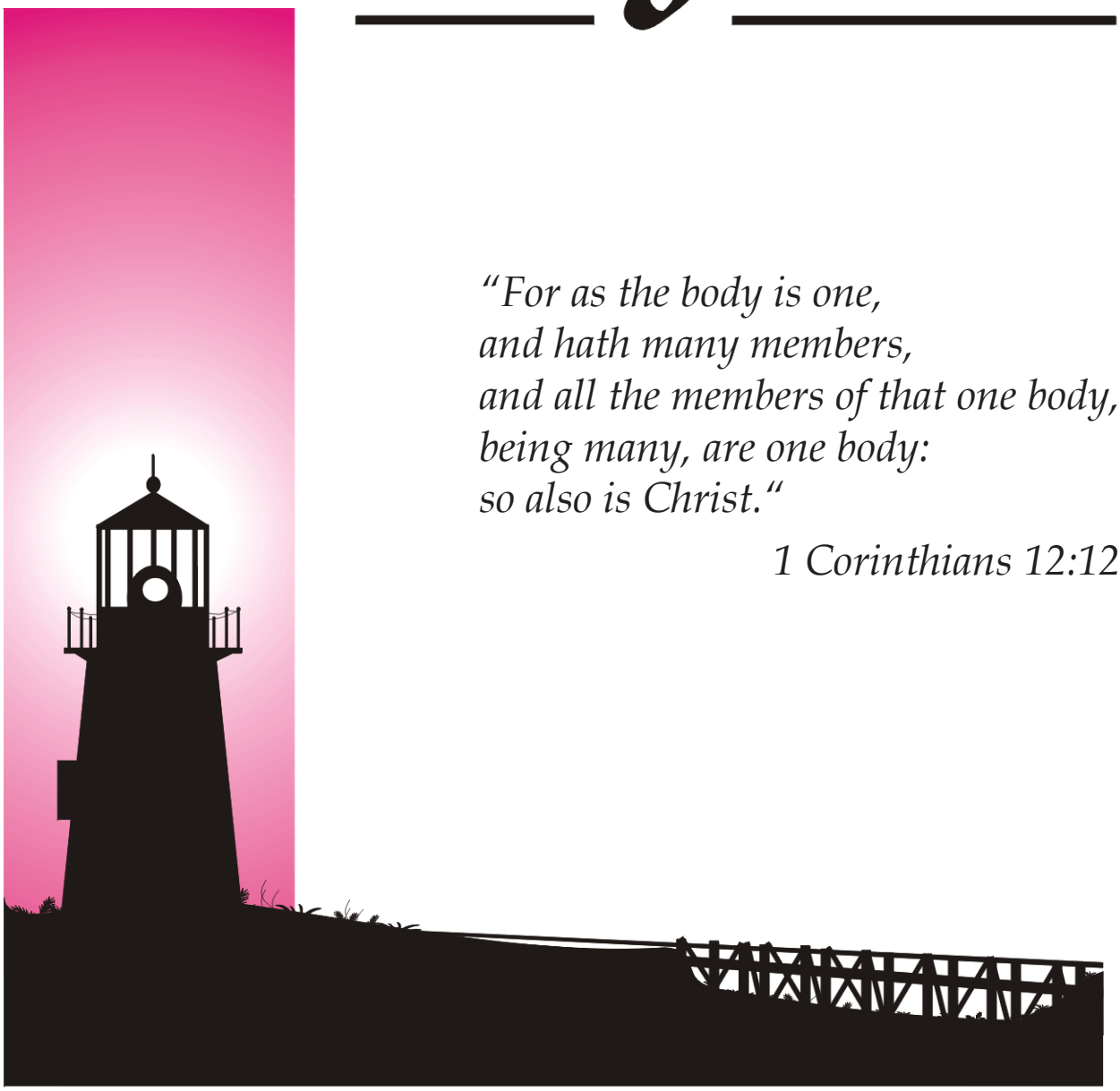
Beacon Lights

April
2012

Volume LXXI
Number 4



"For as the body is one,
and hath many members,
and all the members of that one body,
being many, are one body:
so also is Christ."

1 Corinthians 12:12

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Beacon Lights is published monthly by the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies. Subscription price is $15.00. Please send all correspondence, address changes, subscriptions, and article submissions to the business office.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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Thanks John, Welcome Mark

by Ryan Kregel

How do we begin to thank someone like John Huizenga? John's first article for *Beacon Lights* was published in the August/September issue of 1990. John became editor-in-chief in April of 1996. Along with editing incoming material, John has made over 150 writing contributions himself, not including the devotional writing he has done. In thanking John, we also take an opportunity to thank his wife Jeanine for her help. For several years Jeanine managed subscriptions and business affairs for the magazine. After 16 years as editor with growing responsibilities at home, church and school, John decided it was time to pass the torch. John has been writing for *Beacon Lights* for the past 22 years of his life. He has informed us that he still plans on writing for the magazine in the future. John sees the great importance of the ministry of *Beacon Lights* and its positive influence in the lives our covenant young people. On behalf of the staff of *Beacon Lights* and its subscribers, thank you, John, for your many years of service to this invaluable tool God has blessed us with.

