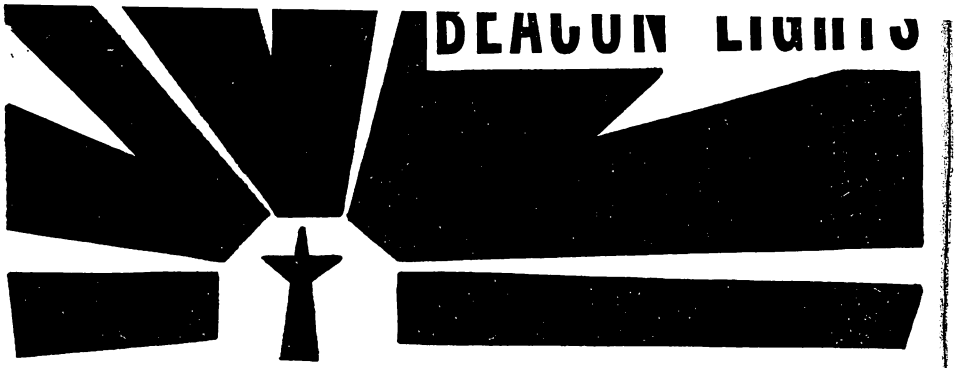
GOD'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS
1925
1975



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Editorial

LEARN

by Jim Van Overloop

Are you preparing yourself for the future? If not, you should. If so, How? In what way? What are the tools, the helpers, the means you are using to do so? I hope you're not using the BOX! The BOX wouldn't do anything but spew filth at you, which your old man would suck up and thrive on. Besides that, there are a lot of better things to do. The BOX drives the mind to sin. Oh, we all know that the BOX doesn't sin; good thing, too, or it wouldn't have a place in our homes and our old man wouldn't like that. It's becoming such a companion that our conscience is hardly stirred anymore by what we see and hear.

How about the music you hear? I wonder how much money is spent for the kingdom on records, tapes, etc. But **whose** kingdom? How is rock music furthering you in your preparation for the future?

Preparing ourselves for the future is a part of everything we do, no matter what age. Young people, be mindful, you are the future church. Look at the past fifty years of God's covenant faithfulness and **learn**. Prepare yourselves to take an active role in the future church.

Do we strive to fulfill our purpose here on this earth? Do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Is our love for God obvious in what we watch, hear, and do?

* * * * *

In this special issue we want to thank God for the past, and pray for grace to continue in the future. Pray for continued mercy and grace. The last two articles in our series dealing with our past history are in this issue. Also there are outlines for the discussion groups for this year's convention. The host society asks that you study these outlines and the texts included in them. Why? For your own good. to help you fulfill your purpose on earth, and to prepare you for the future. You are the church of tomorrow. You prepare yourself by learning: learning the Reformed faith, reading the Bible and understanding it.

Once at a retreat I attended there was a discussion group on the young person's place in the church. Before breaking off into groups, one of our ministers gave a short talk about the subject. I don't know what my foolish mind expected to hear. But instead of describing a young person as having some important position, and whose opinions would be highly regarded, we were told that we had nothing to say. We must learn, period. Wow, what a shock! I hope you as young people realize this. We must listen to our elders, and learn from them. We must become knowledgeable in what our churches stand for. We must take an active role in young people's society, and to do that we must prepare ourselves. Christianity is not a Sunday thing, it's our life and death.

The most important thing in this life is not your future mate, your education, your job, or any other earthly thing. It is your salvation. Your spiritual life needs constant refueling. Do you look forward to Sundays? Are you prepared for them? One way is to read up on what the minister is

going to preach on. If he is preaching a series, get a good commentary on that book of the Bible; read from "The Triple Knowledge" when sermons are on the catechism.

Older people, we ask you to help our young people, and give them sound advice. Also, if you have topic ideas for "Beacon Lights" articles, or better yet, an article you would like to share, send them to me. I'll gladly consider them.

Finally, come to the convention to learn. Come with grateful hearts. Come to meet and talk with others of God's people. Consider yourself fortunate to be able to attend such a memorable event. Thank God for such faithfulness.

Feature

PROUD TO BE P.R.

by Kathy Koole*

***Kathy is a member of our Hope, Walker, Church**

In order to be proud of something in the true sense I will have to be thoroughly convinced that what I stand for is absolutely right and true. That means that no where in the world are there "truths" more in unity with Scripture than those that I believe in. I haven't heard nor studied every religion but I think more important than head knowledge for you and I is the conviction of heart given us aside from book learning.

Being born and raised as P R all my life has made it difficult for me and you as young people to understand all we have to be proud of concerning our church. As youth we have never encountered any opposition in the true sense that could make us stand up and take sides. Those men and women who were aware of the situation of 1924 and 1953 could more easily say exactly what they have being PR over against any other denomination. They must understand what it means to be assured that the P R truths are the purest in the world. These people had to search for answers to questions and accusations and by God's grace found them in our Protestant Reformed Churches.

As young people we have to grow to realize that we don't accept the teachings of parents and teachers to be true only because this is all we have encountered but remember that God in His infinite love and mercy placed us here so we of all young people might have a strong foundation to build on.

Take time to think of other denominations of churches. Look at the gross inconsistences in these churches with doctrine vs scriptures. We see from Scripture how we are saved of grace alone and that not of ourselves and in the preaching we hear how all have a calling to win the world for Christ. Within denominations you can observe division between conservative and liberal churches.

It is something wonderful to see our

denomination preach exactly the same Scriptural truths in the same manner in each church no matter how far removed in traveling distance.

It's a good feeling to know that by the grace of God the P R church seminary is still producing men that preach the same truths that brought us into existence. It's assuring to know in these changing times that the Truth always stands secure and unchangeable.

