

The Standard Bearer

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Do Worthily and Be Famous

The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman.

Ruth 4:11-12

We are all familiar with the story of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabitish woman who married into the family of Elimelech during the period of the Judges. Elimelech and his wife Naomi had moved from Bethlehem of Judah to Moab with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, during the time of famine. In Moab, Mahlon and Chilion took wives of Moab, Ruth and Orpah. It was not a happy time for the family of Elimelech in Moab. Elimelech died, as did also his two sons, leaving three widows. This was God's chastening

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

for a family that should have stayed in Canaan, the land of promise.

When Naomi decided to return to her home in Bethlehem, Ruth insisted on going with her. This was because the Lord had worked in her heart to turn her from idols to serve Him, the living and true God. Ruth not only accompanied Naomi to Bethlehem but also supported her by gleaning in the fields.

God in His providence brought Ruth to the fields of Boaz, who was a close relative of Elimelech's family. When Boaz showed great kindness to Ruth, she proposed marriage to him at Naomi's suggestion. The law required that when a man died childless, the next of kin must marry his widow to raise up seed in the name of his deceased relative. Ruth proposed to Boaz that he perform the duty of the next of kin. But there was a closer relative than Boaz. And so Boaz agreed to marry Ruth provided the closer relative refused to perform his duty of a kin.

This brought Boaz to the city gate, where legal transactions were conducted before the elders and the citizens.

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Editorial Office

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
FAX: 616-457-5980
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave
Hudsonville, MI 49426
benjwig@juno.com

New Zealand Office

Standard Bearer
c/o Mr. B. VanHerK
66 Fraser St
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@
hotmail.co.uk

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The one closer to Ruth than Boaz declined to perform his duty as next of kin. So Boaz expressed his intention of performing this duty, acquiring not only Ruth but also the fields of Elimelech.

The elders and those that witnessed this transaction pronounced a benediction (word of blessing) on Boaz and Ruth that the Lord prosper them and make them famous through their children.

This word of blessing is also our desire for every couple that joins in marriage and that brings forth children.

A glorious benediction!

The benediction expressed by the elders and citizens of Bethlehem was that Boaz would do worthily in Ephrath, and be famous in Bethlehem. To do worthily means to prosper. It includes such ideas as being strong and wealthy. To be famous means to make a name for oneself. This was the express desire of the citizens of Bethlehem for Boaz as he entered his marriage with Ruth and lived in the region of Ephrath and the city of Bethlehem.

The citizens of Bethlehem gave content to this wish in the rest of what they said.

They spoke of the house of Israel that Rachel and Leah did build.

To build a house for someone means to give him offspring. The term “house” is often applied in the Bible to family and children, so that one who begets children builds a house. Under the Lord’s blessing, Rachel and Leah built a house for Jacob. They gave Jacob twelve sons and one daughter. Actually, there were two other mothers that were involved in building the house of Jacob, Bilhah and Zilpah; but because they were concubines, they had no legal status, and thus were not mentioned.

Through the house that Rachel and Leah built for Jacob, he prospered and became famous. This is because Jacob’s house developed into the great nation of Israel—a nation of prosperity and fame. One who fathers a prosperous and famous nation shares in its prosperity and fame.

This prosperity and fame of Jacob and his house was not just physical. It was primarily spiritual. Certainly, the house that Jacob built did become wealthy and prosperous from an earthly point of view. It eventually developed into a mighty nation that conquered and occupied the land of Canaan. It became a great nation among the na-

tions. But the prosperity and fame of Jacob’s house was primarily that it became the covenant people of Jehovah God, whom He had chosen out of all the nations of the world to receive His blessings.

The citizens and elders of Bethlehem also spoke of the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah.

Boaz was of the house of Pharez.

The house of Pharez had an ignoble beginning in that it was born of incest. Tamar was Judah’s daughter-in-law, who played the harlot, so that through Judah she would conceive and raise up a child to her dead husband, Er, whom the Lord smote for his wickedness (cf. Gen. 38).

In spite of its humble beginnings, the Lord prospered the house of Pharez and made it famous. It became, in fact, the leading family in the tribe of Judah. This becomes evident in the genealogies of Israel recorded in Genesis, I Chronicles, and Nehemiah.

This was evidently the Lord’s blessing on the house of Pharez for its faithfulness to the Lord. The Lord blessed faithfulness with prosperity and fame. This is evident from the lives of Joseph and David. In turn, the Lord judged those families that were unfaithful. All one has to do is think of the houses of Eli and King Saul.

The benediction of the citizens of Bethlehem for Boaz (and Ruth) was that the Lord would bless them in the same way that He had blessed the houses of Jacob and Pharez. They desired that under the Lord’s blessing Ruth would build a house for Boaz and that in this house Boaz would prosper and become famous. Their desire was that Boaz and his house would flourish in the covenant and even become famous for their place in the covenant—a leading family in the covenant. They also desired that Boaz and his family would prosper materially. Remember, God’s covenant blessings were inseparably connected in the Old Testament to material prosperity in Canaan.

This desire for covenant prosperity and fame is our desire for every family in the church. It is our desire that under the providence and grace of God every couple that marries in the Lord build a house with children. It is also our desire that the Lord prosper them so that their home will be a covenant home, with children who not only give joy to them but also make them famous for the godliness of their children.

A divine response

The Lord responded to the benediction by prospering Boaz and Ruth and making them famous.

In the immediately following verses we learn how. The Lord blessed Boaz and Ruth with a child, whom they named Obed. Through Obed, Boaz and Ruth became the great grandparents of David, the great king of Israel, who was a man after God's own heart. In David the Lord prospered Boaz and Ruth and made them famous. So highly did the Lord elevate David's house that it became the ruling house of all Israel. But, more importantly, the Lord brought forth the Christ and Savior from David's line.

This was the Lord's reward for the faithfulness of Boaz and Ruth.

Boaz and Ruth were both very godly people. Boaz's godliness is evident from the way he addressed his workers (2:4: "The Lord be with you"). There was also the kindness he showed to Ruth as she gleaned in his fields. And there was his willingness to do the part of a kinsman. Ruth's godliness was evident in how she insisted on accompanying Naomi, from Moab to Bethlehem, even though it promised to be only a life of poverty. There was also her faithful care of Naomi and her desire to raise up seed for the house of Elimelech.

This faithfulness the Lord blessed. He blessed this godliness with covenant children who learned from their parents to walk in the way of the Lord. He blessed this godliness with a place of prominence in the kingdom and covenant of God.

The Lord will respond similarly to godly parents today.

The Lord ordinarily blesses godly husbands and wives with covenant children. There are exceptions. Sometimes the Lord has special work for a couple that requires them to go childless. And this is God's blessing of grace for them. But ordinarily the blessing of God for faithful husbands and wives is to build them a house of children and grandchildren.

And the Lord also blesses those parents who are faithful to the Lord with prosperity and renown in the house they build. The Lord brings their children to the salvation of the covenant, so that they and their parents prosper. The Lord often makes their family to be leading families in the church—leaders in godliness.

May this encourage parents to be faithful in all things of the covenant and to train their children faithfully in the truths of the covenant.

A great faithfulness!

In all this history we see the great faithfulness of Jehovah God to His covenant people Israel.

How unfaithful Israel had been as a nation. The book of Ruth places us at the end of the 400-year period of Judges. This was a period characterized by Israel's repeated unfaithfulness, which brought the chastening rod of Jehovah's wrath to correct them. The benediction of the citizens of Bethlehem on Boaz and Ruth pointed

out that this unfaithfulness went way back into Israel's history. The history of Jacob and his family displayed much unfaithfulness.

But Jehovah was faithful to His covenant people.


He was faithful in chastening them, rather than destroying them.

And now He showed His faithfulness in this history of Ruth. He brought, by His grace, this Moabitish woman into Israel to continue the house of Elimelech by marrying Boaz.

By this union He created the family

that would bring forth Israel's great king, who would deliver them from all their troubles. From this family He brought forth David, who delivered Israel from her oppressors and led Israel into godliness. From this family He brought forth David's son, the Christ, who delivers us from all our enemies to enjoy the blessings of the covenant fully.

Let us cling to and be encouraged by that faithfulness.

This faithful God will chasten us and our families, should we become unfaithful. But this faithful God will certainly bless us when we in Christ Jesus are faithful to Him, by making us prosper and be famous, as Boaz and Ruth. 