With John's retirement as editor-in-chief, we welcome a new editor, Mark Hoeksema, to our staff. During the 1960s, Mark served on the Federation Board of the Protestant Reformed Young People, and also as a writer for *Beacon Lights*. Mark is a graduate of Northwestern College and the Protestant Reformed Theological School. He served two churches before resigning the ministry in 1979. He is presently employed in the green industry, and has worked for the Reformed Free Publishing Association for the past 14 years, primarily as a copy editor. He has also done some writing, as well as having some involvement in design elements. Mark brings a strong literary and publishing background into this position as editor. He looks forward to connecting with the young people through the ministry this magazine brings. ❖

Deep Simplicities– "Thy sins are forgiven thee"

In the next few editorials we are going to take a look at some simple things, which, when you actually stop and take a few moments to think about, you realize how deep they really are, and how important they are to us as Christian young people. We will take into account words of God spoken to us in Scripture: phrases we just read over because of their absolute straightforwardness.

In our consideration this time of the forgiveness of sins we have in Christ, we will refer to one of the times Jesus was preaching in Capernaum. This account can be found in Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:1-12, and also in Luke 5:17-26. In these accounts, Jesus is preaching to a crowd of Pharisees and teachers who had traveled from the surrounding area to hear him. At this time, friends of a paralytic man were trying to

reach Jesus, carrying him on his bed. When they could not get to Jesus because of the press of the crowd, they took the tiles off the roof of the house he was in. They let the man down through the roof in front of Jesus. Jesus, seeing their complete confidence in him to heal their friend, said to the man who was sick of the palsy, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." The Pharisees began talking among themselves, accusing Jesus of blasphemy, saying, "Who can forgive sins, but God alone?" Jesus knew their thoughts and said, "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house" (Luke 5:23, 24).

The Pharisees were questioning Jesus' power to forgive sins. They had the earthly manifestation of God, in the likeness of his own Son, standing right before them. God in flesh was standing before them, had healed the paralytic, and told him his sins were forgiven. We might say, How foolish they were that they could not see that! How stubborn and blind were they! Surely the Pharisees had heard accounts of the amazing miracles Jesus had been performing throughout the land. Some of them had probably even witnessed some of them. They knew what Jesus had done and was capable of doing. But yet they denied the deity of Christ and all that he represented.

We need to stop and consider something for a moment. We need to look at ourselves. Would we be among the Pharisees who were denying God's sovereign power, or would we be among those others who were praising God for what he had done? How often do we actually slow down enough in our lives to consider the wonder of forgiveness? We as undeserving sinners have been fully pardoned for all our sins. Say it to yourself: " I am forgiven. I am forgiven. I am forgiven!" Say it until you realize the amazing wonder that Christ would take upon himself the burden of all our sin and guilt and willingly give himself on the cross as the one sacrifice to pardon us all. Payment was required, and God sacrificed his only begotten Son in order to make that payment. Christ's death was necessary. Important also was that Christ died on a cross. In order to bear the full force of God's eternal and just wrath against all our sins, Jesus had to become accursed of God. Death upon a cross was accursed of God. Galatians 3:13 states, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Christ became accursed so that we did not have to. What a sacrifice! What a selfless act of love for his bride, the church!

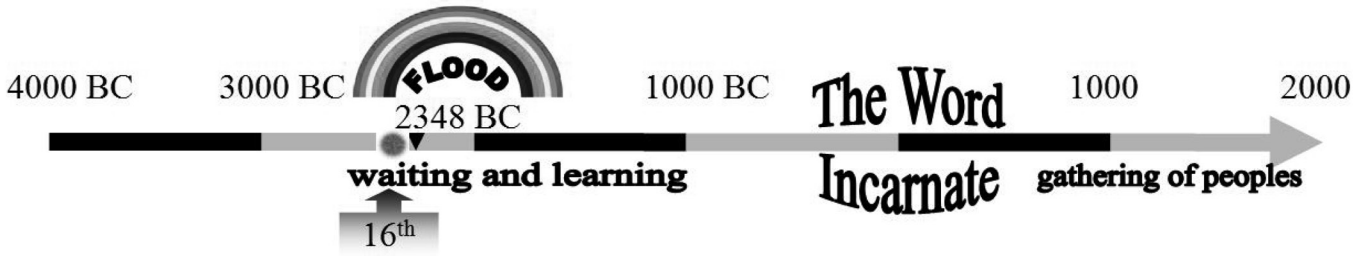
It is imperative now that we address the importance of repentance, a true heartfelt repentance. In order fully to understand and enjoy the gift of forgiveness, we need to have an understanding of the enormity of our sins and the guilt they incur. Once we fully acknowledge our sins, we hit the floor on our knees in true sorrow for them. We get on our knees in prayer and confess our sins to our heavenly Father. We must pray from the inmost depths of our hearts to God, who alone can forgive us. While looking through the *Beacon Lights* archives, I stumbled on a poem in the March 1986 issue titled, Do I Ever Pray? I share with you the first verse. "I often say my prayers/ But do I ever pray? / And do the wishes of my heart / Go with the words I say?" Many of you may have quotations from various people throughout history stuck to the front of your refrigerator. I think this poem is fridge-worthy. I urge you to print it out and hang it on your refrigerator, tape it to your bedroom door, or use it as a bookmark in your Bible so you see it every time you have personal devotions. Given our human nature, it is very easy for us to not be in a proper mindset for prayer. When we are not in the proper mindset for prayer, we are not truly talking to God from our hearts. We need to remind ourselves constantly of our weakness and the need of sincerity in our prayer life.