As individuals from generation to generation we have changed. Some of us slide with the times, but for some reason our doctrine and preaching hasn't slid with us. It has stood the years and proclaimed more forcibly what our calling is as Christians in the P R church. The doctrines of Calvin, The Netherlands Confession and the Canons have brought together and held a church and shown itself in complete unity with the Old and New Testament.

Our instruction is something of beauty. Teachers given to teach in our schools carry in all their subjects the fact that God is in all these studies no matter what the subject. Ministers and elders give of their time to teach their children week after week in catechism and societies until they know exactly what is to be understood with regard to our doctrine and walk in life. It's on the strength of all this we can be proud of so rich a heritage in our church.

God's Covenant Faithfulness 50's to Today

by Mr. Ed Van Egdom*

***Ed is a member of our Doon Church**

It was while reading a newsletter from the Sub Committee of the 50th anniversary of God's covenant faithfulness to the Protestant Reformed Churches, that I began to wonder, Is it really true that there are 1200 people planning to attend a field day to celebrate that occasion? What a coincidence that while thinking about this, the telephone should ring, and a complete stranger to me should ask me to put my thoughts on paper. Oh Jim, I'm sorry and hereby apologize. I do read the Beacon Lights and should have known

who you were, but you caught me by complete surprise. What is amazing in all this is that although many of us do not know each other personally, yet we confess that we have much in common, and for that we are and indeed should ever be humbly thankful for God's Covenant Faithfulness.

I have read with interest the past articles written by those recalling the days of their youth. I say, with interest because they were not too far removed from the days of my youth. I very vividly recall my school days in the great depression. No busses then, no money for gas, no, not even a bicycle. Several miles from school. In the Midwest it was a great depression plus a severe drought, dust storms, and grasshoppers lasting several years.

I think, however, the one thing which stands out above all in looking backward...was the slow, satisfied, and serene pace of life and leisure. It was quite common for one to be born and reared to young adulthood without ever leaving his birthplace more than a few miles. People were generally more respectful of authority as well as being more respectful of friend and neighbor.

However, the great depression according to God's Counsel had also served its purpose and so gave way to the great Socialistic trend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal. At this time also the dictators and their war machines began to be heard in their rumblings across the waters. Hereafter of course came the great World War II, with all its inflationary trend as well as heart-ache and grief and destruction throughout the world.

I have been asked to especially reflect on our life during and after the fifties.

I think again the amazing fact brought about by the war was the intense quickening in the tempo and pace of living throughout the world. The world became small, in that people were pushed and shuffled to the corners of the globe. The Jet Age came upon us. Can you imagine eating breakfast in New York and arriving in California before dinner? Air travel became common, autos powerful and fast.

In all of history it certainly is plainly evident that the four horsemen of Revelation are riding and even now the evidence of this fact is increasing. Scripture is being rapidly fulfilled in our presence in the signs we've just spoken of. Depression, inflation, pestilence, earthquake, wars and rumors of wars, wine and oil, and starvation throughout the world.

In the beginning of the day of the Jet Age shortly after World War II, rumblings of unrest were also heard within the walls of our denomination. "Our walls are too high", were their cries. "We've been too small too long. Lower the walls." Thank our Covenant God that He is eternally faithful. The truth that He is sovereignly the God of us, His people, will stand forever, unconditionally.

If we were too small before the split of the early fifties, we were certainly more so after the split, but not before God. Can you imagine a Classis with, I believe, only two faithful ministers? Small, yes, not because of the truth but because of being faithful to that truth. Ah, we know it's not numbers as such that count, but the faithfulness of our Covenant God has been greatly evidenced among us. From a stuffy basement to a modern building for our Theological School, three faithful professors, and a goodly number of students. Two active home missionaries, a Foreign Mission Committee striving to become involved in foreign fields. A Synodical Contact Committee going to the far down under to contact those interested in like truths as God has revealed them to us and intrusted them into our care.

What does the future hold? Who knows? I have been so foolish to predict what would happen in the next year and have been proven 100% wrong. However, this I know, it does not matter what the future holds. We have seen that it did not matter what has happened in the past, because God causes His eternal counsel to unfold even as He has eternally pre-determined it. This we know by His revelation to us, that He is faithful to His covenant. This He sware by Himself as He could sware by no greater, that He would be the

eternal covenant God of His chosen people. Ah, yes, this we know as a covenant people, that we are not responsible for our salvation, but we certainly are responsible within our salvation. In this year of our 50th anniversary, when the powers of darkness run rampant throughout the earth, the devil and his host has reached the pinacle of ungodliness in all manner of wisdon, so called. Everything must be judged by the standard of relevance. Preaching must go. Marriage is out of style; it too has served its usefulness. Those on deaths row must be freed, even though they may have shed much innocent blood. The unborn must be aborted for the pleasure and good of the human race. Yes, Barabas must be freed, Christ must be crucified.

Yes, we surely have reason to commemorate God's faithfulness. Why? Because He is eternally faithful. "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered. He sent redemption unto His people. He hath commanded His covenant forever. Holy and revered is His name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that do his commandments. His praise endureth forever." (Psa. 111).

The Protestant Reformed Churches Today (1953 - 1975)

by Rev. David Engelsma

In 1953, I was merely 14 years old, a 9th grader under Alice Reitsma at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School, then a small country school. I was aware of the controversy in the churches, but hardly involved. My recollections of it are few. I remember a Sunday evening in Hope when Rev. Hoeksema came to preach-a rare occurrence. He read Ephesians 4. As he was reading, I knew that he meant to preach on verse 14: "...be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine..." After the congregational prayer and the singing, he announced that he had intended to preach on Ephesians 4:14, but that, upon seeing all the children in the audience, he had changed his mind and would now preach out of John's gospel--which he did. I was distinctly impressed by the fact that a minister could so quickly come up with a new sermon and even more deeply impressed by the tender, pastoral character of a man about whom it

was widely alleged, even by some of our schoolfellows, that he itched to fight.

