

The Standard Bearer

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Thanksgiving for God's Goodness

"Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed."

Psalm 65:1

Psalm 65 gives us multiple reasons for which to give thanks, all of which point to God's goodness.

The psalm begins on a note of thanksgiving and carries that thought throughout the psalm: "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion" (Ps. 65:1). Praise has to do with being sincerely and deeply thankful for God's wonderful works and His superior qualities. The reason praise is said to "wait" is that there is always something for which to praise God in Zion. Today and every day God's goodness affords constant material for praise.



Thanksgiving Day ought to call our attention to God's bountiful provision.

Because we live in such a modernized society, we do

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not very often think about where our food comes from. To put food on our tables we have only to go to the store. And, even if we think beyond the supermarket as the source of food, we still tend to think of the harvest as something that men have brought about using machinery to plow, plant, and harvest the crops. Not only that, the money we use to buy our provisions is most often conceived of as a product of our own labor. In other words, we tend to forget God. We forget how dependent we are upon Him to give us daily bread. Thanksgiving Day reminds us to put God back into the picture.

Especially at the completion of harvest, we are reminded that God has once again provided the harvest. He it is that created the plants in the first place. He created the soil to give the proper nutrients for growth. He gives the sunshine and warmth and rain at the right time and in the right amounts. These are just a few of the ways in which God has worked to provide for us.

The psalmist recognizes this provision: "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for

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it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof" (Ps. 65:9-10). The river of God brings an abundant supply, so that the grain flourishes. Such is the abundance of rain, that it fills the furrows etched in the ground by the plow; it causes the ridges between the furrows to be leveled out; it softens the ground; and produces an abundant harvest.

God's provision is summed up in Psalm 65:11: "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness." The idea here seems to be that God adorns the whole year with His goodness, which goodness is manifest in the abundant harvest. Thus it can be rightly said, "Thy paths drop fatness," as if to say, wherever God walks, rich abundance is the result.

Moreover, God's care extends even to the uncultivated regions of the earth. "They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing" (Ps. 65:12-13). Even in those regions where the shepherds lead their flocks, God's goodness is displayed. His provision is so abundant that the meadows are filled with flocks, covering them as with a blanket.

The psalmist lived in a time when people were more closely connected to the land, the result being that they recognized God's hand in the harvest. Though unbelief describes these things as "Mother Nature's" work, by God's grace the psalmist knew better. He knew that the abundant harvest was caused by the far-reaching hand of God's providence. What about us? Do we recognize God's hand of providence in the provisions we enjoy?



Of course, if our thanksgiving does not go beyond our praise for physical provision, we will be missing the main point of our thanks to God.

Indeed, if physical provision were the only thing for which to give thanks, we would really have nothing. If this life, with its physical provision, were all that we had, then we remain most miserable. How does God describe those who live only for the present? While they live, they bless their souls. But when they die, they shall carry nothing along to the other side of the grave (cf. Ps. 49:17-19).

What we need to remember is that the Old Testament saints saw God's physical provision as a sign of greater spiritual realities. When God gave the people physical manna in the wilderness, He was pointing the way to a greater, spiritual provision, which we enjoy in Jesus Christ. Similarly, the inheritance in the land of Canaan pointed the way to the heavenly promised land. So too, the harvest of crops pointed the people to God's abundant spiritual blessings.

In that connection, it is significant that every one of the three great feasts in Israel was tied in some way to the harvest. The Feast of the Passover was connected with the harvest of barley (cf. Lev. 23:10-12). The Passover, of course, points to the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The Feast of Weeks, also called the Feast of Pentecost, was connected to the wheat harvest (cf. Ex. 34:22). This feast points to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which happened fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. The Feast of Tabernacles was held after the gathering of the grain and wine (cf. Deut. 16:13). The Feast of Tabernacles points to a day when God's tabernacle will be with men in the new heavens and the new earth.

Harvest time, therefore, pointed the Old Testament saints to the reality of God's gracious salvation. Thanksgiving Day should do that for us too, as it points us to the fact that God will ever provide for His people.

What are some of those spiritual blessings for which we give thanks?

In the first place, our God is a God who hears prayer: "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed. O thou that hearest prayer,

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unto thee shall all flesh come" (Ps. 65:1-2). It belongs to God's nature to hear and answer the prayers of all those who call upon Him. That's because if God has begun a good work in us, which work has caused us to pray, then He will certainly continue the work by granting us the grace we pray for. "The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them" (Ps. 145:18-19). What a wonderful thing to be thankful for: God hears our prayers!

In the second place, our God is a forgiving God: "Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away" (Ps. 65:3). Our sins are so great and numerous that when we begin to look at them we are overwhelmed in our consciences. We cannot stand before God's judgment seat by ourselves. Wonderfully, God washes away our sins and gives us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Are we thankful for such gracious forgiveness?

Third, not only does God forgive us, He also brings us into fellowship with Himself: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple" (Ps. 65:4). This is the glorious fruit of God's electing love: God calls us to Himself and gives us the privilege of coming into His courts, where we will be abundantly satisfied. Are we thankful for this privilege?

All of these things are God's gracious answer to prayer. They prove that God is working in us mightily to cause us to pray and that He is mighty to answer our prayers. This is the psalmist's point in the verses that follow: "By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea" (Ps. 65:5). God carries out these glorious operations for the sake of His people.

Absolutely nothing can stand in the way of His blessings. He will strike terror into His enemies in answer to our prayers for deliverance. No matter where we find ourselves, God is our confidence.

We trust Him, knowing that He has power even over those things we think are most powerful: "Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power: Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people" (Ps. 65:6-7).




Are we thankful for the wonderful goodness of God? Then our calling is to show forth our thankfulness. That is why the psalmist says, "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion." Literally, the psalmist says, "To thee

is silence, Praise." That silence has to do with stillness and readiness. Everything has been made ready to praise God; all the noise of preparation has ceased; the people are assembled with hearts eager to praise; everyone is filled with a sense of the great majesty and goodness of God.

That is the way it should be with us; the more we dwell upon God's spiritual blessings upon poor creatures of the dust and the more we rehearse His everlasting love and grace towards us,

the more will we be ready to burst forth in praise and thanks to Him.

Those who have such a readiness to praise God will pay their vows: "unto thee shall the vow be performed" (Ps. 65:1b). To perform a vow is to offer to God that which we have promised. The Israelites brought their sacrifices to God; but we must not think their service ended with the outward sacrifice. The true Israel devoted themselves to a life of thankfulness for all that they had received from God's hand.

In the same way, God would have us pay our vows of thankfulness. If we are truly thankful for free forgiveness in Jesus Christ, we will show it by the way we live. Are we thankful for God's goodness? May God give us the grace to praise Him every day of our lives. 

*Are we thankful
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Then our calling is
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Minister-On-Loan—A God-Given Opportunity to Help a Sister Church

What is a minister-on-loan (MOL)? Why are we sending Rev. Lanning to Singapore as an MOL? Have we ever done this before? Is he still a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches? How long will he be an MOL? Why couldn't he go to Singapore for a year or two, and come back to the PRC, perhaps even to Faith? Why didn't Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) call one of our ministers?

These are some of the questions that I have been asked in the last couple months. Perhaps you could add to the list.

The questions arise naturally when a synodically-appointed church (Grandville) extends a call to a minister (Rev. Andy Lanning), the Lord convicts that man of the call to be MOL, and a large congregation (Faith PRC) is then left vacant. Such questions come out of an understanding of the essential importance of the preaching and of all the minister's work. And they give us occasion to reflect on the blessed opportunity that God has given to the PRC.

Two previous editorials have described the history of CERC and her present situation. What stands

out is a compelling need and earnest desire for solid Reformed preaching and teaching in this relatively young congregation. If there is anything that stands out about the PRC, it is their commitment to antithetical, Reformed preaching. If there is any desire that predominates in the hearts of PRC members, it is the desire to have God open doors to allow us to send out the glorious truth of sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant, with all the implications for living the Reformed faith. Clearly, at this time, God opens a door, and at the same time gives the PRC opportunity to assist a sister church, using an MOL.

The concept of MOL is not new in the PRC. The first mention of the idea is found in the 1976 Acts of Synod, in which year the PRC's Committee for Contact with other Churches (CC) gained synod's approval for loaning a PRC minister to the OPC of Christchurch in New Zealand. As the idea developed, the term minister-on-loan was coined.

Synod 1978 decided that a sister-church relationship had to be realized before sending an MOL. The next synod formally adopted an MOL policy. A snag arose in the actual sending of an MOL to New Zealand, and some had questions about the concept. Nonetheless, synod did not turn away from either the term or the idea of an MOL. The synod of 1981 maintained

the policy adopted in 1979.