What then is our response to this undeserved forgiveness of our sins? What else can our response be but the same as that of the man who was healed? All glory be given to God. All praise to him who would choose us, wretched sinners that we are, to be his people. We can safely assume that the paralytic man, in his glorifying God, was not praising God only because he was healed, but because Jesus told him his sins were forgiven. Wonder of all wonders! What else could he and we with him do but praise our just and merciful God?

Jesus paid it. He paid it all! For us! Be thinking of this always. ❖

The Sixteenth Century of His-Story: A Very Small Church Preaches and Builds the Ark by Faith

by John Huizenga



As Noah watched people depart from the church in apostasy and the old pillars of faith, Methuselah and Lamech, grow older while the youth flocked to the thrills of the ungodly world, God looked upon Noah in Christ with singular delight. Noah found grace in the eyes of Jehovah because God had chosen him from all eternity, grafted him into Christ, and delivered him from the power and guilt of sin so that he in thankfulness walked with his God in covenant fellowship. Clinging by faith to the promise of God to crush the head of the serpent with the seed of the woman, Noah waited and looked to God. By the 16th century of history, Noah was about 450 years old; and God blessed him with three sons when he was 500. As he faithfully taught his young boys the fear of Jehovah, God himself spoke to Noah: "The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Gen. 6:13–14a).

God then gave to Noah instructions for building the ark, and Noah did "according to all that God commanded him, so did he." (verse 22) He followed the astounding instructions to every last detail, and openly declared his faith by preaching the contents of his faith. (2 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 11:7) "The promised seed will be born! You who mock and believe that the church will soon die out and free you from the preaching of God's judgment will soon be destroyed with a flood of water. God is righteous. Your rebellion will not stand before him. God sovereignly works out the salvation he has prepared for his church. I build this ark at the command of the God who has created this earth and who will save his church with a flood."

With great zeal and care Noah saw to it that the great gopher wood trees of the forest round about were cut down, shaped, and fitted according to the measurements revealed by God. We can be sure that this new flurry of activity and news of a great building project aroused the attention of the ungodly. They were experts at building cities and anything else to satisfy their desires, but what was this? What is this huge, pointless box Noah is building? Noah was not embarrassed to explain the coming judgment of God. The same God who had faithfully and consistently revealed himself in the church to his fathers had now revealed his will and purpose to Noah. God's purpose was to destroy the monstrous wickedness of man that had developed, scour the earth with water, and preserve the righteous in Christ along with the life of birds, animals, and other creatures in this ark. According to man's reason, this preaching was foolishness, and the ark simply a monument to a dying and soon-to-be dead church. God restrained their impulse to put a quick end to the sting of Noah's preaching, prolonged their entertainment of mockery as they watched and perhaps even helped to build the ark, and in doing so filled the cup of God's wrath upon them.

Throughout the 120 years of building, the sun came up the same every day. Noah's three boys grew up in the shadow of this growing ark. The chopping of wood, the moving of ingenious ramp and crane mechanisms to hoist huge timbers into place, and the preaching of their father was all they knew. As the roof went on, and barrels of pitch were gathered and prepared to seal the ark, a new and increasingly frequent line of scorn cackled from the lips of the wicked, "Where is the promise of his coming?

for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:4). Once this ark is built and nothing happens, they reasoned, the ark will serve as a final coffin and monument to a dead church, and we will dance around it in victory.

