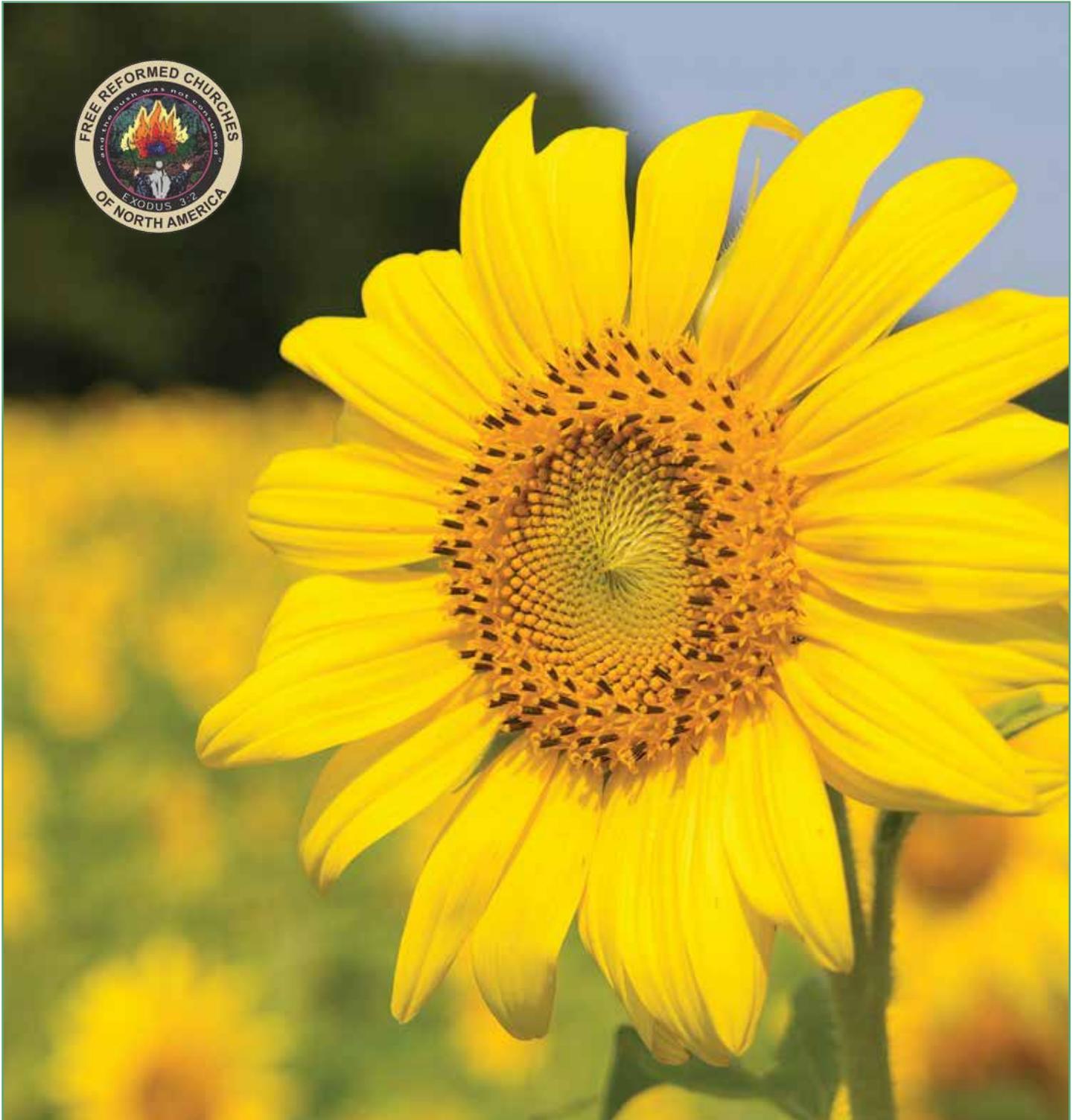


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THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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WHEN IT SEEMS GOD IS DISTANT

There are times in the life of every believer when it seems to them that God is distant - times when it can seem like God is far removed from their circumstances and that He has forgotten all about them and simply left them to themselves. At those times, the believer can feel like God has abandoned them and forsaken them and that He is simply indifferent to their plight. It would seem that that was the way that David was feeling in Psalm 13, one of the many psalms of lament that have been left on record for us for our learning and edification. This psalm has much to teach us then about how we are to respond to times of pain and hardship in life when it seems that God is distant and far removed from our circumstances.

David's Cry

The first thing we see in this psalm is David's cry. It is a cry of anguish and sorrow that arose out of the depths of his heart because of what he was experiencing. He cried out to God four times in rapid succession in verses 1 and 2, "How long?" "How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD, for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" We see something of the intensity of the anguish of soul David was experiencing here in his repeated use of this question, "How long?" David was wondering to himself when the soul-crushing trial that that he was experiencing was ever going to end. Of course, that is often what can make some of the trials we can experience so difficult to endure: the fact that they do go on so long, and it seems perhaps that the relief that we desire will never come. That was where David found himself here. He was growing tired and weary under the strain of what he was going through. Thus, he cried out to God, "How much longer, God, do I have to endure this?" "How much longer, Lord, until You act?" "How much longer until I feel Your presence again?" Clearly, David was in a situation where he was feeling like God was distant from him. God was far removed and absent from him. He didn't sense the nearness and presence of his God. So, he cried out to Him with this string of questions. Is that not the first lesson to be learned from this psalm and the example of David here about how to respond in our own lives at times such as these? Like David, we are to learn to acknowledge the feelings and emotions we have to God and to find our way to Him with them. We are not called by God to deny our feelings or pretend that everything is going well when it isn't. Nor are we to try to just work our way through these things and come up with a solution all by ourselves. Rather, God wants us to bring our felt needs to Him and to cry out to Him with them, to tell Him exactly how we are feeling, for we are to remember, as a certain hymn writer says, that "When all things seem against us, to drive us to despair, we know one gate is open, one ear will hear our prayer."

David's Concern

David didn't allow his feelings to keep him back from telling God about the things that were on his heart. Instead, he allowed them to drive him out of himself to his God. Thus, in verses 3 and 4, we see him going on to say to God, "Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved." In these verses, we see that David expressed his concern that God would take notice of his plight and intervene and act on his behalf. Furthermore, he brings with him arguments and reasons as to why God should do so. He desperately wanted God to respond to him and answer his prayer to bring deliverance to him. David was brought to the point of desperation and longing here and to a conscious sense of his need of God's help. Oftentimes, this can be the very reason God allows us to experience difficulties and hardships in life. He wants us to come to the place where we do sense and know our absolute need of His help and intervention in our lives. God often waits until our prayers are desperate before He does answer us and act on our behalf. Perhaps, as one author says, "the cause of the powerlessness of much of our praying is a lack of desperation; for too often we almost pray with the attitude of wanting God to care about things we really don't care too much about ourselves." David was desperate here, and he was concerned that God would hear him and answer him. So, he brought his concerns to his God, and he cried out to Him with them as the One who was in sovereign and full control of his situation and who alone could bring relief from it. Whatever the intensity of our own trials may be therefore, and whatever pressures and strains may press in upon us from day to day, that is what we too must learn to do. For rather than despairing over these things, we need to learn to let them bring us to the God of all grace, the God who is God over all, the God who assures us in His Word that He has a care and a concern for us. We are to cast all of our cares and burdens upon Him then, in the knowledge, and with the firm belief, as Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 5:7, that He cares for us. When we do so, as David himself acknowledged in Psalm 55:22, we can rest assured that God shall sustain and uphold us and bring relief to us.

David's Confidence

That is the last thing that we learn from the example of David in this psalm. We see him go on in verses 5 and 6 to express his confidence and trust in his God by saying to Him, "But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me." What a wonderful transition we see here in David's experience. He moves from feelings of abandonment by God to faith and rejoicing in God. By crying out to God and turning to Him in earnest with his concerns, David shifted his attention away from himself and his problems, and he refocused it on his God. As a result, he was once again able to rejoice in God as he brought to remembrance all that He is in Himself and all that He is to His people. In spite of all that was still going on in his life, he was now able to rise above these things, for his mind was no longer preoccupied with them. Rather, his mind and thoughts were taken up with the greatness of his God and what He had done for him, so much so that he was ready to sing to the Lord, because he saw that He had dealt bountifully with him. While it seems David's circumstances hadn't changed here, he himself had been changed because he had experienced the relief that comes from shifting his gaze off of himself and his own ever-changing emotions and feelings and circumstances to the One true and only unchanging constant in this world, his Lord and his God. His feelings of reality therefore gave way here to an apprehension and appreciation of the ultimate reality. That which is fixed. That which is constant. It was that same realization which brought about this wonderful expression of confidence from his lips. Is that not the place where we all need to come to in our own experience of life? We all need to look beyond what is seen and temporal and to fix our minds and hearts on that which is unseen and eternal and to affirm and reaffirm to ourselves, over and over and over again, what is true about God so that we too would trust in His mercy and rejoice in His salvation and that our hearts would be stirred up within us to sing to the Lord for His bountiful dealings with us. May that be your confidence and mine then as we each look to the future with all its uncertainties and unknowns, and may it lead us to commit our way to our God in faith and in trust. AMEN. 

