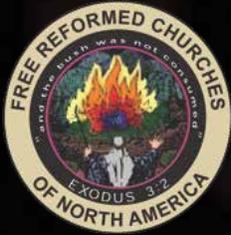


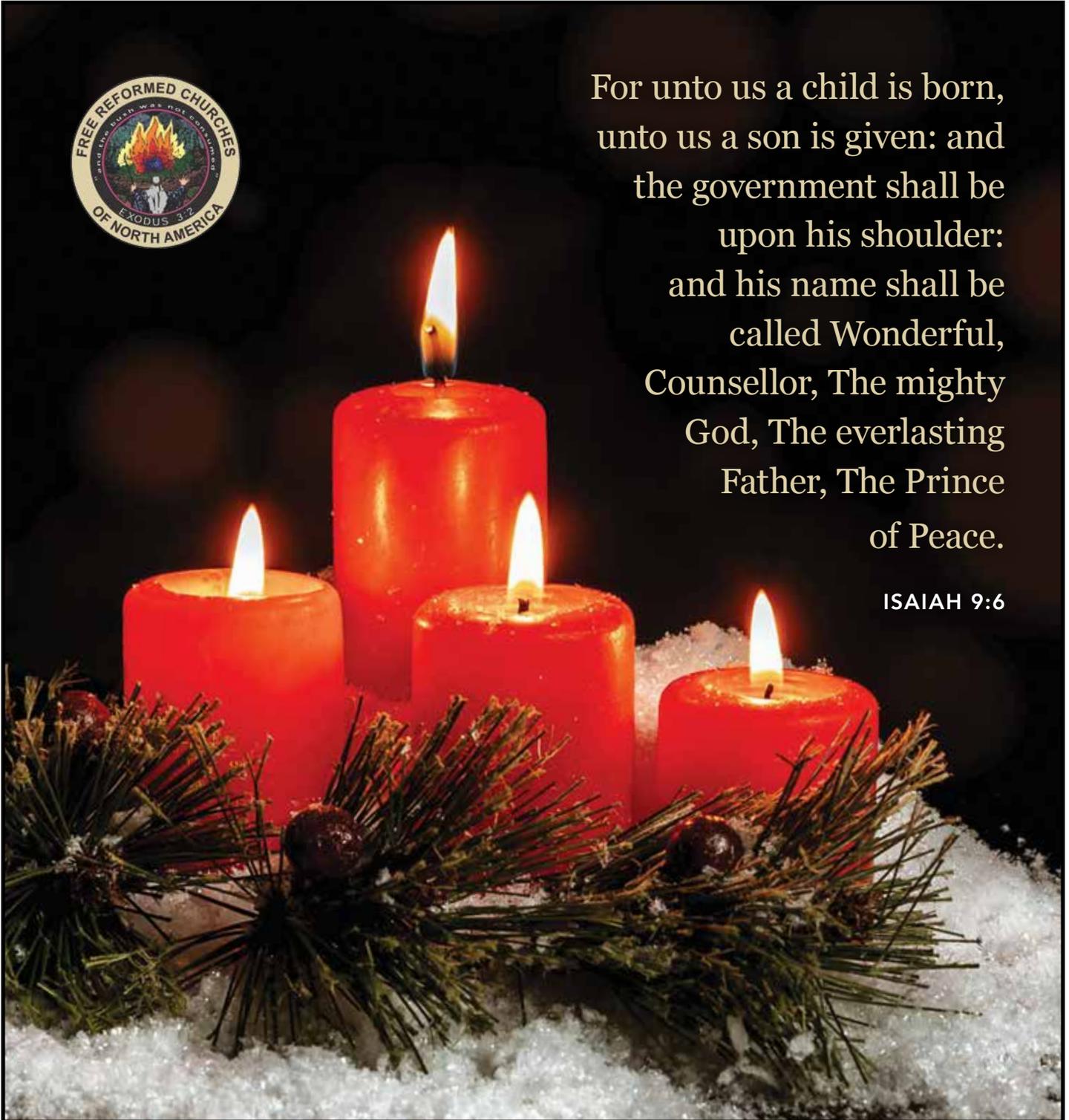
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For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given: and
the government shall be
upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be
called Wonderful,
Counsellor, The mighty
God, The everlasting
Father, The Prince
of Peace.

ISAIAH 9:6



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THE MIND OF CHRIST

*“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”
(Phil 2:5)*

We live in a world of power abuses. The ruling elites think their power and status give them reason to take advantage of others, to take their property, their bodies, and even their lives. This abusive grasping is not just seen in ruling elites, but sadly in others too. Stories of domestic abuse are common in the world and at times in the church. When churchgoers take advantage of others, it is doubly evil, because this involves a complete misrepresentation of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 2, the famous Christ-encomium that praises the incarnation of our Lord Jesus, is a powerful corrective in such a world. The first advent of the Son of God in the flesh (Phil 2:6-8), along with the promise of His second advent (Phil 2:9-11), is the best remedy for the trauma and heartache of victims of such power games. It is also the best remedy to train those who have any kind of authority over others concerning the true nature of authority.

This text is unique. First, it is the only text that explicitly tells us the attitude of our Lord Jesus in taking on our humanity and going to the cross. We know what motivated Him to take the form of humanity and die on the cross.

Second, this text is unique because of its powerful contrast with the mindset of the ruling Greco-Roman elites in the first century – which is still shared by ruling elites today. These verses are challenging to translate, since Philippians 2:6 uses a Greek word that is only used once in our Bibles, a word that is almost impossible to translate with just one English word. The KJV reads: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” The impression given here is that since Jesus Christ was God, it would not be wrong for Him to grasp that equality or hold onto it. However, a British scholar has brought to light the way a Greek speaker in the first century would have heard these words.¹ The word translated “robbery” could better be translated “rapacity,” a word that, though uncommon in English, does carry overtones of violence and abuse. The negative goes with this noun rather than the verb, so “rapacity” is rejected as a right alternative.