Noah faithfully built the ark in those final days of the old world, and today we labor as well to build up the church in the final days before the last judgment. Christ comes quickly, and God has given us clear direction in the work he would have us do to prepare for his coming. It is a work of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the world, and also a work of bearing covenant children, rearing them in the fear of the Lord, and having fellowship with one another in the church. This work is clearly explained to us in the book of Thessalonians as a "work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father" (1 Thess 1:3). This is a labor of faith, not family planning. It is a labor of love, not the selfish accumulation of wealth for our own enjoyment. It is a labor rooted in the hope of Christ's return to gather his church. In doing this, the church of Thessalonica itself gave testimony to the world around to her faith and hope (vv. 7–8). The instruction continues with the words "walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (2:12). We are "to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men" (3:12).

The earthly occupations we have to provide income may not so absorb our time and energy that we don't have time for this work in the church, but neither do we neglect our daily work in the home, factory, or business. The Thessalonians made the mistake of stopping their work and waiting around for Christ, but Paul exhorts them to "study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing" (1 Thess. 4:11–12). Providing for the children God gives us requires hard work and sacrifice. We work together to build schools where we can hire and support godly teachers. This work requires diligence, patience, and love toward one another.

Noah lived every day in the conscious awareness that God was soon coming in judgment and redemption. He did not become so absorbed in the work that he fell asleep spiritually. The living word of God was actively preached as he worked. Paul reminds the church, "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thess. 5:6). We must be active in the church, supporting one another as well as the office bearers. We read in verses 11–13, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves."

Let us cheerfully take up the work that God has given to us, and work like Noah did, in faith. Compared to the billions of people around us, the church which holds to "the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 Thess. 2:15), is very small. Unlike Noah, who worked virtually alone with his family, we have brothers and sisters in the Lord to give encouragement and comfort. We also have faithful preachers for whom we are called to pray "that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified" (3:1). Let us pray for peace and harmony in the church that this work continue until it is completed and Christ comes to redeem his people with judgment. ❖

John is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I have just finished reading the January 2012 issue of *Beacon Lights* and found it another good read of seriously Reformed material—and most informative. So much so, that with the latest article of the series "Our Children's Education" by Aaron Lim of the CERC, and the beautifully crafted and biblical poem from Rev Harbach (written in 1988), my heart is so uplifted that I can do no less than send this email to thank you and the Fed. Board, as well as give thanks to God, for the ongoing witness that this magazine is and has always been.

After reading it for some 30 years it still is an exceptional and unique publication. I am now sharing it with a couple families in our own congregation (The Reformed Church of Dovedale).

To God be the glory!
(Mrs) Dilys Watson ❖

Wonderful Resurrection

by Joe Holstege

There have been many events in the history of this world that are important and significant. Not everybody comes from a Christian perspective, so some might say that the most important events in history are the two world wars or perhaps the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This is not the case, however, when you look at history through the spectacles of God's word. When history is viewed properly, the conclusion one comes to is that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most wondrous and joyful occasion in all history, and thus the most important and significant.

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of me and angels say: Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens and earth reply: Alleluia!

The significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for the Christian believer is such that it directly changes the way one looks at the world. The world is a fallen, sinful, dark, scary place for all mankind if it is abandoned and left to itself. But this is not the case. Jesus Christ came down from heaven, was incarnated into human flesh, died on the cross, paying the penalty for the sins of all of his people, and then conquered death in one swift, powerful blow when he sprang out of the grave. When one takes into consideration the sheer magnitude of the task that Christ accomplished for his people, it causes a thrill of excitement to jump down his spine. Jesus conquered the sins of every one of his people throughout all of history. That is a lot of people! On top of that, each one of those people sinned so much that the number is almost infinite. It almost seems that Christ paid the price for an infinite amount of infinities of sins, and then he arose from the grave, demonstrating the complete victory he had won.

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!

The significance of this victory is for all of God's chosen people whom he loves. All of those who in God's eyes are now without sin as a result of Christ's work on the cross benefit from this extraordinary miracle. Even the angels rejoice at this act because God is glorified, and that is really the purpose of all things. God used angels to assist in Christ's birth by way of announcement to the shepherds ("Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). When Christ arose, God used the angels to explain to the disciples who came to Jesus' tomb that he was risen, because the disciples did not yet fully understand ("Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen" Luke 24: 5–6). The angels rejoice in that work because they are accomplishing God's will, and for the angels who are not tainted with sin, that is all that they want to do. The same is true for regenerated believers according to the new man.

Sons of men and angels say: Alleluia!

Imagine that a track runner just won a gold medal at the Olympics. The result of his feat of physical prowess would be honor and respect from people of all nations. Now take that honor and respect and amplify it an infinite amount of times. That is the amount of honor and respect that Christians owe to Jesus, who conquered death. "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." (Psalm 150: 6) Give him praise and honor, and worship him because he alone is worthy of worship. Jesus Christ is the savior of his people who were fallen in sin, deserving of death, and totally helpless. That is something worth giving all the recognition in the world to.

Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!

