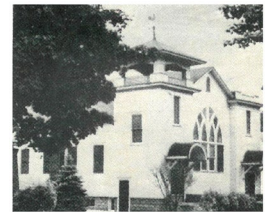
Fourth PRC located on Kalamazoo Ave. (dedicated in the spring of 1953).

Hope PRC located on Wilson Ave.



Hudsonville PRC located on School St.

Second PRC located on Ellen St.

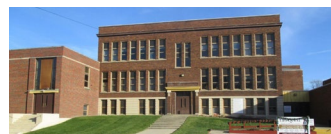


Christian Reformed Schools most used in SE Grand Rapids during the 1950s:

Baldwin School located on Fuller Ave. near Fulton

Baxter School located on Baxter and Bemis near Fuller Ave.

Oakdale School located between Neland and Alto near Kalamazoo Ave. and Hall.



Protestant Reformed Schools:



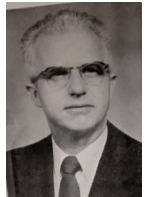
Adams St. PR School located on Adams St.

Hope PR School located on Wilson Ave.



Pre-1953 Consistory, First PRC

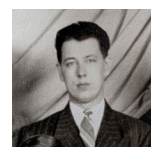
Rev. H. De Wolf—Quoting from Hope PRC's book "A Spiritual House Preserved" "Rev. DeWolf was very much a likeable man. His sermons were appreciated in Hope." The same applied at First PRC. I remembered him saying, "Let brotherly love prevail" and "Let's all get along, come on over." And 2/3s of First PRC congregation did so.



Rev. George Ophoff, Rev. Herman Hoeksema, Rev. Cornelius Hanko (pastors and elder at First PRC).



John Flikkema (r) and George Vink (l). The contention between H. DeWolf and H. Hoeksema was so great that it became



necessary to have a liaison between the two ministers. So my father, George Vink, was partner with John Flikkema as liaisons representing Hoeksema. My father died in 1963, leaving my mother, Katherine, a widow.

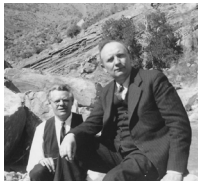
She married John Flikkema in 1968. So these two partners were my father and John Flikkema who later became my step-father.

First PRC Consistory in 1953—16 elders, 10 deacons, Rev. C. Hanko absent.



Klaas Schilder

Dr. Klaas Schilder was a theologian in the Netherlands who made two extensive lecture tours in the USA during the 1930s and 1940s.



This photo is of Schilder with Rev. G. Vos in the background. The western background indicates that much of Schilder's lectures took place in the west.

He objected to the doctrine of common grace and therefore had a friendship with Rev. H. Hoeksema. However, Schilder had a different view of the covenant than what was being taught in the PRC. Schilder viewed God's covenant as a contract or agreement that God makes at baptism with all children of believers. He said God promises salvation to all baptized children. But in order to receive the promised salvation, he said there is a condition of faith that the child must later meet: that is believe on Jesus Christ. The children must meet the condition or be condemned. Hoeksema objected to the idea of conditions as Arminianism applied to the covenant.

Rev. Hoeksema, Rev. Ophoff, and Rev. Vos developed a mutual opinion that we needed to distance ourselves from Schilder and his teachings; however, many of our ministers were not inclined to do so. Now the seeds were sown for the coming split of 1953.

The Schism

After WWII many Dutch immigrants came to the USA and Canada. They were advised by Schilder to join the PRC. However, we were faced with the question whether to allow Schilder's view of the covenant or to reject it. Many PRC ministers and members favored Schilder's point of view. In 1951 our synod drew up and adopted the Declaration of Principles, which maintained the truth that God's promise of salvation is not a general, conditional promise to all baptized children. The promise is not general but specific. It is particular to the elect children of believers, who show the fruit of their election by believing on Jesus Christ. This was a rejection of Schilder's covenant view. It also was in harmony with the view taught in our churches from the beginning that God's covenant and its promises are only for the elect in Jesus Christ. The Declaration of Principles was our answer to the followers of Schilder. At first, the Declaration of Principles had tacit approval denomination wide. But by May of 1953, the *Standard Bearer* posted a long list of our churches, mainly Classis West, objecting to it.