As events unfolded in New Zealand, eventually a new congregation was formed there (adopting the name the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand), and sister-church relationship was established (in 1986). However, rather than request an MOL, the church in Wellington used a provision of a sister-church relationship and extended a call to Rev. Rod Miersma, which call he accepted. While an MOL remains a minister in the PRC, Rev. Miersma officially left the ranks the Protestant Reformed ministers for the time that he was pastor in Wellington. When he accepted a call from Immanuel PRC (Lacombe, AB, Canada), he became once again a minister in the PRC.

The next time the concept of MOL surfaced was in 1991, when synod approved calling a minister to be loaned to the Singaporean churches (ERCS). The arrangement for MOL would follow the guidelines of 1979. Hope PRC (Walker) was appointed the calling church.

Rev. Jason Kortering accepted that call. He was given three years for an initial length of service. His term of labor was extended twice by synod—the last time in 1997 for five years. Later Rev. den Hartog accepted the call to replace Rev. Kortering as MOL, a position he held until 2005. Subsequently the ERCS informed

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the PRC that they no longer needed the assistance of an MOL.

The idea arises again in 2012 with the approval of an MOL for CERC. And with it, the questions surface.

First, it should be noted that, according to the Contact Committee's constitution, a sister-church relationship implies "mutual acknowledgment of offices, so that ministers of sister churches are allowed preaching privileges in one another's congregations and are eligible to be called by congregations in sister churches" (V, B, 1). This provision gives a sister church the right to call one of our ministers as the PRC of New Zealand did in 1987. The Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland did the same. The PRC had sent Rev. Angus Stewart to serve as the missionary in Northern Ireland. After organization in 2006, CPRC extended a call to Rev. Stewart, which he accepted. As a result, Rev. Stewart is not a minister in the PRC, but of CPRCNI. A congregation in the PRC has the right to call Rev. Stewart, or Rev. McGeown, just as Covenant PRCNI has the right to call a minister of the PRC.

So, why did Covenant ERCS and the Contact Committee work out a proposal (subject to synod's approval) for an MOL, rather than to have CERC call a minister of the PRC? The reasons for this are presented in the 2012 Acts (pp. 74-79). An explanation of the reasons may be helpful.

The key word in this matter is "time." This proposal (now approved and implemented) gives CERC time to prepare for calling a PRC minister. They need this time to sift through the many government regulations for calling a minister of the PRC

as their own. Since CERC had had MOLs before, they knew the process for gaining their government approval of an MOL coming to work in Singapore, and the leaders were confident that the government would approve it once again. In fact, it took only a week or two to gain official approval from the Singaporean government, once Rev. Lanning had obtained passports for his family. Calling a minister as their own pastor will be different, and CERC needs time to investigate and prepare for such an undertaking.

Second, the MOL policy gives the minister (Rev. Lanning) and CERC the time to determine whether or not he is the right man for the work. In that regard, the MOL arrangement follows the wise policy of the PRC with a foreign missionary. A man who accepts a call to be a missionary to a foreign field is given a set period to labor (called a "tenure of service" in the Foreign Mission Committee's constitution, VI, C, 4). At the end of that period, the missionary may decline further labor on the field. Perhaps his family or he has not been able to adjust to living in a foreign land and culture. He would then be brought home and be eligible for a call in the PRC.

That is essentially the same procedure to be followed with the MOL to Singapore. Living in Singapore will demand a major adjustment both for Rev. Lanning and the Lanning family. That is obvious on the face of it. If the Lannings find it impossible to adapt to their new land and work, they will be brought back to the USA and Rev. Lanning will be declared eligible for a call in the PRC. It seems highly improbable that that should be necessary. Rev. and Mrs. Lanning and family give every evidence of be-

ing well prepared by God not only to adjust, but to flourish in Singapore. Nonetheless, if it should go differently, the arrangement allows for them to return to the PRC.

After the MOL has been in Covenant ERC for two years, CERC will have the opportunity to extend a call to the MOL to be their pastor. If he accepts that call, he will no longer be a minister under Grandville's consistory, but the pastor of CERC.

Someone might wonder—Why not have Faith PRC release Rev. Lanning to go to Singapore for a year and then return to Faith? That could be done, but it is not the better option. If Rev. Lanning is called to Faith, he ought to labor as pastor in Faith. When God calls a man, He equips that man for the work. Can a man be used elsewhere for a time, help out for a month or two even in a different land? Certainly. But the man's heart would be, rightly, back in his home congregation, for that is where God called him to work.

The better way is that a minister go to Singapore with the conviction that Christ has called him to labor as a pastor in CERC. For, as noted, when Christ calls, He also equips a man to the work. That a pastor is needed in CERC is clear. The work demands more than a commitment of a few months, or even a year. And it requires that a man be devoted completely to the work with the conviction that God calls him to these labors.

Rev. and Mrs. Lanning are not anticipating a return to the USA in two years. They are committed to long-term living and working in CERC. That dedication is the fruit of Christ's call. That is exactly what any congregation needs—a pastor fully devoted

to working for the welfare of that congregation, as long as Christ gives him to labor there.

The PRC has before it the blessed opportunity to help a sister congregation. The need is apparent. Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, having lost three ministers in a row and having gone through a split for the sake of the truth of God, is in need of full-time pastoral care. CERC, composed almost entirely of first and second-generation Christians, is in need of careful instruction—in preaching, catechism classes, speeches, and Bible study. CERC, devoted to the Reformed faith, and particularly the truths of sovereign, particular grace and the unconditional covenant, is eager for solid, Reformed instruction and guidance

in all aspects of the Reformed faith and walk. And CERC is eager to stand as a beacon of light in Singapore for the truth that is preached consistently in the PRC.

God providentially brought this request from CERC at a time when the PRC had but two vacant congregations. It pains us (members of Faith) to bid our pastor farewell, to be sure. And the three vacant congregations earnestly desire pastors. Yet as churches, we are hardly shorthanded. God provides ministers who are able to care for the congregations. Three vacancies allows for movement of ministers, which the Reformed church understands to be necessary and good.

Thus the PRC stand ready to help their newest sister. God has graciously given the Protestant Reformed

Churches a glorious heritage in the Reformed faith. The PRC are wholeheartedly committed to antithetical, Reformed preaching. God continues to give faithful ministers of the Word who proclaim that Reformed gospel clearly and antithetically. As He has through the entire new dispensation, God puts into His church the desire to send forth the gospel.

That desire fills the hearts of PRC members, the desire to have God open doors to allow us to send out the glorious truth of sovereign grace and the unconditional covenant, with all the implications. Clearly, at this time, God opens a door, and simultaneously gives the PRC opportunity to assist a sister church, using an MOL. May God richly bless this endeavor.



LETTERS

CRC and the FOS

I just finished the “All Around Us” article on the CRC and the FOS. The last paragraph on the first page mentions a misquoting of the creeds and the classes’ abuse of the FOS going back to 1924, alluding, I assume, to the deposing of Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and Henry Danhof. I would be interested in reading about that abuse in more detail. Is there an article in the archives of the *SB* or a book that relates those events?

Thank you,
Sharon Gordon
Wanaque, NJ

Response

The best book about the history of the adoption of common grace by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1924 and the abuse of the formula of subscription (FOS) by the classes that deposed Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof is the firsthand account written by Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*. Herman Hoeksema wrote this book already in 1936. Anyone who is in-

terested in that history must read this book. The book has been out of print for a long time and is difficult to find. Easier to find substitutes are *Ready to Give an Answer*, which deals with the doctrinal issues of 1924, *A Watered Garden*, which includes a treatment of the history of 1924; and *For Thy Truth’s Sake*, a doctrinal history of Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) that has a section on 1924. The Reformed Free Publishing Association publishes these three books.

I also take this opportunity to point out a few details relating to the charge of misquoting the creeds in 1924, the subsequent abuse of the FOS in the deposition of faithful officebearers, and why this is the historical root of developments in the CRC today.

First, the outstanding example of the synod’s misquoting the creeds is the use of the Canons of Dordt III/IV.4 to support the third point of common grace. The third point taught that by virtue of God’s common grace the natural man is able to do civic good. To establish that doctrine from the creeds the synod quoted the first part of Article 4: “There remain, however, in man since the fall, glimmerings of natural light, whereby he

retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment.” Herman Hoeksema said about the quotation: “a superficial reading of the first sentence of this article leaves the impression upon the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced that it actually teaches that the natural man is able to do good works, as the third point would have us believe” (*Protestant Reformed Churches*, 350).

To its shame, however, the synod did not quote the second part of the article that refutes the very point that it attempted to establish: “But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God, and to true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God.”