A paraphrase in this case helps get at the glorious significance of this text: “Who, because He was in the form of God, considered not rapacity the way to express being in a manner equal with God, but instead expressed His equality with God by making Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men.” The word paraphrased above as “rapacity” is a technical Greek word for erotic kidnappings. Greco-Roman myths told of “gods” who took human form to violate women. Caesars and kings thought they could express their equality with God – that is their worthiness of divine honors – by doing the same. Ruling elites did so as well in various levels of society. This was the *expected* behavior of those in power.

This reading of the text sheds glorious light on this passage. It is not that Jesus Christ had two equally valid ways of expressing His equality with God and chose one. Rather, the wrong way and the right way are contrasted here. The wrong way, the expected pattern of society, was to violate others. The right way was to humble Himself, to take the form of a servant, and to be found in fashion as a man, even to the shameful death of the cross. Jesus Christ chose the cross because it was THE way to express the character of God in a rapacious world. While the world completely misjudged Jesus Christ and considered Him worthy of the cross, God’s opinion is the opposite. God declares that Jesus Christ’s expression of what it means to be God deserves the highest honors, the name above all names, and universal acclamation as the Lord of glory (Phil 2:9-11).

What a glorious gospel this shines on the first and second advents of our Lord Jesus! He reveals to us who God really is in a world of violence and evil. In a world full of bad news because of the actions of rapacious humans (in the Ukraine, Gaza, and so many other places), the actions of the Son of God are the best possible news! For those whose lives have been shattered by the rapacity of others, Christ brings the cure of resurrection glory that will heal all sorrows of body and heart (Phil 3:17-21).

In Philippians 2, the cross is not mentioned first as the way for our sins to be forgiven – that is mentioned in many other passages. The cross is mentioned here as the ultimate attitude tuner. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...” (see also Phil 2:1-4). This gospel is meant to make us lowly, humble, and willing to lay down our lives for others even when they are least worthy of it. Such behavior is Christlike and images God. This is worth stressing in the age of politics, where ego, arrogance, and verbal braggadocio are everywhere. Let us not adopt that as our mindset but rather seek the mind of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ can tune your heart and mind to conform to His image, just as He did in turning Saul into Paul (Phil 3:4-11). That too is good news, the best news, for those who are weary of their own arrogant grasping hearts and long for the true greatness that is Christ-like humility. You can be remade in the image of God in Christ! What better message is there for Advent? ①

Rev. E. Moerdyk serves as pastor of the Free Reformed Church of St. Thomas, Ontario.

1. Fletcher-Louis, Crispin. *The Divine Heartset: Paul’s Philippians Christ Hymn, Metaphysical Affections, and Civic Virtues*. Cascade Books, 2023.

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BEHOLDING THE GRACE OF THE LORD:

REFORMING OUR VIEW OF SYNOD (PART 1)

This is a two-part series comparing our customs at synod (and other church meetings – consistory, combined consistory) with what we see in the Scriptures. In other words, how are we to eye and adore the grace of God manifest in the assemblies of His church? This was initially delivered at the October 2025 retreat of the FRC ministers, London, ON – ed.

It may be more legend than fact, but someone recalled to me consistory meetings in one of our congregations in the 1950s and 1960s as times when the hard-working and strong-minded elders would speak with immense passion and regular acrimony about the reverend’s sermon from last Sunday. One elder would lead the charge and quote from what the *dominee* had said in his third point and would have an issue with how it was worded, to where this statement would lead, or how the old writers would never have said that.

The two or three other elders would throw themselves into the tussle until voices were raised. Back and forth they would speak with animation about the propriety and legitimacy of one or other statement or emphasis and the danger or incompleteness of such a statement, until one would announce that it was coffee time. They would all go to the kitchen to talk in a friendly tone about their crops or work and the hardships they were facing. One would announce that fifteen minutes were finished and they would return to their hard wooden chairs. One of them would want to move on to a next agenda item, but another would go right back to the poor minister’s sermon from last Sunday and pound the same point with the occasional thump on the table around which these animated European immigrants were huddled.

Many of us who can picture this scene may be happy to leave this as an amusing memory of the past in the mind of a few, but thinking about it some sixty or seventy years later, the thought that a point from the sermon was worth so much focus and banter betrays a view of preaching that I can’t help but think has been largely lost. It is true, these men should have been required to fulfill Ken Sande’s Peacekeeping course, which should be required of every elder and synod delegate. Yet,

looking at this legendary or less than legendary scene, you might seem to see a low view of preaching that made them imagine they could spend a few hours beating on a minister's point in the sermon. From another perspective, *the care of what was being spoken in God's name in preaching* shines through, even though not always expressed with such biblical principles of charity, forbearance, and guarding the unity of the faith. One could wish a high view of the church and a high view of the import of preaching would still be among us.

My point with this story is not to delve into how elders should give oversight to the preaching, or what our view of preaching should be, but show how a tone and culture of how we speak together can look very different in the light of history. Taking some distance from what we have been part of can reveal the good and the bad. It is impossible to entirely shed our view of the things we are passionately or dispassionately engaged in – either of which options may be deficient. However, I would plead for some sacred reflection on what is happening at our recent synods by the light of Scripture and secondarily also in the light of our history and then to consider some Scriptural principles to take into the future. My aim is to take into account the place and shape that thrilling grace should have in our synodical meeting, which, by the way, might have as much propriety in our consistory and combined-consistory meetings as well.