I also remember passionate, even enraged arguments between relatives and erstwhile friends, some of which reduced us children to tears.

My life in the churches has mainly been lived from 1953 on. During this time, I have lived through some significant changes. I was the first seminary student who did not have Rev. Ophoff as professor at all. He last taught the school-year of 1957-1958,was emeritated by the Synod of 1959, and died in 1962. Not that I did not benefit at all from his instruction. For some time, he attended Rev. Hoeksema's dogmatics class, and, time and again, he and Rev. Hoeksema engaged in fascinating theological discussion. Once, those two worthies carried on a vigorous debate in class over the question, whether in the Incarnation the Virgin Mary produced anything at all for the conception of Jesus. For two or three class periods, they delved into the theological profundities of the Incarnation, showing no reluctance to deal with the biological aspects of conception. It was humorous to me to witness the two, old theological giants earnestly contending about the "ovum," the "sperma," the "embryo," and the like. Finally, Rev. Hoeksema said, "Mystery!," and firmly pulled the veil over that wonder. It is not strange that we have theology in our blood.

I was also the last to have Rev. Hoeksema as teacher all three years in seminary and the first to have Professor Hoeksema all three years. So, I have passed from "yesterday" into "today."

The Protestant Reformed Churches have been blessed with numerical growth and significant physical development since 1953. Decimated numerically by the schism of 1953 (from about 5500 members in 1952 to about 2400 members in 1954), we have been growing steadily, so that we are about 3500 at the present time.

We have developed the seminary. We now have three full-time professors, whereas formerly we had only one; we have a fine building, whereas formerly the work was done in the "catacombs" of First Church's basement; we have recently added pre-seminary education to the curriculum of the school.

We are busy in missions. We now have two missionaries. Since 1953, we have labored across the length and breadth of the United States, going out wherever it appeared that God was giving us an open door and willingly answering the calls from high and low, "Come over and help us." We have worked in Jamaica with the Jamaicans and are at this time considering whether Christ our King calls us still to continue there. Besides, there is the considerable, ongoing work by radio and pamphlets and the individual labors of many of our congregations.

Several churches have been established since 1953: Loveland, Colorado in 1958; Forbes, North Dakota in 1960; Isabel, South Dakota in 1960; Jenison, Michigan in 1973; and Prospect Park, New Jersey in 1973.

We are, as some who observe us from the outside put it, "a writing Church." "The Standard Bearer" flourishes; the "Beacon Lights" is doing a good job for the young people; pamphlets pour off the presses; we are now publishing a spate of books.

There have been noteworthy developments in the cause of Protestant Reformed Christian education. The Michigan people have established a high school; several grade schools have been established, or are being established, throughout the country.

Growth, however, is not and may never become the main thing with us. We do well to keep in mind always Joab's words to King David, when the king proudly regarded Israel's size and ordered his captain to number the people: "Now the Lord thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it; but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?" (II Sam. 24:3). Size means nothing to Jehovah our God. "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people" (Deut. 7:7).

"But because the Lord loved you..."

In His love, God continues His covenant with us, according to His promise to our parents and our grandparents before us. He is with us! We enjoy His friendship! We have this friendship in the truth of His Word, the pure gospel of grace preached every Sunday in our congregations, taught faithfully every week in the catechism classes, and handed down to young pastors and teachers in the seminary. We maintain the historic Reformed faith set down in the three Reformed creeds, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic confession, and the Canons of Dordt. It is loved among us-its doctrine and its life. With regard to this all-important matter, nothing has changed from "yesterday" to "today." This is our strength; this is our reason for celebrating our 50th anniversary; this is the source of our growth and development-and, therefore, that growth is good.

That we are Reformed, that we have this treasure-this precious treasure-is due entirely and alone to God's covenant faithfulness. We do not celebrate ourselves-the thought is abhorrent. We celebrate the covenant God! He has kept covenant with us! How could we boast in ourselves? The 50th anniversary is an occasion for humbling ourselves before God in confessing our sins and utter unworthiness. There have been painful defections, grievous struggles, and iniquities. That we exist, that we have the truth, that we are God's covenant friends still-this is His grace, His great grace.

Just for this reason, we have good hope for the future.

No, we do not delude ourselves with visions of earthly triumphs. Our hope is fashioned by the Word. The Word directs us to hope for the coming again of Jesus Christ from heaven and the resurrection of our bodies on that day. Before then, as we wait, we shall have tribulation in the world.