*...ordinarily the blessing
of God
for faithful husbands
and wives is to
build them a house
of children
and grandchildren.*

The *Manhattan Declaration*: Document of Ongoing Controversy (2)

In our previous editorial (Aug. 1) we began a brief critique of the *Manhattan Declaration* and the subsequent controversy it has stirred up in evangelical circles. Its authors drew it up to be a clarion call for ‘Christian solidarity’ on three basic social, ethical issues, namely, the sanctity of life (vs. the legalization of abortion and euthanasia), marriage and sexuality (vs. the homosexual movement and gay-rights), and religious liberty (vs. laws curtailing religious freedoms, in particular the right of Christians to express their faith and evaluations in the marketplace without restrictions).

The document was first signed by a good number of leading names from the evangelical as well as Anglican, Roman Catholic, and even Eastern-Orthodox traditions. The invitation to sign was then extended to “other men and women of good will” of every background as well, thus not excluding Mormons, Jewish rabbis, or anyone else of conservative political stripe.

Hence the controversy within evangelical circles.

Those leading evangelicals who *refused* to sign the Declaration

Previous article in this series: August 2010, p. 436.

found it necessary to explain why they refused to sign a document that speaks out against assaults on principles so foundational to a free and moral society. Those who *signed* the Declaration found it necessary to justify their making an alliance with Roman Catholics and men of Eastern Orthodox convictions.

In our previous article we offered a quotation from one of the signatories, Ligon Duncan III (President of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals). Dr. Duncan insists that the Declaration is not an *ecumenical document*, like those produced by the Evangelical and Catholics Together (ECT), because the Declaration does not deal with biblical doctrines, but rather with social, ethical issues basic to the fabric of a free and orderly society.

Dr. A. Mohler’s rationale for signing the Declaration is much the same. Having stated that “[t]here is every good reason to believe that the freedom to conduct Christian ministry according to Christian conviction is being subverted and denied before our eyes” (with which we certainly agree), Mohler goes on to state,

I signed the *Manhattan Declaration* because it is a limited statement of Christian conviction on... three crucial issues, and not a wide-

-ranging theological document that subverts confessional integrity. I cannot and do not sign documents such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together that attempt to establish common ground on vast theological terrain. I could not sign a statement that purports, for example, to bridge the divide between Roman Catholics and evangelicals on the doctrine of justification. The *Manhattan Declaration* is not a manifesto for united action. It is a statement of urgent concern and common conscience on these three issues—the sanctity of human life, the integrity of marriage, and the defense of religious liberty...

We are happy to hear that Dr. Mohler would not sign a document such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together, a document that does indeed subvert confessional integrity and corrupt the doctrine of justification in order to bridge the chasm between Rome and Protestantism. Such refusal is to be commended.

The question is, however, is it indeed true that signing this Declaration does not *essentially* commit one to the same thing?

Dr. Mohler and his colleagues say it does not. We are convinced it does, as we intend to demonstrate.

But before we do that, we want to comment on Mohler’s assertion

(reassurance?) that “The *Manhattan Declaration* is not a manifesto for united [!] action” (with “united” referring, of course, to the forging of an alliance between evangelicals and Roman Catholics that commits the signatories to united political action down the road).

Dr. Mohler and his associates may in all sincerity assert such is not so, but such simply cannot be maintained in any credible way. If such is not the purpose of this Declaration, there would be no need for the Declaration. Surely Mohler, Duncan, J. I. Packer, J. Dobson, et al do not need to sign some public document for the public to know that they are for family values and are committed to opposing the social evils loose in our society today. That’s known. This is exactly why their signatures were sought to begin with. They were men who, in the public eye, were opposed to the social evils receiving legal sanction in our day.

The whole rationale for drawing up the Declaration and seeking well-known names in the Christian church world to sign it was exactly to serve notice to the powers that be that those whose signatures are affixed to this document do not stand *alone* in opposing the evils being sanctioned by law, but that they (*we*) stand shoulder to shoulder with many others who are resolved to oppose having certain evils imposed upon us or restrictions placed upon our right to oppose said evils. The whole purpose of the Declaration is to let Washington know that *we* are not going to go down on these issues without a fight. And this *we* is not just a few, but many—

count the signatures! Let Washington take note!

The public expression of solidarity, by implication, commits the signatories to united action when the call for such action goes out. Strikingly, for all Dr. Mohler’s honorable intentions, the fact is that he himself realizes that he, with the other signatories, cannot really escape the implications of the Declaration. The concluding words of his apology make this plain.

Finally, I signed the *Manhattan Declaration* because I want to put my name on its final pledge—that we will not bend the knee to Caesar. We will not participate in any subversion of life. We will not be forced to accept any other relationship as equal in status or rights to heterosexual marriage. We will not refrain from proclaiming the truth—and we *will* order our churches and institutions and ministries by Christian conviction.

The pronoun *we* is used five times. It is not an editorial *we*. Just previously, Dr. Mohler used the pronoun *I*. The *we* refers to those with whom he has chosen to take a stand, namely those whose signatures are affixed to the document—not just evangelicals with whose doctrines he agrees, but the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox as well.

With such he makes his pledge (one of mutual allegiance)—to do what? This: “...that we will not bend the knee to Caesar.... We will not be forced [!] to accept any other relationship as equal...to heterosexual marriage.”

For all Dr. Mohler’s honorable intentions, those are fighting words, implying, “Let the State take notice. She

can expect *us* not simply meekly to acquiesce, but to offer stout resistance if she seeks to impose on *us* what goes against *our* convictions and consciences.”

Dr. Mohler may be sure that those who drew up the Declaration and those who signed it will expect him to honor his pledge for action when the time comes, and to do so in concert with Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. And not just as convenient comrades-in-arms. The point of the Declaration is that the signatories do this in the name of Christ, united (as fellow believers) in the cause of His righteousness and truth.

This is clear from the concluding paragraph of the second section of the document (under the heading “Declaration.”)

We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences to affirm our right...to speak and act in defense of these (three listed) truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers [!], that no power on earth...will intimidate us to silence or acquiescence.

Significantly, those evangelicals who refused to sign the Declaration understood this. Their reasons for refusing to sign and, by implication, for criticizing their colleagues who did, show commendable insight.

One such explanation for refusing is offered by Dr. John MacArthur:

[The Declaration] assumes from the start that all signatories are fellow Christians whose only

differences have to do with the fact that they represent distinct 'communities.' Points of disagreement are tacitly acknowledged but are described as 'historic lines of ecclesial differences' rather than fundamental conflicts of doctrine and conviction with regard to the gospel and the question of which teachings are essential to authentic Christianity. ... [It would] relegate the very essence of gospel truth to the level of a secondary issue. That is the wrong way—perhaps the very worst way—for evangelicals to address the moral and political crises of our time.

MacArthur's opening sentence is precisely correct.

Signing a document such as the Declaration is not merely a matter of declaring where one stands on various social evils being sanctioned


in our day. It is not the same as signing a petition to get a proposal on the state ballot against legalizing gay-marriage, for instance. By such action one says nothing about recognizing the spiritual status of fellow signatories, nor concerning the orthodoxy of the doctrines they profess.

Signing this Declaration is different. Here one goes on record as acknowledging that the 'community' that the Romish 'brothers' represent, namely, Rome herself, is an authentic brand of Christianity when all is said and done, and, therefore, so is the 'gospel' to which Rome is committed. And note well, the great gospel truths that have divided confessional Protestantism from Rome are relegated to the category of being merely a matter of "ecclesial differences," which is to say, merely a matter of

emphasis found in Christ's church that arises out of different historical traditions rather than a matter of fundamental biblical interpretation.

Say what they will, what men like Mohler and Duncan tried to withhold from Rome with one hand by refusing to sign the ECT documents a decade ago, namely, Rome's right of claim to be valid representatives of the apostolic gospel, they now, by signing the Declaration, have granted Rome with the other.

But as serious as MacArthur's and others' criticism of the Declaration is, the problems with the document go even deeper. This is brought home by Richard Bennett in an article entitled "The Roman Catholic Agenda Embedded in the Manhattan Declaration."

This we intend to quote and comment on next time. 

LETTERS

"Apostasy Revisited"

I am grateful to the *Standard Bearer* and to Rev. Kenneth Koole for the editorial "Apostasy Revisited—Reflections on an Analysis of the Apostasy of the CRC in the Last Half-Century" (vol. 86, p. 316). You have validated concerns I have developed over the last few years.