The Thrill of Synod in Scripture and History

When considering what Scripture has to say about how to view synod, our minds go understandably to Acts 15. What a thrilling synod that was! But we need to remember that it took place in a context of deep and painful controversy and polarization. More than that, the account of that synod is not isolated, but stands in an inspired record, at the center of the book of Acts, so filled with absolute thrill.

What do we learn about our assemblies from Acts 15 in context?

1. The thrill of synod is, first of all, owing to the living Christ through the Spirit.

The book of Acts is the inspired account of the risen and exalted Christ continuing His work through people of flesh and blood, the apostles and others, all animated by the living Spirit of Christ poured out by the Father and the Son on the day of Pentecost.

Like elsewhere in Scripture, so too in Acts, Christ is among His people. He is where two or three are gathered in His Name (Matt. 18:20), in accordance with His faithful promise. He guides His church. He impels her mission. He anointed His servants. He sows the seed of the Word. He grows, preserves, and defends His church. As Revelation 1 makes clear, He holds the candlestick of His church (Rev. 1:20). Notice the fire implied in the metaphor of the candlestick. Christ's presence with His people is what is behind the light and warmth that is to mark the church of Jesus Christ. If there is a chill in our churches and in our meetings, we can draw from that that Christ is removed, perhaps outside as with Laodicea, which was lukewarm (Rev. 3:20).

Christ is not just with His people, but He is with and among His servants as they serve Him (Acts 18:10), even despite their greatest fears. Christ, through His Spirit, will lead them and all God's people into all truth (John 16:13). This Scriptural Christ-centredness is celebrated everywhere in the book of Acts. Without a profound awareness of the glory of Christ and His presence among His people, we will have a dim view of synod and miss what should thrill us. Synod is about the living Christ in the midst of His church through His Word and Spirit.

2. The thrill of synod is, secondly, the thrill of the power of grace on display.

Synod should not have a greater kinship with the halls of power in Ottawa or Washington than with what happens in the gathering of the church in the worship of Christ, who is seated on heaven's throne. Unlike our world, synod is not about power, unless you mean the power of God's grace through Christ. Certainly, synod should never be about power plays, power dynamics, a man-centred tug of wars, where parties prevail and not Christ.

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What we need is an “eye for God’s grace.” Looking at the book of Acts, grace is manifest in every chapter, in waiting, in repentance, in awe, in discipline, in prayer, in generosity, in courage, in suffering, in fellowship, and in witness. These graces reverberated wherever the gospel came blessed by the Spirit. A key to understanding what the Spirit is saying about church gatherings in the book of Acts is what we find in Acts 11: 23: “Who, when he [Barnabas] came, and had seen **the grace of God**, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”

The context shows that this grace in our text was manifest in the conversion of Gentiles and the resultant unity that is experienced through Christ and because of Christ. There is grace in its freshness, the reality, the humility, the joy, the love, the brokenness, and all that marks God’s grace.

In other words, church gatherings should showcase the thrilling grace of God and render it visible, which is something that takes eyes to see.

This grace fostered a joy that was invigorating and strengthening. As a result of witnessing this grace, Barnabas was glad. Grace (*charis*) gives joy (*chara*). We will know this grace of the Holy Spirit when there is joy in our hearts like Barnabas experienced, together with a felt and expressed desire to cleave to the Lord. True Christian joy is nothing less than the strengthening “thrill” of the Spirit. Grace gives something of the thrill of heaven on the earth. *In other words, church gatherings should showcase the thrilling grace of God and render it visible, which is something that takes eyes to see. It takes a certain spiritual focus, for spiritual things are understood spiritually. They are spiritually discerned.*

None of this grace is against truth, for the Spirit of grace is the Spirit of truth. Where the Spirit of truth is grace and truth meet and righteousness and peace kiss each other. The most humbling sweetness is enjoyed when the Spirit, who inspired Scripture, guides His church in the way of Scripture. When the Synod of Dort closed, the pastors could sing Psalm 124, for truly grace and truth prevailed there: the defense of truth graciously and the offer of grace truthfully.

Shouldn’t our synods be marked by the Word of the Spirit, the Scriptures, and expositions and applications of that Word? Shouldn’t our synods be marked by fervent prayer for the Spirit of grace and supplication, not just at the beginning of the synod in the prayer service, but throughout? Shouldn’t our synods be marked by much of the fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22-23)? Through crucifying the flesh with the lusts thereof, the Spirit will reign through righteousness. What a thrill such a Spirit-ruled synod would be! ¹¹

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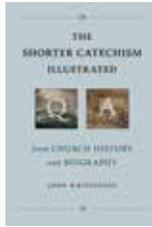
CLASSIC TITLES

The Shorter Catechism Illustrated from Church History and Biography

By John Whitecross

This helpful volume follows the doctrinal structure of the Shorter Catechism but expands each doctrinal point with a wide range of factual stories that illustrate or apply the teaching. Subjects like Providence, Prayer, and the Ten Commandments are illuminated with telling, moving, and sometimes fascinating narratives. John Whitecross's book stands out as a resource that will help to memorably teach the catechism in a family, small group, or formal setting. First published in 1828, the book has been gently modernized. Whitecross was a schoolmaster who knew how to gain people's attention and help them retain what they learned. It is a valuable treasury of illustrative matter for all those who have the responsibility of making biblical teaching interesting in the home, school, or church. John Whitecross was the father of Margaret Paton, the wife of the Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides, John G. Paton. Hardcover, 235 pages, Banner of Truth Trust