Rev. K. Hutton is pastor of Bethel Free Reformed Church of Mitchell, Ontario.

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HOUSE VISITATION — THRILL OR CHILL?

According to the Church Order of Dort (1619), elders are “faithfully to visit the families of the congregation, to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion” (Art. 23). In many congregations, from the 17th to the 20th century, house visitation was considered to be the spiritual highlight of the year. As elders went two by two from house to house, they spoke heart to heart to their people, warning, comforting, and directing as each had need. Many accounts from the past speak of how house visits could spark or deepen spiritual life among members of a congregation.

In many denominations, house visitation has fallen on hard times. Where it is still practiced, it has become a social check-in with members or a drudgery on the part of both elders and members.

The regular visit of the members, however, is intended to be a serious and spiritual means of shepherding the flock by the elders. It is an important opportunity to build spiritual connections and help both members and elders in the pilgrimage through this life. The current increase of suffering from isolation and a materialistic approach to life only makes house visitation the more valuable.

The Mandate

House visitation is not just a custom handed down from the Netherlands.¹ In Scripture, elders are instructed to “take heed... to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). Members are reminded that elders are to “watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Heb. 13:17). Paul refers to the fact that he was teaching people “publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). Gisbertus Voetius wrote: “The duties of elders are not only in the consistory or in the church services, but extend into the homes and the personal lives of the flock.” The Belgic Confession, Article 30, says the office of elder exists “that true religion may be preserved... and that the poor and distressed may be relieved and comforted, according to their necessities.”

Elders need to see house visitation as not simply a duty, but a Christ-given responsibility and opportunity to help guide the flock, among which they are to reflect Christ’s care (1 Pet. 5:1-5). In a world of social media, artificial intelligence, and rampant loneliness, meetings with office-bearers can help people feel much more connected to actual people, particularly when elders come to see how their members are doing.

Means of Grace

When elders visit in the home, it is appropriate to get an update

on how the member or family is doing in general. Are they in good health? Are they provided for? Have there been recent changes in their lives? The elders should engage the children as well with interest and seek to know and remember their names as well as new developments in their lives. This will help trust in the long term.

The main aim of the visit is to ascertain the spiritual condition and encourage the spiritual well-being of the member or family. This should not be done without Scripture and prayer and brief devotional thoughts attuned to the age of any children or the life-stage of the family or member. The elders can both model how Scripture informs our lives as well as teach the family a lesson from Scripture. This lesson can then be a springboard for further discussion and follow-up questions for the member or family. If the member or family has gone through difficulties lately or has significant stresses, encouraging passages can help direct the family through this season of need. If there is a need to encourage greater participation in the life of the church or to warn against worldly influences, this too can be done with pertinent passages.

Through this all, it should become clear to the member or family that the elders care for them, and more than that, that Christ cares for His flock. The prayer at the beginning and end of the visit should also lay the needs of the member or family before the Lord, as well as emphasize all the means of grace that Christ is expending for the spiritual benefit of this member or family.

Listening Well

Perhaps the greatest benefit of house visitation is to foster real spiritual growth. Just as a physical check-up at the doctor's office is not just to collect or review the latest indicators of someone's physical health but to direct to ways in which problems can be addressed and physical help promoted, so too the house visitation should yield some true directions for the member or family.

Chiefly, the elders should seek to ascertain what effect the weekly preaching of the Word is having. It is best to hear some specifics rather than just vague generalities. What was a sermon or sermon series recently that had an effect on you, and in what way? How have you benefited from the administration of the sacraments, and how do you stand with respect to the Lord's Supper? Secondly, the elders should ask after the habits of family and personal worship in the home. Thirdly, if there is a couple, the elders should ascertain whether the marriage is doing well, and each is conducting themselves in a biblical way in marriage. The same is true when there are children.

Elders need to learn and practice good listening skills. Ideally, the conversation should be about 50-50. Open-ended questions and follow-up questions will help someone to feel heard and encouraged to share more. If there is a couple, both the husband and wife should be encouraged to share.

In all these things, the elders should have a Christ-like spirit of gentleness. Paul writes to the Thessalonians that he was "gentle ... as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because you were dear unto us" (1 Thess. 2:7-8). There may be need to encourage use of the means of grace, but do it then as a shepherd, who leads beside the still waters and restores the soul (see Ps. 23:2-3). Remember not to break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, for you will not be like your Master (Matt. 12:20).

House visitation should also not be the only time you are speaking to your members. If you have a district, it may be good to call to check in a few times a year, and those in need even more frequently. Sometimes an overlooked way of connecting with your members is to greet them at church and ask how they are, spiritually and otherwise. It may feel artificial if only once a year at house visitation you ask personal questions. It is about building relationships so that trust and openness can grow.

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Reality

In the house visit, it will be important to be real. The elders on the one hand should be real and down-to-earth. There should not be any ostentation or fakeness. Appropriate soberness, yes; an unrelatable piousness, no. One of the things that marked Jesus' interaction with people was the genuine human interest He showed, and so should the elders who represent Him.

Elders will often fear this hasn't happened, but the desire should be to leave behind a spiritual fragrance, the sweet savour of Christ (2 Cor. 2:15), both to those who are Christ's and those who are not. It should be when the elders leave that it was as if the Lord Himself passed by. At the same time, while some visits may leave elders burdened and hopefully resolving to pray for the member or family and check in with them again, other visits will leave them encouraged. Either way, if the visit is real, it will remind everyone of the reality of life, both the griefs, joys, difficulties, as well as the reality of eternity and those things which are eternal. It will remind of the reality of the Holy Spirit's work in salvation as well as the quiet growth the Lord brings about in His children. Where there is hardness, indifference, bitterness, or inconsistency, elders will have matter to double their prayers.

Both those visited as well as those who did the visiting should reflect on the visit. It may be that the elder was not able to answer questions on the spot and may need time to think and weigh things. For that matter, elders should be educating themselves both prior to taking the office, as well as growing in knowledge in the office. The form for the ordination/installation of office-bearers exhorts them to "continually be meditating on the mysteries of faith." Certainly, elders should be ones who can direct people as to the beginning and growth in spiritual life. Many among the flock can struggle with assurance, unbelief, or a sense of the Lord forsaking them. Young people can struggle with a lot of issues they face in university or the workforce. Though there are many books or websites that can help, there is nothing like a trusted pastor or elder to help cut through difficult issues. It is also good for elders to know what people are dealing with in life.

There will be times when elders will need to refer matters on

Both those visited as well as those who did the visiting should reflect on the visit.

to the pastor or professionals, or even authorities. Through it all, elders will gain experience and this will in turn stand the members and the congregation in good stead.

Conclusion

If you still find your yearly house visitation a thrill, thank God for that blessing. If you do not, please consider how it might become that. Thoughtful preparation and prayer beforehand will help your readiness to benefit from the Scriptural institution of house visitation. If you are an elder, grow in your ability to listen and prayerfully direct people to Scripture. If you are the head of a household, prepare your family for the occasion by instructing them in what house visitation is all about. May the Lord help us all to settle for more than dread of drudgery when it comes to this important institution.

Earlier I mentioned the similarity of a house visit to an annual physical with a health professional. Few of us would, however, associate the word "thrill," with a physical. However, that is where the similarity breaks down. A house visitation is a God-ordained means to help you in your pilgrimage. The annual check-up with the doctor simply registers the declining health of our body. However, with the climbing of years, a believer may say: "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). As God's people near the end of their journey, house visits can be more focused on the eternal rest to which God's people may look together with anticipation. Even at the beginning of the pilgrimage, the opportunity to speak with others about what effect the Word is having on the soul can and should be a thrill. And if God uses the visit to convict someone to seek the Lord or return from a path of backsliding, that too would be thrilling. ①

Endnotes

1. The term "house visitation" then does not refer to the physical "house" where members live, but the household, just like when the Bible refers to Lydia and her house (Acts 16:15), or the jailor from Philippi and his house (Phil. 16:34). Of course, those who live alone are also to be counted as a "house." House visitation is practiced in many nations and denominations throughout our world, with some differences, especially in terms of regularity.