I came to prison 25 years ago as a "backslidden" (i.e., unconverted) Pentecostal. Through God's grace, I met brothers along the way who taught me the great Reformed doctrines of grace. Since then, most of my contact, fellowship, and instruction have come from the CRC. I completed Crossroads Bible Institute's 3-Tier program, and college classes in Christian Doctrine. Three wonderful men of God maintained a correspondence with me, all of whom have served in the higher ranks of the CRC. One in particular has sent me the *Banner* on a regular basis. I missed their debate on scriptural authority, and I have been disturbed to see

some of their articles supporting theistic evolution. However, I read a good deal of their debate to seat women elders at Synod and now their discussion of active homosexuals in fellowship. These issues have deeply upset me.


Professor, I love God and I am jealous for His Word. When the issue of seating women at Synod came up, I wrote to my friends with the best biblical argument against it I could. I remember so well that when Synod debated the issue there was a group of CRC women, all wearing blue, demonstrating their support for seating women. At the time, I commented that they seemed like the CRC's version of the radical feminist organization "Code Pink." My CRC friends disagreed with me, supporting the seating of women as biblical and right. When the editor of the *Banner* kicked off the debate on homosexuals, I was livid. Even his suggestion that we "talk about it" was a contradiction of clear biblical teaching and standing CRC policy. It seems as though God's

Word is taking second place to our personal feelings of esteem, belonging, and “fair treatment.” I wrote to the *Banner* editor twice concerning this issue. His response was gracious, but the idea was that although I “believe the Bible teaches” against homosexual practice, others believe the Bible teaches it is alright in committed relationships.

Sir, I have prayed a lot for the CRC. I can see that they are being influenced more by our secular culture than by God’s Word. That hurts me emotionally, because the CRC gave me my spiritual nourishment as a Reformed believer. Your article gave me some comfort because now I know I am not alone in seeing that secular influence. I

look forward to reading Rev. Koole’s next installment in this series. No, I am not on your mailing list. One of the brothers here receives the *Standard Bearer* and passes the issues to me when he is done.

You have my permission to share all I’ve said in this letter with anyone you wish. Again, I really appreciate your dedication to truth, and Rev. Koole’s thoughtful and fair analysis of the CRC. God bless you. The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

James Doyle,
Bowling Green, Florida 

DECENCY AND ORDER

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

Recognition of Other Reformed Churches (1)

“Churches whose usages differ from ours merely in nonessentials shall not be rejected.”
Church Order, Article 85.

Introduction

Article 85 of the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches arises out of the marvelous truth of the catholicity of the church. This article was included in the Church Order because the Dutch Reformed churches desired to acknowledge the Reformed churches found in other lands. With the church of all ages, they confessed “an holy, catholic church.” This “holy church,” according to Article 27 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, “is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit.”

Believing the catholicity of the church, and believing it to be our solemn calling before Christ, the one Head of

the church, to manifest the unity of His body, the Protestant Reformed Churches do not reject “churches whose usages differ from ours merely in nonessentials.” Article 85 is negative—deliberately so. Like the prohibitions of the Ten Commandments that are framed as they are on account of the tendency of our sinful nature, so is Article 85 negative. Always there is the tendency to suppose that our way is the only way and that those who differ from us in any respect are in error. Really Article 85 concerns the same sinful inclination to pride within a denomination that was addressed in Article 84. Only now the “lording it over” that Article 84 warns against extends to other churches and denominations. No such attitude may manifest itself in our dealings with other churches. On account of usages that are merely nonessential, they shall not be rejected.

Implied in the negative form of Article 85 is the positive. Churches that differ from us only in matters nonessential must be received gladly. We must be searching for

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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such churches. We must be willing to reach out to such churches, extending the right hand of fellowship in Christ. We must establish ties with such churches, ties that aim at mutual edification and ties that aim at cooperation in the calling of the church in the world.

What joy such ties have brought to the Protestant Reformed Churches throughout their history! And what joy they are at present!

Historical Background

The sum and substance of our present Article 85 go all the way back to the earliest history of the Dutch Reformed churches. Already the Convent of Wezel, 1568, concluded the articles that it had drafted for the churches by saying:

The ministers who have taken the trouble to compile these regulations want herewith publicly to testify before God and men that they in the determination of these points, which so far have been determined for the benefit of the churches in the Netherlands and their common and unified ordering, have in no way done this to the detriment of the other [foreign] churches, but that they have only taken into consideration the time, the places, the persons and other circumstances [peculiar to the Dutch Reformed churches]....

The Synod of Emden, 1571, did not include in its Church Order an article resembling our present Article 85. Nevertheless, the spirit of the article is contained in an article that the synod drafted specifically in reference to the French Reformed churches.

In order to demonstrate the unity in doctrine among the Netherlands churches, the brethren thought it well to subscribe to the Confession of Faith of the Netherlands churches, likewise to subscribe to the confessions of the [Reformed] churches in France, in order thereby to attest their agreement and unity with these French churches, surely trusting that the ministers of these French churches also on their part will subscribe to the Confession of Faith of the Netherlands churches, giving testimony to their mutual unity (Article 2).

Article 72 of the Church Order of the Synod of Dordt, 1578, is:

In all non-essential matters no churches shall be rejected that use a different method from our own.

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, included a similar article in its Church Order, but added the word “foreign,” thus making explicit what was implicit in the previous articles.

In indifferent things the foreign churches which have different customs than our own shall not be rejected (Article 46).

The Synod of the Hague, 1586, reaffirmed the decision of Middelburg in Article 78 of its Church Order, as did the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, in Article 85 of its Church Order. This is basically our Article 85, with one deletion. The Christian Reformed Church revision of the Church Order that was approved in 1914 dropped the word “foreign” from the article. VanDellen and Monsma report that the adjective “foreign” was dropped because the CRC “wanted the article to apply to Reformed denominations right in our own country, as well as to Reformed Churches of other countries” (*The Church Order Commentary*, p. 344).

Churches That Are To Be Rejected

Article 85 calls for recognition of other Reformed and Presbyterian churches with whom we differ only in nonessentials. By clear implication this article calls for the rejection of all churches that differ with us *in essentials*. At the time of the Reformation, the Reformed churches rejected both the Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptist churches. Both of these churches differ from the Reformed in the fundamentals of the gospel. And both of these churches and their teachings are rejected in the Reformed confessions that were written at the time of the Reformation.

The Belgic Confession of Faith makes very explicit not only the calling of believers to join the true church of Christ in the world and to manifest this church’s unity, but also the calling to separate from the false church (Art. 28). Concerning this false church, the Confession says that

she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word

of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry (Article 29).

In addition, the Reformed rejected official ties with the Lutheran churches. To be sure, there was a noticeable difference of attitude on the part of the Reformed towards the Lutheran churches, in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church and the Anabaptists churches. The Reformed did not reject the Lutheran churches as false churches. Nevertheless, the significant doctrinal differences between the Reformed and the Lutheran precluded any formal ecclesiastical union between them.


By clear implication, therefore, Article 85 of the Church Order warns against establishing official ecclesiastical relationships with denominations of churches that reject the fundamental doctrines of Scripture. We must not unite with churches that are not Reformed and that do not subscribe to the Reformed confessions. We must not cooperate in ministry with such churches. We must not join ecumenical organizations that include such churches that differ with us in essentials. To do so is to sin against the unity of the church and to sin against her Head, Jesus Christ. No Reformed church, for example, ought to be a part of the World or National Council of Churches. Unity, true unity, is founded on the truth of the Word of God, which truth is summarized in the Reformed confessions, the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

Included in the number of those churches that are to be rejected are not only those that forthrightly reject the Reformed faith, but also those churches that, although they formally subscribe to the Reformed confessions, are not in reality faithful Reformed churches. They are Reformed in theory, but not in actual practice. Sadly, in our day numerous Reformed and Presbyterian churches fall into this category. These are Reformed churches that tolerate false doctrine in their midst. These are Reformed churches that fail to exercise Christian discipline against impenitent sinners. These are Reformed

churches that have taken decisions at their broadest assemblies compromising the doctrines of sovereign grace. These are Reformed churches that approve common grace, the well-meant gospel offer, divorce and remarriage for every cause (or no cause at all), women officebearers, homosexuality, theistic evolution, conditional covenant, justification by faith and works, the errors of the Federal Vision, and the list goes on. With such Reformed churches the Protestant Reformed Churches may establish no ties of ecclesiastical fellowship.