RBS Price \$32.00

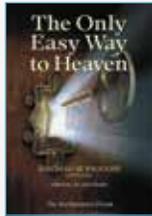


The Only Easy Way to Heaven

By Jeremiah Burroughs

This seems like an odd title for a Puritan work, but it is Burroughs' actual title. The title page says, "Showing that the way that Jesus Christ teaches is an easy way." Based on Matthew 11:30, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light," Burroughs shows that the way of salvation is indeed easy if compared to any other way. The yoke of Christ is certainly easier than the yoke of the law. It is easier than the yoke of sin. It is easier than trying to earn God's favour through human effort. One prominent pastor has said that there are only two religions that have ever existed: the religion of human achievement and the religion of divine accomplishment. It's actually the ONLY way to heaven, much less the only EASY way to heaven. This book should be of great encouragement to all God's children. Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) was loved for his preaching and his gentle spirit, yet the government persecuted him because of his nonconformity to the Church of England. Forced to flee to Rotterdam, Holland, for a time, he eventually returned to England. Hardcover, 142 pages, Northampton Press

RBS Price \$28.00



The Sinner's Sanctuary: Gospel Freedom from Death, Condemnation, and the Law

By Hugh Binning

"He was, by any measure, a remarkable minister. But today he is largely forgotten" --Sinclair Ferguson, from the Foreword. *The Sinner's Sanctuary* consists of a series of forty sermons on Romans 8:1-15. They were preached by Hugh Binning, minister in Govan, now part of Glasgow, on the south bank of the River Clyde in the west of Scotland. Walking readers through the apostle Paul's argument, Binning carefully explains the safety and freedom that saved sinners experience through life united to Christ and walking according to His Spirit. The results are particularly powerful and comforting for believers. These sermons are representative of Binning's all-too-brief ministry from 1650 until his death in 1653 at the age of twenty-six. He was, by any measure, a remarkable minister. He became a professor of philosophy at the age of nineteen.

Hardcover, 389 pages, Soli Deo Gloria Publications

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RECENT BOOKS

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By Lydia Brownback

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Softcover, 100 pages, Crossway

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100 Proofs That Jesus is God

By Curt D. Daniel

What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him? The entirety of the Christian faith hinges on this question: Is Jesus really God? In *100 Proofs That Jesus Is God*, Dr. Curt Daniel presents an undeniable avalanche of biblical evidence for the deity of Christ. From specific texts to the names of Christ, to biblical themes, this little book proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Bible proclaims that Jesus is God. Read *100 Proofs That Jesus is God* to proclaim this glorious truth to unbelievers and skeptics. The book has a Foreword by Dr. Joel Beeke and is endorsed by well-known authors. Softcover, 128 pages, Reformation Heritage Books

RBS Price \$12.00



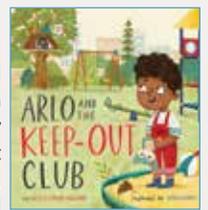
Arlo and the Great Big Cover Up

By Betsy Childs Howard

This is a book with beautiful illustrations and a simple story with a lesson for children on repentance and grace. Arlo discovers not only the misery that comes from hiding his sin but also the relief that comes through confessing it. With easy-to-understand language and engaging illustrations, children will learn important lessons with Arlo about repentance and the forgiveness found only in Jesus. Suitable for ages 3-7 by teaching them biblical truths about how to live and grow as God's children in today's culture.

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A BIBLE STUDY ON PROVERBS

A Woman's Wisdom: How the book of Proverbs Speaks to Everything.

By Lydia Brownback. Published by Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois. Softcover, 223 pages.

A daily, consecutive reading of the Book of Proverbs for devotions can seem repetitive and disjointed and seem to focus on women as temptresses, except for chapter 31, where the portrait of the ideal woman seems unattainable. If you feel this way, here is a Bible study, directed especially to women, which will give you a new insight into the wisdom contained in this book. In the genre of Wisdom Literature, Proverbs is central in its focus on individual and everyday life:

In the Preface, the author emphasizes that “there is no truly reliable wisdom apart from God. To know and trust him *is* wisdom. The way we get this wisdom isn’t by living a long time. Nor is it found by trying our best to follow the paths of wisdom that are set before us in the book of Proverbs. Even if we were able to follow those paths, which we are not, we would fail to lay hold of true wisdom. It is found only in Christ” (p.11). She refers to the apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 1:26-30, where he ends with the statement: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom” (v. 30).

The author reminds us throughout the study that the book of Proverbs is filled with wisdom for *everything in life*. It is not a book that tells us in the first place *how* to live, but it tells us *where* we may obtain the wisdom we need for every challenge that faces us. It is found in our union with Christ. We can never attain to wisdom and will always fail on our own. Focusing on both ideal and foolish descriptions, Proverbs points to Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Divided into three parts, with a total of nine chapters and a study guide, the focus is on the various circumstances addressed by Proverbs and why these matter to women (Part One). Part Two has six chapters of topics, each describing wisdom that is applicable to women. The study ends with




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a detailed description of the ideal wise woman of Proverbs 31 as a “portrait of wisdom.”

The author takes the cue from Proverbs chapters 1-3 and 8-9, where many passages focus on different ways of describing the fear of the LORD. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (1:7 and 9:10). It is the beginning of wisdom. If we don't have this, we cannot understand wisdom rightly. It is remarkable that the word “fear” is used in describing what it means to be attuned to God's wisdom. It is a godly fear and should not be dismissed so easily. It includes the fear of awe experienced by Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:4-6). It includes the cry of Isaiah (Isa. 6:5) when he was confronted with the holiness of God. It includes the fear of Mary when the angel brought her the news of the miraculous birth of Jesus. The angel had to tell her not to be afraid (Luke 1:30). As Lydia Furman states, it is in this “recognition of our sin before a holy God,” casting ourselves upon Him for mercy, “we will move beyond just merely understanding the doctrines of the Christian faith in our minds to living them from our hearts with deep joy. Wisdom is the realization that he is everything. After we are driven to Christ through this kind of fear, ...we are able to know God as kind, wise, fatherly, holy, powerful, all-knowing, and compassionate” (pp. 23-24).