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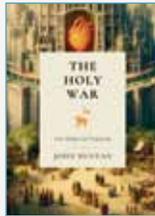
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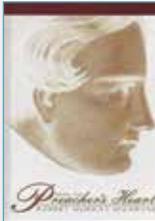
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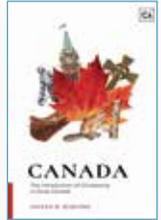


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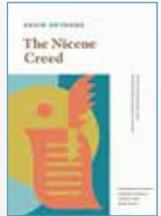
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In our study of the Reformed Baptismal Form, we now come to the exhortations and questions presented to the parents of the children about to be baptized.

Address to the Parents

Notice the way the parents are addressed: “Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have heard that baptism is an ordinance of God to seal unto us and to our seed His covenant.” This implies that the sacrament of infant baptism benefits both children and their parents. Both are assured by the Lord that His mercy “is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children” (Psalm 103:17).

Because of the great significance of baptism, the Form warns that no one should use this sacrament for themselves or their children, “out of custom or superstition.” Many parents go through the ceremony of baptism without giving it much thought. Others see something mystical or magical in it. The Form even speaks of the sin of idolatry, similar to Rome’s error of baptism pouring God’s grace into those receiving baptism. Therefore, everyone should present their child for baptism in the right way. The Form addresses questions to the parents that they are expected to answer affirmatively.

Questions to Parents

The first question is: “Whether you acknowledge that although our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are subject to all miseries, yea, to condemnation itself; yet that they are sanctified in Christ, and therefore, as members of his Church ought to be baptized?”

Here the Form repeats what it already stated in its opening statement, reminding the parents of the seriousness of the spiritual state of their children. How solemn are these words: “conceived and born in sin, and therefore subject to all miseries, yea to condemnation itself.” Some parents object as they look at their sweet little babies: “What have they done wrong? They have not committed any sins yet.” But they forget that the Form also speaks of original sin. We have all sinned in Adam, our representative, whose guilt has been charged or imputed to all his descendants. David was aware of this when he said, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5).

True, this is not the only thing the Bible says about our children. But before it tells us of the wonderful truth of salvation, it wants us to understand how awful the plight of us and our children is by nature. Parents who bring their children to the baptismal font are asked if they believe both truths: whether they and their children are liable to divine judgment, as well as the welcome message that they are sanctified in Christ.



Sanctified in Christ

Much has been written on this subject and debate continues as to the exact meaning of the words “sanctified in Christ.” Some believe that the reference is to inward holiness, and that all children of believers are holy because they are regenerated from birth. Dr. Abraham Kuyper’s doctrine of presumptive regeneration holds this view. According to this doctrine, all covenant children are viewed as elect and inwardly sanctified in the sight of God.

Along with other denominations, the Free Reformed Churches oppose this view and hold that the term “sanctified in Christ” refers to an outward sanctification or covenant holiness through which baptized children are related to God and distinguished from the world. This relationship, however, can be broken and severed due to unbelief. Hebrews 10:29 warns him “who hath trodden under foot the Son of God...counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing.”

Scripture teaches that both in the Old and New Testament churches there were two kinds of covenant children who were circumcised and baptized, respectively. Abraham circumcised all who belonged to his house, including both his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, while Isaac did the same thing with his sons, Jacob and Esau. The same happened in the New Testament church in which Ananias and Sapphira, along with Simon the Sorcerer, Demas, and others were baptized.

Many even Reformed people seem to forget what Calvin writes in his commentary on Genesis 17:7 (I’m paraphrasing): Here then a twofold class of sons presents itself in the Church to us, for since the whole body of the people is gathered together in the fold of God, by one and the same voice, all without exception, are, in this respect, accounted children, the name of the Church is applicable in common to them all, but in the innermost sanctuary of God, none others are reckoned the sons of God, than they in whom the promise is ratified by faith.

It is very important that, in one of the last two questions, our Baptismal Form asks the parents, “Whether you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testaments, and in the articles of the Christian faith,” is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. Also, they are asked to answer affirmatively to the question, “Whether you promise and intend to see these children when [they] come to years of discretion [old enough to understand] to be instructed and brought up in this doctrine.”

If the complete doctrine of salvation includes regeneration, why do these children need to be born again? If they are already regenerated before or during baptism, they don’t need to come to saving faith, repentance, and conversion, because these realities grow out of regeneration.

One of the earlier opponents of Kuyper, F. M. Ten Hoor, saw the danger of Kuyper’s doctrine of presumptive regeneration that was being hotly discussed in the Reformed community in the Netherlands during the latter part of the nineteenth century. After moving to the United States, Ten Hoor taught dogmatics at the seminary of the Christian Reformed Church, Calvin Theological

Seminary, from 1900 until 1924. In 1905, he wrote an article in the *Reformed American* entitled “Practical Objections,” in which he pointed out the implications of Kuyper’s views for the preaching of the Word and the catechetical instruction of covenant children. Here is the gist of his opinion on the consequences of presumptive regeneration.

If it is assumed that those who hear the Word are already in a state of grace, preaching does not have to deal with the necessity of a new heart... All along, the preacher assumes he is dealing with Christians. Their state for eternity is secure, and in his preaching, he does not address spiritually dead sinners who are on their way to hell but regenerate children of God who are on their way to heaven.¹

What Ten Hoor means is that the task of preachers, parents, and teachers is to bring lost sinners to saving faith through the ministry of the Holy Spirit who convicts both parents and their children of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:14) and applies the promises of the gospel after baptism. Herman Bavinck agreed with Ten Hoor. Sacraments, including baptism, he wrote, mean nothing if they are isolated from the Word. They are seals that follow upon the Word and are connected indissolubly to the Word.

But what about infants who die as babies? They must be elect and go to heaven without pastoral and parental instruction. Don’t the Canons of Dort (1, art. 17) urge us to believe that godly parents have no reason to doubt their children’s election and salvation? Bavinck agrees but points out that Synod’s comforting pronouncement is intended for godly parents. This is important, Bavinck explains. Parents who themselves have no interest in their election and salvation cannot be genuinely concerned about the destiny of their children; neither need they nor can they enjoy such comfort.²

True spiritual comfort can only be ours if we love our children and bring them to Him who says, “Suffer [allow] the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14).

Our children, Lord, in faith and prayer;
We now devote to Thee;
Let them Thy cov’nant mercies share;
And Thy salvation see.

Such helpless babes Thou didst embrace
When dwelling here below;
To us and ours, O God of grace
The same compassion show.

In early days their hearts secure;
From worldly snares, we pray.
O, let them to the end endure;
In every righteous way. ¹¹

Endnotes

1. F.M. Ten Hoor, “Practische Bezwaren,” *De Gereformeerde Amerikaan* 9 (1905): 396-97.
2. H. Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*, pp.8 1-83

Dr. C. Pronk is an emeritus pastor and a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.

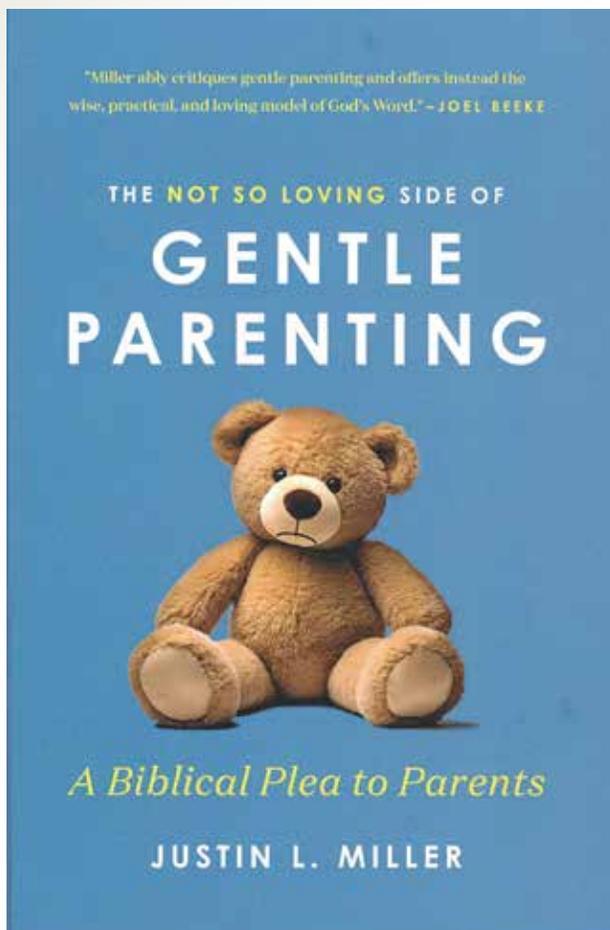
A PLEA FOR BIBLICAL PARENTING

THE NOT SO LOVING SIDE OF GENTLE PARENTING: A Biblical Plea to Parents, by Justin L. Miller. Published by Free Grace Press, 2025. Softcover, 125 pages.