There is another implication to Article 85. That implication is that if ties exist with churches that at one time were faithful Reformed churches that differed with us only in nonessentials, but now it comes to it that an essential difference has arisen, the tie must be broken off. This is a real possibility. This has happened in the history of the PRCA. When this happens, work must be done to point out the essential character of the difference that has arisen. Discussions must be held. Exhortations must be given. Sufficient time must be allowed for instruction to sink in. And it must be clearly established that the difference is indeed an essential difference, a difference over the clear teaching of Scripture and a difference that concerns the Reformed confessions. There must be no breaking of official relationships over nonessentials, to be sure. But when it comes to the essentials, painful as it is, devotion to the truth and to Christ require the breaking of ties. Our relationship to Christ comes before our relationship to men. There may be no formal ecclesiastical ties with those who differ

with us in the essentials of the Reformed faith.

But with churches who differ with our churches “merely in nonessentials” formal ties ought to be established. But what are these “nonessentials” that must not stand in the way of ecclesiastical fellowship? What are the determining factors and who decides? What is included in mutual acknowledgment? And what about the denominational committee that is directly involved in implementing all that is included in formal ecclesiastical relationships? These questions will be the concern of our next article. 

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The Teenage Years: Goofiness or Godliness?

I challenge you to think about some radical questions. What does the world say today about the teenage life? Is what the world says about this life right? Have you and your parents bought into this lie in some areas of your lives? How does God call you to live in your teenage years?

Maybe when you read these questions you do not want to face them because this does not sound like much fun. These are some serious questions that require you to do some soul searching.

I am writing about this, not to make your life more miserable, but in order that you might know the joy of serving the Lord! After all, Scripture says in Psalm 1:1, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” “Blessed” means happy, joyful. True joy and happiness are found in godliness.

I challenge you to think biblically about the life of a teenager. God’s Word calls you to love and serve Him by loving and serving others. His Word calls you not to waste these years with riotous living, but to *enjoy* your teenage years with a life of glorifying God. Yes, this is the way to enjoy your teenage years.

I used the word “teenager.” A teenager is a person between the ages of thirteen and nineteen years old. If you fall into this category you attend school; you probably have a Facebook account with many friends; you probably have a cell phone (if you do not, you are trying to convince your parents that you need one); and you text more than you talk on that phone. Did you know that the term “teenager” is of recent origin? The word itself has been around for only about seventy years. The term

is not a bad one, and I do not object to using it. But what has happened is that, in our society, another age-class has been formed. In addition to children and adults, we now have teenagers.

What characterizes the teenage years? In the world today, the bar is set low. How low? Maybe at your knees, or even lower. The teen years are seen as a vacation from responsibility and seriousness. The world today does not expect competence, maturity, or obedience from its teens. The world says that the teen years are for goofing off and having fun. It is the time to be a slob, to be irresponsible, to rebel against your parents, to party, etc. The world expects teens to experiment with drugs, alcohol, smoking, and sex. To illustrate just how low the world sets its expectations for teens, I refer you to some suggestions I read online recently for what parents should expect of their teenage child:

- Make your bed every day.
- Be able to take a message on the phone.
- Clean your room every week.
- Do a daily chore (just one), like taking out the trash.
- Make sure the gas gauge stays above a quarter of a tank.

The article includes an encouragement to parents: “Please do not feel that your teenager should be doing all of them.” Really? A teenager should not be expected to do all of these things? I hope that you are as outraged as I am that parents would not expect more from their teenagers than this. Certainly your parents expect more than this of you. Many of you probably have a job (or want one), pay for your own gas and maybe even your own car, make your bed and clean your bedroom, and do many chores around the house.

What I have seen is that many teens in the world today think the ideal day is to sleep in until at least 10:00

Rev. Eriks is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

A.M. After grabbing a pop tart or a bowl of cereal, they check their phone, text their friends, play some video games, spend the afternoon by the pool, and then go out with their friends until at least midnight. Meanwhile their room is such a mess you cannot tell what color the carpet is, and they complain when mom suggests they mow the lawn or weed the garden. May you aspire to much more than this, because God calls you to do so.

We must evaluate this biblically. Is it true, biblically, that the teenage years are all about having fun and goofing off? Is it true that God gives you a free pass in your teen years to live irresponsibly, and that He calls you to live responsibly only when you are older? The Bible's answer, of course, is no! God calls you to godliness, responsibility, and leadership. He calls us, surely, to exercise these virtues when we are adults. Your youth is the training ground for this. The teen years are for training in godliness, responsibility, and leadership. This is why God has given this time of life to you.

You will not find in Scripture any use of the words teenager or adolescence. You will not find, either, a reference in Scripture to this separate period in a person's life between childhood and adulthood. There is only reference to children becoming adults. Paul speaks of this in I Corinthians 13:11: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Paul builds on this in I Corinthians 14:20: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." Our culture says, "Be mature in evil, but in your thinking and behavior be childish." Being irresponsible and living to play is childish. Your teen years are a time of transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a time in which you should strive for godliness and holiness. It is a time for spiritual growth, as you grow and change also physically. If you live as children in the teen years, then you waste this time. There is also the likelihood that you will continue to live as a child well into your twenties and thirties.

In the Scriptures there are many examples of teenagers

who grew in godliness and responsibility. May these examples encourage you to reject the thinking of the world about the teenage years. The first example is David. When David fought against Goliath, King Saul called him a "youth." This means that physically he was not considered a grown man. He was a teenager, transitioning from being a boy to being a man. Do you recall the amazing things David did as a teenager? As a teenager, David was responsible and godly. Read I Samuel 16 and 17 (maybe you could use this for your young people's Bible study this year). When David was in his early teens, his father entrusted to him the care of the sheep. This would be like a farmer entrusting the running of part of his farm to his teenage son, or like a father entrusting the running of his business to his son. David was away from home days at a time, shepherding his father's sheep in the mountainous pastures in Judah. This was no slack job. He stood between predators and his sheep to protect the sheep. He had to be alert constantly. He did not have the luxury of sleeping until late in the morning. During the quiet times, David did not simply relax, but

he composed songs, played musical instruments, and sang. This music was not the music of the world, but as a teenager he loved to sing praises to God. Imagine this young man singing Psalm 23, while he cared for his father's sheep. By the grace of God, he was a responsible, godly young man.

After Samuel anointed him king, David received another important job—playing his harp for King

Saul, to calm his troubled spirit. As a youth, David was entrusted with this important work in the palace of the king. He was given this job because he was known as a responsible and godly young man.

This job of playing harp ended when Saul led Israel in battle against the Philistines. Jesse, David's father, thought nothing of sending his teenage son on a journey of 8-10 miles on foot to bring food to his brothers who were fighting and to check on their welfare. What do we learn about David from this event? First, as a responsible young man he was entrusted with this duty. Secondly, he was a godly son who obeyed his father without arguing.

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God used this godly teenager to give a mighty deliverance to Israel over the Philistines. In his love for God, David was outraged that Goliath defied the armies of the living God. He went to fight the giant, but not in his own strength. David was a young man of faith who confessed, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (I Sam. 17:37). David was strengthened by God for this battle against the enemy, and God gave him the victory.

This history teaches us about Christ, because David was a picture of Christ. Because this is true, it also teaches you as young people what it means to have the mind of Christ.

Daniel and his three friends are another biblical example of teenagers who were godly and responsible (another book of the Bible worthy of study in a young people's society). They were taken to Babylon probably between the ages of 14 and 16 years old. Satan worked through Babylon in an attempt to conform them to the ungodliness of their society. They were given Babylonian names, a pagan public education, and the luxurious food of the land. But by the grace of God, Daniel and his three friends, without parents or grandparents looking over their shoulders, chose to serve the living God. They refused to eat the king's meat. They refused to bow down to the idol gods of Babylon. And they regularly prayed to God facing toward Jerusalem. God gave to them, as young men, important positions of rule and leadership in the kingdom of Babylon.


It would be easy for you to think, "Yes, but that was David and Daniel and his three friends. They were exceptional men." Before you go any further in that thinking, remember that they were teenagers who faced temptation and sin. Do not set them up on some pedestal so that the way they lived is impossible for you. It is not impossible, because it was all God's grace. These young people were not without sin. But the lives they lived as servants of the living God should be the lives you strive for also.