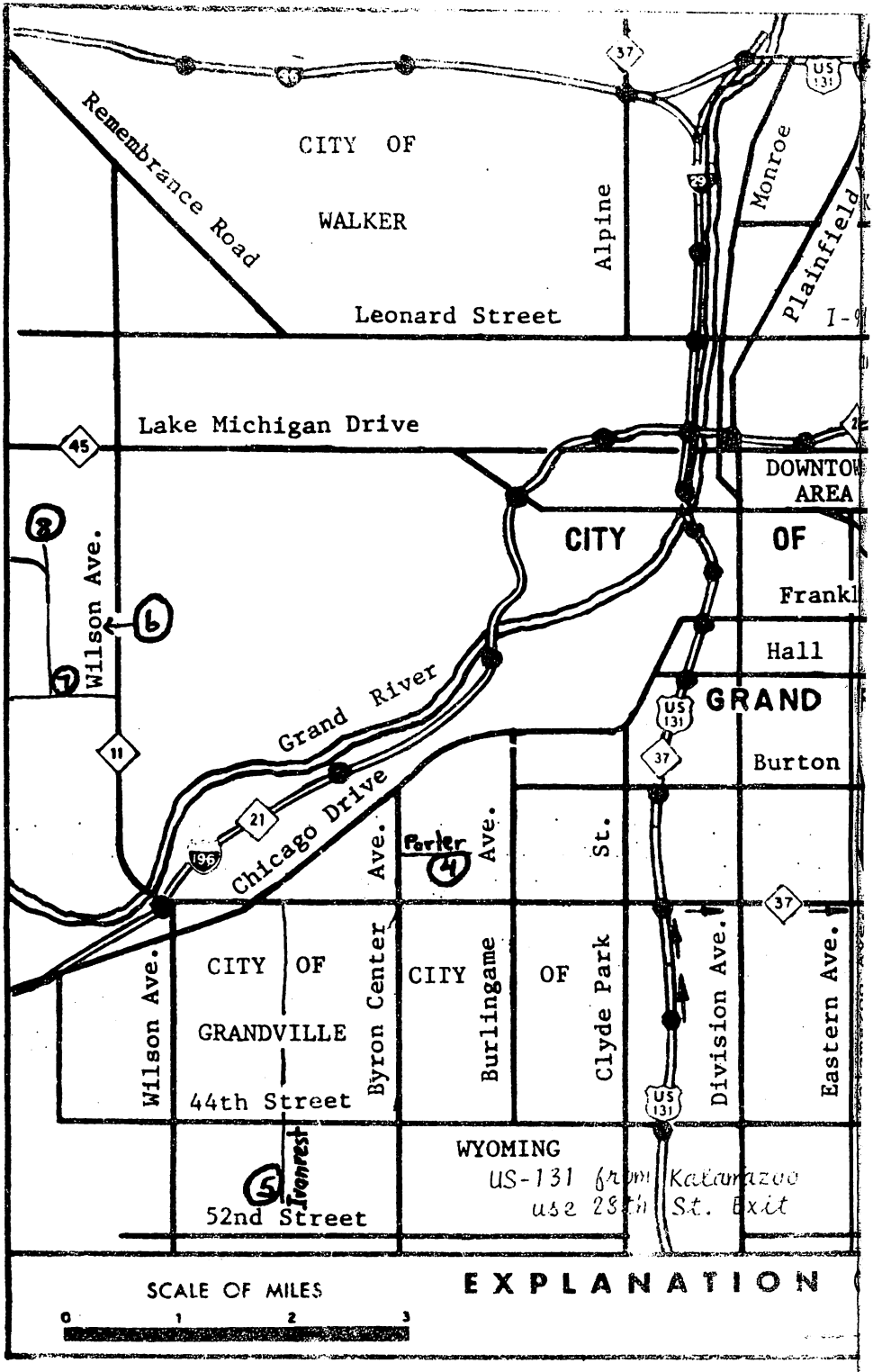
But we may and do expect that we and our children will continue to enjoy the covenant and its blessings. "And, having Thee, on earth is nought that I can yet desire."

If the youth ask, "What then is **our** calling in the future?" my answer is: "Learn the Reformed faith! Know the truth of God's Word! Know what it is to be Protestant Reformed! Be alert in church; hear in catechism; study in Young People's; talk to your parents and pastor! This is the privilege of youth-to be devoted to **learning**. Soon enough-all too soon-will come the time of teaching others. And from infancy on, obey that great and terrible and loving covenant God! Walk in His ways! Be holy!"

It may be that the Lord will use our churches in the future to strengthen, help, and restore others. One thing is certain: we may not, we dare not, we must not slink off into a corner and content ourselves with guarding our treasure by ourselves. Protestantism is today utterly in ruins. Churches nominally Reformed are, by and large, either apostate or running as fast as they can from everything Reformed, both in doctrine and in life. We must have the conviction that Protestantism is Christianity, that the Reformed faith is Protestantism, and that Protestant Reformed is the Reformed faith-in doctrine, in church government, and in ethics, the Christian life. We must be bold to confess.

That we may be used-by a holy God-let us be constantly reforming ourselves.

On the following pages is an area map showing the location of some of the area churches. Following the map are the three discussions outlines for the convention. Please study these carefully.