Christ's work was so wonderful that even the elements of the creation rejoice at his victory. Even the ground, trees, birds, and beasts recognize him as Lord of all. "The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing." (Psalm 65: 13) To draw the attention even of the creation itself, Christ's work on the cross and his completion of that work in his resurrection must have had to be a work of all importance and significance.

Sing, ye heaven and earth reply: Alleluia!

Jesus Christ arose from the grave. The head of the serpent is crushed, death and sin are defeated, and the people of God are merited salvation purely of God's wonderful grace. Sing loud praises and alleluias! Bow before your Lord, children of God, and worship him.

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens and earth reply: Alleluia! ❖

Joe is a member of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Why Am I in the Protestant Reformed Churches?

by Ryan Schipper

God in eternity has chosen those whom he in his divine wisdom both loves and hates—the elect and the reprobate. Since earliest history, God has shown the distinction between these two groups. He has promised that he will bless the elect and preserve them, and also that he will curse the reprobate and bring them to destruction. If you read the historical parts of the Bible, you will clearly see both of these things happening. Take, for example, the story of Noah or of David and Goliath. In both cases, the faithful child of God overcame the godless, blaspheming reprobate, thanks to God's providential care.

Throughout history God has preserved both his church and the truth of his word, and has helped them to grow. He used the wicked men of this world to force his church to battle for the truth, and thereby to grow in their doctrinal understanding of God's word. Through these battles, God has rooted out those who claim to be his people, but are not willing to fight for the truth, and has kept his church pure. By this means, we have today what is the clearest and purest manifestation of the truth the world has ever known, that is, the Protestant Reformed Churches. We are immensely blessed of God that he has chosen us to be his people, and has worked through our ancestors to bring us all here where we are today. To be able to hear the unadulterated truth of God's word is a wonderful thing that we so often take for granted. Praise be to God for this great blessing, and may we strive to live a life of thanksgiving before him. ❖

Ryan is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

Meditation

Forgiven

by Ben Rau

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psalm 130:3–4).

In Psalm 130, the psalmist finds himself in a hopeless situation. We are not told who the writer of this psalm is, but he has sunk into the depths of trouble and woe, as referred to in verse 1. In his utter hopelessness, his cry arises to God for help. As he seeks deliverance from his Lord and God, he finds assurance in the words that we consider for this meditation, the knowledge that God does not count the iniquities of those whom he has chosen, but rather has imputed their guilt to his Son.

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" This reflection draws our attention in this meditation. After expressing the extent of the miserable depths in which he finds himself, the psalmist uses this rhetorical question to explain the comfort and the faith that he has in the midst of his suffering.

It is important to understand what is being illustrated when the psalmist speaks of "marking" our iniquities. Marking refers to a process of recording or counting. We can conceptualize God's "marking" iniquities by imagining a book in which the sinful thoughts, words, and deeds of all men are recorded by the pen of God (we speak foolishly, as men, of course). However, the idea of God's marking our iniquities is also more than that: it carries the connotation that our iniquities are all continually before his face. Constantly the sinful actions and deeds of every man are preserved in God's eyes. Though our ability to comprehend this fully is weak, try to imagine your sins forever before the consciousness of the almighty and holy God who can stand no evil. Oh, how the people ought to have trembled in the days of Jeremiah when God prophesied that his eyes were "upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes" (Jeremiah 16:17). How

dreadful for us also then to stand before the holiest one when defiled by the filth of one's own sins.

Consider that the God who has created all things and sustains them by his marvelous power knows your actions, your thoughts, your intentions, and your inclinations on a level that we cannot even fathom with our weak understanding. David, who explores this very topic in Psalm 139, confesses that even before his members were formed God had known them and seen them. This is our God, the God of whom the psalmist speaks here.

Note that the musing of the psalmist is not without hope. He does not say, "Because you do mark iniquities, how can I stand?" No, the comfort of the psalmist is that what he proposes in verse 3 is not true of God's elect. Rather, the psalmist finds his comfort in the very fact that his loving Father does not mark his iniquities. This is where he can and does find his comfort in his deep affliction. The psalmist's next thought immediately reinforces this idea: "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." The use of the word "but" creates a sharp contrast between the hopelessness of those whose iniquities are marked by God and those whose iniquities are covered.

However, his iniquities are not removed due to some action that the psalmist has performed. Instead, the psalmist's words make it strikingly obvious that God alone can forgive. "There is forgiveness with thee." God alone is able to forgive. This is supported in the rest of Scripture: God's promise to Israel and us today was and is that he is the one who blots out our transgressions (Isaiah 43:25, 44:22).