What is this life that God calls you to live? These examples of godly teenagers, as well as other passages in Scripture, describe for us this godly life that young people should live. This is not a time in life for you to do what makes you feel good. It is not a time of life to coast and

goof off, with drinking and drugs, with constant amusements, with the movies and violent video games that fill your minds with sin. It is not a time for a young man to lust after young women because of how their bodies look. It is not a time for young women to put their bodies on display with immodest dress. It is not a time to date to have some fun without thinking about marriage. It is not a time to experiment sexually. It is not a time to procrastinate and to dillydally, so that parents and classmates cannot count on you to get things done.

Godly teenagers are responsible. They get things done, even the things they do not want to do. They learn to keep their rooms clean, do their homework, help out around the house, and work hard if they have a job. Godly teenagers are obedient. They obey mom and dad without arguing, set a good example for their siblings, refuse to indulge in all the sinful pleasures the world has to offer, and encourage their friends to live in godliness.

Here are a couple of other Scripture passages to ponder. II Timothy 2:22: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." Hebrews 10:24, 25: "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

I do not mean to say that in our churches we do not have young people who are living responsibly or godly. We do. We have many. I have seen it with my own eyes. I remember taking an energetic group of young people from Loveland to the mission in Spokane in a fifteen-passenger van on a nineteen-hour ride to be an encouragement and help for a conference they were having in Spokane. I have seen young people stand up with conviction against the ungodliness around them. But it is not easy. For those who are struggling and living in sinful, childish ways, may you be awakened to serve the living God as teenagers. For those who are striving to be responsible and godly, may this encourage you to continue. This is the way to enjoy your teenage years. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.... But his delight is in the law of the LORD" (Ps. 1:1, 2). 

My Last Word:

Let the Deacons Use Their Office Well

All good things, this side of the grave and the renewed creation, must come to an end. So must this in-depth treatment of the office of deacon. I expect this to be my last article on the subject. God willing, we will turn our attention next to the office of elder—although perhaps not treating that subject as thoroughly as we have this one.

A brief review

Over the past twelve years we have examined a number of subjects pertaining to the office of deacon—its history, basis, and nature; the qualifications of deacons; and the principles governing the election and installation of deacons. Then we turned our attention to various aspects of their work—their fundamental work in the caring for the poor, their care of the non-poor Christians, and the prophetic aspect of their work. After that, we covered the subject of deacons' meetings, and the relationship of the deacons to the consistory. Then we turned to the more practical matters of preparing for the office of deacon, and the role of the congregation in supporting her diaconate. We concluded by examining the matter of women assisting the deacons, particularly in their care of the non-poor Christians, and the matter of deacons' conferences.

In writing these articles I had several overall goals.

One was to present the teachings of Scripture and our confessions on this subject, as Reformed churches have historically understood and implemented these teachings. Especially this was for the benefit of the deacons, so that they would better know what their work entailed.

A second was to impress on the church as a whole the necessity of having deacons who know their fundamental work and take it seriously. We must rejoice that God has

preserved in our midst such deacons, in a day and age in which many churches have a wrong understanding of what a deacon is, or in which the elders and the people let the deacons become virtually redundant because they will not seek the mercies of Christ, preferring instead the cruel tender mercies of the government (Prov. 12:10). In a day and age in which apostasy will continue to develop, and in which Protestant Reformed Churches too will have to fight against spiritual decline, we do well to remember what a blessing this is.

Yet a third goal was to help us—church and deacons—develop in our understanding of the work of the diaconate, and to suggest ways in which our deacons could do yet more to carry out their work of benevolence and mercy in Christ's church. With this goal in mind, I developed the subject of the diaconal care of non-poor Christians, concluding it with a modest proposal for a Protestant Reformed retirement home. I also intended the articles regarding the prophetic aspect of the work of the deacons to serve this purpose, as well as the more recent series on women assisting the deacons. And in this article...well, read on and find out.

The broad and difficult work of the diaconate

In accomplishing these goals, we have seen that the work of the diaconate is both broad and, at times, difficult.

Their work is broad because it includes the care of the poor and needy in the church of Jesus Christ, as well as the care of those poor and needy outside the church of Christ who seek that help.

It is broad also because the needs of God's people are varied. Some need money; others need help in other ways. It is the calling of the deacons both to assess need, and to be sure the resources exist to supply all legitimate needs.

It is broad because God's people need not only earthly

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

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gifts, but also spiritual gifts. The deacons must therefore bring both money or other resources and comfortable words from Scripture and prayer.

Nor is the work easy. At times, and in certain cases, it might be easy—those cases in which the need of the saints is clearly evident, in which the saints cooperate with the deacons in their investigation, and in which the saints receive the earthly gifts and spiritual gifts with joy and gratitude to God. However, not all cases are like that. The deacons deal with sinners who hinder them from doing their real work. They come in contact with the covetous, whose earthly needs are more imagined than real. They must visit those who desire earthly gifts, but not the Word.

And, in times of widespread economic distress, it is not an easy task to ensure that sufficient means exist to care for all the poor and needy.

Deacons, use your office well!

The burden of this last article is to encourage all of you who are deacons to use your office well—that is, to be diligent and faithful in your labors!

For a number of reasons, I think it good to leave you with this encouragement.

First, there is the reality of human nature that if we find a job to be difficult, and know that we might soon be relieved of the job anyway, we are tempted not to pour into that work the energy that it requires of us. Term limits for elders and deacons, as we have them in the PRC, have their benefits. One possible drawback, however, is that if we become discouraged with the work, we simply wait out the rest of our term. Against this we must be on guard.

Second, the deacons must always remember that they function with authority. Jesus Christ has given you authority to carry out your labors in the care of the poor and needy on His behalf. This is a reason to believe that God uses you, and will equip you (in fact, already has equipped you) to do the work to which He has called you.

But third—and this is the most important reason to encourage you—the work of the diaconate will continue to be undermined and opposed. This is due in part to the increasing individualism of our society, in which people will not always admit their need for help, or, if they seek help, will not seek it from the right source. This is also due in part to apostasy. Falling away in areas of doctrine

always affects the church's life as well. It is no surprise, therefore, that in apostate churches, if an office of deacons exists, it does not at all resemble the office as Scripture speaks of it. And in this day in which the government increasingly takes care of the earthly needs of its citizens (note the passing of the recent health care reform bill as development of this), even church-goers might think it redundant for the church to give help as well.

So, deacons: use your office well, and do the work assigned you by Christ!

Elders, encourage and enable the deacons to do their work!

Encouragement must be given as much to the elders as to the deacons. For, as the overseers and rulers of the congregation, it falls to the elders to see that the deacons are doing their work.

How the elders are to watch over the deacons is not my concern for the moment. My concern is that the elders take the time to encourage the deacons to do their work, and to enable them to do their work.

Particularly, my concern is that the elders do all in their power to prevent the deacons as a body from being sidetracked from their real work.

It has happened, and still does happen, that the diaconate gets assigned tasks that do not belong to their office. Let me be clear here: I am not taking issue with the fact that an individual deacon might, in addition to being a deacon, serve another function in the church. But elders should avoid assigning to the diaconate *as a body* any tasks that do not pertain to their work of benevolence and mercy, so that the deacons can focus on their God-given work.

One application of this is that we ought not view our deacons as the financial committee of the council. Preparing the annual budget, drawing up the collection schedule, and counting all collections other than those for benevolence is the work of the council as a whole—elders and deacons together. These tasks should be done by committees of the council, consisting of one or more elders as well as one or more deacons. Or, if the council finds itself too busy for this work, it can even appoint a committee of non-officebearers to serve in this way, as we often do when appointing a building committee, made up mostly of non-officebearers, which answers to the council.

Some of our diaconates begin their monthly meetings by counting the General Fund collections for the past month. After counting and recording the offerings, they might spend time reviewing the General Fund ledger, and discussing what to do with those who are delinquent in paying their budget but have indicated that they have no benevolent needs. Possibly an hour or more is spent on this task—and yet this is not their fundamental work.

And why is it that the *deacons* have to pass out candy and fruit at the Christmas program? That the *deacons* have to set up for the church picnic, or serve the ice cream? That the *deacons* distribute the handouts after church on behalf of the council? Not every church asks the deacons to do these things; in fact, very likely most churches do not. But it is possible that in some other way, your congregation asks or expects the deacons as a body to do some task that is not part of the work of mercy.