CITY OF
WALKER
Remembrance Road
Leonard Street
Alpine
Monroe
Plainfield
Lake Michigan Drive
Wilson Ave.
CITY OF
GRAND
Grand River
Chicago Drive
Porter Ave.
St.
Burton
Hall
Frankl
DOWNTO
AREA
CITY OF
GRANDVILLE
44th Street
Byron Center
CITY OF
Burlingame
Clyde Park
Division Ave.
Eastern Ave.
Ivanrest
52nd Street
WYOMING
US-131 from Kalamazoo
use 28th St. Exit
SCALE OF MILES
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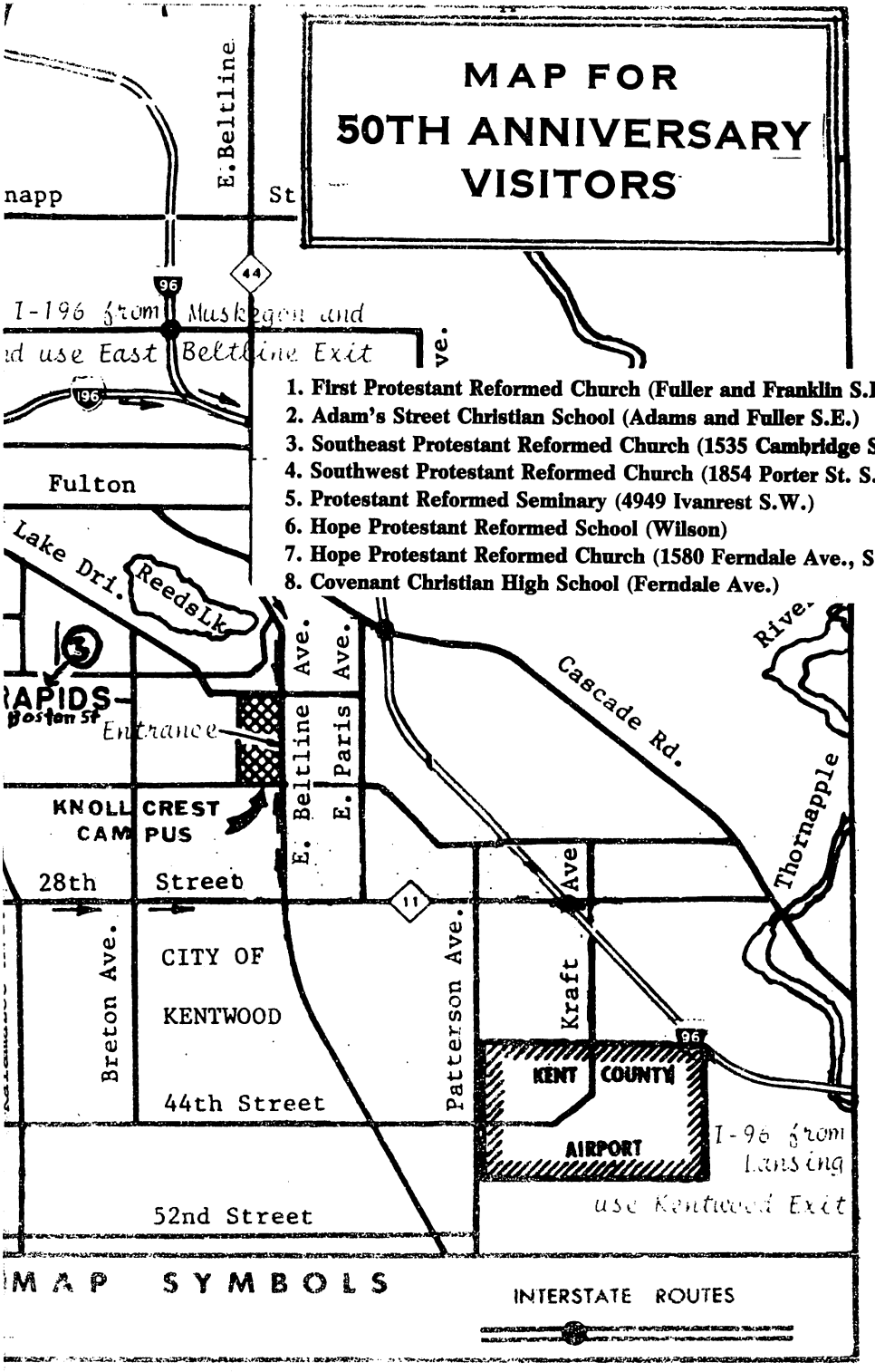
EXPLANATION


MAP FOR
50TH ANNIVERSARY
VISITORS
1. First Protestant Reformed Church (Fuller and Franklin S.E.)
2. Adam's Street Christian School (Adams and Fuller S.E.)
3. Southeast Protestant Reformed Church (1535 Cambridge S.E.)
4. Southwest Protestant Reformed Church (1854 Porter St. S.W.)
5. Protestant Reformed Seminary (4949 Ivanrest S.W.)
6. Hope Protestant Reformed School (Wilson)
7. Hope Protestant Reformed Church (1580 Ferndale Ave., S.W.)
8. Covenant Christian High School (Ferndale Ave.)
E. Beltline
St
96
44
I-196 from Muskegon and
use East Beltline Exit
Fulton
Lake Dri.
Reeds Lk
Entrance
E. Beltline Ave.
E. Paris Ave.
KNOLL CREST CAMPUS
28th Street
11
Cascade Rd.
Thornapple
Ave
Kraft
Patterson Ave.
Breton Ave.
CITY OF
KENTWOOD
44th Street
52nd Street
KENT COUNTY
AIRPORT
I-96 from Lansing
use Kentwood Exit
MAP SYMBOLS
INTERSTATE ROUTES

COMMON GRACE

by Prof. Robert D. Decker

A. The First Point of Common Grace, as adopted by the C.R. Synod of 1924:

"Relative to the first point which concerns the favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general and not only towards the elect, Synod declares it to be established according to Scripture and the confession, that apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the Scripture passages quoted and from the Canons of Dordt, II 5 and III IV 8, 9, which deal with the general offer of the Gospel, while it appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology that our reformed writers from the past favored this view."

1. The teaching contained in this first point:
   a. There are two kinds of grace: Saving grace shown only to the elect and a "certain favor or grace of God" shown to His creatures in general.
   b. Assuming the Gospel to be an offer to all the first point finds evidence of this common grace in the general offer of the Gospel.
2. Scripture passages quoted in support of common grace:
   a. Psalm 145:9.
      1] Does the word "all" in this text mean all men?
      2] Are God's tender mercies shown also to the ungodly reprobate? [Study entire Psalm, but especially verse 20.]
   b. Matthew 5:44, 45: [See also Luke 6:36.]
      1] Those who teach common grace say this text says that God shows favor to the ungodly by sending them rain and sunshine.
      2] Question: Does God show wrath then to His people when He sends floods, tornadoes etc.?
      3] What from a positive point of view does this text teach?
         a] Does loving our enemies mean having fellowship with them? Study: Col. 3:14, I John 2:14ff., James 4:4.
         b] How do we reveal the love of God to our enemies?
      4] Consider also this question: Is the grace of God in things? Or are things means to an end? What end?
      5] Study: Romans 8:28-30; Psalm 84:11; Psalm 73; 5:4,5ff.; 34; Prov. 3:33; Romans 1:17ff.; Lord's Days IX, X.