What Herman Hoeksema said about another creedal citation by the synod applies to them all: “I would say that synod must have been desperately looking for anything that would have a semblance of proof in the Confessions” (*Protestant Reformed Churches*, 386, 387).

The synod’s use of the creeds will stand to the everlasting shame of that synod. By it the synod bore false witness against the truth in a theological controversy of enormous proportions, a controversy involving the heart of gospel truth, the continued faithfulness of that denomination to Reformed orthodoxy, and the ecclesiastical life of three of her ministers, their respective consistories, and their congregations.

Second, regarding the subsequent abuse of the FOS in the deposition of faithful officebearers, the synod of 1924 refused to discipline Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof for their opposition to common grace. The demand to discipline both Hoeksema and Danhof was before the synod and was settled by the synod. This was a point that Herman Hoeksema insisted on. Indeed, not only did the synod refuse to discipline, but it also refused even to administer a rebuke to the men for opposing common grace, and commended the doctrine to the churches for further study. The synod

also gave the testimony about Hoeksema and Danhof that they were “Reformed in the fundamental truths as formulated in our confessions.” It matters little that the synod added that they tended to “one-sidedness.” The testimony stands. They were Reformed according to the confessions. That was the testimony that they were faithful in keeping the promise that they made when they signed the FOS.

After the synod, two CRC classes deposed these men on the ground that they violated the FOS. The question here is not whether those actions of the classes were legal. They were completely illegal. Classes have no right to depose officebearers. The question here is not the justice of those actions. They were grossly unjust. They treated the men with disdain, and all decency and order was lacking in those decisions. The issue is *how* the classes deposed them: with the FOS as the main ground. Hoeksema called this appeal to the formula in his deposition “mistaken” (*Protestant Reformed Churches*, 214).

The actions by the classes were an egregious abuse of the FOS. The FOS places the officebearer under the solemn obligation to promote and defend the truth of the creeds. The classes used the FOS to cast out three faithful ministers and their consistories that did exactly that. Indeed, they deposed men about whom their own synod said, not six months earlier, that they were “Reformed in the fundamental truths as formulated in our confessions.”

A denomination that will so misuse the creeds to establish false doctrine and so abuse the FOS to depose faithful officebearers has fundamentally departed from the creeds already and from the proper attitude that a Reformed man, church, and denomination must have toward the creeds as expressed in the FOS. Such a denomination can only expect that there will be a fit judgment of God on those actions. This is what we see today. Using the formula to cast out the faithful, she is full of the unfaithful. Misusing the creeds, she loses the creeds. Having abused the formula, she now boldly replaces it.

Third, Hoeksema’s actions in that gripping history were by him—and should be by us—understood in terms of the FOS. Speaking of the promise that Classis Grand Rapids East attempted to extort from him

not to speak against common grace before it deposed him, he said: “He was convinced that it was absolutely impossible to preach and teach in his own congregation, without touching upon and contradicting the principles expressed in the Three Points. And he also felt that it would be a breach of promise on his part if he should refrain from publicly warning the churches against the false doctrines adopted by the Synod of Kalamazoo. For, when he signed the Formula of Subscription he promised that he would maintain and defend the Reformed doctrine as expressed in the Formulas of Unity” (*Protestant Reformed Churches*, 205). Ophoff and Danhof had similar convictions. They were being faithful to their promises.

So likewise must we. This was—and still is—the main contention of the PRC against common grace: the doctrine is not Reformed because it is not creedal. It cannot be maintained or tolerated in a Reformed church because it is contrary to the creeds. The controversy over common grace that the PRC have with other Reformed churches who either have not repudiated those decisions of the CRC, who tolerate them, or who defend them to this day is a creedal controversy. It is a controversy that can be settled on the basis of the creeds alone. On that basis it is our conviction that the formula requires the Reformed officebearer to repudiate common grace as not Reformed and as militating against the truth of the creeds.

—NJL ∞

○ COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

Called into His Presence: The Opening Service (1)

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124:8

To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:7

Introduction

We have studied three great biblical principles of worship so far. The first is that public worship is a *covenantal assembly* gathered to meet with the living God. From that principle we drew other principles: public worship must be simple, centered on the Word,

joyful, and reverent. The second great principle of public worship is that this covenantal assembly is carried out as a *dialogue* between God and His people. God speaks, and we respond in worship and praise. The corporate worship service is the experience, therefore, of covenantal communion. The third principle is that this meeting of the people of God with their God in a dialogue of the covenant is *regulated* by God Himself. He tells us what elements should be in the worship of His name. He tells us what the character of worship should be. Worship must be after His heart.

From now to the end of the series of articles on worship, we will go through the various aspects of biblical and Reformed worship. We will focus mainly on the elements of worship as they are seen in Reformed worship generally, but carried out in a typical Protestant Reformed worship service specifically.

In this article and the next, we cover what has some-

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Previous article in this series: August 2012, p. 448.

times been called “the opening service.” It is the part of the worship service that includes the call to worship (if it is understood to be part of worship), the doxology, salutation, votum, and benediction. This opening service is in a sense introductory. It is not less important, but introductory. All of it has God ushering us into His presence and we willingly coming as a body to gather before Him in covenantal love.

The Call to Worship

The first aspect is the call to worship. It is debated whether or not the call to worship—and silent prayer following it—are part of the actual worship service of the church. Some would say that it is not. I believe that it is. In Protestant Reformed worship services that have a call to worship, and in the services of other churches that have a call to worship, there is nothing to indicate that it is separate from the actual worship service of the church. If you asked anyone who was ignorant of the issue, I believe he would think that the service has begun with the call to worship.

In addition, the concept of a call to worship is a right and biblical one. In all of salvation God is the sovereign God who calls us to Himself. It is not we who say first that we will come to Him, but He who first powerfully says, “Come to Me” (Matt. 11:28). In the garden, after Adam and Eve fell into sin, it was not Adam who sought out God, but God who called out to Adam, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9). That is, “Come into my presence; appear before me.” When Israel was led out of bondage in Egypt and unto the base of Mt. Sinai to worship, it was not the *Israelites* who took the initiative. *God* did: “Out of Egypt *I have called* my Son” (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15).

This is true also of the covenantal meeting that takes place between God and His people.

God calls this meeting. He irresistibly beckons us to gather before Him in public worship. And so the Scriptures contain inspired calls to worship such as the verse that makes up the rubric of this series (Psalm 95:6), “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.”

Such a call is necessary. We must be called by God’s almighty voice to come to worship Him. We are lost on our own. Though worship is the chief end of man

and man’s highest joy, we are so earthly minded that if not *called* to it we would not come. It takes faith to see and love what is happening here in the service, and we are often weak. Therefore we must be called to faith and called to come to assemble before our God in faith. The call to worship that draws us into covenantal communion in the service testifies to the truth of all God’s sovereign work to draw us to Himself in the covenant of grace.

As God in His Word calls us, His call enlivens our faith to see and know what we are doing here before Him. The congregation responds first in prayer. The purpose of this silent prayer is for us personally to set our hearts aright to come into His presence. Though we pray as individuals, silent prayer also prepares us to come as *one body*, spiritually united and spiritually prepared to come before God. We are one body by the union we have with Jesus Christ, and silent prayer prepares us to come as one body *conscious* of that spiritual union. We all as individuals set our hearts right to come before God, and by doing that as individuals, we come before God individually prepared all together. Whatever we include in this prayer, therefore, part of it must be giving of thanks for God’s calling us into His presence, an expression of a need to be in His presence, a willingness to come humbly before Him, and an expression of the desire for Him to unite us together as one body before Him that we might together glorify His name.

We respond to His call secondly with praise to His glorious name in the opening doxology.

Let us not sing those words without thinking, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below, praise Him above ye heavenly host, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

Called by God to worship, we respond in praise. But as we are called, we realize it is not just we in this congregation who are called to worship. Immediately we are aware that this assembly of our local congregation is an expression of the grand host gathered before God. The doxology reminds us that we join the voices of all creation, all true people of God on this earth, and all the host in heaven (Heb. 12:23). in exalting our triune God. We are part of the grand universal body gathered before Him in adoration and praise.

Salutation

Having called His people to Himself, as they now are assembled as one in His presence in prayer and praise, God greets us in the words of the salutation. The salutation is one phrase—it is easy not to pay attention to it—but it is a phrase essential to God’s people and their worship. “Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Or, “Beloved of God, called to be saints.”

This is God greeting His people. God speaks these words. The minister says them on behalf of God, but it is God’s greeting to His church.¹ That is how we must hear the salutation too. Why would it matter if in the *minister’s* estimation you were beloved of God? What matters is that in *God’s* estimation this is your position. And what matters is that He is willing to tell you so.