Many PRC ministers and members made the claim that we were building our walls too high. There should be room in our churches for Schilder's covenant view. This led to two sermons that Rev. H. DeWolf, a pastor at First PRC, preached in which he made statements that were contrary to the Declaration of Principles and supported Schilder's view of the covenant. In 1953 First PRC with the advice of Classis East suspended Rev. DeWolf for his statements. This resulted in a devastating split in the PRC in which we lost the majority of our ministers and churches.

~~~~~  
**Steps**—Consistory meetings were so contentious, that my dad wondered if a deputy sheriff might be seated in the front of the sanctuary. I ran up the steps as fast as I could go to check and see, but all was peaceful, with no sheriff deputy present.



**Utility pole**—At 12:00 midnight, or thereafter, the consistory would let out and walk across to the pole where a group of men were standing under the street light waiting for any news they could get as to what happened at the consistory meeting.

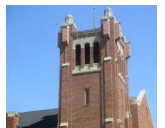


Then my dad would walk across the street to our 1947 Chevy.



In order to sooth his jangled nerves, he liked to turn on the radio to hear some nice music. But the radio thieves stole the radio. So many radios were needed to be replaced at the time that the waiting period for a new radio installation was one year. Used car dealers at the time sold their cars without a radio but with a certificate to be redeemed in one year.

**Bell tower**—The bell tower was a wonderful place to go, especially in the winter when snow is good packing for snowballs. You could throw snowballs at cars, people, or even dogs. When you hit a dog, he did not know where the snowball came from, so he blamed the person next to him.



~~~~~  
In the spring of 1953 Rev. Hoeksema and his 8 elders held a clandestine meeting in this living room. Rev. G. Ophoff and Rev. C. Hanko were not present because they were advisors and not voting consistory members.



The agenda to vote on was the question: "Shall we leave?" meaning shall we leave off from meeting at our public worship service at the church on Fuller and Franklin and meet elsewhere. A unanimous "yes" vote followed. This was a contingency plan meeting taking a straw vote with no immediate action to be taken. I know this because my brother and I were told to stay in the basement and keep quiet. However, we eavesdropped! I later verified this meeting when I talked to a widow of an elder who was there. She remembered this meeting well.

Meanwhile, concurrently DeWolf held his clandestine meeting at an undisclosed location. There he initiated his action plan. His phase 1: Hold a congregational meeting to vote for an additional elder. The elders were divided 8 to 8, hopelessly deadlocked. Rev. DeWolf's brother-in-law Ade Vermeer, was put up for a candidate.

Since the DeWolf group had a 2/3 majority of voters, Ade Vermeer was an automatic shoe-in. Now the new vote was 9-8, DeWolf. Wasting no time with his new majority, he activated phase 2: gather up all of the keys to the locks in the church.

The last outstanding key was held by seminarian Hanko and his wife Wilma. The DeWolf committee, wishing to obtain the last key, went to the residence of seminarian Herman Hanko, finding him not home at the time.

Wilma was home, but when asked to hand over the key, she refused to surrender the key to the DeWolf committee.

So DeWolf activated phase 3: Change all of the locks in the church.