B. As is evident from the last part of this first point Common Grace also teaches that the Gospel is a general offer to all.
1. Common Grace teaches that in the preaching of the Gospel God is gracious to all the hearers.
2. Scripture passages used in support of this error:
   a. Romans 2:4. This text is interpreted to mean that God intended in His goodness to lead man to repentance but man despised the riches of God.
      1] Notice the text nowhere speaks of God's intention, but of what His goodness accomplishes. It leads men to repentance.
      2] This is true of elect man.
   b. Ezekiel 33:11 is said to teach that God has no pleasure in the death of all

wicked men, but desires that they turn from their evil ways and live.

1] Does this text say anything at all about the Gospel?

2] Who are the "wicked" in this text?

c. Other passages often cited in this connection are: II Peter 3:9; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 3:20; Rev. 22:17.

3. The Truth is that the Gospel is grace to the elect only.

a. In brief the truth may be summed as follows:

1] God from eternity sovereignly loved and ordained to eternal life a people in Christ.

2] For these and in their place Christ made atonement by His death on the cross as sealed in the victory of His resurrection.

3] By the Spirit of Christ the elect are regenerated, called efficaciously, upon them is bestowed the faith to believe in Christ.

4] By grace the elect are preserved unto final salvation so that they can never fall away.

5] Therefore the preaching of the Gospel is never either in God's intent or in actual fact grace to all the hearers. It is grace for the elect whom God calls in the preaching unto salvation.

b. Scripture proof: Romans 8:29,30; Rom. 9:13,16,18; Eph. 1:3,4; John 6:37,39,65; John 10:26-30; I Peter 1:4,5.

c. What do the following passages have to say concerning the Gospel and the reprobate? II Cor. 2:15,16; Mark 4:11; Matt. 11:25,26; John 12:39,40; I Peter 2:7,8; Isaiah 6:9ff.

d. Is it important that we maintain the truth on this point?

A. Point II of Common Grace reads:

"Relative to the second point, which is concerned with the restraint of sin in the life of the individual man and in the community, the Synod declared that there is such a restraint of sin according to Scripture and the confession. This is evident from the citations from Scripture and from the Netherlands Confession, Art. 13 and 36, which teach that God by the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin, by which human life in society remains possible; while it is also evident from the citations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology, that from ancient times our Reformed fathers were of the same opinion."

1. We certainly do not deny that the wicked are controlled, limited, and even restrained in their outward actions so that they cannot always realize to the full their evil intentions. God controls them and all things by His providence so that they accomplish nothing against His will.

2. The second point, however, teaches more than this in that it refers to: "the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man..." This implies:

a. There remains some "good" in fallen man.

b. The Holy Spirit preserves this "good" thus restraining the process of sin making human life and society possible.

B. Confessional and Scriptural passages cited as proof:

1. From the Confession of Faith:

a. Article XIII. What does this article teach?

2. From Scripture:
   a. Genesis 6:3:
      1] Does this teach restraint of sin? See verse 5.
      2] The word "strive" does not mean restrain, but means "to oppose or fight against."
      3] In what way did the Spirit of God fight the ungodly? See Jude 14,15.

C. The Bible teaches the opposite of Point II. Cf. Ps. 81:11,12; Romans 1:18ff.

A. Point III of Common Grace reads:

"Relative to the third point which is concerned with the question of civil righteousness as performed by the unregenerate, Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confessions the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. This is evident from the quotations from Scripture and from the Canons of Dordt, III, IV, 4, and from the Netherlands Confession, Art. 36, which teach that God without renewing the heart so influences man that he is able to perform civil good; while it also appears from the citations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed theology that our Reformed fathers from ancient times were of the same opinion."

1. Does Canons III, IV, 4, teach this? What does the Article in fact say?
2. What is the teaching of Art. 36 of the Netherlands Confession?

B. Objections to this third point:
   1. It blurs the Biblical distinction between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness.
      a. There is "civil good" and there is "saving good."
      b. Hence the absolute standard of good, the Law of God, is really denied.
      c. It means there is an area where there can be fellowship between the righteous and the wicked.
      d. What are the practical implications of this?
   2. Our principle objection is that the third point is Pelagian in that it denies the truth of total depravity.

C. Scriptural and Confessional references against this point:
   1. Scripture: Psalm 14:1-3; Rom. 3:9-18; Matt. 7:16-20; I John 2:15-17; Eph. 2:1ff.
   2. Lord's Day III, q. 8; Lord's Day XXXIII, q. 91; Lord's Day XLIV, q. 114; Belgic Confession Article 14.

Dating Practices and Marriage

by Rev. R. Van Overloop

I. To gain a proper understanding and viewpoint of dating and its practices, we should first of all consider what marriage is.
   A. The relationship between husband and wife is the most basic relationship on earth.
      1. In Paradise the first relationship God created was husband and wife.
      2. In Gen. 2:24 and Eph. 5:31 God says that man must leave father and mother and cleave to his wife.
      3. The relationship between husband and wife is the first mentioned in Eph. 5 and 6.
   B. Scripture shows us that marriage is the union of two into one flesh.

a. The man is the head and the woman is the body in such a way that the woman complements her husband. [Some women think that they are the ones to be helped.] I Cor. 11:3,7-9.

b. Thus two in marriage become one emotionally, spiritually, psychologically and physically.