In this greeting, God addresses the congregation as a whole, “Beloved *congregation*.” The apostle Paul addresses the whole church at Rome with the inspired greeting of Romans 1:7: “Beloved of God, called to be saints.” He does that even though there may be unbelievers present. There may be unbelievers who visit the service. There may be a carnal element in the body. Those unbelievers may be given attention in the service, attention *as unbelievers* at times. Yet, worship is the meeting of the true covenantal assembly with God, and the congregation gathered is addressed as such. A wheat field might have weeds in it, and you give those weeds in your field attention *as weeds* at times, but it is still a wheat field and is called a wheat field and treated as a wheat field.

Children are addressed as we bring them into worship with us. The children of the church are part of the covenantal assembly. They are not visitors; they are members. They are not observers; they are participants. God speaks to them as He speaks to the adults when He says, “Beloved congregation.” Those who are weak are addressed along with the strong; those greatly gifted along with those less gifted. The diverse congregation is greeted as one body, the congregation of the living God gathered before Him.

God calls them “beloved.” The word “beloved” is

¹ This may be a benefit of using the salutation “Beloved of God, called to be saints,” rather than “Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ.” The first is a direct quote from Romans 1:7. It is the very words of God in Scripture.

used in the greeting because so often in the New Testament the people of God are addressed as God’s beloved. Just read I John 3 or II Peter 2.² In addition, in the inspired greeting of Romans 1:7 “beloved” is the address.

What a wonderful word to hear from God upon entering His presence, “You are my beloved!” We have sins that we carry with us into the house of God. We come here to lay them down at the foot of the cross. Yet we wonder, does God want us here? Sometimes we see our sins so clearly we think, “Is it really His desire that we enter into His presence?”

In addition, we are often troubled by what is happening in our lives or in the world. Things are not always easy for God’s people. We come to the service with the distress of Psalm 124 upon us. Verse 2: “men have risen up against us”; verse 3: “their wrath is kindled against us”; verses 4-5: “Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul.” The troubles that we face are sometimes that great. It is as though the waters are about to flood over our souls and take us down. And then we come to the house of God to meet Him, and He says to us from His Word, “Beloved! You are the objects of my love. Embraced. Prized. Valued. Held close.”

What is more, He does not *wait* to call us His beloved until *after* we read the law and confess our sins and pray. But immediately when He meets with us, He greets us as His beloved, as though He can’t wait to tell us. And He does not hold back, even though we come with sins in our hands, needing forgiveness and needing to experience reconciliation.³

He declares this *publicly*. He is not ashamed to have the whole world hear that He addresses us as His beloved. He speaks of us publicly with the same word He used to speak of His only begotten son Jesus Christ. Remember what He announced publicly to the world at Jesus’ baptism: “This is my beloved Son!”

Likewise here, He announces to the world that we are His beloved sons and daughters by adoption, dear to Him as His only begotten is dear to Him.

² One sees the same in the Old Testament of course. Song of Solomon provides the prime example.

³ Just as in the giving of the law itself in Exodus 20, God tells His people He is their God before He gives the law that leads them to repentance.

Faith believes this. Faith hears this and knows Jehovah is saying this to *me* as part of the body. And faith believes this because it knows we are Jehovah's beloved *in the Lord Jesus Christ*. If I wonder, "Can I believe Him when He says 'beloved' at the beginning of the service?" the undoubted assurance and proof that it is true is because we are *in the Lord Jesus Christ*. Even though we come with sin and need to experience reconciliation, we *are objectively reconciled* in the Lord Jesus. In Him we are beloved as He is beloved.

Votum

In response to God's sovereign voice in the salutation, we respond with the words of the votum.

The word votum means "vow." The words are a vow expressed by the congregation to God in both prayer and praise taken from Psalm 124:8: "Our help is in the name of Jehovah, who made heaven and earth."

This vow is our response to the fact that Jehovah has called us "beloved!" We have come with our troubles both physical and spiritual, concerning which Psalm 124 itself speaks. And God has called us "beloved." Now we know we are safe and are accepted in His sight. Thus, we speak with Psalm 124 not only about our troubles, but also about the fact that the LORD is on our side (v. 2); that He has not given us as prey to their teeth (v. 6). Therefore, we can corporately take the last words of Psalm 124:8 upon our lips, "Our help is in the name of Jehovah, who made heaven and earth."

When we say those words, we are saying to Him, "God, our help is not found in this world. Whatever the trial we bear, we do not turn to the gods of this world for assistance. We call upon Thee and turn to Thee for help, the maker of heaven and earth, the one who is in control of all. We turn to the one who is Jehovah, the God of the covenant, who has just told us we are His beloved covenant children. We know now that on our pilgrimage we will be safe with Thee." And when we say those words we are not just saying that our help is in Jehovah now—that is, for the time that we are in this service. Rather, we are confessing and vowing that our help is always in His name. All along life's journey He is our strength, and He will lead us to glory.

The congregation is speaking this *to God*. This is

true even though the minister is the one who says it.

The minister functions in the worship service at times in such a way that He is used to speak God's words to the people in this dialogue, and also at times the people's words to God in this dialogue. We do not always think about this with respect to the votum because it follows so quickly upon the salutation, and the minister speaks it. Although it is acceptable that the minister speaks these words, it is my contention that it would be beneficial for the congregation to say the votum in unison rather than having the minister speak it. It is not necessary that the minister speak this (as it is necessary for the minister to speak for the congregation in congregational prayer), and if the congregation did speak it, it would highlight the dialogue that is taking place. One could also argue that it would do greater justice to the priesthood of all believers.⁴ Regardless, the votum is the response of the congregation, trusting in and magnifying the sovereign love of Jehovah God.

Benediction

Finally, Jehovah speaks in this opening service by pronouncing His benediction upon us. Often the words from the benedictions of the apostle Paul in his epistles are used. For example, Romans 1:7: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." Often the words, "through the operation of the Holy Spirit," are added to that to make it explicitly trinitarian. A benediction that is itself trinitarian and can be quoted directly from Scripture is the one given by the apostle John in Revelation 1:4-5, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth."

There is another benediction or blessing at the end of the service. This is often the benediction found in the last verse of II Corinthians, although there are others. With this benediction God dismisses His people


⁴ G. VanDooren goes so far as to attribute the tradition of the minister speaking the votum to the tradition of the mass. It is a Roman Catholic remnant according to him and must be done away with, so that the congregation might speak in unison here. VanDooren, G. *The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy*. Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1980. 25.

with His blessing as He has greeted them with His blessing. This follows the example provided us in the inspired epistles of the apostles. The apostles used benedictions as bookends at the beginning and ending of their epistles, and we follow that example in our worship service. God blesses His people coming into His presence, and He blesses them as they leave His presence.

Again, in the benedictions God speaks. Only now, God is not just speaking *to* His people, He is pronouncing a blessing *upon* His people. This means God is not saying, “I *hope* you have grace and mercy and peace.” Or, “This is my wish for you.” Rather, He is *setting* grace and mercy and peace *upon us* in the benediction. In the Old Testament, when Isaac gave Jacob the blessing that he intended to give to Esau, Esau cried out that Isaac should take back what he said to Jacob and give it to him. Isaac responded, “I... have blessed him...and he *shall be blessed*” (Gen. 27:33). Isaac could not take it back. It could not be

reversed; it was done. So effectual was the blessing. It was a pronouncement made upon Jacob that could not be reversed. So too when God pronounces His blessing upon us, it is not as though God does that on a whim. It is not just a nice wish. This is His pronouncement for His people. And it *effects* what it speaks. We have His grace and mercy and peace with Him in Christ, and we know that because He pronounces it upon us.

We come to the house of God needing this blessing. We must know that God has created peace between us and Him. Then everything in our life, even if it does not immediately make sense, can be seen through the lenses of our peace with Him and the truth that He works for our good. Thus, we cannot help but respond with the first Psalter number in a song of praise and adoration to His name.

In our next article we will examine the opening service as a whole, and see its function in the broader context of a Reformed order of worship. 

GUEST ARTICLE

REV. DAVID OVERWAY

Our Psalter: 100 Years of Praise (1)

Called to Sing Psalms

“O come let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.”

Psalm 95:1-2

The year 2012 marks the 100th anniversary of our Psalter, which was first published in the year 1912. The Psalter has been *the* songbook in the Protestant Reformed churches for their entire history—88 of the 100 years of the Psalter’s existence. And it has served them well. It has also been

a blessing to the other denominations that have used it during these past 100 years.