We do well to change these things, so that the deacons can keep the focus of their meetings on the real work to which they are called. And the ones to take the lead in such change are the elders, who have the oversight of the deacons, and who therefore must see that the deacons are doing the work that God has assigned them.

Congregation, encourage and enable the deacons to do their work!

All members of the church of Jesus Christ also have a calling in this regard. Although in past articles this calling has been pointed out, I take the opportunity to remind the members of it.

Enabling the deacons to do their work involves supplying them with the necessary gifts with which they can carry out their work—that is, giving for the cause of benevolence, and being ready to serve in other ways, according to need and ability.

Enabling the deacons to do their work means that, when one is truly in need, one comes readily to the dea-

cons for help, and cooperates with the deacons as they investigate the need.

And enabling the deacons to do their work means for the congregation that it also understands what the real work of the deacons is, and desires that they attend to that work without distraction.

The congregation encourages the deacons in their work by praying for them, and by conveying to the deacons that it consciously enjoys blessing in the way of their faithful labors.

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Encouragement for deacons in the work.

Some years ago already we examined the passage that speaks of the reward of grace that God gives to faithful deacons: “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 3:13). This text is God’s own encouragement to deacons in their work, and an incentive for deacons to do their work well.

The encouragement is that God notes your faithful labors in His service, and will reward you accordingly. Of course, the reward is earned by Christ. It is a reward of grace. But it is graciously promised to faithful deacons.

The encouragement is that the power to such faithful service is found in our only High Priest, and our Merciful Deacon, Jesus Christ. His service to the church is the example for all to follow (Matt. 20:27-28). But it is not only an example; by His death and resurrection He shows that He possesses the power to serve well, and bestows that power on His people by His Spirit. In particular and special measure, He gives that power to deacons.

So use your office well! Make manifest to the people that the exalted Jesus Christ lives and dwells with us, and continually ministers to our needs!

And congregations, rejoice in this gift of God to His church: faithful deacons, servants of Christ and of His church’s needy. ☞

The Pilgrim's Awareness of the End

The fundamental reason why God's people are aware of the end of all things is that they are pilgrims and strangers on this earth. If this earth were our permanent and only home, we would not think about its end. We would not want that end to come, would not notice that it is coming, and would not be ready for it. However, as pilgrims our focus is on our eternal, heavenly home. We realize we are just passing through. We are conscious of the reality of the end of all things.

The Scriptures admonish us to be conscious of this. Interestingly, it is most often the Lord Jesus Himself who calls us to be aware of the end. Time and again during His earthly ministry He pointedly admonished His people to be watchful, so that they would be ready for His return.

We also find this admonition in the New Testament book that addresses us specifically as pilgrims and strangers on this earth. There we read (I Pet. 4:7), "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

What does it mean to be aware of the end?

The pilgrim's awareness of the end involves understanding what that end is. The "end" of all things is literally the "goal" of all things. The end will not simply be the last thing to happen in a succession of events. Nor will it come about simply because this world cannot continue to exist (because it is worn out, or because man has ruined it). The end will come because God's goal for all things will have been reached. And that goal is God

*Life is not about us,
but about God.*

Himself and His own glory. All things were planned and created by Him so that He might be glorified through the salvation of His elect church. Now, in time and history, that purpose is being accomplished through absolutely everything that occurs. When it has been fully accomplished, then God's goal will have been reached, and the end of all things will come. When the last child of God has been gathered into the church, there will be no more reason for the world to continue. Nothing more will need to happen on earth. Christ will return and bring it all to its final end.

This has an effect on the pilgrim. It especially does so by giving him the proper perspective on life. God's purpose with this world and with earthly life is not us – it is much larger, much broader, much more grand. We are not here below so that we might have an enjoyable and ease-filled life. We are not here to seek after every possible earthly pleasure and to accomplish our own desires and goals. But we are on earth, as is everything and everyone else, for the sake of God's glory. Life is not about us, but about God. Even if we do not see or understand how all things serve our salvation, we believe it, and in quiet trust wait upon our almighty Father.

In close connection with what we have just considered, the pilgrim's awareness of the end involves the realization that most things in this world are unimportant. Since the end to which all things are headed is the salvation of the church, everything else is simply a means to that end. At the center of world history is the church, and all else is simply a scaffold. That scaffold is necessary for the building process to take place, but once the building is finished, it is no longer needed and thus useless. The scaffold is also ugly, and detracts from the beauty of the building. For this reason

Rev. Kleyn is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.

it is torn down and destroyed. This means that once the church has been saved, all that surrounds it will be destroyed – all earthly creatures, all man’s accomplishments, every building on this planet, all our possessions, all the heavenly bodies, even the whole universe. Then finally the church will be revealed and seen in all its beauty and glory.

This also has an effect on the pilgrim. He realizes that the things of this world have no value in themselves, but are worthwhile only insofar as they serve the building of the church. Why be attracted and attached to things that are fleeting and temporary? Why love the things of the world when the only certain thing about them is that they will be burned up and destroyed? Why lay up for ourselves treasures that cannot be taken along into eternity? We belong to a heavenly kingdom with treasures that are

eternal. And the things of earth so easily distract us from our spiritual treasures in Christ. Faithful pilgrims do not focus on the scaffold, but on the glorious building to which they, by God’s grace, belong.

The pilgrim’s awareness of the end also consists of being aware of the nearness of that end. It is near in three ways.

It is near first of all because at any time our earthly pilgrimage could end through death. At any time, for each of us, Christ could return and separate us permanently from all that is earthly. In this sense, the end is always near.

It is near, secondly, because it is next. The coming of the end is the last great event in the history of the salvation of the church. There have already been a number of great events that the people of God looked forward to in the past, such as the flood, the establishment of the Old Testament church in Canaan, and the first coming of Jesus Christ. But since Christ’s ascension, there is nothing for the church to look forward to but the second coming of Christ. No other great event in the history of salvation will occur. The end is near because it is next.

The end is near, in the third place, in terms of actual time. This is made clear to us through the precursory signs. More than ever, we see these signs being fulfilled. The clear speech of Christ through it all is that He is returning soon. His footsteps are heard in the signs we see

in the church, in the world, and in creation. Loudly and clearly Christ makes us know we are living in the end times. The history of this world cannot and will not go on much longer. Things are rushing to the end. Soon it will all be over. The pilgrim is watchful and notices the signs. Through them he is constantly reminded, “The end is near!”

The effect of all this on the pilgrim is a life lived in the awareness of the end. Knowing the end is coming makes all the difference. Then the pilgrim is not troubled by great or unexpected events in the world or in his own life. He does not

conclude that things are going wrong. He understands that all things are a necessary part of God’s plan to save the church and glorify Himself. No matter what occurs, he has a proper response of humble submission to the good will of God. And all these things serve to strengthen his desire for the return of His Lord.

The pilgrim’s awareness of the end also equips him, by the grace of God, to be ready for the end to come. He does not make his earthly life more permanent than it ought to be. He does not sink his roots down into this physical world. He does not build himself a kingdom and amass to himself earthly treasures. He is not gripped by the desire to have and enjoy the things of this earth. Rather, he acknowledges that there is nothing permanent about that which is earthly. The end is coming. This world and all that is in it is just a shack compared to his heavenly mansion. The pilgrim hopes for the return of Christ. He is ready to be taken by his Lord to his eternal home in the heavens. He longs for the day of his full and eternal deliverance. His daily prayer is, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!” ☪

*Faithful pilgrims
do not focus
on the scaffold,
but on the glorious
building to which they,
by God’s grace, belong.*

The Ordination of Rev. McGeown As Missionary to Limerick

Jesus Christ, the exalted head of His church, has sent forth another pastor-teacher to labour in His harvest and to fight in the service of the kingdom of heaven! That labourer and spiritual warrior is well known to many SB readers: Martyn McGeown, who spent four happy years in Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church, brought a word of edification in many PR congregations, served a six-month internship in Southwest PR Church, graduated from the PR Seminary, and sustained an exam before the PR Synod in June. Now he has begun his life's calling as an ordained minister of the Word and sacraments! May the Lord use him mightily for many years in this glorious work!