The idea of "blotting" is essentially that of hiding, covering or wiping out. Something that is blotted has been fully removed and is no longer visible. God blots out our sins, but it is not the case that God simply makes these sins disappear on a whim. This cannot be the case. The righteousness and justice of our God demands that satisfaction or payment be made for our sin (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 5). Our Savior and head bore the eternal reproach of hell which we ought to have suffered, and thereby redeemed or purchased us. The beauty of our sins' being blotted out is that the sins that were blotted from our book have been added to the book that belongs to Jesus Christ. Our guilt has been imputed, or transferred to him. Not only that, but in exchange we are also given all the full righteousness of Christ. What an unfathomable exchange! Our rags for Christ's riches, as it has been said. Psalm 69, in a remarkable foreshadowing of the coming Messiah, proclaimed that he would "restore that which [he] took not away." Indeed, what a restoration has been made unto us!

The answer to the psalmist's question in verse 3 is that none can stand if God would mark iniquities. However, knowing that we have been forgiven in the blood of our divine Savior, we are able to stand in the day of judgment. What greater comfort is there than that? This knowledge brings to mind the words of a familiar hymn, "On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand." We can be comforted in the knowledge that when God looks upon his people, he sees us as guiltless because all our guilt has been completely borne by our Savior. We read in I John 4:17 that we may even have boldness in the day of judgment, with firm faith stemming from Christ's eternal love for us and his righteousness that has become ours.

We are able to stand because the Lord who sees all things has not marked our iniquities. What a comfort we have! This comfort is not some distant, intangible future idea that we hope to experience in the day of the Lord's return, but not until then. This does not even begin to do it justice. We are comforted here and now. We are assured of an eternal, undying love that is for each of us, even though we all confess that we are the most dreadful of sinners (I Timothy 1:15). When we sin, we can and must come to God for forgiveness, but we need not do so in fear that this time we may not be forgiven. We come in the full assurance of our faith—an assurance we often sorely need when we are plagued again and again by sin. In our every difficulty, we are borne up by the consciousness that we have a faithful high priest who knows our infirmities. "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" will indeed give us all things and will work all things to our salvation (Romans 8:31-39). God in Christ gives us the assurance that we need in this life.

No matter the depth of sorrow or tribulation, our Lord Jesus Christ is with us. He went to the ultimate of depths. And for whom, but us? The filthy, wretched sinners that we are? He bore our shame and reproach? Yes, he did! "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Isaiah 53:4). Notice how emphatically "he" and "our" are used in that text. It could not be any more clear that Christ is the one on whom the unfathomable burden of our guilt has been laid. What comfort that is, young people! The one who loved us with an eternal love strong enough to take away all of the filth of our sins is the one seated at God's right hand as our Mediator. No matter the day or the hour, Jesus Christ is the same, and his gracious love to us changes not. Knowing this, we can come to him in full assurance of our faith, believing that we will be heard of him.

As young people in the church of Christ, we need this assurance. We know that we are weak; we face many trials and temptations, and we often feel that we fall again and again. How assuring is it to know that we belong to him!

Knowing this, our assurance is undoubtedly rich. But another fruit of considering this deliverance must be humility in our Christian life. We read in the form for the administration of the Lord's Supper that the result of self-examination is that we "abhor and humble" ourselves before God, when considering the wrath of God against your and my sin apart from Christ. As we have already considered, the fact that God shows mercy to us ought to resonate in our hearts every day. Consider that even the smallest of sins against the most high majesty of God merits for one eternal death, and then think about the sins that we commit with our deeds, hearts, and minds every day. It is frightening to consider one's plight apart from the mercy of Christ when we think about the depths of our sins. The only thing that separates us from that state is his mercy in choosing us to be his people from all eternity. How is it even conceivable that we could exalt ourselves in pride when we understand the deliverance we have been given?

Consider also the great evil of bearing grudges or of speaking evil of others within the body of Christ. Is this characteristic of those who know that they have been spared from the agonies of hell by grace alone? Often we can make excuses and allow ourselves to walk in these ways of sin. "If it was another sin, I could forgive him, but I can't ever forgive that sin!" Or we spread a story about something or someone that we know is better left unsaid. Young people, Christ bore the burden of the guilt of all his people. How can we then allow ourselves to mark the sins of others as though Christ has not taken them away? But that is what we are doing when we dwell on the sin of others who have already repented. When we neglect to forgive, we mark again the iniquities which Christ has already taken away. Why would we desire such a terrible thing? Rather, with believing hearts we ought to strive to forgive others and lead them in the spirit of love to the cross, where they can experience the true joy of repentance.

Beloved, our calling is to consider our sins and the curse due to us for them, and in that knowledge flee to the shadow of the cross. In what way can we live a life of gratitude but in the shadow of the cross? Knowing our sin, hating it, and fleeing from it, we will be humbled and will flee from iniquity. We do not lift ourselves up in pride, but rather we run into the arms of our Savior, for, "in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). ❖

Ben is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison,Michigan.

Gem of the Month

For American Literature, we were assigned a creative writing project where we had to take phrases from the *Grand Rapids Press* and write a poem, song, story, etc. from it. This was my poem. I was inspired by the passing of my grandpa a couple years ago, who slowly passed away from lung cancer. I tried to put myself into his mind as he went through that time.