In using the title “100 years of praise,” I mean two things: 1) the Psalter has been loved and *praised* by many over its 100-year history, and 2) the Psalter has served the churches that use it exceptionally well in their *praise* to God, as it has aided the members of these churches in their worship of the Lord by the singing of *Psalms*. The singing of the Psalms is the main blessing that the Psalter has afforded us.

It is not our goal in these articles to examine the Psalter critically to discover faults in wording, tunes, etc. We admit that the Psalter is not perfect. Minor adjustments and improvements could be made. But our goal is to be renewed in our appreciation for singing the

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Psalms as praise to God, which our Psalter has assisted God's people in doing for these last 100 years.

In reminding us of the importance of singing the Psalms, I plan to do the following: 1) Point out that it is God's intention that His people sing the Psalms; 2) Show that historically the church has followed this calling; and 3) Answer some objections to Psalm singing, and in so doing point out the value of singing the Psalms.

The Lord's Purpose

First of all, then, it was the Lord's intention that His church sing the Psalms. This is why they were written. This is the reason He inspired them by the Holy Spirit and gave them to the church as part of the Scriptures. Yes, the Lord intended that the Psalms be read. Also that they be meditated upon, memorized, recited, preached on, and learned from. But especially did He give them to us to *sing* them.

Consider that the very word "Psalm" in Hebrew means "melody," or "song." In giving us a book of Psalms the Lord gave us a book of "songs." Many of the Psalm headings indicate that the inspired psalmist understood this purpose of God. Notice, for example, how often these headings include the words: "To the chief musician..." or something similar.

And the Psalms themselves frequently include the injunction to sing. We are told in Psalm 135:3 to praise God by singing: "Praise the LORD; for the LORD is good: sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant." Similarly, in Psalm 149:1 we are told, "Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints." And Psalm 30:4 instructs, "Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of His..." These are, of course, only a few of many examples.

A few passages even more specifically reflect *what* the Lord expects us to sing: "Sing unto him, *sing psalms* unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works" (Ps. 105:2). Again in Psalm 95:2 we read, "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him *with psalms*."

The Lord's Example

At many occasions recorded in Scripture, Psalms were sung. This indicates both that godly men understood the Lord's purpose with the Psalms and that the Lord set before us these holy examples in His Scrip-

tures so we would clearly understand how He intended the Psalms to be used.

In fact, one of these instances involves Jesus Himself as He sang a psalm with His disciples at the last supper. The record of this instance, Matthew 26:30, uses the words "sung an hymn" in the King James Version (KJV), but the original word carries the meaning of simply "sung a song of praise." Taking this together with the fact that it is well known that it was universal practice for Jews at this time to sing from the Hallel Psalms (113-118) at the Passover meal, it is certain that Jesus sang a psalm at this occasion. Jesus used the Psalms as they were intended.

New Testament Requirement

The New Testament Scriptures are explicit in calling the people of God to sing Psalms. That singing is a requirement for the child of God is established plainly by James 5:13: "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." The callings set forth as responses to the two questions of this passage are put to us in the imperative, the verb mood that is used for commands. It is not optional to sing, but required. In fact, the command to sing is parallel in the text to the command to pray. No less must we sing than pray. And the KJV provides us with a good translation of the original word that tells us *what* to sing when it says: "Let him sing psalms."

Especially two other New Testament passages call us to the same thing. In Ephesians 5:19, we read, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Similarly, in Colossians 3:16, we are instructed: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

There are some who point to these two passages and insist vigorously that these passages also allow hymns to be sung in the church's worship. Although it is not our intention to enter fully into all the arguments for and against this position in these articles, it will serve our purpose to make a few comments and observations on this point.

First of all, those who hold to the view that Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 allow more than the singing of


Psalms in worship must at the very least agree with us that these passages do require that the Psalms be sung. After all, these passages include the word “psalms” as much as they include the words “hymns and spiritual songs.” It would only be consistent that those who promote hymns on the basis of these passages insist as vigorously that Psalms must be sung as they do their right to sing hymns. Rather, history demonstrates that the churches that allow hymns in worship have over time allowed the singing of fewer and fewer Psalms.

Secondly, the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures—with which the apostle Paul would have been very familiar) divided the book of Psalms into three sections: one named “psalms,” one named “hymns,” and one named “spiritual songs.” It is almost certain that this is what Paul had in mind when

he wrote that we should sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” These passages instruct us that we should sing the Psalms, all the different types of Psalms.

Reformed Requirement

Our spiritual fathers understood this biblical evidence and recognized that it is the Lord’s intention that His church sing the Psalms. Because of this, our fathers at the Synod of Dordt prescribed the singing of Psalms in the churches in Article 60 of our Church Order.

This Church Order article brings into harmony our churches’ official position with the Lord’s purpose in giving to His people the Psalms. Our Psalter, then, serves to help us follow this Church Order requirement and the Lord’s purpose and command to sing the Psalms—the Psalms that He gave us to sing. 

RFPA Secretary’s 2012 Annual Report: The Year of ePub

“**T**he Year of ePub” is a good title for this past year at the RFPA. Were you to peruse the minutes of the year as I did prior to writing this report, it would become obvious why that title is so fitting: discussion and decisions by our standing committees and the RFPA Board were dominated by doing what needed to be done to make the RFPA compatible with the electronic age in which we live.

This work has not gone unnoticed. In fact, in response to making our first eBook (*Federal Vision*) available, a considerate supporter sent us this email: “I know you guys have been busy on all of the projects going on, but it is exciting to see the progress being made. Keep up the good work.” In our attempt to keep up that good work we have now published eight books in eBook format and are in the process of doing the same with many others in our catalog. In fact, the eBook

format is so cost effective that we are in the process of selecting books that are available in the public domain and making them available as eBooks. The *Commentary on the Church Order* by Van Dellen and Monsma is one example. By the way, if you are a present owner of a hard copy of this commentary, you might find it advantageous to obtain the eBook format also because of the search capabilities that will be available.

Of course, it is one thing to make RFPA publications available in ePub format, the question is, are they being purchased? The degree to which the ePub format will be in demand by those who purchase our publications will take some time to determine. We have, to date, sold 30 books in ePub format. Some of these have gone to places as far away as the United Kingdom. In our age of the need for instant gratification, ePub is the way to go, for it has the distinct advantage of instant availability of our electronically published materials to anyone in the world who has access to the Internet.

While all of this ePub stuff is interesting and excit-

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ing, it has generated a considerable amount of work for the RFPA Board and its support staff. Numerous questions have been addressed: How much should we charge for eBooks compared to hard copies? What if someone wants both, do we give them a discount? May Book Club members choose one or the other? Should we sell eBooks from our own website, through Amazon (and others), or both? Should we protect our ePub selections from piracy, and if so, how? No doubt there will be countless other questions to answer in the future. Many of us on the Board lack the background knowledge needed to address some of these kinds of questions; consequently, we are thankful for knowledgeable consultants on whom we can rely for assistance in these matters. We are thankful too for Paula Kamps, Bethany Kingma, Evelyn Langerak, and Tim Pipe, who have been of inestimable value in providing the Board with the information required to make informed decisions. Furthermore, they have been faithful in the work of carrying out board decisions as they function in the day-to-day activities of the RFPA. Pray for them and the Board as we go forward with this new and exciting work. Pray that the Lord of the harvest be pleased to use this labor as an effective witness to the truth and as a means to expose the lie, which is, after all, our purpose.

But there is more than ePub going on at the RFPA. Four new hard copy books were published this past year (all are currently available as eBooks): *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root*; *Covenant and Election*; *Defense of the Church Institute: Response to the Critics of Bound to Join*; and *Communion with God*. While it is to be expected that not all responses to our publications will be favorable, a Book Club member from Maine gave this heartwarming response to *Communion with God*: "This is a great book, as good as it gets in devotional literature.... My plea...please confirm that you will continue to release further volumes of Hoeksema's incredible treasury of writings.... What a great read, a wonderful way to end my day, in preparation for sleep." Thanks to this reader and countless others, book sales this past year have exceeded our ten-year average by about \$30,000.

This Maine reader and many others will be happy

to know that another book of Hoeksema's devotionals is currently in the RFPA's plans for the future. Other books likely to be published during the 2012-13 fiscal year include *The Pilgrim's Manual*, by Prof. Hanko; *Behold the Beauty* volume 2, by Connie Meyer (not to be a Book Club publication); *Struggle, Schism, and Salvation: The History and Doctrine of the Declaration of Principles*, by Prof. Engelsma; and *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, edited by Prof. Engelsma.