The key does not fit. Rev. Hoeksema has been accused of being schismatic in that he walked out. He did not walk out. He was locked out.

~~~~~

There was no need for an emergency meeting; the contingency meeting already took place at the Vink home.

On Sunday, June 28, 1953, Hoeksema and his followers met for public worship services at Grand Rapids Christian High Chapel located on Madison Ave. at Franklin. We met there for just short of three years.

What follows are some of the things that happened while worshipping at the Grand Rapids Christian High chapel.

The two flags, USA and State of Michigan were placed one on each side of the lectern pulpit. Hoeksema did not like to have preaching and politics together. He instructed the consistory, during the public worship service, to remove the flags and place them in the hallway.



Grand Rapids Christian High found out about it, and informed us we were renting the chapel with everything in place, including the flags. I asked why a man was always standing in the hallway. I was told "He's the flag watcher. He keeps a sharp vigil on the flags so no one removes them from the platform."

While DeWolf kept First Church locked up, many things were inside of the church building.

Although the *Standard Bearer* archive and work room were inside of the church building, we could get by temporarily. The hero who maintained the *Standard Bearer* was Henry "Bub" VanderWal, who collected articles, sent them to the printer, and mailed the *Standard Bearer* out on the first and fifteenth of the month.

While the Reformed Witness Hour was not inside the church building until later on, another hero, Ed Kooienga, was the "tech" person who made sure the Reformed Witness Hour continued to broadcast throughout the mid 1950s and beyond.

The Protestant Reformed Seminary was entirely contained within the church basement. With permission from DeWolf, the seminary had to be packed up, removed, and unloaded into Fourth PRC basement.

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What happened to Adams Street Protestant Reformed Christian School?

The DeWolf group made the false charge: Hoeksema already stole the school and now he's trying to steal the church

besides! Adams School board was entirely made up of Hoeksema supporters, therefore the DeWolf group had no basis for any claim on the school. Adams School was frequently used for almost all First Church meetings.

My dad, retired from the consistory, now was Adams School board treasurer. DeWolf families enrolled their children in Adams School for the 1953-1954 school year. Sometime in late winter or early spring of 1954, all of the DeWolf families removed their children from school on the very same day. They all went back to the Christian Reformed Schools. We had 50-50 occupancy of classroom desks. Half were occupied by Hoeksema families and half were empty.

Worst of all, many but not all of the DeWolf families left without paying any tuition for the school year. This financial situation left Adams School facing insolvency. This happened all on my dad's watch.

The school board, all with vivid memories of the depression, were determined to first protect the property. Making payments on the debt was a priority. Secondly, pay the utilities. As far as teacher's salaries go, teacher's suffered payless paydays. I verified this later on with a teacher who was there at the time, and said it was true she had payless paydays.

The solution at hand was to double up on classrooms leaving four rooms vacant. Two rooms were rented to the Lutherans as they were building a new school. Two rooms were rented to the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Now the seminary had to pack their boxes one more time and move out of Fourth PRC basement and into Adams School.

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I could tell stories about each corner of First Church, but I'll limit it to just three stories of this corner.

The cornerstone read 1926, but after the church sold, they placed mortar on it so you cannot read it.

The horizontal gray concrete slab is not what it looks like, but



is actually a cigar shelf. The first man coming up to the door would lay his cigar on the shelf near the door. Soon, cigars were lined up all the way to the end of the shelf. One Sunday a man placed his new cigar, with a colorful band, on the shelf, and coming out too late could not find his cigar. The only cigars remaining were short stogies with tooth picks through them. He said "That's OK, I'll pick up a better

one next time."

At the very corner, there was a black sign with gold lettering reading "First Protestant Reformed Church." Someone took a bucket of black paint and blacked out the whole sign. In order to "prove" that Rev. Hoeksema did it, black paint was spilled all over Hoeksema's driveway. Now I want you to know, Hoeksema did not paint with buckets of black paint. He was a landscape painter! (cf. this HH painting, see top of next page).

Rev. C. Hanko had no easy time of it in 1953. I will include



one anecdotal example. He served in Manhattan, MT during 1945-1948. When serving in First Church in 1953, he determined to return back to Manhattan so as to encourage the minority of Hoeksema supporters. Rev. Vis was the pastor at the time. Rev. Vis, a firebrand, was an adamant DeWolff supporter. He aggressively defended his territory. When C. Hanko arrived, he met stiff opposition and disappointment. Hanko later returned to make one more effort, and met with the same results.

~~~~~

How I remember the cars the ministers drove!

Rev. Hoeksema had a 1958 black Buick. When he drove up in his black Buick, it was a commanding presence. In the 1950's, he would go on vacation to Nader's Motel in Ludington, MI. Our family would rent a cabin across the street on the beach side at Mrs. Young's place. As such Rev. Hoeksema could walk across the street and down the sand dune to go swimming. I would lay on top of the dune and watch him dive through the breakers as he was a tremendous swimmer.



Rev. Ophoff, later in the 1950's, had a 1952 green Cadillac. He would go on vacation up north and attach to the car cane fishing poles, called the short. One end of the poles attached to the front bumper and all the way around the top to the rear bumper. The back seat was full of items needed for his vacation to the cottage.



Rev. Hanko had a 1950 DeSoto with a colorful stripe on the side. There was only one other car like it in Grand Rapids which was usually parked in front of a tavern. Rev. Hanko did not like this situation one bit. He often traveled to Florida on vacation.



1953-56 Court Cases

These court cases were bench trials with no jury involved (see picture of old court house). Trials dealt exclusively with church property and assets, not any doctrine. Hoeksema won the court cases. The judges would not discuss their



decisions. Although DeWolff had 2/3 majority of the congregation on his side, he lost. Nationwide, most all of the PRC court cases were awarded to the DeWolff group.

Nov. 2, 1953—*Grand Rapids Press* reports filing of a Bill of Complaint by First PRC in Circuit Court against DeWolff to turn over all property and real estate.