This book may cause some controversy, but let's listen to the author before making a judgment. Justin L. Miller is a husband, father, pastor, theologian, and the author of several books on the Puritans. He makes a plea for biblical parenting rather than psychological approaches. Prominent Reformed theologians who endorsed this book agree that many young parents today use unbiblical psychological approaches, called "gentle parenting," rather than the discipline and authority of God's Word. When I approached several young women, unmarried and married, they all knew about gentle parenting. This book argues that gentle parenting is not biblical and wants to persuade young parents to follow the Bible's precepts. You may ask, what's wrong with "gentle parenting"? It sounds good, doesn't it?

Before answering this question, the author outlines the Bible's teachings on the importance of the family and biblical parenting. "The family is the fabric of society (Gen. 2:24)," and history shows that the way "the family goes so goes a people and a nation" (p. 17). God instituted the family and its commission to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). God instituted marriage and the family for the fulfillment of this commission (Gen. 2:24). God's law includes the Fifth Commandment, which refers to the authority of parents in their relationship with their children. In Ephesians 5, the apostle Paul comments on the institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24 as a picture of the relationship of Christ as Head of His church. The Book of Proverbs has much to say about nurturing, teaching, and disciplining children. Most quoted is: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). This doesn't mean that when parents do everything right, their children will "turn out great and wonderful" (p. 28). Examples of poor parenting are displayed by Eli, the high priest, who pleased his children above the LORD. King David is another example of poor parenting resulting in a dysfunctional family. Solomon, his son, made poor marriage choices, but it seems he repented, as indicated by the Book of Proverbs.

So, what is gentle parenting? The author cites many authorities and begins with a quote from The Gentle Parenting Institute, in an article called "Please Don't Spank Your Child (<https://gentleparentinginstitute.com>) [Dec. 24, 2024]).



The article states: "When you spank your child, you put your relationship with your child at risk. You put your child's emotional, physical, and mental well-being at risk" (p. 29). Miller grants that this is an extreme statement. Most of the gentle parenting promoters have a basic philosophy of parenting "that aims to raise happy, confident, and independent children through respect, empathy, understanding, and setting healthy boundaries" (p. 30). This goal has merit, but the approach is a "child-led parenting ideology that does not punish; rather it coaches. It aims to produce happy, confident, and self-fulfilled children" (p. 31). While traditional parenting styles focus on reward and punishment for good and bad behaviour, gentle parenting focuses on a child's self-awareness and understanding of their behaviour. A wide range of authors are cited by Miller as proof, including scientific research in the books *The Whole Brain Child* and *Brain-Body Parenting*. Miller recognizes that some of the strategies

to communicate with a child are not unbiblical, such as having a calm and reasoned approach.

In Chapter 3, the author summarizes and expands his critiques of gentle parenting. Critique 1: Gentle parenting sees parents and children as partners with the aim of the child's self-fulfilment. It's a new way of thinking about behaviours and authority structures (pp. 52-54). Critique 2: This approach wrongly identifies the child's problems. Children are seen as inherently good, who struggle with emotions and feelings to be managed. Miller counters this by stating that the Bible teaches that all people are conceived and born in sin (Rom. 5:12-19; Ps. 51:5). Every child from Adam demonstrates this in their behaviour. Critique 3 is that children are given an incorrect purpose in life. Gentle parenting holds that parents are to help their children to be happier, healthier, and more fully themselves. However, Christianity is not human-centred, but God-centred. This focus should shape parenting. Summing up, gentle parenting is a partnership of parents and children to help them to be happier, become fully themselves, confident, and independent. Scriptural parenting holds that parental authority is from God, all have sinned and need God's gift of salvation, and all are created to glorify God

and enjoy Him.

The book concludes with a biblical approach to parenting. Primary is that "God the Father is an Example of Parenting" (p. 67). Hebrews 12:5-11 states that the Lord disciplines the one He loves and chastises every son whom He receives. Throughout the Bible, there are many "biblical admonitions concerning teaching and discipline" (p. 70 ff; cf. Deut. 6:4-9; 11:18-21; the Book of Proverbs). The apostle Paul points out that Timothy was taught in a family situation by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Parental authority is upheld and confirmed by Paul's admonishments to children to obey their parents, with the caution that parents are not to use unreasonable severity (Eph. 6:1-4). Parental discipline must be administered with love, modelling God's chastisement of a beloved son. "For whom the LORD loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Heb. 12:6).

The author has written this book "for the Christian who believes the Bible is God's Word" (p. 85) and ends with a plea for parents to reject gentle parenting. "It rejects the biblical authority given to parents. It rejects the root problem of all children and all humanity's problems in life, namely their sinful nature. Lastly, it rejects the aim of all of life and all parenting, which is to know God, glorify God, and enjoy Him" (p. 96). The endorsement of Joel Beeke and other trusted theologians echoes the author's views. "What we need in our day is a return to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture in matters of family life, childrearing, and discipline. Above all, our children must understand that they have violated God's law and that they need the gospel. Biblical parenting, then, is gospel parenting" (Endorsements).

Two Appendices by the author set forth biblical foundations to help parents teach children the "fear of the LORD" (Prov. 9:10) and put this into practice. An extensive Bibliography completes the book. There is much material here for further study. ¹¹

This book may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.

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



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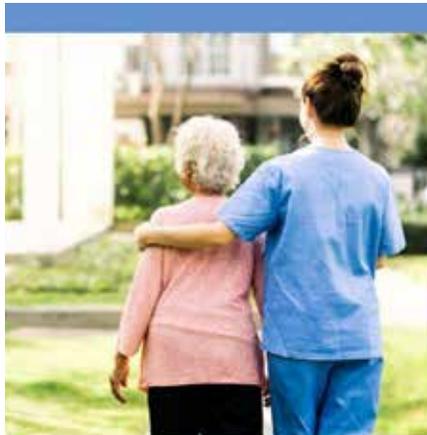
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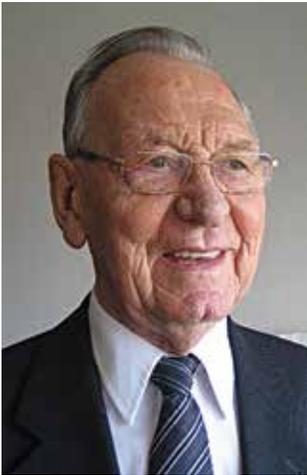
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REV ARIE STEHOUWER, MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Hebrews 13:7).

On May 17, 2025, Rev. Arie Stehouwer passed away in Vlaardingen, the Netherlands, at the age of 94. Born in Papendrecht on October 10, 1930, he was the fourth child of a family would grow to nine children. When he was nine, World War II broke out, and he never forgot having to go to farms looking for food. As a teenager, he worked at a bakery to provide for his parental home and then studied to be a psychiatric nurse.

Already in the Netherlands, he was engaged to Janet Kok, but they did not see a future in the Netherlands, so he emigrated in 1953 to Toronto. There he worked as a psychiatric nurse for a year before his fiancée joined him in Toronto and they were married.

He joined the Free Reformed Church of Toronto during the ministry of Rev. J. Tamminga. Since he knew English better than most in this Dutch-speaking congregation, he was asked to teach catechism to the youth who were going to English schools. He also served as deacon. In Toronto, he spent four years taking night school to complete further studies. Feeling a sense of call to the ministry, he enquired what the further process would be and was told he needed a four-year bachelor’s degree and then three years of seminary. For a young, financially struggling immigrant, this seemed an insurmountable obstacle, but the Lord encouraged him to trust in the Lord’s provision and did not put that trust to shame.

After acceptance by the Free Reformed Theological Education Committee, he began classes at Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For two years, I was a colleague of him at Calvin Seminary, and we enjoyed the parsonage education and friendship with Rev. & Mrs. J. Tamminga, who at this time served the Free Reformed congregation at Grand Rapids.

Arie graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1967 and was declared a candidate. After receiving six calls, he was ordained and installed as the first minister who had been trained and examined by the Free Reformed Churches in North America. Until that time, all the ministers who served the FRCNA had come from the Netherlands. Only Rev. Gerald Hamstra had been a Free Reformed member who trained for ministry in North America (at Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia); however, he was ordained in the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Toronto in 1963 before accepting a call to the Dundas, Ontario FRC.