—Heather Zolen

A Quick Goodbye

I stare at my family as I lie in my bed;
I wonder why this is how it must end.
They speak with a mumble, but I hear every word.
It tears me up to know my voice can't be heard.
The pain emanates throughout my veins;
My breath becomes scarcer, and my power drains.
My family utters one last, quick goodbye.
I struggle through my weakness: I try to reply.
I've loved them more than they could know,
I've watched every single one of them grow.
They're the greatest blessing a man could ask for.
A good, Christian family; I couldn't want more.
But these are the things that would remain unspoken,
Including apologies for my promises broken.
My eyes start to tear as I realized then
That I'd never hold another child again.
These fears were comforted by my family's care,
The love in their eyes, and the hope in their prayer.
The place that I'm going will bring me no harm.
And I long to be up in my dear Savior's arms.
With only God's help and the strength he bestows,
I knew they'd be ready to finally let go.
With one final breath, and a moment of goodbye,
Christ took me in his arms, and no more did I cry.

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

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

April 11 Read Judges 18

Sometimes something that seems to be so right is so wrong. Yes, Israel was to capture Canaan and to destroy the inhabitants in it. That is what the children of Dan did. That sounds good, doesn't it? Don't overlook their sin of idolatry. By taking the priest who was not from the line of Aaron and did not serve God as he commanded, they sinned grievously in God's eyes. What was their root sin? We find it in verse 1. They believed that there was no king in Israel. Is God "king forever" in your eyes? Sing Psalter 266.

April 12 Read Judges 19

Here we have one of those chapters that cause us to blush at reading them either by ourselves or with a family. Because Israel did not accept God as king, he gave them over to the shameful acts that we read about in this chapter. Before we judge Israel too harshly, we must examine our own lives to see what we harbor within our souls and within our daily lives. Do we push God's kingship away from us so that we can do what is good in our own eyes? As individuals and as members of Christ's body we must examine our lives and make sure that we bow to God our king. Sing Psalter 303.

April 13 Read Judges 20

As we read this account, we stop, and then we read it again to be sure of what we read. It appears that Israel was right in going against the evil men of Gibeah. They asked God what they must do, but they were defeated in battle not once, but twice. Then comes verse 26. Obviously either the rest of Israel was wrong in the attitude they had taken on themselves as they went up to defeat Gibeah, or they had their own sins that must be removed before they could remove the evil in Benjamin. We must be holy in order to carry out the will of the holy God. Let us seek that holiness in order that God will prosper us in our spiritual lives. Sing Psalter 156.

April 14 Read Judges 21

Again what looks to be right is obviously so wrong. Israel thought to help God in providing wives for the men of Benjamin who were left after the slaughter described in the preceding chapter. What follows is another situation that causes us to blush with shame. God inspires the writer of the book to pen the words of the last verse, which provide the commentary not only on the events of the last several chapter but also provide a commentary on life in the church because it would not let God be king in its life. Where do we stand on this matter? Sing Psalter 138.

April 15 Read Ruth 1

There was a king in Israel and he will rule and set his Son upon the throne. The events of the book of Ruth happened during the time of the Judges. Elimelech and his family sought to avoid the chastisement of God by leaving Bethlehem and going to Moab. While there, it at first seems that all is well. But then God took all the men out of the family, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law. Naomi feels God's hand upon them and with Ruth returns to Israel, the picture of the church with the effects of that chastisement obviously upon her. Sing Psalter 216.

April 16 Read Ruth 2

God's light was not completely gone out from his people. In Bethlehem was Boaz, a very godly man. In Ruth the germ of regeneration was sprouting, bringing forth the effects of grace upon a young woman who cared for her mother-in-law in their distress. Through the events of this chapter God not only gives a redeemer for Naomi and Ruth, but he also gives to us the redeemer, Christ Jesus. Sing Psalter 24.

April 17 Read Ruth 3

We see that Naomi, when brought face to face with their hard condition, remembers that provision that God has provided for those in her plight. This was no accident, for God causes Naomi to remember the laws that would bring a blessing not only to her house but also to all of God's people. The words of this book are not just a nice story, but they are the way of salvation for a beloved people. We must remember this as we read through this short and interesting book. Jehovah provided for them in their distress, and he will provide for all his people.

He will provide the redeemer so that they might live for ever in the heavenly Canaan. Sing Psalter 247.

April 18 Read Ruth 4

First, we see in this chapter the carrying out of the ceremony of the redeemer and the Levirate marriage. There is more, though, than the buying of a piece of property and the giving of a name to Elimelech. As we read through the last verses of the chapter and the book, we can imagine the genealogy continued until the name of Jesus is named. This chapter and book gives to us hope. God's promises are sure, and he will bring to pass what he has promised. He will provide a Redeemer who will give to us the promised land of the new heavens and the new earth. May we look forward to the marriage of Christ and his church and blessedness that will follow. Sing Psalter 368.