Dec. 16, 1953—DeWolff filed a cross-suit in Superior Court, called a Crossbill against Hoeksema.

May 25, 1954—Superior Court is in session.

Dec. 22, 1954—Superior Court rules that Hoeksema is entitled to church property and assets.

Jan. 1955—DeWolff appeals to Michigan State Supreme Court.

Mar. 1, 1956—*Grand Rapids Press* reports that Michigan State Supreme Court unanimously upheld the decree of the Superior Court.

Mar. 11, 1956—First PRC worships in their own property again.

I have a personal opinion that I cannot prove. It seems to me that the worldly judges looked at two figures: DeWolff and Hoeksema. They saw DeWolff as disingenuous. They saw Hoeksema as honest. Admittedly this is highly speculative thinking, but I cannot come up with a better reason for the decision.

DeWolff had to vacate First Church. In March of 1956, Hoeksema returned to First Church on Fuller and Franklin.

DeWolff used the old parsonage of Immanuel Reformed Church (see photo) located on Eastern and Thomas for his weekday meetings. We had a family gathering at this old parsonage, where



we found heavy earthenware plates, cups, and saucers all with "OPR" on each piece. I asked my dad "What is OPR?" He said "Orthodox Protestant Reformed."

~~~~~

DeWolff first met at Baxter Christian School, then at Calvin College. I remember my dad reading Rev. A. Petter's article in their OPR magazine stating, "Our cause is untenable." To that my dad asked, "Then why did they drag us through all this?" It seems there was no good answer. By 1961, DeWolff and the Orthodox Protestant Reformed Church disbanded, with many of the ministers joining the CRC.



First PRC Consistory, Post-1953

## CONCLUSION

Can we find *grace* during the turmoil of the 1950s?

I suggest we consider the following:

The *Standard Bearer*—Preserved

The Reformed Witness Hour—Preserved

The Protestant Reformed Seminary—Preserved

The Protestant Reformed Christian Day Schools—Preserved  
The Preaching of the Word from Sunday to Sunday—Preserved  
The Protestant Reformed Churches—Preserved

SOLI DEO GLORIA

# THANK YOU FOR MAKING PRCA100 A SUCCESS!



*Steering Committee (left to right): Nick and Leanne Engelsma, Nate and Ellen Pastoor, Josh and Sharla Hoekstra, Kyle and Sarah Kooienga, Steve and Mary VanDrunen, Duane and Esther Huiskens*

The Steering Committee thanks the following people who helped make the anniversary celebration a memorable and God-glorifying event. Volunteers or committee members involved in or as: orchestra, accompanists, games, candy store, carnival, devotions, sectional leaders, evening speakers, Bible camp, music directors and organizers, soloists, special performers,

technology, tournaments, tours. You have given freely of your time out of love for fellow saints. We also appreciate all who participated in the Children's Choir, Kingdom Voices Choir, and the Mass Choir and any whose name we may have missed. Though your names are not listed, our Father in heaven knows your joyful service.

Aalsma, Erika  
Aalsma, Jamie  
Andringa, Audra  
Baas, Alaina  
Baas, Jori  
Baas, Renae  
Baker, Jodi  
Baldwin, Levi  
Barnhill, Rev. Ryan  
Beute, Paige  
Bleyenbergh, Kristin  
Bodbyl, Michelle

Bouma, Tricia  
Bouwkamp, Ashley  
Bouwkamp, Dawn  
Boverhof, Brooke  
Boverhof, Lindsey  
Braaksma, Gene  
Braaksma, Kathy  
Broekhuizen, Danae  
Broekhuizen, Joe  
Brower, Alex  
Brummel, Rev. Allen  
Bylsma, Andy

Bylsma, Erika  
Bylsma, Shannon  
Cammenga, Nicole  
Chesebro, Gideon  
Cnossen, Emily  
Daling, Jim  
Daling, Karen  
DeBoer, Becky  
DeBoer, Cameryn  
Decker, Ella  
Decker, Jim  
Decker, Sarah

Deemter, Anne  
DeVries, Anna  
DeVries, Callie  
DeVries, Dan  
DeYoung, Kelsey  
Dykstra, Dena  
Dykstra, Doug  
Dykstra, Joelle  
Dykstra, Kamryn  
Dykstra, Kelly  
Dykstra, Kim  
Dykstra, Kristin

Dykstra, Lauren  
Dykstra, Libby  
Dykstra, Luke  
Dykstra, Lyla  
Dykstra, Megan  
Dykstra, Prof. Russ  
Elzinga, Matt  
Engelsma, Brent  
Engelsma, Carli  
Engelsma, Courtney  
Engelsma, Ken  
Engelsma, Monica