2. So marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and His Church. Eph. 5:22-33

3. As such God ordained marriage to be a union, which, like everything else in this life, must be dedicated to His service.

C. Both must be believers to be truely married.

1. Unbelievers can have a superficial unity by submerging their differences and hiding their selfishness for a while, but their marriage is not blessed, nor is it filled with true joy. [The marriages of Christians can be just a superficial unity as well.]

2. A brother in Christ is marrying a sister in the Lord.

a. Both are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and therefore it is possible for them to have true unity and joy.

b. This blessed unity is possible because both desire to walk as people of God fighting against all sin and seeking the forgiveness of sins together.

1] Both want to grow in the knowledge of the Word of God, ready to bow before its teachings.

2] They have one calling, one faith, one hope; have mutual interests and concerns, mutual desires and hopes.

3. All people are sinners and therefore no two people are by nature compatible.

a. Each one has many reasons why not to love or submit [why not be compatible or one.]

b. If marriage is without the love of Christ as its foundation, it is legalized prostitution.

1] The love needed for marriage comes from Christ [our individual, personal relationship to Him.]

2] Our personal, experiential union to Christ produces the energy for the love of marriage.

c. To be one is possible only for the Christian who by God's grace works hard at this task.

D. Roles in marriage.

1. The role of the wife is to submit, love, honor and obey her husband. I Peter 3:1-6

a. She must submit in all things no matter what her husband's motive might be. [The only exception is when she is commanded to sin herself.]

b. She must submit to her husband just as she submits to God.

c. This submission does not remove her freedom, but allows for her true freedom [just as a train is only really free when it is on tracks.]

2. The role of the husband is to love, and thus to rule. [Love is first. Eph. 5:25]

a. Husbands must aspire to nothing less than to exemplify the perfect headship of Christ.

b. The head feeds, nourishes and encourages the body because he loves his body. Eph. 5:28-30

c. Love is not a feeling, but the giving of oneself because he loves her so much. cf. Eph. 5:25-27; I John 3:16-18.

II. If this is what marriage is, then how must we conceive of dating and its practices?

1. Because all things have a purpose, what is the purpose of dating?
   a. The purpose of all things must be to give God the glory and the honor; therefore how is God glorified in dating?
   b. Is the purpose of dating to have good Christian fun and fellowship with a fellowsaint?
      1] Can we date just anyone and still fulfill this purpose?
      2] Is it necessary that it be with a fellowsaint? Is it necessary because we just might end up marrying them?
   c. Is the purpose of dating to find a husband or wife?
2. We know that our sovereign God has picked out our husband or wife in His counsel.
   a. How do we find out who that one is?
   b. It is impossible and just not normal to talk about the possibility of marriage on the first dates.
      1] God reveals to us our marriage partner, not by sudden or special revelation, but by leading us to the one whom He has determined for us. [This takes place in what we call a normal or natural way.]
      2] But we should always keep in the back of our minds that we are looking for the one God has already picked out for us.
         a] Periodically we should ask ourselves this question.
         b] The answer will come to us in a normal way.
3. Is this an unrealistic way of looking at dating?
   a. Even if it is realistic, is it a foolish way of looking at dating?
   b. If this is true, does it say anything about the ones with whom we may date?

B. Dating practices.
1. What are qualities we should look for in a young man? In a young woman?
2. In dating we should begin to practice the roles of marriage, even on the first date. [Should be groomed for these roles long before our dating begins by our parents.]
3. In dating should we seek to have our love to be a reflection of the love of God, or should this wait until we are married?
   a. Love is a delight in perfection. The only perfection we have is that which God has wrought in us.
   b. Does God use mere physical love as a means to lead us to this love of God's work in each other?
4. What are proper things we can do when we date?

Personal Devotions and Proper Bible Study

by Rev. M. Joostens

The topic before us ought to be of interest to all of us. This is true, because it stands at the very center of each of our lives. Essentially it deals with our relationship to God and is an important factor in our spiritual wellbeing.

The following study guide is prepared to stimulate our discussion of this topic at the '75 convention. In order that our spiritual lives may be enhanced.

I. Our personal devotions and Bible study are determined by our relationship to God.
   A. We are often called "covenant young people."
      1. What does that really mean?
         a. What do we understand by God's covenant?
            1] What light does Gen. 17:7 shed on this?
            2] How does Paul explain the word "seed" in Gal. 3:16?
               a] What do we mean by the "sphere" of the covenant?
               b] Who are covenant children according to Rom. 2:28?
         b. We also speak of the promise of the covenant.
            1] What is it? [Baptism Form, p.65 Psalter, 2ndly]
            2] What then is our relationship to God in Christ? [H.H.'s Reformed Dogmatics, p.324, top]
      2. The Bible often speaks of God's people as being His friends.
         a. See: Is. 41:8, Jam. 2:23.
         b. What light does the Scripture shed upon the real idea of friendship? [Gen. 18:17-19, Rev. 3:20, Ps. 25:14]
         c. Covenant friendship then is communion and fellowship with God.
   B. Knowledge is the basis of this fellowship.
      1. Is true friendship possible without knowledge?
         a. Consider this re. our earthly relations of friendship.
         b. How about our infinitely greater friendship with God?
            1] Why was Abraham called God's friend? [cf. Jam. 2:23]
            2] What is often called the "life-line" of the christian?
            3] What is the Heidleberg Catechism's definition of faith? [L.D. 7]
      2. How is knowledge acquired re. our relationship to God?
         a. On God's part it is self-evident.
         b. How about our part?
            1] How do we learn anything about God?
               a] i.e. How does God tell us of Himself?
               b] What is the only objective standard of this knowledge?
            2] How can we increase our knowledge of God and so deepen our trust in Him?
         c. Then, how necessary is Bible study?
II. Let's bring this to bear upon our topic.
   A. Personal Devotions.
      1. Does friendship with God require intimacy?
         a. Do you think family devotions, church services, societies etc. to be sufficient?
            1] Is true friendship possible without private intimacy?
            2] Do we have secrets between God and us? Is this proper?
         b. Jesus often felt this need of intimacy with His Father.
            1] Cf. Luke 5:12, 22:41, Mark 1:35, Matt. 26:38-9.
            2] We must take Him as our example.
               a] How much time must we set aside for this?
               b] When are the best times for personal communion with God?
      2. Prayer is no doubt the chiefest activity of our personal devotions.
         a. What is prayer? [cf. The exposition of L.D. 45 in the "Triple Knowledge"]
            1] The holy art of prayer can be learned from the Scriptures.
               a] Why do we need to pray? [Matt. 7:7-8, Ps. 50:14-15, L.D. 45 Que. 116]