Candidate Stehouwer was ordained with a sermon on 2 Timothy

4:2: “Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season.” His inaugural sermon was on Colossians 4:3a: “Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance.”

He first served the congregation of Chatham, Ontario (1967-1972). He then served the congregation of London, Ontario (1972-1975), of which he always had particularly fond memories. In 1975, he accepted the call of Aldergrove, British Columbia (now Abbotsford), where he served for seven years, amid a number of congregational difficulties. In 1982, he accepted a call from Nijkerk, one of our Dutch sister churches.

Leaving Canada, he and Janet, with their two young children, settled in the Netherlands, where his children have since married. Next, he served in Vlaardingen, where he retired in 1998. For some time, he served in a part-time position assisting a small congregation, Zuidland. For many years, he enjoyed preaching in the summer for Dutch vacationers in France. He continued to preach as he had opportunity for a number of years until his eyesight prevented him.

During their retirement years, Pastor Stehouwer and Janet lived in a senior residence in Vlaardingen, the Netherlands, enjoying fellowship with their children, grandchildren, and many visitors. Several times, they were able to make trips to Canada, visiting with Janet’s sister and brother-in-law, Rinus and Ina VanderMaarl, members of the Brantford FRC. His wife’s passing away in 2019 left a big void in his life, but he continued to show interest in Canada, keeping touch regularly with his sister-in-law, Ina.

Rev. Stehouwer wrote in one of his letters: “We loved our (FRC) church and remember her daily in our prayers... My wife and I are very thankful to the Lord our God for His grace. He provided for all our needs, and He used us to be a blessing to the churches... May the Lord bless and continue to be with His Church in Canada and also in Holland.”

One of his children said at his funeral: “In Dad’s life, the Lord’s prayer and the Apostles’ Creed had an important place. He gives us our daily bread; He forgives our sins; he gives salvation and life eternal. That was again confirmed when Dad spoke to us for the last time and with difficulty said, *“Die na korstondig ongeneugt, Mij eindeloos verheugt... voor eeuwig! [Who after short-lived discomfort will be my joy ... forever (Genevan Psalm 43)].”* ①

Rev. C. Pronk is an emeritus Free Reformed pastor residing in Brantford, Ontario. He was ordained to the ministry in 1968, a year after Rev. Stehouwer was ordained.

IN MEMORIAM OF DEAR DAD STEHOUSER

Below is an excerpt of the reflections on Rev. Stehouwer by his daughter.

Our father's work had a strong influence on how our family functioned, but he was also our father, father-in-law, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Everyone who knew him would describe him as a cheerful, easygoing, loving, and an open man who was always there for us. Even in old age, he was our father. Always empathetic: "How are things at home? How are your studies or work going? Are you taking care of yourself? Don't work too hard." He wanted to know everything about the grandchildren, was deeply involved with them, and thankful for them and for his great-grandchild. He loved doing things with us.

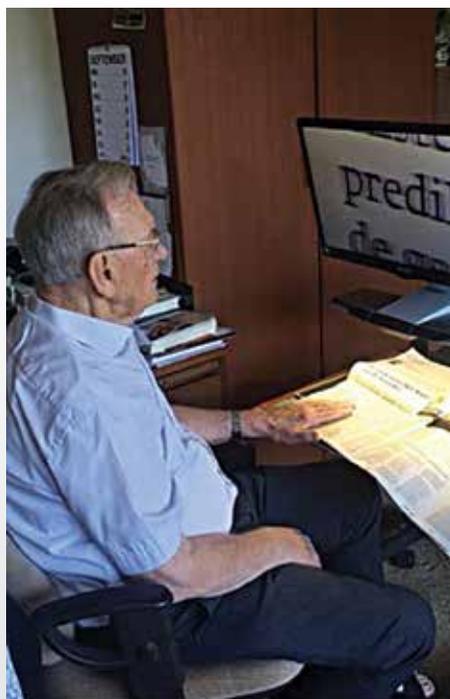
It still feels unreal that we will now have to miss him in our midst. We love him so much! He was such an integral part of us. The love of the grandchildren for him was evident too—you will miss your grandfather deeply. He received much love from you and loved you all dearly.

He always had a word for everyone around him—a pat on the back and especially an encouraging word of faith, which was his source of life.

The loss of Janny after 65 years of marriage was hard for him. They were so intertwined and loved one another dearly. They had received each other from God's hand. Yet, even in this, he did not complain. He was thankful for what he had received in her and for all the years they had together, even though he missed her.

Our father's greatest desire and prayer was that we, his children and grandchildren, would walk in the way of the Lord and one day together eternally glorify God. Even on his sickbed, he prayed with and for the grandchildren. He gave a personal word for each one of them. In this, he was a great example to us.

As the years went on, the roles gradually reversed, and we were able to care for him. We did so with all the love in our hearts, and he knew it. With every visit, he expressed deep gratitude for our loving care.



Health issues began to arise, especially in the last months. His physical condition declined, but his faith remained unwavering. His peace and trust were in God.

There were several hospital admissions with concerns about his health. It became clear that something very serious was going on. It wasn't easy for him. Those weeks were intense for us. He never complained, always pointing to God, where his peace rested. Time and again during his final illness, he quoted Psalm 73 about God preparing him to receive him in glory. He knew that when his work here was done, he would go to God's glory. This is such a great comfort to us. God can, will, and shall in need—even as death draws nigh—give full deliverance. In this faith, we can go forward in life, despite the sorrow of missing him.

We shared many beautiful moments with him in the last weeks. We told him how much we loved him, and he would say in English, "I love you sooo much..." right until the end. That love will always remain with us.

Our father (and mother) lived from the awareness that the Lord directed their lives. Life was certainly not always easy, but He gave the strength needed. To Him be the thanks and the glory forever. Now they may sing together in praise and give Him all honor, with all the redeemed.

I close with a psalter that our father often quoted in English, one he looked forward to and which is now a reality for him: Psalter 32 (Psalm 17).

When I in righteousness at last
Thy glorious face shall see,
When all the weary night has past,
And I awake with thee.
To view the glories that abide
Then, then I shall be satisfied!

Mrs. Corinna van den Berg is the daughter of Rev. Arie Stehouwer.

FREE REFORMED SYNOD



The Free Reformed Synod of 2025 was opened on Monday, June 2, in Maranatha Free Reformed Church of Hamilton with a **prayer service**. Rev. J. Koopman preached from Psalm 84:1, emphasizing the glory and necessity of gathering to worship in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The psalmist confesses the spiritual beauty of the Lord's house and expresses his earnest longing to be satisfied in the worship of his God. The desire of God's children is to have that communion with God, which is found especially in the physical gathering of God's people, the place where the Lord also delights to dwell. This sermon was a message worth hearing, and we highly recommend that you take the time to listen to it.

This year's **executive** consisted of Chairman Rev. J. Schoeman, Vice Chair Rev. J. Overduin, 1st clerk Rev. E. Moerdyk, and 2nd clerk Rev. R. Van Doodeward. The chair made a special mention of the men who have passed away this past year, remembering their many years of faithful service in our federation. These included elder Connor Keuning (Hamilton), Rev. H. Van Essen (Mitchell), and elder Ransom Webb (Powassen).

The chair also conveyed our gratitude to Brother John Wilbrink for the many years he has faithfully served as synod treasurer. He has requested to be relieved of these responsibilities. As the years go on, the costs of hosting the synod are continually increasing, so an ad hoc committee was appointed to explore ways of saving costs for this valuable aspect of our church life.

Dr. D. Van Brugge of Burgessville Heritage Reformed Congregation opened the first day of synod with the question: **Why do you Sing?** There are so many reasons to sing.

Unbelievers also sing, but for the wrong reasons. Isaiah 12:5 calls us to "sing unto the Lord; for he hath done excellent things." It is God's Word that informs us what to sing about. Isaiah speaks about the worthiness, excellence, and greatness of God. He magnifies the holiness of God in contrast to our sinfulness, as he relates his personal experience in Isaiah 6. He glorifies God through the prophecies that Emmanuel would be born and the promised Son would lead the people out of darkness. Isaiah 12 is then a hymn of praise following the announcement that the Root of Jesse will gather the remnant of the people. Scripture teaches us to sing about God's glory and our misery, Christ the Saviour and the gospel message, and the joy found in Christ. God has given us His Word to guide and instruct us to sing to His praise and to the edification of our soul. What a treasure we have in our Psalter that we can sing the Word of God to inform our minds and enflame our hearts in praise for the excellent things God has done. As we consider the importance of singing the Word of God in public worship, we wait with anticipation for the revised interdenominational **Psalter book**, completed in cooperation with the Heritage Reformed and Protestant Reformed churches. This 2024 edition of the Psalter has been completed. Another edition with contemporary pronouns is being developed by a Free Reformed synodical committee. Printing decisions are still being investigated. Another aspect of singing that synod is studying is the reason and validity for the extra songs which currently exist in the back of the Psalter. May the Lord use His psalms to unite the churches and federations in the exaltation of His name.