On Friday, 30 July, Mr. McGeown was ordained as a missionary by the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in Northern Ireland to labour with the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF) in the Republic of Ireland. The venue was the new CPRC church building in Ballymena, not yet completed but serviceable for the event. The baptismal font, for instance, was not yet installed, but for this meeting it was hardly necessary. Brother McGeown's ordination marked the building's first service, making it an auspicious day for more than one reason.

The evening began with a photographer taking pictures of Missionary McGeown and the CPRC Consistory outside the building's front entrance for the local press. The ushers guided visitors from the overflow car park to the pews, providing a handshake and a programme in between.

Rev. Angus Stewart of the CPRC brought the "charge": "The Missionary as Soldier, Athlete, and Farmer," from

II Timothy 2:3-6, explaining the minister's hardships, disentanglement from worldly affairs, and purpose (as a soldier), and his calling to compete lawfully (as an athlete) and be first partaker of the fruits before bringing the bounties of God's Word to the people (as a farmer). The audio of the sermon and the video of several parts of the service are on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/NTindividual.htm#ordination).

Rev. Stewart and Elders Ivan Reid and Brian Crossett performed the laying on of hands ceremony. Deacon William Graham read a touching letter from the faculty of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, which concluded echoing the words of the apostle Paul urging us to "pray always with all supplication in the Spirit for the newly ordained brother, that utterance may be given unto him, that he may open his mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel...as he ought to speak (Eph. 6:18-20)." Mr. Graham then presented gifts to the new missionary from the CPRC (a Bible) and Southwest Protestant Reformed Church (a satellite navigation system). With these two gifts to guide him, our brother



"Yes, truly, with all my heart."

Rev. Stewart is pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland.

has no excuse for losing his way, spiritually or geographically!

The service was concluded with Rev. McGeown pronouncing the benediction and shaking hands with everyone as they left the sanctuary and headed upstairs. There fellowship was enjoyed over tea and sandwiches.


This was a joyous occasion for the CPRC (our first missionary!) and the LRF, some of whom drove 4-5 hours to attend (their first pastor!). The family of Rev. McGeown were present in force, including his parents, brother-in-law, and sister, whom some SB readers met when they were in west Michigan in June for the brother's examination and graduation. Friends from England (Stephen Rushton, a member of the British Reformed Fellowship Council) and Italy (Marco Barone of the Italian Reformed Fellowship), as well as from Scotland and the Netherlands, were in attendance.

The Limerick Reformed Fellowship, the group with whom Rev. McGeown is working, is zealous and dedicated. Though small, they are a multi-national body of

saints. The LRF services include not only saints from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, but also those whose origins lie in Wales, Germany, South Africa, the Philippines, and China. The Reformed believers in Limerick are delighted with their new missionary pastor. May the Lord bless the LRF and Missionary McGeown together in their labours to spread the Reformed faith in Limerick and the Republic of Ireland and use their witness to gather Christ's sheep and form an instituted church!

Info

Rev. Martyn McGeown
11, the Laurels, Briarfield, Castletroy,
Limerick, Republic of Ireland
Tel. 00353 61 635582

Missionary-pastor of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship, meeting in Conradh na Gaelige, Thomas Street, Limerick (Sunday services 11 AM and 7 PM)
www.limerickreformed.com 

PROTESTANT REFORMED SPECIAL ED

MR. BRYANT VAN OVERLOOP

Annual Society Meeting Report

May 3, 2010

On behalf of the Board, I warmly welcome you Society members and new members to this 2010 Society meeting. We thank you for your support and prayers over this past year and covet your continued support and prayers in the year to come. We above all thank our heavenly Father, who is the giver of every perfect gift.

Last year we budgeted, as a Society, to raise \$104,000.00 in our Drive. This year we have had to conduct a secondary Drive to reach our goal. We are pleased that we have surpassed our goal and have received

\$116,500.00 in gifts. We thank you Society members for your support and generous donations and ask that you please continue prayerfully to consider this need.

We as a Board have focused this past year on different ways to broaden our base of support. This year the Publicity Committee sent an informative letter to our churches, to be published in their monthly newsletters. A pig-roast fundraiser is being planned for this coming fall. And, as individuals on the Board, we have personally asked brothers at our own congregations to consider becoming members of this Society. We also suggest that you approach men in your family, as well as friends and brothers in your congregation, to ask them to consider joining this worthy Society. We pray that more and more men in our congregations may realize their corpo-

Mr. VanOverloop is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

rate responsibility in the body of believers, as we read in I Corinthians 12:14-25:

For the body is not one member, but many.... But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary; and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness....That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

The Board has been busy this past school year with school visits to Heritage, Adams, and Hope Schools. We met with our own teacher, Mrs. Karen Ensink, on a monthly basis, observing her in action in her classroom. We thank God for Karen and for the excellent job she does day in and day out. The Board offered her a contract for the 2010-2011 school year, which she has signed and accepted. Karen has five inclusion students for whom she is responsible, which adds up to preparing for around 20 classes every day. Thankfully Karen has excellent aides to assist her in this daunting task. Mrs. Tina Mingerink, Mrs. Alyssa VanBaren, and Mrs. Shelly Start deserve our thanks as well. We thank Alyssa Van Baren for her years of service, as she is planning on not returning next year. To replace her we have hired Mrs. Heidi Pipe.

Karen went to an Autism Conference in Green Bay, WI, which was very informative. This conference was led by Temple Grandin, who has autism herself. Karen came back with several practical ideas and resources to use in her own classroom.

Karen and Mrs. Mary VanOverloop report that there may be a greater need for the coming 2010-2011 school year due to potentially three students coming into kindergarten that may need Special Education assistance. Mary heads the Discovery Program (which helps 55 students) and also assists the Board in managing the Special Ed room. Mary has been so helpful and involved in

setting goals for inclusion students. Mary also performs individualized, education-planning testing for numerous students in general education who need special help in various subjects. Because of a donation to the Discovery Center, Mary was able to purchase a program called "Everybody Counts." This is a program that will be used every year as a disability awareness program for kindergarten through 8th grade. Each grade has a disability it focuses on, so by the time the students have completed their years at Heritage, they will have been exposed to simulations for different disabilities from blindness, and cognitive delays, to serious illnesses.

On March 26, 2010, through extensive efforts by Mary Van Overloop, Karen Ensink, Donna Peterson, and 25 other volunteers, a Fearfully and Wonderfully Made Dis-Ability Awareness Day was held at Heritage and was a success. Karen and Mary received a great response from volunteers, DC staff, and classroom teachers. Karen and Mary may present the materials at a PRTI Convention, to show the program to our other schools and make copies of the program manual available for their use. We as a Board wholeheartedly thank these ladies for their pioneer efforts and encourage our other schools to implement such a program. We thank the Lord for Karen, Mary, and all the aides here at Heritage and their dedicated labor of love for these students.

The Board met with Mrs. Sandy Kooiman, Mrs. Alva Spiensma, Mrs. Linda VanderWoude, and Mrs. Melissa Looyenga at Adams PRC School. Sandy Kooiman heads Adams' Resource Room. Currently Adams' Resource Room helps 31 students with learning disabilities in various subjects. Sandy continuously is looking into more efficient ways of running such an expansive program there. They had Linda Kleyn, from Elim, visit their room and give recommendations and advice for such efficiencies. From the Board's visit it appears that Adams' Resource Room is running very effectively and the students are benefitting from it. We thank God for these four ladies, who labor diligently in love for those who need extra help at Adams School.

The Board met with Mrs. Audrey Starrett at Hope PRC School's ALPS room. Along with Audrey, Mrs. Helen Medema and Mrs. Marilyn Schipper help part-time in Hope's Resource Room. Audrey helps 18 chil-

dren from 2nd grade to 8th grade in a variety of different subjects. Helen heads the reading tutorial program. Helen and Marilyn are writing their own reading tutorial program. They see the need for early intervention and are volunteering their time and efforts to do just that at Hope. Mrs. Deb Kuiper has been hired to head the Discovery Center, which will start this coming school year. We thank God for these four ladies and their labor of love for those in need at Hope School.