In addition to ePub and the publishing of hard copy books, the RFPA has been busy this past year implementing its "Five Year Plan." Those with good memories will recall the mention of this in last year's annual report and in this past spring's edition of the RFPA *Update*. This plan was devised by the RFPA Board as a way to put to use a sizable gift from a supporter who included the RFPA in his estate. Parts of the plan that have been implemented include the following. 1) We are in regular consultation with experts in all aspects of Christian book publishing. 2) We are utilizing the services of a marketing consultant to assist us in the day-to-day efforts of sales and marketing. 3) The media capability for the RFPA board and conference room has been upgraded. We have already experienced many benefits of this upgrade, including teleconferencing with prospective writers. 4) We have purchased and are currently using office equipment that has expanded our publishing capabilities. 5) A burglar alarm system has been installed to assist in protecting our building and contents. 6) Translation work is being done from Dutch to English on commentaries of two of our minor creeds, the Baptism Form and the Lord's Supper Form. 7) As noted earlier, we now have in place what it takes to publish and distribute RFPA materials in electronic format. 8) The services of financial institutions have been secured to assist us in making wise financial decisions. 9) The RFPA website has been redesigned to make it professional in appearance, user friendly, and helpful for the purpose of reaching a broader audience for our publications. (If you haven't done so already, you might want to check out our website and see if you agree with a supporter from Washington who took the time to write: "Your website and communication looks ever so much more professional and interesting than it did just a few short years ago." And while you are at

it, take the time to listen to a few of the sermon audio selections now available there).

Without a doubt the lion's share of the RFPA Board's work involves the publication of books, many of which have had their beginning as series articles in our *Standard Bearer*. But since the content of the *Standard Bearer* is the responsibility of the Editorial Staff, the RFPA board's work with respect to its publication is limited. Nevertheless, how grateful we are for the writers whose efforts are responsible for the *Standard Bearer's* consistent witness to the truth of the Reformed faith. Thankful we are too for the labors of Don and Judi Doezema who for more than 25 years now have seen to its editing and typesetting.

While we are on the subject of the *Standard Bearer*, are you aware that eSubscriptions to the *SB* are now available? Also, are you aware that the *Standard Bearer* can be received in audio format? Southeast PRC makes this available at their website. This service can also be accessed at the RFPA website. A goodly number of these files are sent out on cassette to vision-impaired individuals.

Reader reactions to the *SB* like the one from New

Jersey who addressed the envelope containing his payment: "The *Standard Bearer: Best in the Land*" are a great source of encouragement. Without a doubt, to be deserving of the label "Best in the Land" we are dependent on faithful writers and diligent personnel ready and willing to perform the day-to-day responsibilities of our publishing efforts. But neither do we forget the importance of our RFPA members, our 2,209 *Standard Bearer* subscribers and our 1,220 Book Club members. I should mention that the board is committed to obtaining significant growth in each of these areas in the coming year. Your help is crucial for this is to be realized. We ask that you actively promote our publications and cause. Accept the RFPA challenge to enlist at least one new *SB* subscriber and one new Book Club member by next year's annual meeting. The RFPA Board welcomes your suggestions to further our cause.

Nevertheless we understand that our best efforts are totally dependent on the Lord's blessing. As we look back over the past year, we cannot help but conclude that the Lord is indeed blessing this work. Thanks be to Him! ☺

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

The Blessedness of the Covenant Home of the God-fearing

I have written on the above topic before while serving as one of the writers for this rubric. I am writing this article today from a different perspective. My wife and I are enjoying, at the time of this writing, a four-week stay in Singapore. We were invited by Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church to be here for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Covenant. This celebration so far has been full of joy and excitement for us as a returning missionary. In many ways the church and her members are doing well under the

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blessing of the Lord and in the way of confessing and living by the truth of God's Word.

There are impressive things about life in Singapore. Singapore today is an extremely prosperous and world-renowned city. It now has a population of over five million, which is an astounding increase in just a few years. Government policy, in quest for continued growth and ever increasing prosperity, has encouraged immigration, especially from China. The privilege to emigrate to Singapore is usually granted to a select few who have the greatest potential to contribute to the economic success and prosperity of the nation.

One is reminded of the purpose of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon when he gathered from conquered nations the best, the most noble and gifted, young people to have them live and serve in his palace and kingdom, to contribute to its glory and splendor. Glamorous young people are everywhere in Singapore, on the subways and in public places, rushing here and there to fulfill the demands of successful careers and in pursuit of great heights of prosperity and glory. Young people predominate in the society, successful young people, who have gained heights of success and prosperity far beyond what their parents could ever have dreamed of. Young girls have been encouraged, pressed, and driven to pursue careers in the world, with the promise of prosperity.

The driving force for this is not only personal advantage. There is also a public philosophy that greatly encourages it. The thinking is that a rich and prosperous society cannot be attained if only men are working. It requires also that women not consider seriously the role of being a wife and a mother and a keeper of the home, because keepers at home will not contribute to a successful and prosperous nation. One is struck by the several very prominent features of Singaporean society. It seems that there are young girls everywhere, in greater numbers even than young men, all running very fast in the same earthly pursuit. Many of these are not interested in marriage, at least not in the days of their youth. They have seen the life of sacrifice required for marriage, raising a family, and being a keeper of the home. Such a life is seen as far less glamorous than a career. Though in a city the size of Singapore there are indeed millions of children, they are significantly fewer in number than in Western society. This is quite obvious when one frequents public places. If there are children in families at all, they are few in number. The role of being a homemaker receives little honor and dignity compared to being a worldly career woman. The role of motherhood and raising a family is considered to be drudgery and to require far too much personal sacrifice.

It is not only the girls that have this philosophy, the young men do as well. The men are taught to give their all to enter into successful careers, with the promise of great heights of prosperity, being able to own beautiful

apartments, drive expensive cars, have the latest high tech devices such as computers, cell phones, and many other gadgets that are symbols of success and the envy of those who are not able to purchase them. So men also postpone marriage to later years in life, only after they have established themselves in successful careers through long periods of time pursuing advanced education and highly regarded careers. For Singaporeans this often means going overseas to obtain their degrees. There are two reasons for this: limited places available in Singaporean universities, and the added prestige in society of having a degree from a famous university in another country, often a Western country.

This is what Singapore is all about. Singapore is an unimaginably prosperous and glamorous society. There is great opportunity for luxurious living, possessing great riches, being able to eat in expensive restaurants, and being a member in a popular country club. Singapore has shopping centers everywhere that cater to the rich, with high-priced merchandise, name-brand clothes of the latest designer making, and sport and recreational equipment of the highest worldly standards and popularity.

Again one is reminded so often of the nation built by Nebuchadnezzar, where we finally hear of him standing in his palace boasting, "is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" Babylon was devoted in the whole of its philosophy and worldly pursuit to the idols of pagan religion. The Lord, the sovereign and true and living God, soon judged and humbled Nebuchadnezzar himself in all of his vain human pride and boasting and made him like the beast of the forest, until he acknowledged the true and living God of heaven and earth. And what happened to Babylon? She would soon be destroyed by a nation greater than she. This would not happen by mere chance or by reason of the flow of history and the natural course of the rise and fall of nations and great societies. The destruction was accomplished by the almighty, sovereign God of heaven and earth, the ruler of nations, who is also the righteous and holy judge of all the nations of the earth. This true and living God had weighed this nation in the balances and found her wanting. Chiefly she was found to be without the fear of God. God

brought her to utter ruin and destruction, showing her the vanity of her whole existence and all her worldly pursuit.

The sovereign Lord accomplished the ruin of Babylon to make way for the glorious kingdom of His Son Jesus Christ that will continue for all eternity in the new heavens and earth. The glory of this kingdom will be that she is entirely devoted to the service and praise of the true and living God of heaven and earth, whose name is Jehovah and whose glory transcends all of the universe. He alone is to be feared and adored by the children of men.

The blessedness of this kingdom will be that she has God in her midst and His glory revealed among her in every place. The blessedness of this kingdom will be covenant life with God and the enjoyment of His favor and blessing.

America, once considered a nominally Christian nation, is more and more driven and devoted to the philosophy and pursuits of Babylon. She has largely forsaken the fear of God. She is busy with the same worldly pursuits. She has the same disregard of the Lord's commandments. She too is found wanting in the presence of the sovereign and holy Lord of heaven and earth. In the end, she will receive the same judgment and be destroyed with the same judgment.

God's people must be wise and learn the fear of God. They must set their hearts not on the kingdoms of this world but on the coming of the glorious and everlasting kingdom of Christ. They must separate themselves from and realize the vanity of the philosophy of Babylon and all of its pursuits.


Central to expecting the glorious kingdom of Christ is the establishing and maintaining of covenant homes. These homes must be characterized by the fear of God. The blessedness of these homes all have their source and fountain in the blessing of the Lord. This is the beautiful teaching of Psalm 128 from which I derived the title of this article.