|                       |                       |                      |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Engelsma, Pam         | Holstege, Rhonda      | Kuiper, Paula        | Pipe, Justin          | VanDyke, Aaron        |
| Engelsma, Prof. David | Holstege, Stephanie   | Kuiper, Prof. Doug   | Pipe, Marisa          | VanDyke, Alyse        |
| Engelsma, Reese       | Holstege, Toby        | Kuiper, Skyler       | Pipe, Michelle        | VanDyke, Dan          |
| Engelsma, Rev. Joshua | Hop, Jacob            | Langerak, Jared      | Pipe, Vanessa         | VanOostenbrugge, Alex |
| Engelsma, Shiloh      | Horvat, Amy           | Laning, Ben          | Poppema, Chris        | VanOverloop, Aliya    |
| Eriks, Jen            | Horvat, Johnny        | Lenting, Amber       | Prins, Carolyn        | VanOverloop, Bryant   |
| Eriks, Rev. Garry     | Horvat, Gerrit        | Lenting, Jason       | Regnerus, Jana        | VanOverloop, Cowen    |
| Feenstra, Bruce       | Horvat, Samantha      | Lenting, Samantha    | Regnerus, Jim         | VanOverloop, Deb      |
| Feenstra, Janelle     | Howerzyl, Dawn        | Looyenga, Kierra     | Regnerus, Lanae       | VanOverloop, Dee      |
| Feenstra, Marlin      | Howerzyl, Julia       | Looyenga, Lauryn     | Riemersma, Jill       | VanOverloop, Ella     |
| Feenstra, Victoria    | Huisken, Sara         | Lubbers, Connor      | Rutgers, Jon          | VanOverloop, Jessalyn |
| Fisher, Matt          | Huizing, Abby         | Lubbers, Danielle    | Schimmel, Melissa     | VanOverloop, Jon      |
| Glashower, Sandy      | Huizinga, Lynne       | Lubbers, Stacy       | Schimmel, Shelly      | VanOverloop, Josh     |
| Griess, JohnOwen      | Huizinga, Prof. Brian | McGeown, Rev. Martyn | Schipper, Gracia      | VanOverloop, Kenslee  |
| Griess, Prof. Cory    | Kaiser, Seth          | Meelker, Casey       | Schut, Aubrey         | VanOverloop, Lucas    |
| Griess, Salem         | Kalsbeek, Brian       | Meelker, Kristina    | Schut, Barb           | VanOverloop, Maraya   |
| Griess, Simeon        | Kalsbeek, Cal         | Meulenberg, Bri      | Smits, Deb            | VanOverloop, Mary     |
| Gritters, Becca       | Kalsbeek, Jen         | Miedema, Cindy       | Spriensma, Shauna     | VanOverloop, Vicki    |
| Gritters, Brian       | Kaptein, Amy          | Miedema, Lynnae      | Start, Doug           | VanPutten, Amy        |
| Gritters, Curt        | Kaptein, Kara         | Miedema, Todd        | Stewart, Rev. Angus   | VanPutten, Ryan       |
| Gritters, Denise      | Kaptein, Kurt         | Minderhoud, Joel     | Stouwie, Mary         | VanSingel, Beth       |
| Gritters, Eric        | Karsemeyer, Erika     | Mingerink, Hailey    | Swierenga, Dr. Robert | VanSolkema, Abby      |
| Gritters, Heidi       | Karsemeyer, Morgan    | Mingerink, Rick      | Terpstra, Charles     | VanUffelen, Dan       |
| Gritters, Leah        | Karsemeyer, Todd      | Moelker, Josh        | Terpstra, Dave        | VanUffelen, Kate      |
| Gritters, Nancy       | Key, Rev. Steven      | Monsma, Sara         | Terpstra, Lynnae      | Velthouse, Mary       |
| Gritters, Prof. Barry | Kiel, Erika           | Mowery, Eric         | Terpstra, Mary        | Vink, Gord            |
| Haak, Rev. Carl       | Kleyn, Ethan          | Mowery, Heidi        | TeSlaa, Jeff          | Visser, Andrea        |
| Haan, Denise          | Kleyn, Makayala       | Mowery, Kinsley      | VanBaren, Alison      | Visser, Emily         |
| Harris, Larissa       | Kleyn, Nick           | Nienhuis, Chad       | VanBaren, Alyssa      | Visser, Justin        |
| Haveman, Vern         | Kleyn, Rev. Daniel    | Nienhuis, Mary       | VanBaren, Alyssa      | Visser, Megan         |
| Hayes, Trevor         | Kleyn, Seth           | Noorman, Rick        | VanBaren, Beth        | Visser, Nicole        |
| Hekstra, Bristol      | Kleyn, Zachary        | Pastoor, Leah        | VanBaren, Claire      | Westing-Kuiper, Kim   |
| Helms, Jeremy         | Koll, Julie           | PaulRaj, Joan        | VanBaren, John        | Westra, Bryan         |