Additional chapters apply this in detail to women by describing how this “fear of the LORD” becomes evident in their words and actions. Examples from Scripture are given to show how this is worked out in the lives of Scripture women and how we may learn from them. It is remarkable how this wisdom of the “fear of the LORD” is manifested in women (and men) throughout Scripture.

There are many portions in Proverbs that describe the blessings and benefits of true wisdom. The counterpart to the positive portrayals of the positive wisdom passages in Proverbs are the dark passages that describe the foolish, including women. They are there as warnings. Examples of foolishness are given in no uncertain terms, such as the seven things the LORD hates and are an abomination to him in 6:16-19. The end of a fool is terrible. Repeatedly, Proverbs points to true wisdom. The answer is crying out to the source of Wisdom, “Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24).

In Part Two, the focus is on the power of words, and the author draws on examples relating them to women. She describes how many of the wise sayings apply specifically to women and draws attention to women being created to be helpers, complementing men. She compares foolish words and wise words (18:7; 18:21) and how women have the power of the tongue. Other chapters deal with friendship, self-control, and discerning our thoughts, feelings, and desires. Proverbs deals with all these emotions from a wise perspective as well as showing their foolish counterparts, such as anger, grief, and bad

desires.

Instructive is the chapter that deals with passages in Proverbs dealing with finances. “Wise Women are Financially Savvy,” Lydia states. “He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich” (10:4). Statements such as “Give me

neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’” (30:8-9) are full of instruction, also for women. In the chapter “Wise Women Safeguard their Sexuality,” we learn that Proverbs does not put “women down,” and the words about immorality are just as applicable to women. True, the culture was different during Solomon's time, but today “there can be a special danger in an office setting, where men and women work side by side and spend more of their waking hours with their colleagues than with their spouses” (p. 145). Safeguarding marriage is being aware that a husband “might not be the Prince Charming you thought early on, but you chose to marry him for a reason” (p. 132).

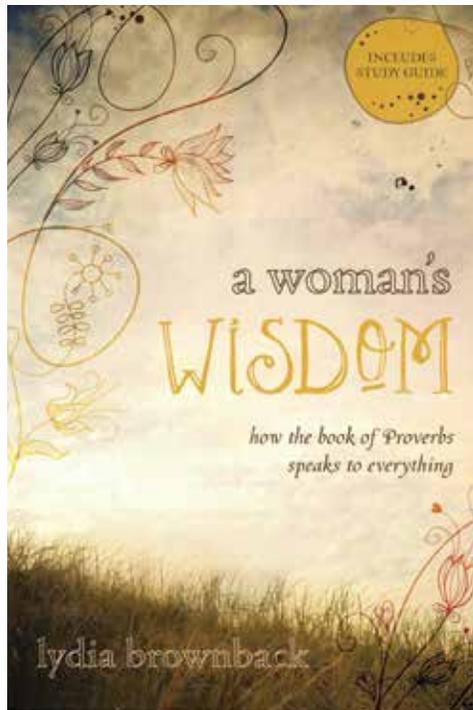
Her response to Proverbs 31:10-11 is that it is a poem set in the form of an acrostic, which means that each different letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a complementary meaning. The central part of the poem focuses on the woman's husband (v. 23), indicating that the choice of a wife can make or break the husband, and the wife's choice is equally applicable. The woman in this chapter is a godly woman, “a portrait of feminine wisdom,” a type a man would be wise to choose (p. 164). The description of this “excellent wife” is not on her achievements—no woman can attain them—but the attitude of her heart. “The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her (v.11). She is a good household manager, a nurturer, and may even be a businesswoman who adds to the household's finances. Does this mean she has to *do* all these things? No woman can. This often puts women in a difficult position of making choices (p. 177). Every circumstance is different, and here the author includes the single woman also.

The woman of Proverbs 31 can help us make wise choices because she is a godly woman. Such women will seek God's wisdom in everything. Summing up, it is not explicitly following this wise woman. She “is the picture of a wise living, but not primarily of how to be better homemaker or businesswoman. The picture she provides is how full and rewarding a woman's life can be if she fears the LORD” (p. 187).

Here we have come full circle to the first principle of wisdom: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (1:7 and 9:10).

A highly recommended Bible study. 

Mrs. Frederika (Ricky) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.



INTRODUCING THE FREE REFORMED CHURCH OF BORNHOLM, ONTARIO

With an aim of growing familiarity across our denomination, we are asking each of our congregations to give an introduction to or brief update about their congregation. - The Editors.



Cornerstone Free Reformed Church is located in the town of Blackfalds, a town of just over 10,000 residents, halfway between the major Albertan centres of Calgary and Edmonton. The Free Reformed Church of Bornholm is a small congregation of approximately 60 members. We are located just outside the hamlet of Bornholm in West Perth, situated in the heart of southwestern Ontario's rich agricultural region. Each year, the surrounding fields testify to God's goodness as we witness the seasonal rhythm of seedtime and harvest around our church property.

Our congregation began in November 1999 as a preaching station under the oversight of Dundas Free Reformed Church. Many of our founding members came from the Mitchell FRC congregation. In the early years, we met in the municipal

office building in Bornholm, which we rented initially and later purchased. By God's grace, the Free Reformed Church of Bornholm was formally instituted on July 11, 2003.

That same year, we were blessed to receive our first pastor, Rev. D.H. Kranendonk, who faithfully served our congregation for ten years. His ministry among us was a great encouragement, and we were saddened, though supportive, when he accepted a call to Oxford FRC. Bornholm was his first pastoral charge. After a two-year vacancy, Rev. J. Procee was installed as our second pastor in 2015. He served faithfully for five years before accepting a call to the Heritage Reformed Congregations. Since then, we have been in another extended vacancy of four and a half years, continually praying that the Lord of the harvest would raise up and send forth labourers into His vineyard.