The fear of God must be maintained in these homes. Only those who fear God shall be truly blessed. The fear of God is enjoyed in this home in the way of keeping His commandments by the grace of Jesus Christ in the hearts of the members of this home.

The maintaining of the fear of God in the covenant home is largely the responsibility of the covenant father

of this home. The father must devote a great deal of time and effort to his family. He must have on-going and great interest in and concern for his family. He must promote the atmosphere of the fear of God in this home. He must himself walk in the fear of God and keep the commandments of the Lord. He must teach his children to do this, not only by teaching them the precepts of the Lord, but also by his own daily personal godly example. He must be sure that covenant life is real in his home through the reality of his own life and walk with the Lord, the love that he has for his children, and the godly discipline in which he raises his children. He must be an example of conversation and life with God, in prayer, the reading of God's Word with his children, and seeking the favor and blessing of the Lord upon himself and his covenant children. This must be more important than anything else in his life. As important as a man's earthly occupation is for the support of his home and family, he must be wise so that even this important calling does not take him away from an even more important calling: the spiritual instruction and care and fellowship of his covenant family.

The godly mother must realize the high calling of being a covenant mother. She must be ready to make many personal sacrifices to fulfill this calling. She must be devoted to the love of her husband and children. Her chief occupation must be the care and guidance of her home and family. This occupation is not glorious in the eyes of men. It is not recognized as being an honorable career in the world. The philosophy of the world is constantly urging her to forsake her covenant occupation in the home for a more highly regarded career in the world. She must resist the temptation to do this. Her occupation in the covenant home is honorable in the sight of God and will bring upon her and her family the great blessing of the favor of God. She is serving the cause of the kingdom. She will bring great joy to her home and be used of the Lord to raise the citizens of the everlasting and glorious kingdom of Christ. What could possibly be more honorable and blessed than this?!

"The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion [the Old Testament type of the kingdom of Christ], and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all thy days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children and peace upon Israel" (Ps 128: 5, 6). 

Revelation

In the New Testament, revelation is a translation of the Greek word *apocalypse*. *Apocalypse* does not appear in our English Bible, but is common in the Greek, and is one of those rare instances of a Greek word so familiar to us it probably could have been left un-translated. How sobering would it be to read of “the day of wrath and apocalypse of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5). How ominous, how majestic and hopeful would it be to know the last book of Scripture as the “The Apocalypse” (Rev. 1:1). Still, revelation is a good translation. The basic meaning of it is to uncover, or make visible and known by taking away that which hides it, and therefore also to enlighten (Luke 2:32), make manifest (Rom. 8:19), or appear (I Pet. 1:7).

God alone can truly reveal. Deep and secret things He reveals, because He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him (Dan. 2:22). God reveals many things, but all primarily concern Himself. Therefore, He is also the revelation. A mystery of eternal, invisible spirit, He remains forever hidden from us temporal, material, and blind creatures unless He is revealed. Thankfully God delights so to do. Although the secret things belong to the LORD, those things He reveals belong unto us and to our children forever (Deut. 29:29). He revealed himself to Samuel (I Sam. 3:21), David (II Sam. 7:27), Isaiah (Is. 22:14), Daniel (Dan. 2:19), old Simeon (Luke 2:25), Peter (Matt. 16:17), and Paul, whom God was pleased to separate in his mother’s womb and call by his grace to reveal his Son through him (Gal. 1:15-16). To us He reveals His grace. But not all revelation is grace. For while the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:17-18).

God reveals Himself in grace only by His Spirit through Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12). Jesus said so. No man knows the Father but the Son and He to whom the Son

will reveal Him (Luke 10:22). God out of God, His express image, the Light, and His Word, Jesus Christ is *the* apocalypse, the one revelator of God in all His works and perfections, and one revelation of the great mystery kept secret since the world began (Rom. 16:25). He is the Word of God in whom the glory of the LORD is revealed so all flesh shall see it together (Is. 40:5). He is the power of God by whom the arm of the LORD is revealed (Is. 53:1). He is the justice of God through whom His salvation is made near and His righteousness is revealed (Is. 56:1). He is the promise of God by whom faith is revealed (Gal. 3:23). But not to all. Jesus said so. God has hid these things from the wise and prudent, but is pleased to reveal them to babes (Matt. 11:25).

As truly God, even Jesus must be revealed. He was revealed in His incarnation (John 1:1). He is revealed in the holy gospel (Eph. 3:5). And there is a day coming when the Son of man will be revealed and will reveal God unlike ever before (Luke 17:30). Before that day, the man of sin, son of perdition, and Wicked is revealed sitting in God’s temple claiming to be God. Then in a grand, final apocalypse, the Lord will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, expose the imposter, and destroy him with the brightness of His coming (II Thess. 2:3-8). Everything covered will be revealed (Matt. 10:26). The thoughts of many hearts (Luke 2:35) and every man’s work shall be revealed (I Cor. 3:13). Unto that revelation of the righteous judgment of God, the wicked store up wrath against themselves (Rom. 2:5). But given the spirit of revelation in the knowledge of Christ (Eph. 1:17), we are to fear not (Matt. 10:26). Our present sufferings cannot be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us (Rom. 8:18). Hidden from many eyes, ears, and hearts are the things God has prepared for them that love Him, but they are revealed to us by the Spirit, who searches all things, even the hidden things of God (I Cor. 2:10). Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you by the revelation, the apocalypse, of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1:13). ☺

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An Evaluation of Six Trends in Present-Day Missions (3)

The trends in modern missions that we have considered thus far were that missions ought to be counter-cultural, contextual, ecological, ecumenical, and laity-led. The final trend, as we indicated last time, is perhaps the most alarming and fundamentally mistaken. It is that modern missions must be taught “with an uncertain faith.” This trend comes from the statement of Prof. Bosch, who wrote that “faith embraces itself and the doubt about itself.”¹ For him, this is the faith that must be preached in missions.

This is not the first time in church history that doubt has been raised to the level of virtue. The Arminians did this when speaking of election and when teaching that with regard to the truth of God, especially election, the child of God must embrace uncertain certainties. Under the blessing and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Reformed churches rejected such talk: “For not only is it absurd to speak of an uncertain certainty...” (Canons of Dordt, I, Rejection of Errors, 7). In another place in the Canons of Dordt, Section V, Article 11, the churches confessed that the believer in this life must struggle with various “carnal doubts.” This description of doubt places the origin of doubt in our carnal flesh, which description speaks of doubt as a dirty and unvirtuous thing. Also, the Reformed churches confessed in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s

¹ David J. Bosch, *Believing in the Future* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), Chapter 6, “Conclusion,” 55-62.

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Day 7, that our faith is not doubtful and uncertain, but is the “catholic undoubted Christian faith.” Furthermore, Jesus teaches us that we may never regard doubt as something good. Jesus rebuked His disciple Peter and also us when we sink into the same sin of doubt, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matt. 14:31).

Therefore, to synthesize doubt and faith into theology is the death of true theology and the loss of our only comfort in life and death. If the church preaches an uncertain faith, she has nothing to preach in a post-modern world given over to a culture and philosophy of uncertain certainties and relative truth. She becomes like a lightless lighthouse that is unable to warn and guide incoming ships away from disaster and to the safety of the harbor in the dark and stormy night.

Instead, let faithful missions act as the spear point into the world of the wicked: thrusting forward with the sharp point of the clear Word of Jehovah, causing the hearts of men to bleed. Let the sword of the faith, tempered by the Spirit of Christ over centuries of battle by the church through controversy and reformation, penetrate the hearts of men and their households unto repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and also unto the hardening and condemnation, according to what God has ordained the preaching of faithful missionaries to accomplish among the nations of men.

Let not missions preach for truth various theories that are still in development, or various propositions that still apparently need centuries of scientific verification. Hence, the work of God in creation in Genesis 1 and 2, and as referenced in many other places through-

out the Bible, may not be preached as a competing theory alongside theistic evolution, atheistic evolution, or the creation legends of many pagan religions. The doctrines of God's grace may not be preached as a theory that is still open for doubtful questioning. Amillennialism may not be preached and taught at this stage in church history as merely another view of the return of Christ alongside postmillennialism and premillennial dispensationalism.

For missions to confront the strongholds of heathendom in the East or the secularism and materialism in the West with a sword that is admittedly unproven and doubtful surely cannot inspire much confidence in missionaries that what they preach today will inflict any damage against the strongholds of Satan for the condemnation of his dominion and for the rescue of the sheep from his tyranny. Therefore, let missions preach "thus saith Jehovah." Let that sure Word of God be preached in confidence unto the ingathering of Christ's sheep.