| Hoekstra, Aubrey      | Kooienga, Kenzie      | Phelps, Crista       | VanBaren, Jordan      | Westra, Dirk          |
| Hoekstra, Paul        | Kooienga, Landon      | Phelps, Dorothy      | VanBaren, Karen       | Whiteley, Jimmy       |
| Holstege, Fiona       | Kooienga, Noah        | Phelps, Eric         | VanBaren, Melissa     | Wieringa, Blake       |
| Holstege, Jim         | Koole, Ron            | Phelps, Eric Jr      | VanBaren, Phil        | Wieringa, Lindsey     |
| Holstege, Joel        | Koops, Rebecca        | Phelps, Gabrielle    | VanderSchaaf, Dee     | Wieringa, Rick        |
| Holstege, Joyce       | Kuiper, Cynthia       | Phelps, Kate         | VanderSchaaf, Gary    | Wieringa, Ronda       |
| Holstege, Lanae       | Kuiper, Katie         | Pipe, Ashely         | VandeVegte, Terri     | Wories, Bert          |
| Holstege, Rev. Daniel | Kuiper, Kim           | Pipe, Brenda         | VanDrunen, Joel       | Zandstra, Danielle    |
|                       |                       |                      | VanDrunen, Karissa    |                       |

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

**100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY**

With hearts full of gratitude and praise to God, on August 31, 2025, **Dolly Anne Geers** celebrated her 100th birthday. Thanks are given to our heavenly Father for His faithful guidance, care and love of her through these years. Throughout the century, Dolly has experienced God's grace and has been richly blessed by the communion and fellowship of her church family as a member of First Protestant Reformed Church (Grand Rapids, MI). We pray that God will continue to hold Dolly in the palm of His hand. "O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. Thy righteousness also, O God, is very high, who has done great things: O God, who is like unto thee!" (Psalm 71:17-19).

## THE STANDARD BEARER

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### ANNOUNCEMENTS

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#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY:

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathies to Bob De Young and his family in the passing of their beloved wife, mother, and grandmother **Karren De Young**. It is our prayer that they may receive comfort from the words of our Savior Jesus Christ in John 10:27-28, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Rev. David Noorman, President  
Mike Moelker, Clerk

#### NOTICE:

RFPA Annual Meeting, in Southwest PRC on September 25 at 7:00 P.M., "Intelligence or Illusion? Christian Perspectives on AI," by Dr. Brendan Looyenga and Mr. Ben Rau.

#### SB FOR BINDING

The September issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 101. If you would like your own issues of volume 101 bound, please send/bring them to the RFPA office before December 1, 2025. For additional orders, call the RFPA at (616) 457-5970.



#### REV. CARL HAAK

- 9/7 Out of the Mouth of Babies, Ps. 8:2
- 9/14 Hiding God's Word in Our Hearts, Ps. 119:11
- 9/21 Relief From the Burden of Sin, Ps. 32:5
- 9/28 Much More Than Enough, Ex. 36:4-7

#### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY:

The Council and congregation of Doon PRC express our Christian sympathies to Mrs. Valorie (Val) Klein, and Howard and LaJean Bonestroo in the death of Valorie's husband and LaJean's brother, **Mr. William (Bill) Klein**. "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, President  
Perry Van Egdom, Clerk

#### SEMINARY CONVOCATION

Seminary Convocation will be held September 3 in Hudsonville PRC at 7:00 P.M. Prof. B. Gritters will be speaking on "AI and the Gospel: Why God Will Never Be Pleased with an AI-generated Sermon (nor with the Minister Who Tries)."

#### CLASSIS WEST

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Crete PRC on Wednesday, September 24, 2025, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Crete's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