As a smaller congregation, our demographics are diverse, yet limited in number within each age group. At present, we have four nursery-aged children, four children attending Sunday School, and close to ten in the Catechism classes and Confession of Faith class. Some of our young people join with Mitchell FRC's youth group for study and fellowship. We also have a Ladies' Bible Study, which has been a meaningful ministry for the women in our church. While some of our children attend local Christian schools, others are homeschooled. Encouragingly, we have seen a number of recent marriages among our young people, which gives us hope for continued growth and vitality in the years to come.

Despite the challenges we face—particularly being without a pastor and having a small consistory of just two elders and two deacons—we remain grateful for the Lord's sustaining grace. We have been blessed with regular pulpit supply from faithful pastors and professors. We often rely on reading services as well. Through it all, we give thanks for God's continued provision and the encouragement of His Word.

We remain committed to the Reformed faith and the fellowship of believers, trusting that the Lord will continue to build His church in Bornholm according to His perfect will and timing.

"O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" Psalm 96:9



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ABOUT GRACE CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

GCA exists to glorify God by partnering with Christian families to educate students in truth and godliness with the hope of seeing children come to faith in Christ and grow in that faith. We provide a nurturing environment where biblical principles guide all learning and leadership, equipping students to serve Christ faithfully in every area of life.

Learn more at

<https://gcagr.org>

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The ideal candidate will demonstrate spiritual maturity, educational expertise, a heart for shepherding people, and a team approach for leadership of the school.

Applications should send a resume and statement of faith to the chair of the hiring committee,

Dr. Maarten Kuivenhoven,
maarten.kuivenhoven@gcagr.org

Application deadline is January 31, 2026.

A NEW (?) STUDENT ADMISSION POLICY

An Explanation of the Changes Made to the Theological Education Committee's Procedure for Accepting Students into the Ministerial Training Program of the FRCNA



Two years ago (2023), the Theological Education Committee (TEC) of our churches proposed to synod a significant change in how it processes applications for the ministerial training program of the FRCNA. Historically, a man who felt called to the ministry would speak to his pastor and consistory about his sense of call. The consistory would then examine him with regard to his relationship to the Lord and spiritual growth, his sense of call, his gifts relating to speech, teaching, and spiritual leadership, his involvement in the life and service of the local church and community, and any areas of concern or weakness that may be observed. He would then be referred to the TEC for a further interview. If the committee accepted him, a recommendation would be made to synod, and if approved, his name would be announced to the churches through the synodical press release.

In its report to Synod 2023, the committee identified several weaknesses with this approach. Specifically, consistories often provide the committee with too little information about the applicant, making it difficult to reach a well-informed decision. This lack of detail is understandable, if consistories are unaware of what kind of information the committee is seeking. As a result, too much depends on the applicant's brief, hour-long interview with the committee, during which the TEC must make a weighty and deeply spiritual decision with limited information. This situation highlighted the need for greater emphasis on assessing the applicant's spiritual and practical giftedness for ministry within the life of the local church, including the crucial ability to speak an edifying word, which should form a vital part of the evaluation process.

To address these weaknesses, the committee (among other things) proposed that when recommending an applicant to

the TEC, consistories include confirmation that the applicant has been a member in good standing of the congregation for at least one year and has been interviewed by the consistory. The consistory should provide an assessment of the applicant's conversion, state of grace, and walk of life, as well as his sense of call to the ministry of the Word and his spiritual and natural gifts. The report should also describe and evaluate the applicant's involvement in the life and service of the local church and community, along with an assessment of his personal strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the consistory should give a clear recommendation as to whether the applicant can be commended to the ministerial training program.

Although the admissions procedure always asked about the applicant's involvement in the local church and community, the new procedure places much more emphasis on this and expects the consistory to test and evaluate a man's gifts and aptitude in the context of the local church *before* he applies to the committee.

This approach is wise because a very serious and sincere man may feel called by the Lord, but if he does not possess the necessary gifts (e.g. the gift of public speaking, the gift of leadership, the gift of relating well to people, academic gifts, not to mention the qualifications in 1 Tim 3 and Titus 1), he is not called. To be sure, many of these gifts may be immature and in need of development. Not all men called to the ministry are gifted in all areas to the same degree and the theological education training program is to be a means in God's hand to develop gifts further. But a man must possess at least a modicum of these necessary gifts. Who better can assess whether this is the case than the office-bearers and members of the congregation where he is a member?

One might argue a man should assess his own gifts. Yes, he must do that too, but the Bible teaches that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer 17: 9). What is more, we are by nature proud and selfish. As such, we are also prone to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom 12:3). To counteract this tendency, the TEC has asked consistories to do this as well. In Volume 1 of his *Pastoral Theology*, Rev. Albert Martin writes: “While sober self-assessment of our desires, graces, and gifts is a personal responsibility which no man can rightly evade, an external confirmation of that assessment by a cross-section of spiritually-minded people is essential to a valid call to the pastoral office.”

In this, he is supported by the great Puritan theologian John Owen. Owen argued that before the church trains any man for the office of minister, it must first assess whether the man in question possesses the necessary “graces, gifts, and abilities for the discharge of [this] office”. Secondly, he writes, “There is to be an exploration or trial of those gifts and abilities as unto their accommodation unto the edification of that church whereunto any person is to be ordained a pastor or minister” (Owen, *Works*, Vol. 16, pp. 73-74). In other words, these gifts must be tested in the context of the local church.

This approach is also Biblical. In 3 John 12, John writes, “Demetrius hath good report of all *men*, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.” Demetrius was likely a helper of the apostle Paul. Notice what Paul says about him: he had a “good report of all men” (probably referring to believers in the church). John cites this as a reason why the church can trust him (unlike Diotrephes, who was not to be trusted – see verses 9-10).