Prof. Bosch mistakenly views the development of the truth as a development of theories that rarely can be proven with absolute certainty. Rather, the truth develops through history like the growth of large mango trees in the Philippines.² As the tree continues to grow, new growth at the end of the branches occurs, but nobody expects that someday massive new trunks will suddenly appear, nor will there be 50-year-old boughs suddenly cut loose to be replaced by young and fashionable looking ones. The old stalwart will continue to live and grow in its God-given strength through joyous sunshine and also harsh storms. Similarly, having delivered to the saints the truth of His Trinity, the covenant, particular grace, and all the doctrines of His Word through history, the Lord will not suddenly replace these mighty boughs with fashionable and modern ones. A church may reject the truth and replace it with false doctrines, but God's truth shall stand forever. Let faithful missions preach and teach that truth.

What happens when the church thinks that the faith

² This idea of the development of the truth like the growth of a tree, such as a mango tree or an oak tree, was mentioned by Professor Herman Hanko in the "Preface" to his book *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: RFP, 2000), xix.

is developed by a healthy dose of doubt and reinvention? What is the result of this proposed doubt-fueled development of the truth? The age-old doctrine of the creation by God has been overhauled by a synthesis with the heresy of evolution. Churches that once stood faithfully for the doctrines of sovereign grace have embraced subtle and bold changes that have led them back into apostasy. Moreover, in bondage to such doubt, no longer can the believer confess that he is persuaded of God's truth, but only persuaded of possibilities, theories, and uncertain certainties. How can he then silence the fiery darts of temptation from the Devil, if the only thing with which he can defend himself is at best a doubtful and uncertain certainty?

Doubt is our enemy, an ally of the Devil. Doubt cannot believe and maintain the truth. A doubtful faith is not true faith. The truth faith is known by a certain knowledge and an assured confidence, which is rooted in Jesus Christ, the Truth, and in the infallible Scriptures. In that faith in the living God, let faithful missions preach "our catholic undoubted Christian faith" and do its proper work for the gathering of Christ's other sheep into that undoubted faith.



In summary, let us not promote missions that is counter-cultural, contextual, ecological, ecumenical, laity-led, and with an uncertain faith. Instead, let us promote and conduct domestic and foreign missions that are antithetical, authoritatively applicatory, by and for heavenly-minded believing stewards of God's good gifts, governed and supported by churches that maintain to their utmost the marks of a true church, carried out by qualified and lawfully ordained ministers of the Word of God, and faithful to the gracious heritage of our undoubted Christian, Protestant, and Reformed faith.

Of course, this kind of missions bucks the tsunami of popular trends in modern missions.

Nevertheless, it is what we must command and teach.

In this kind of missions, there is certain and comforting hope that every one of the other sheep of Christ will be gathered to Him as He has promised (John 10:16).



Mission Activities

The weekend of October 5 and 6 the members of the PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA sponsored their annual Family Conference. The conference included two speeches, the first held Friday night and the second on Saturday morning. These speeches were given in the conference room of the Hyatt Place Cranberry in Cranberry Township, just north of the city of Pittsburgh. The theme of the conference was entitled, "Exercising Ourselves in the Knowledge of Scripture," based on Psalm 131. Friday night Rev. James Slopsema, pastor of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, spoke on the subject, "Things Hidden and Things Revealed." This speech addressed the truth that there are certain things of God and His ways that God has chosen not to reveal to us, and are therefore beyond our understanding. Saturday morning Rev. W. Bruinsma, from our PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh, spoke on the subject, "How Much Knowledge of Scripture is Enough?" This speech focused on what is necessary to know of those things God has revealed to us. Is the simple knowledge that Christ has died for our sins enough? Or will the true believer seek to know more and therefore search out the Scriptures to attain to a deeper, fuller knowledge of salvation? Af-

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ter each speech, time was given for open discussion of these subjects. Rev. Bruinsma writes that there were between 40 and 50 who attended the conference, with seven of those being visitors, and that all those attending testified that they thoroughly enjoyed the time together.

As we reported in our "News" of September 1, the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI and the DMC of our churches approved the sending of four pastors over the fall and winter to assist in the work in Pittsburgh. As you may have guessed from reading the above, Rev. Slopsema was the first of these four pastors to travel to Pittsburgh. He and Rev. Bruinsma investigated Cranberry Township and Wexford in late September and early October to determine whether these places would be a potential area to begin a future work. They also planned to visit Butler to determine its potential as well. Rev. Garry Ericks planned to arrive October 19 in order to help in the continued labors in Pittsburgh and in the north.

Denomination Activities

Prof. Barry Gritters spoke on the subject, "Church Membership in a Postmodern Era" at the Reformed Free Publishing Association's annual meeting on September 27 at the Hudsonville, MI PRC. This speech by Prof. Gritters was given in connection with and as a follow-up to a conference on postmodernism given by Hudsonville this past winter, and in connection with two books recently published by the RFPA written by

Prof. David Engelsma: *Bound to Join* and *A Defense of the Church Institute*.

Sunday evening, October 7, the members of the Reformed Witness Hour, our denomination's radio ministry, hosted a Fall RWH Rally at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. This rally was intended to serve as a way to stir up enthusiasm for our radio and Internet ministry. The program included remarks from Rev. Carl Haak, the radio voice of the RWH, members of the RWH Committee giving a behind-the-scenes look at what is involved in producing our half-hour radio program each week, and a special number from the Hope Heralds.

Congregation Activities

On Sunday evening, September 30, Rev. Andrew Lanning, pastor of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI since late 2006, preached his farewell sermon as their pastor. Rev. Lanning chose to preach from the Word of God in Numbers 6:22-27, under the theme, "The Lord Bless Thee, and Keep Thee." Following the worship service, the congregation gathered to present their farewell in song and word to Rev. Lanning, his wife, Stephanie, and their children.

The following Thursday, October 4, at 7:00 p.m., the congregation of the Grandville, MI PRC, as well as all those interested in our work in Singapore, were invited to gather in worship for the installation of Rev. Andrew Lanning as minister-on-loan to Singapore.


Rev. Lanning preached his inaugural sermon for the Grandville congregation the following Lord's Day, October 7. He entitled his sermon, "The Minister-on-Loan... to Ephesus," based on God's Word found in Colossians 4, Ephesians 6, and Acts 20. We share the sentiments of Grandville: "With heartfelt gratitude to God for leading him to accept the call to serve as MOL to Covenant ERC of Singapore we welcome him and his wife, Stephanie, together with their 5 children: Jessica, Eric, Emily, Megan, and Jason to our congregation and fellowship, though it be only for a month's time. They will be leaving for Singapore the first week of November."

We express our thanks to Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD for

serving as the host congregation for the second Seniors Retreat on September 18-21 at the Holiday Inn in Sioux Falls. Approximately 110 seniors from our churches enjoyed a week of good Christian fellowship and spiritual instruction. If you have not done so yet, we encourage you to check out Heritage's web site to view and enjoy a slide presentation of a few of the week's events. This year's retreat centered on the theme, "Our Glorious Heritage." Rev. Kenneth Koole spoke on the subject, "Our Heritage of Faith." This was followed the next morning by Rev. Audred Spriensma speaking on "Our Heritage of Family and Friends," and then the next day Prof. Russell Dykstra concluded with, "Our Heritage and the Future."

The "Care Group" committee of the Calvary PRC in Hull, Iowa planned on sending care packages to the young adults in their congregation who attend college. This committee asked their church to become involved by donating items for those care packages. Plans were to put the packages together in mid-October.

Minister Activities

We add our congratulations, along with those of our Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, to their pastor and wife, Rev. Clayton and Allison Spronk, who received the gift of a newborn son, Blake Evan, born on October 2. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Men's and Ladies' Society of Southwest PRC express their Christian sympathy to fellow member, Mrs. Grace Kuiper on the death of her husband,

CLARENCE KUIPER.

Question 42 of the Heidelberg Catechism: "Since then Christ died for us, why must we also die?" is answered for us in this way: "Our death is not a satisfaction for our sins, but only an abolishing of sin, and a passage into eternal life."

Marvin Kamps, President
Natalie Jefferson, Secretary

Notice

■ A digital index of the *Standard Bearer* is now available for Volumes 1 – 88. Go to www.rfpa.org to order.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Peace PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Peter and Janice Poortenga and their families in the death of their dear father, grandfather, and great grandfather,

MR. JAMES BLANKESPOOR,

who went to be with the Lord on Saturday, October 13, 2012. May God comfort them in their sorrow with these words from Psalm 48:14: "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

Rev. Clayton Spronk, President
William De Jong, Clerk