The Synod meetings are also a special time of communication

not only within our own federation, but through the grace of Christ, with **churches from around the world**. Peter writes in 1 Peter 5:13, “The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son.” The churches greet each other in brotherly love in Christ. Peter and Mark were both men who carried the painful scars of their own failures and sins. Peter denied Christ and Mark had a sharp dispute and falling out with Paul. Now, both men are able to send heartfelt greetings to the churches, having themselves tasted of the love and restoring grace in Christ. They acknowledge the electing love of God in Christ Jesus as the foundation of our salvation. At synod meetings, such greetings are received and returned. Though greetings are from one federation of broken people and fractured churches to another, yet in Christ they find the balm and the mortar which forms the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Elder Rozeboom from the Providence Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, brought greetings and expressed their thanks for the various ways that the FRCNA has supported them. He shared his desire that the abiding presence of Christ would be experienced in our federation. Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection giving them His peace, His Holy

Spirit, and the understanding of the Scriptures. Their desire for our federation is that the churches and ministry be marked by the presence of Jesus standing in our midst and supplying all our needs. He also gave an update on student Dan Schipper of his congregation, who has served various free Reformed Churches and now feels called to serve in South Africa.

Rev. Jeremy Veldman brought greetings on behalf of the United Reformed Churches and encouraged us in our work and witness. He stated that there is a family likeness between the federations, having the same Reformed roots and confessions, and yet they are unique in many ways. He outlined some of the many ways that the local churches and members have worked together, specifically mentioning the benefit of Reformed Book Services. He also noted that a younger generation in our society is seeking churches that are biblically and historically rooted in faith and doctrine as they seek stability and hope in our day and age. This is an age of opportunity to share the Reformed faith with the nations as they seek for truth.

Rev. Marc Jagt brought greetings from the Canadian Reformed Churches. He encouraged us to make much of Christ as the council of Nicaea did when it formulated the Nicene Creed in response to the errors of that day. If we make much of Christ, we will then also





The Synod delegates and attendees wish to thank the Free Reformed Church of Hamilton for their hospitality and especially those who provided and served delicious meals and baking.

make much of Christ's church. He conveyed that their federation of churches has many similar struggles, and some of the same matters were recently addressed at their synod.

Greetings were brought from the Presbyterian Reformed Church by Rev. Douglas Gebbie. Their highlights were their mission work in Liberia and the Reformed parish ministry by Michael Ives. He specifically noted the shared values our federations have on the free offer of the gospel and experiential preaching.

Dr. D. Van Brugge brought greetings in the name of our God from the Heritage Reformed Churches, having recently accepted a call to the Burgessville congregation. It is a great blessing to be able to work closely together as federations in so many ways. The Lord willing, the plan is to hold a concurrent synod again next year alongside the HRC. A joint ethics committee was formed with the HRC to work together on current ethical issues that our people face. As we increasingly work together in these ways, we can find mutual support and benefit as federations utilizing the unique gifts God has supplied for the edification of His Church.

The report from **Free Reformed Missions Incorporated (FRMI)** provided an update on many projects with which they are involved, highlighting many of the prayer needs for God's blessing on each area of work. Concerning the work in Guatemala, they stressed the need for prayer for the small local churches and struggling pastors, for the Achi Bible to be spread, as well as for the children and teachers in the various education programs in Guatemala. Prayer is requested for the work of Mukhanyo Theological College in South Africa, and now especially also for the needs of the newly formed Nazir College.

Dr. Zhou gave an update on the blessings and challenges of Nazir College. The Lord has been faithful and opened many doors of opportunity for the college. There are also challenges, which include the need for more professors and staff. Many registered students are also leading churches or church plants. This prevents them from studying full-time due to their workload and responsibilities. Another challenge is the fledgling nature of

the churches in general. These challenges can be overwhelming, but we are very thankful to have the privilege of being involved

in this college and that God has called our professor Zhao to serve there. We ask for your continued prayers that God would bless and prosper this work.

The **Theological Education Committee** highlighted the ongoing need for more students for the ministry. With thankfulness, our current student, Carsten Koopman, was licensed to exhort in the churches this summer. In consultation with the Theological Education Committee, student Floris Visser's program of study is on pause as he seeks direction whether he is to pursue ministry in the Netherlands or in our churches. Let us pray for God to make his way clear to this dear brother and his family and use him in His service. We are reminded of Jesus' words in Luke 10:2, "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." It is His harvest; they are elect of God the Father. Surely, He will hear your prayer for laborers to gather His own from the corners of the earth.

Dr. G. M. Bilkes sent greetings from the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, noting its 30th anniversary and the 27 years of FRC involvement. There are many blessings and many reasons to give thanks unto the Lord for His goodness. All good is from God and all glory must be to God. Mention was also made of the need to pray for pastors, students, and professors, which God alone can provide. Prayer is also needed that each of the staff, and the seminary itself, would be kept faithful, recognizing that Satan seeks to harm this work in many ways. Along with this, he emphasized the need for continual faithful preaching based on God's Word and consistent with our confessions. The preaching must declare that it will go well with those who are in Christ, but on the other hand that, as long as sinners remain unbelieving

and unrepentant, they remain under the wrath of God. PRTS is being used to train men around the world in these Reformed doctrines, reaching the nations and passing on the riches that have been entrusted to us.

The news received from our mother- or sister-churches, the **Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken** (CGK) in the Netherlands, brought concern and grief. A letter was received in which they expressed their concerns and shared the challenges that their churches currently face. Their synod (which occurs every three years) began in June 2024, has been meeting intermittently since then, and had their final sessions while our synod meetings were taking place. Their synod closed early since it was unable to come to a unified position on the issues at hand. A minority of churches disregarded biblical synod decisions about women in office and homosexuality. When decisions of synod are no longer respected on such a scale, synod can no longer function. As a result, the executive did not appoint a congregation to call another synod, which means the denominational bond has been broken. The covenant that bound the churches together in the shared confessions and church order has been broken. May God continue to guide His flock and lead them in the doctrines of His Holy Word.

As Pastor VanderMeyden reminded us, the **confessions of the church** are a covenant with God. There must be a breaking away from the devil, because by our sin we have covenanted with the devil. But in this world, the church learns to confess Christ. When by grace you are called out of darkness into union with Christ, you are called to confess Christ before men, as Peter did in Matthew 16:16, when he said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He is our only comfort in life and death. If Christ is not ashamed to call us His brethren, we must not be ashamed to call Christ our Lord. With Peter we say, “to whom else shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” We must seek to follow His word carefully both in daily life and in the life of the churches.

Peter wrote “The church that is in Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you.” The Church is situated in the wilderness of this world, where she is surrounded by idolatry, where she faces opposition and persecution, where she is allured to compromise her confession by commerce, luxury, and pleasure dangling in her face. The Church that is in Babylon, the heart of this fallen world, yet elect together with you, salutes you. Christ gathers His flock, He builds and preserves His Church in the midst of this crooked and perverse nation. May the Lord bless not only our federation and the decisions made at this synod, but also His elect Church from every nation, yet one over all the earth. He is the Church’s one foundation. 

Rev. B. vanLiere serves as pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Langley, British Columbia. The pre-synodical prayer service can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc-OWiQf_To



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RESPONDING TO ABUSE

PRACTICAL COUNSEL TO HELP THE VICTIM

Last time, we reflected on the use of Matthew 18:15-17 in dealing with situations of abuse. We heard that the aim of Matthew 18 was the protection and defense of the vulnerable (little ones) and the repentance of the perpetrator. We will now consider how we should respond in a practical sense to help the victim in an abusive situation. Next time, we will come with some practical counsel to help the perpetrator, D.V. We must recognize that each one must be helped, for all have a never-dying soul.