2] Must our prayers always be precipitated by specific needs?
2] What does the Heidelberg Catechism consider prayer to be?
b] What must we pray for? [L.D. 45 Que. 118, Phil. 4:6, Ps. 32:5-6, Jam. 5:16]
1] How much do we pray with the Bible as a guide?
2] What kind of things are proper or not to pray for?
2] Prayer is the God ordained way of personal communion with Him.
a] Can we live without prayer? Why not?
b] What does God do to us when we neglect to pray, often for a long time? [cf. Ps. 6-38]
b. Though prayer is chiefest, it is not the only part of personal devotions.

B. That brings us to the proper study of the Bible.
1. Throughout we have established the importance of Bible study.
2. The Scriptures must be the staple of our devotional diet.
a. Must the Bible be our only source of devotional reading and study?
1] What about daily meditations?
a] How should or can they be used?
b] Our denomination used to publish meditations for enlisted men. Would these be beneficial on a broader scale?
2] Are there books that are conducive to personal devotions?
a] What type of books are suitable?
b] What should we be on guard against re. devotional material?
c] Can you suggest some beneficial works?
b. Re. Bible study itself.
1] How can we properly study it with benefit?
a] Is a good concordance or a commentary more beneficial?
b] Should we use other versions of the Bible? How and to what extent?
2] What constitutes improper study of the Bible?

C. In summation:
1. Why are personal devotions an essential part of our personal lives?
2. Why must the Scripture be basic to our devotional studies?
3. What part does prayer play in our devotions?

STEERING COMMITTEE NEWS

Greetings in Christ from the 1975 convention steering committee,

With less than a month left to go to the convention, the steering committee is working busily to prepare for the arrival of some 400 conventioneers from all over the country.

At this time we would like to thank all of the societies and individuals who sent in their lists of patrons and contributions. Money was raised in various ways by many societies, such as soup suppers, bake sales, basketball games, casserole suppers,

etc. If your society's secretary has not sent in the list of those planning on attending the convention please tell them to do so immediately as we must have names to make registration easier for everyone. If you have not sent in your patron lists, please do this also. We will have accommodations for those of you who will arrive the weekend before if you will only let us know so we can figure how many to plan on.

When packing your suitcases, be sure to remember your bathing suit for swimming in Calvin's pool and for the outing at Lake Michigan. Tennis shoes are a must for the gym activities we have planned, so don't forget them. There are tennis courts for you tennis buffs, so you may pack your tennis racket and get in some practice.

The registration fee will be only $10.00 plus a small extra charge for a picture if you want one.

Lastly, but most importantly, don't forget your Bibles. We have some really interesting discussion groups planned, and everyone can participate.

We hope to see all of you there this year to come for Christian fellowship and to help us celebrate the 50th anniversary of our churches. This is one convention that no one should miss.

Yours in Christ,
Convention Steering Committee
Gwen Van Eenenaam, Publicity

Vi Van Den Top, of our Hull church, composed this poem for Hull's 50th Anniversary Singspiration held June 15. With her permission we gladly include this in our special issue.

COVENANT FAITHFULNESS

by Vi Van Den Top

Thy people wander oft O God
Taking the way so smooth and broad.
With chastening rod and conscience sore,
Thou restorest them to thy path once more.

Thy youth are tempted to go astray;
To take the easier compromise way
Graciously leading and guiding them along
Thou bringst them to a faith that's strong.

Each little child is known by Thee
And is written in thy firm decree
And when, as children, we disobey
Thou keepst us in the narrow way.

Thy faithfulness! it knows no bounds,
And in ourselves we have no grounds
To merit Thy unfailing love
Or to receive blessing from above.

Thy covenant which stands of old
Reminds us of Thy grace untold.
As we look back on fifty years,
How wonderful Thy love appears!

To God alone be glory giv'n
By saints on earth and saints in heaven.
For ages past, for years to come
He brings us to our eternal home.

Our fears and doubts are laid aside
As we safe in God abide.
He's promised us he'd keep His race
What assurance! What unfailing grace!

Seeing our blessed heritage
May God give us the courage
To fight the battle 'til vict'ry is won.
Then hear our Lord say, "My servant, well done."

God in heaven, grant that we
Ever fruitful vines may be.
Until we join the heavenly choir,
Our minds enlighten, our zeal inspire.

God of mercy, love and might
Show thy favor here tonight
And may our praise and thoughts arise
As sacrificial smoke in evening skies.

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