In addition to the above three schools, we support also Covenant CHS; Faith PRCS in Randolph, WI; Eastside PRCS in Grand Rapids; and Loveland PRCS in Loveland, CO. We are able to see the wisdom of our all-wise Father in heaven to place on the hearts of our fathers and grandfathers to begin the Society for Protestant Reformed Special Education in the early 1980s, and we give thanks for this Society. We ask that you continue to pray for this Society and her needs, that the Lord would bestow His grace and mercy upon us.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to thank the retiring Board members, Mr. Herm DeVries and Mr. Bryant VanOverloop, for their years of service on the Board. Your labors have been greatly appreciated. We look forward to working with the new Board members, Mr. Jim Van Overloop and Mr. Jordan VanderKolk. Those presently serving on the Board are Mr. Dave Rau (president), Mr. Eugene Kamps (vice-all), Mr. Bern Zandstra, Mr. Brandon Van Overloop (treasurer), and Mr. Deane Wassink.

In conclusion, we ask that you continue to pray for the Board, the Society, and all involved in the training of the special covenant seed that God has given to us to care for, for a time. We take comfort that we are not our own but belong to our faithful Father in heaven, who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above what we could ask or think, and who knows our needs before we even ask. We thank and praise Him for all His many blessings. ☺

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Sister-Church Activities

What a summer for our sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena! We can only imagine the range of emotions they have experienced, and are still experiencing, for all our heavenly Father has done for and through them. First, Mr. Martyn McGeown, one of their members, graduated this past June from our Theological School and accepted Covenant's call to serve as their missionary pastor. Mr. McGeown was ordained into the office of minister of the Word and Sacraments on July 30. Rev. McGeown will be working as missionary, with his labors centering in Limerick, Republic of Ireland,

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

working with the Limerick Reformed Fellowship.

Second, after many long years of anticipation, the Covenant congregation held their final worship service in the Protestant Hall on Sunday, July 25, and moved into their newly completed church building. Their first worship service there was the following Friday evening, the ordination service for Rev. McGeown. We rejoice that God has given our sister church a missionary pastor, and we also thank God that He has given to Covenant a church building of their own. The building was to be dedicated on August 5 in a special worship service led by Prof. H. Hanko.

Dr. David Torlach, of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (a denomination with which our churches have a corresponding relationship), who was trained in our

Theological School, was examined in July by the Presbytery of the EPC for candidacy in the ministry of the EPCA. Dr. Torlach passed this exam and is now eligible for call from one of their vacant churches. We rejoice with our brother and his family and pray that his ministry may be a clear and shining light to the glory of God.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL recently decided to start using sermonaudio.com. For a while now the most recent sermons from Peace have been posted on their Website. Now those sermons will be archived at sermonaudio.com, so the older sermons will also be available. Another advantage of using sermonaudio is that Peace now

has the ability to broadcast their sermons live. This is especially convenient for those who, for good reason, must miss a service. Peace will also be able to monitor how many people listen to their services. Other churches report that many people from many different countries listen to their sermons this way. Clearly, this is another effective way of spreading the truth about Jesus Christ.

The Evangelism Committee of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI sponsored a short summer seminar on personal evangelism after their evening worship services, July 25 and August 8. This seminar was particularly intended to equip recent high school graduates and college students for the work of evangelism in their everyday lives.

Congregation Activities

The congregation of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a summer singspiration entitled "His Wondrous Love Proclaim," on Sunday evening, July 25, at their church. Members of First and neighboring churches were invited to spend an hour that evening praising God with audience singing and through the voices and musical instruments of others.

At a meeting this summer, the Council of the Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI approved the

publishing of a monthly newsletter entitled "Providence Post." The first edition of this newsletter was available to the congregation on July 25.

At a special congregational meeting held on July 8, the Hudsonville, MI PRC voted to go forward with architectural drawings for a proposed addition to their church building. Hudsonville anticipates the need for additional space at this time and into the future, as the number of children continues to increase in the congregation. This proposal is not to increase the seating capacity of the sanctuary, but to provide support areas of the appropriate size to meet the needs of their congregation.

A special committee of the Loveland, CO PRC has also been investigating future expansion of their church building taking into account the needs of the church and the school. Their most significant recommendation is to remodel their present facility by demolishing the old portion of the church, digging a basement to provide additional rooms, expanding the narthex, and putting a larger consistory room, nursery, and restrooms on the main floor and adding a second floor with four full-size classrooms that can also be used by the school. After receiving cost estimates and considering the financial needs, the Council will decide on recommendations to pres-

ent to their congregation.

The congregation of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD invited the area PR congregations to join them on July 29 for a day at Wild Water West. The discounted admission fee included unlimited access to go-carts, batting cages, mini-golf, bumper boats, water park, wave pool, and sand volleyball. Even though the weather interrupted plans, the turnout exceeded all expectations, with over 250 people signed up.

Minister Activities

Rev. J. Laning preached his farewell sermon at the Hope PRC in Walker, MI on Sunday, July 11. Rev. Laning served Hope for almost 13 years. That week he and his family moved to Hull, IA, where he was installed on Sunday, July 25, as their 13th pastor.

Since last month's "News," a number of calls from vacant congregations have been declined: Rev. G. Eriks declined the call extended to him by the First PRC in Holland; Rev. C. Spronk, the call from Trinity PRC in Hudsonville; Rev. W. Langerak, the call from Wingham PRC in Ontario, Canada; and Rev. A. Lanning, calls from Edgerton, MN PRC, Hope PRC in Walker, MI, and Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. Edgerton PRC has subsequently called Candidate Daniel Holstege. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dedication

■ The dedication of the new facility of South Holland PRC will take place on Friday, September 17, at 7:30 P.M. The address of the church is 1777 E. Richton Road, Crete, IL 60417.

Notice

■ RFPA Annual Meeting, Thursday, September 23, 7:30 P.M., at Hope PRC.

Yearbook change

■ Please change the telephone number of Rev. Dennis Lee (under PR Clergy and Congregational statistics) to (847) 524-4676 and add a study number for Rev. J. Laning: (712) 363-1944.

Wedding Anniversary

■ On August 1, 2010, our parents, **ALAN and VIOLA DE BOER**, celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. "And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, LORD, has not forsaken them that seek thee" (Psalm 9:10).

- ✿ Brad & Jill De Boer
Dana & Renae
- ✿ Andon & Angie De Boer

Doon, Iowa

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to God, we rejoiced with

**WILBUR and DOROTHY
BRUINSMA,**

as they celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on August 21, 2010.

We thank our heavenly Father for the many years of covenant instruction and for the godly example they set for us. We, along with them, acknowledge that all our ways are directed by God, and His grace is sufficient for all our needs.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7).

To God be the glory!

- ✿ John and Judy Kalsbeek
- ✿ Lew and Donna Bruinsma
- ✿ Rev. Wilbur and Mary Bruinsma
- ✿ Keith and Wanda Bruinsma
29 grandchildren
58 great grandchildren

Lansing, Illinois

Seminary Convocation

■ Seminary Convocation will be held on September 15, 2010, at 7:30 P.M., in Southwest PRC. Prof. Barrett Gritters will speak on the topic "The Minister as Physician." Please note that the seminary building will be open after the Convocation, to allow everyone to see the newly renovated classrooms.

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to our God and joy in our hearts we celebrate on September 4 the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents:

**RICHARD and NANCY
BOSMAN.**

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be. Thy wife shall be as a faithful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion.... Yea thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128).

- ✿ Ben and Loree Bosman
Jessica, Solomon, Ariel, Esaias,
Gideon
- ✿ April and Russ Morris
- ✿ Adam and Carrie Bosman
Adele, Neil
- ✿ Becky and Karl Quinton
Riley, Zoe

Holland, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ On August 8, 2010, our parents, **RICHARD and RONDA WIERINGA,**

celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. We thank God for giving us parents who raised us in the fear of His name. We pray that the Lord may continue to guide and bless them in their marriage. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- ✿ Blake and Lindsey Wieringa
- ✿ Trenton Wieringa
- ✿ Jori Wieringa

Hudsonville, Michigan

Resolution of sympathy

■ The Men's Society of the Hope PRC in Walker expresses sincere Christian sympathy to member Mr. Harry Langerak and his family in the death of his mother,

MRS. JEAN LANGERAK.

May the brother and his family find comfort in II Corinthians 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

James Schimmel, Sec'y.

Reformed Witness Hour

August 2010

Date	Topic	Text
September 5	"The Beginning of Birth Pains"	Matthew 24:7, 8
September 12	"Nation Against Nation"	Matthew 24:6, 7
September 19	"Lawlessness in Society"	Matthew 24:12, 13
September 26	"Economic Imbalance"	Revelation 6:5, 6