How should we respond when we hear from someone that they have been or are presently being abused? How we initially respond to someone who confides in us is critical for the well-being of a victim who has disclosed abuse to us. Understand that normally it requires incredible courage for someone to reveal these private details to someone else. The pain they carry is immense, and their willingness to share is an act of profound trust. It creates a certain vulnerability. Often such a revelation is accompanied with shame, guilt, or embarrassment. Sometimes, they think that they are personally responsible for what has happened to them. This may be a sign that they have been manipulated by an abuser for quite some time. In fact, often their response to abuse creates conflicting emotions, even at times thinking they deserve to be abused. These realities mean that we must be very careful in how we respond to them. Here are a few hints on how we should respond:

1. Listen attentively and without interruption. Acknowledge their pain in some way, even just by saying: *"I am so sorry that this has happened to you. Thank you for trusting me."* Recognize the weight of their disclosure to you. The Bible calls us to *weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15), which means we show sympathy towards them, not attempting to come with solutions too quickly. We also resist asking questions of explanation but instead attempt to bring comfort to them in some way. If we listen with kindness, they will eventually reveal further details to us in their own time. Assure them that speaking to you is safe and you will help them or obtain help for them. However, be careful about offering solutions too quickly, as that will appear to trivialize their situation. It is unlikely that there is a simple solution which the victim has not already considered.
2. Ensure that the victim has a place of safety where they are not vulnerable to their abuser or anyone else. In fact, this should be our first priority in their care. The fact is that their vulnerability may increase because they have spoken to you about their abuse. Often, an abuser maintains their control by manipulation and control of their victim. Many times, the abuser

is in a position of power and authority over the victim and has used that control to satisfy their own perverted desires. Therefore, you must realize that as the one helping the victim, you could very well become the object of the abuser's scorn. Be careful that you don't unnecessarily share any information with others if the person is not in a place of safety. Support them in setting boundaries with their abuser. It is biblical and wise to protect oneself from further harm (Proverbs 27:12).

3. Respond with Christlike compassion and comfort. The Lord Jesus tells us that anyone who harms *"one of these little ones...it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea"* (Matthew 18:6). Jesus fiercely defends and protects *little ones*. The LORD *heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds* (Psalm 147:3). Abuse is evil and should never be excused or tolerated (Romans 12:9, Proverbs 8:13). Encourage them with the truths and comforts of the gospel, but be careful in quoting texts such as Romans 8:28 that God works all things together for good. It is better to remind them that God hears their cries and carries their burdens. Encourage them to cast all their care on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 55:22). Help them to express their pain with the words of Scripture such as are found in the Psalms, Jeremiah, Job, or even by the words of Jesus Himself in His anguish.
4. Try to bring some hope to them by assuring them that you are always willing to listen. Sometimes the ministry of presence—simply being there—is the most powerful gift you can give to someone who has been isolated and vulnerable. In fact, if abuse has been taken place for a long time, it is possible that their abuser has restricted their contact with others. At the appropriate time, encourage them to seek biblical counselling to help them deal with their trauma. Encourage them to seek help from trusted professionals, such as counsellors, pastors trained in trauma care, or law enforcement if needed. As a Christian friend or leader, your presence in walking alongside them and pointing them to Christ will be of incredible encouragement to them. Pray with and for them if they are open to it, asking God for comfort and healing. Give them your phone number and encourage them to call you any time of the day or night.
5. Avoid unhelpful response which can often be more harmful than helpful. When someone confides in you about abuse, your response can have a profound impact on their healing journey. While it's natural to want to help, certain actions and words can unintentionally cause further harm.

- a. Don't minimize or dismiss their trauma. Avoid saying things like: "It could have been worse" or "You need to forgive and forget it." In fact, many times victims forget some of their abuse and may in fact have tried to minimize it themselves and it hasn't worked. These are unbiblical responses to a serious situation.
- b. Don't blame the victim for their abuse. In fact, this is probably all that they have heard from their abuser, probably for years. They were probably being told by their abuser that it is their fault that they are being abused because they are incompetent, stupid, ugly, non-submissive, difficult, careless etc. Never suggest that if they had acted differently that the abuse would not have happened. Abuse is always wrong, and it is a serious transgression of the 6th commandment.
- c. Don't try to spiritualize away their pain by quoting Scripture out of context, implying that if they had enough faith, they wouldn't have a problem dealing with their abuse. Reminding them that God is sovereign will appear as if you are excusing the wickedness of the abuser. Reminding them that God is good will seem to them that you are claiming their abuse is good.
- d. Don't force them to forgive or reconcile with their abuser. The Bible does not require victims to return to unsafe situations or restore relationships with unrepentant abusers. Recognize that forgiveness is something that will take time and may not always result in restoration of a relationship.
- e. Don't gossip or involve others without the person's consent, unless it is necessary according to the law, or to protect them or others from serious harm. However, even on those occasions, the victim should be informed so that they are never surprised. If you are an office-bearer, understand that this is a pastoral matter which shouldn't be shared with the consistory. There is rarely, if ever, a need to share extensive details with anyone but those directly involved, such as a counsellor. Maintaining confidentiality is key to maintaining their trust of you.

Overall, when an abusive situation is revealed to you, the first step is to provide support and care to the victim. When someone shares their story of abuse, respond as Christ would by showing compassion, providing protection, and assuring them that God hears their cries. Avoid platitudes, blame, or pressure to forgive prematurely. Instead, walk alongside them as they seek healing, pointing them to the God who sees, knows, and cares for them. "The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

The Bible is clear that God hates evil and injustice (Proverbs 8:13, Romans 12:9). He is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18) and calls His people to defend the oppressed: "Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isaiah 1:17). Jesus Himself identified with the suffering and promised rest to the weary: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Responding to abuse requires more than good intentions—it demands biblical wisdom, deep compassion, and unwavering commitment to the safety and healing of the victim. Let us remember that every soul is precious in God's sight, and our response to abuse must reflect the love, justice, and hope found in Christ. Our response should bear witness to the transforming power of the gospel for all who are wounded and oppressed. However, we also must provide help to the perpetrator, knowing that he also has a never-dying soul. We hope to consider that next time D.V. 11

Rev. J. Koopman is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, British Columbia.

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PASTOR FELIPE ALONZO CALO: A LIFE OF FAITH, SACRIFICE, AND SERVICE



Pastor Felipe and his wife.

Early Life

Felipe Alonzo Calo is the pastor of the Reformed Church in Patuy. He was born in this remote community on February 6, 1975, the seventh child of a family of nine. Patuy is a small village of around two hundred people nestled in a narrow valley beneath the majestic Chimeagua Mountain.

His childhood was typical of that of other boys in his village. He helped around the home with chores: collecting firewood, working the fields, and carrying supplies. For many years, education was non-existent, until he was around 13 years old. A hydroelectric company sent an itinerant teacher who would come and teach one day a week. Felipe enrolled in classes and studied for three years. Although many in the community had a negative view of education, his parents supported the education of their children.

At 17, Felipe married and started a family. Still hungry for learning, he and his older brother Celestino enrolled in a weekend adult education program in Cubulco, a grueling six-hour hike from Patuy. Despite the enormous sacrifice and ridicule by people in the community, Felipe and Celestino persevered and were able to complete primary school and begin middle school.

However, family burdens forced him to abandon his studies. He experienced problems in his marriage due to his wife's struggles with illness, meddling in-laws, and his struggles with alcoholism. The people in the community claimed that the illness was due to witchcraft, but despite seeking help from witch doctors, his wife's illness did not go away.

Transformed by the Gospel

During this challenging time, Felipe met our missionary pastor, Ken Herfst, at a literacy meeting. He spoke with him and gave him Christian literature to read since Felipe enjoyed reading. The

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John 4:14a

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literature challenged his thinking and contradicted the Roman Catholic teachings he was taught. He turned to the Bible and soon realized that the Bible contradicted what he had been taught. Pastor Herfst began visiting Patuy and Felipe's home. During the first visit, Felipe was not home, and his wife was very antagonistic as she had been indoctrinated by nuns in the Catholic traditions and had been taught not to trust Protestants. She told Felipe that if the missionary stopped by again, she would throw boiling water in his face. She never carried out her threat because, in subsequent visits, she experienced the love of Christ through the care and support of the missionaries who helped her overcome her illness through medical intervention and prayer. It was through experiencing the love of Christ demonstrated by missionaries and reading the Word of God that the family was transformed by the gospel.

When Felipe's wife's family learned that they had become Protestant, they summoned his wife to the family altar and threatened to beat her and take away her inheritance if she did not recant. Despite being illiterate and having a limited knowledge of the Bible, she stood firm because she had a God and a husband who loved her. This caused a lot of tension between them for many years. Thankfully, the relationship with Felipe's parents was different since Felipe's brother (Celestino) was also interested in the gospel. They would spend hours at their parents' home answering questions from Bible study books. They would ask the questions of the rest of the family and compare their answers to Scripture. Initially, Felipe's mother resisted and told them to do something useful, but eventually both parents were saved.

Called to Ministry

After being saved, Felipe had a burning desire to share the gospel with family, friends, and others. When Pastor Herfst invited Felipe and Celestino to help with the work of evangelism, they jumped at the opportunity. Sharing the gospel was not easy, as it was common for Christians to be excluded from community events. Despite the difficulties, they persisted, which gave them opportunities to share the gospel and to show others a more excellent way. This resulted in more people becoming interested in the gospel, which eventually led to the formation of a Reformed Church in Patuy.