The point is twofold: How can the church trust a man unless he has a good report of believers in his local church? How can he have a good report of believers in his local church unless the local church has seen him in action?

Commenting on this verse, John MacArthur writes: “The example of Demetrius shows that a man’s worth can be measured by his reputation in the community, his faithfulness to the truth of Scripture, and the opinion godly Christian leaders have of him.”

Acts 6 records the installation of the first deacons. Notice the instructions that the apostles gave to the church: “Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

Significantly, the apostles gave the responsibility of putting forth men for this office to the congregation. The only stipulation was that they had to be “of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.” These are qualities that they had to observe. But they could not observe them unless they saw them in action.

Similarly, in Acts 16, when Paul met Timothy, he and Silas

“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2

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and Luke observed that he “was well reported of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium” (Verse 2). Evidently, the churches at Lystra and Iconium had seen Timothy in action and approved of him. They saw in him the necessary gifts and grace for ministry. On this basis, Paul asked Timothy to accompany him on his missionary journey.

Finally, in 1 Timothy 3, Paul lists the qualifications for elders and deacons. In verse 10 he writes concerning deacons, “let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.” Although Paul was referring specifically to deacons, surely the same principle applies to men who feel called to the office of minister. Before embarking on this task, they must first be proved” or “tested.” Who was to do the testing? The office bearers and members of the church!

Commenting on this verse, Matthew Henry writes, “Some trial should be made of a persons’ qualifications before they are admitted into office in the church, or have any trust committed to them.”

Similarly, Matthew Poole writes, “The higher officers ought to *be proved*, (as well as these of a lower order,) as by examination or conference, so (which possibly is here, more intended) by an observation of their lives and conversation, for some time before they were admitted into this employment.”



And Calvin writes: “He [Paul] wishes that they who are chosen should not be unknown, but that their integrity should be ascertained, like that of the bishops...Besides, this trial is not for a single hour, but consists in long experience. In a word, when deacons are to be ordained, the choice must not fall at random, and without selection, on any that come to hand; but those men are to be chosen who are approved by their past life in such a manner that, after what may be called full inquiry, they are ascertained to be well qualified.”

It is clear, therefore, that before a man is installed in any office of the church (especially the office of minister), he must first be tested.

This raises the question: How is this to be done? The TEC has deliberately chosen not to specify this, but to leave this to each consistory to decide. The consistory may do this formally before or after he applies to the committee by observing him in specific ministry contexts (e.g. by having him teach a Sunday School or catechism class, prepare and deliver a meditation at a congregational meeting or prayer meeting, lead a Bible study or youth group, serve as an office bearer, visit the sick and elderly, etc.) and then observing how he functions in that context, making allowance – especially if he is still young – for development and growth. The consistory may also do so informally by generally observing how he functions within the congregation. Either way, the consistory must assess his gifts.

Some might object: Are we not in danger of placing so much emphasis on giftedness that we undermine the necessity and paramount importance of a clear call from the Lord? That is a valid concern. It would be to the detriment of our churches (not to mention the man himself) if we no longer required a man to give a clear testimony of his sense of call. Our current regulations continue to emphasize this requirement. According to our TEC Handbook (which can be found on the FRCNA website under Resources > Other Resources), every applicant to our ministerial program must “have a clear sense of call, a sacrificial love for



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Christ and His church, and a burden for souls.” Yet, a called man must also possess the necessary gifts. To admit men into the ministry who believe they are called, but who lack the necessary gifts, would also be to the detriment of our churches and the man himself!

This change means that our admissions policy is “new” (hence the title of this article). The requirement for a man’s gifts to be tested is not new. Most Reformed and Presbyterian churches require something similar of their students, which is usually done while the man is engaged in theological studies and after he has come under the care of his classis/presbytery. What is new is that we are asking that a man’s gifts be tested even before he applies to the committee.

Yet, even this expectation is not new (hence the question mark in the title). In past centuries (and perhaps still today), many churches in Great Britain would have a man who said he felt called to ministry preach a sermon. Spurgeon references this practice in his *Lectures to My Students*. He writes: “It is by no means a law which ought to bind all persons, but still, it is a good old custom in many of our country churches for the young man who aspires to the ministry to preach before the church. It can hardly ever be a very pleasant ordeal for the youthful aspirant, and, in many cases, it will scarcely be a very edifying exercise for the people; but still, it may prove a most salutary piece of discipline and save the public exposure of rampant ignorance.”

Our time and context are different. Our regulations do not allow a man to speak an edifying word in the churches until after he has completed a probationary period of study of at least one year. The point is, the church has always

seen the need to test a man’s gifts and now we desire to test those not only while a student is under care but also before he comes under care.

May the Lord be pleased to give us more men who are called and equipped by the Holy Spirit to this glorious work! ①

Rev. J. Schoeman is pastor of Abbotsford Free Reformed Church and chairman of the Theological Education Committee.



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On October 4, 2025, Andre Knevel was honoured to receive the King Charles III Coronation Medal.



It was presented at a private ceremony and dinner by MPP Jennie Stevens. Among other things, she said, “Andre has shared his extraordinary musical talent across Canada and around the world. It was an honour to spend time with the Knevel family on Saturday, presenting this medal in recognition of his remarkable contributions to the arts and to our city (St. Catharines, ON).”

It was indeed a privilege to be chosen as one of six people from among a pool of 35 nominees. He wishes to thank his unknown nominator and appreciates greatly all those who have shown such faithful and humbling support throughout his musical career. Ultimately, all honour and glory go to the Lord for the granting of His amazing blessings and care.