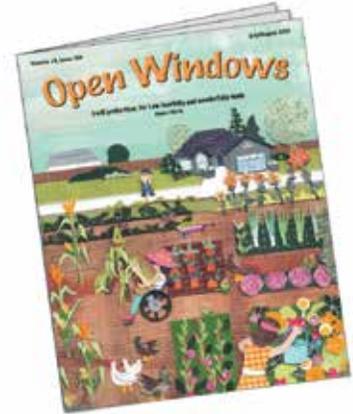
As the church grew, Felipe was tasked with leading the church. To assist him in this calling, he attended the Bible Institute in Cubulco for five days each month. After many years, he was able to graduate with various certificates and diplomas in theology. He also completed middle school and eventually graduated from high school with a degree in theology. In 2015, he was ordained as a minister of the gospel in Patuy.



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WHERE: Hamilton FRC

SPEAKER: Rev. Mark Wagenaar

SCHEDULE: 9:30 Opening

THEME: WHAT IS REFORMED
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10:30 Coffee

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Report on the 2025 Office Bearers' Conference

On March 29, 2025, our annual combined FRC/HRC Office Bearers' Conference was held in Burgessville, ON. This year it was organized by the FRC OBC Committee. This year's theme was "The Word in a Biblically Illiterate World." The speakers were Mr. Ray Pennings and Dr. David Van Brugge. Mr. Pennings led Session I: **"Beyond Words: How the Culture's 'Woke' and 'Based' Frameworks Militate Against a Biblical Witness."** Dr. VanBrugge led Session II: **"Finding the Right Words: Promoting Truth, Goodness, and Beauty amid a Narcissistic Culture."**

Mr. Pennings spoke about how today's "woke" world has moved from speaking honest truth about norms and behaviors, which were widely considered to be biblically right, to being affirmative and supportive of whatever a person feels or wants to do, even to the extent that it defies logic, science, and common sense. Dr. VanBrugge spoke about how to respond biblically, coming alongside the church, to assist both the leaders and the members, especially the families, to educate, counsel, guide, etc., to answer questions such as how to give constructive criticism, how to affirm at all, how to show sympathy; in short, how to be salt and light in a "woke" and self-affirming culture.

It was not only a time of much needed instruction but of encouragement and brotherly fellowship as well. Since many office-bearers were not able to attend, we encourage each consistory to watch the video and obtain the detailed speaker's outlines and share it with their members. It would be especially beneficial for husbands and fathers to advise and guide their families in a time such as this. May the Lord bless our congregations and use these efforts for the salvation of the lost and the growth of believers. You can watch the video (and also find the outlines used by the speakers) here: www.sermonaudio.com/sermons/33025233473471.

Service to Church and Community

Pastor Felipe continues to faithfully lead the church in Patuy and has been instrumental in launching initiatives that benefit both the church and the community. He helped establish an after-school program with the support of Free Reformed Missions (FRMI), Word & Deed, and AMG. One hundred children from the community attend the program five days a week. They receive help with their homework and are taught life skills and the Bible. In 2024-25, through the support of FRMI and the church, three classrooms were constructed, which allow the children to meet in classrooms instead of the church.

Adversity

Felipe and his family have faced much adversity in their lives. In 2014, he lost one of his six children in a tragic bike accident. He was only 18 years old. A few years later, his only daughter was raped and became pregnant. Despite this, the family is raising this child as one of their own. Recently, his younger sister passed away from cancer, and his wife's illness resurfaced. Furthermore, in November of 2024, Felipe was diagnosed with advanced cancer in one kidney that had spread to his pancreas. Thanks to the generosity of individuals, churches, and FRMI, he was able to afford surgery to remove the cancer. His recovery has been slow, and there is concern that the cancer might have spread further. He was recently seen by a US medical team at the AMG Cubulco hospital, who told him that he urgently needed to go to the cancer hospital for more testing. The challenges are that the nearest cancer hospital is in Guatemala City, eight hours away, and the exams and treatments are expensive.



The young man on the left is Santos Roberto who passed away.

A Pastor with the Heart of Christ

Despite the severe challenges in his life, Felipe is still concerned about the well-being of the church and others. In October, he heard that his niece was living on the streets of Cubulco together with her eight children. Despite not feeling well, he immediately went with his son to find and help her. She left her abusive husband and in-laws after they threatened to kill her. After

helping her navigate the legal system, he brought them to live with him in his home in Patuy. After living in his home for five months in cramped quarters and providing for their basic needs, a piece of land was purchased, and a modest home constructed for the family through the generous support of the local church and others. The family is now attending church and experiencing the love of Christ.

Felipe has a heart for the Word of God, and this is evident in the way he lives his life. What motivates him is the love of God that he was shown. For this reason, his favorite Bible passage is 1 Corinthians 13. A question he often asks is, "How is it possible that people from a foreign country who do not even know us can show such love?" The only answer to this question is, "Because they have experienced the love of God."

Please Pray:

For Pastor Felipe's full recovery and healing
 For his wife's ongoing health challenges
 For the church and the after-school program
 For God to raise faithful leaders to continue the ministry in Patuy
 For the salvation of Felipe's niece and her children and for healing amid their trauma ①

Mr. Nico Kattenberg is a member of the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, British Columbia and involved with the Free Reformed Mission work in Guatemala.

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"Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord." Ps. 127:3

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1965 August 14 2025
 Wedding text: "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" Psalm 119:5

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



"I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"
John 11:25

The Lord has taken our dear husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather to his eternal home.

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January 27, 1930-May 15, 2025

Dear husband of **Margaret Lobbezoo** for 69 years.

Loving father of

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Bill Lobbezoo - St. George, ON
Mike and Marsha Lobbezoo, Corrina Lobbezoo, Nicholas Lobbezoo and Debbie, David Lobbezoo, Lydia Lobbezoo, Alyssa Lobbezoo, Andrew Lobbezoo

Andy and Sylvia Lobbezoo - Lynden, ON
Jason and Carolyn Lobbezoo, Jennifer and Jordan Lavigne, Chris and Michelle Lobbezoo, Brad and Jenna Lobbezoo, Michelle and Will Dendekker

Kevin and Trish Lobbezoo - St. George, ON
Ashton and Mitchell Blackwell, Scott and Jesse Lobbezoo, Madeline and Ezekiel Nicholson

And 42 great grandchildren.

Predeceased by daughter, **Christine Elizabeth** (April 20, 1984) and infant son, **David Anthony** (October, 31, 1965).

Funeral service was held on May 21, 2025 in the Dundas Free Reformed Church with Rev. L.J. Bilkes officiating.

Mailing Address:

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OBITUARY



"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

On May 17, 2025, at the age of **94**, the LORD took unto Himself our dear, loving father and praying "Opa"

ARIE STEHOUWER

Minister of the Word in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands and Free Reformed Churches in Canada.

Widower of Janet Stehouwer – Kok since September 23, 2019.

Peter-John and Trijntje

Annemarie and Lennard
Arie and Marit
Jeanine and Klaas

Corinna and Alfons

Annette and Nick (*Maeve*)
Benjamin and Lotte (*Tim*)
Marie-Jose

Correspondence Address:

P. J. Stehouwer
Kooiker 5, 8309 CD, Tollebeek
The Netherlands.

The funeral service took place on Friday, May 23, 2025, in the Eben-Haezer church in Vlaardingen, The Netherlands and was conducted by Ds. J.W. Schoonderwoerd.

OBITUARY



One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.

Psalms 27:4

Peacefully, surrounded by her loving family, our Lord took to Himself our dear wife, mother, and grandmother

HENRIETTA (RITA) CATHERINE ELIZABETH WILBRINK

(nee Feijer)

January 18, 1954 – April 30, 2025
Loving wife of John for 46 years.

Devoted and caring mother and grandmother of

Mark and Rachel

Gailen, Malcolm, Landon, Elise, Wyatt, Roselyn

Marlies and John Procee

Gevin (Sarah Kloot), Hadassah, Craighton, Cherith, Talitha

Jared and Krista

Titus, Silas, Justin, Joshua, Katelyn

Adrian and Heather

Reuben, Kalieya, Caleb, Brendan, Calvin
Renee and fiancé Wijnand van Deelen

Rita will also be greatly missed by her brother, sister-in-laws, brother-in-laws, and many nieces and nephews.

Contact information:

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PRECIOUS
IN THE SIGHT OF THE
LORD IS THE DEATH
OF HIS SAINTS.

P S A L M 1 1 6 : 1 5