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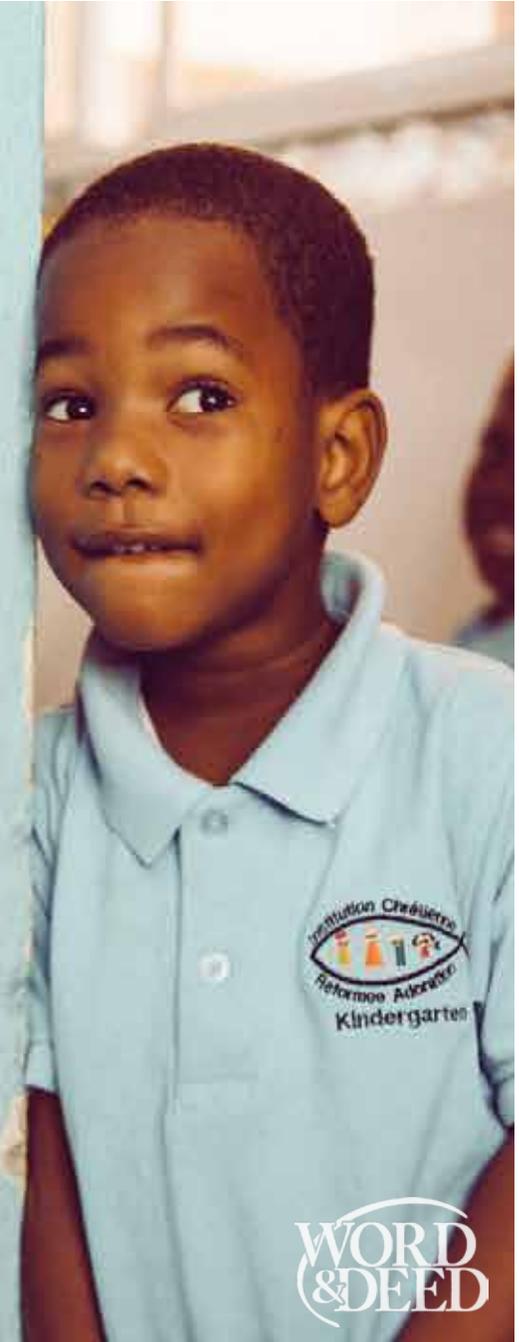
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REFORMED EVANGELISTIC OUTREACH

INTERNATION PLOWING MATCH & RURAL EXPO 2025



The International Plowing Match & Rural Expo (IPM) is held annually in different counties throughout Ontario. It is North America's largest outdoor agricultural and rural expo attracting 70,000 to 110,000 visitors. The IPM is organized and run by the Ontario Plowmen's Association (OPA). This year the IPM was held near Grassie, a small village between Hamilton and St. Catharines from September 16 through 20. This marks our 40th IPM that the Reformed Evangelistic Outreach has attended.

The Reformed Evangelistic Outreach committee (REO) rents a 20'x40' tent where tables are set up with the tracts, Bibles, books, etc. We are grateful for the seven to ten





volunteers that help in the booth each day handing out Christian calendars, tracts and bookmarks to those who pass by. We encourage them to browse in our booth where we have Bibles and hundreds of Christian books available for sale at a very low cost (approximately 800 books were sold). We are encouraged with the frequent discussions that are generated about the Christian faith.

Reformed Evangelical Outreach committee takes this opportunity to thank the various supporting individuals and churches for their prayers and monetary support. Each year, the costs to attend the IPM as well as purchasing the Bibles, books, tracts, calendars and bookmarks is nearly \$20,000. The REO committee is aware that without the Lord this work will amount to nothing. We are to sow the seed, and it is God that gives the increase!

Please remember this outreach in your prayers. Pray for both adults and children who received a Bible, book or tract, that they will read it, and that the Lord will be pleased by His Holy Spirit, to make alive the spiritually dead, and edify those in the faith to grow in grace.

The Lord willing, the 2026 International Plowing Match and Rural Expo will be held in Walkerton, Bruce County, Ontario from September 22-26.

In Christian Love,

Reformed Evangelical Outreach
www.reoutreach.com



Free Reformed Historical Centre

"What do I do with these things?"

Contact the Free Reformed Historical Centre

The Free Reformed Historical Centre is to gather and preserve materials relating to the Dutch roots and North American establishment, development, and ongoing life of our churches. Specific materials are classified as unrestricted access (available to all), restricted access (available only to approved persons), and/or time-specified access (available after a specified future date).

The Historical Centre is looking for:

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- Personal materials (letters, diaries, sermon notes, essays, etc).
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If you or your (grand)parents have materials that may be of interest to the centre, please contact:

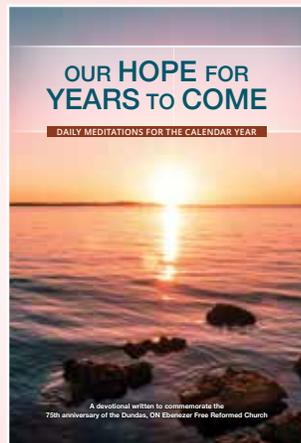
Rev. D. Kranendonk (secretary)

Cell: 616-290-4125 • Email: kranendonk@frcna.org



NEW DEVOTIONAL AVAILABLE

In connection with its **75th anniversary** as a congregation, the Dundas FRC has produced at **366 day devotional**. The meditations were written by living former pastors of the congregation (when the project was launched) as well as two pastors who previously were members of the congregation, the writers include *Pastors A. Baars, K. Hoefnagel, L.J. Bilkes, G.R Procee, C. Pronk & J.G Procee*. The wives of these pastors also provide reflections of their time in the congregation and beyond.



Copies are available for purchase for **\$25 EACH**. To obtain a copy, contact Herman den Hollander at hdenhollander@yahoo.com.

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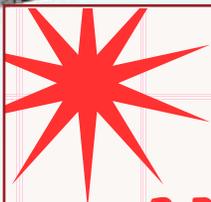
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