April 19 Read I Samuel 1

The book of I Samuel begins the transition from the time of the judges to the time of the kings. It begins with a godly woman going to God in prayer for a covenant child. It is obvious that she believes in the covenant as she dedicates her longed-for infant to the service of Jehovah. The prayer and desire of every godly couple should be that God would use their children in his service. We know that children are an heritage from God. May we ever go to him in prayer with our children's welfare in mind. Sing Psalter 359.

April 20 Read I Samuel 2

Here in this chapter we have contrasts in parenting. Hannah brought up Samuel in the fear of the Lord and sought his welfare in that fear. Those yearly coats showed not only a phsical growth, but also showed a spiritual growth. Eli was a permissive parent and did not discipline his children. The results are evident. Samuel grew up seeking Jehovah in all that he did, while Hophni and Phinehas grew up seeking themselves and their pleasure until God brought death upon them. May we, as parents, learn child-rearing lessons from this chapter of Holy Scripture. Sing Psalter 360.

April 21 Read I Samuel 3

As we read the account of God coming to Samuel, we see that God's word is true, and he will carry out what he has decreed. For a lack of faithfulness Eli's family would be cut off from the priestly office. But reread verse 19. What a beautiful idea is found in the words, "…and did let none of his words fall to the ground." Do we treat God's word as being that precious? Or are we apt to ignore the word that we read or hear proclaimed on the Sabbath Day? God's word is precious, as is testified throughout the Bible, but especially in Psalm 19 and 119. May we cling to them and hold them tightly in our hearts. Sing Psalter 42.

April 22 Read I Samuel 4

The holy things of God are not magic charms. That was the sin of Israel. When they lost the first battle, instead of turning to God in prayer and confession of sin, they turned to a heathen ploy. Sadly, they learned the fallacy of that thinking. God gave them over to their wicked plan, they were defeated in battle, and the ark was captured by heathen. As the news was recounted to Eli, a baby was born. The baby's sad name would remind Israel of their folly. May we never need to name someone or something Ichabod, as that would mean that God's glory would be taken from us. Sing Psalter 65.

April 23 Read I Samuel 5

God would not let his holy things be mocked by the heathen. They, too, would learn as Israel would learn many times in its history that "Jehovah, he is the God." You see the obstinacy of the heathen as numerous times they try to show that their gods were greater than the living God of heaven and earth. Numerous times the heathen gods were brought to naught by Jehovah. Did this cause a confession of sin? As we will see, it did not, as confession of sin is only by the Holy Spirit. Sing Psalter 308.

April 24 Read I Samuel 6

Not only did the heathen have to learn hard lessons, but the Israelites did as well. They too did not follow the rules God had laid down for his holy things. When they did not, the men of Bethshemesh came to a sad end. As we worship the Lord in this day and age, we too must obey the rules for worship that he has decreed in his word. If we do not, then we might as well name our church Ichabod. We must glorify our God in our worship as he has commanded in his word. Sing Psalter 137.

April 25 Read I Samuel 7

For twenty long years the ark remained away from the tabernacle. For twenty long years Israel was reminded of its folly of removing the ark. Israel was still in the time of the judges. The cycle of sin—crying to God, repentance, and a God-sent judge was still happening. God sends to Israel Samuel. He commands them to give up the idolatrous practices in which they were engaging. As he calls them to prayer, Philistia prepares to attack. After a prayer of intercession by Samuel, God saves Israel. Samuel gives to them a perpetual reminder in the stone named Ebenezer, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Is this our confession in our lives? Sing Psalter 204.

April 26 Read I Samuel 8

Everybody else is doing it! If we think this is a modern phenomenon, we are mistaken. That was Israel's reasoning as they asked Samuel to make them a king. They wanted to be like the other nations. In the book of Deuteronomy, God through Moses had warned them against this behavior. Israel did not listen, and asked Samuel to give them a king. We must not be too hard on Israel. We too forget that God is our king and in his laws is freedom. Let us not disregard the freedoms and privileges that we have been graciously given by God our king forever. Sing Psalter 265.

April 27 Read I Samuel 9

We may wonder why the long circuitous way in which God brought Saul to Israel. God's ways are never without purpose. In bringing Saul to his position of being king, God was showing to him that he alone is the "I am that I am." Just as Moses' trip to the wilderness brought him to the burning bush, so the lost asses of Kish brought Saul to Samuel. Saul needed this journey so that he would be without excuse when he fell into sin. Not only Saul needed this journey, but Samuel did as well. He had to remember that God was in control and he would glorify his name in this act. We too must always know and confess that God is God in our lives. Sing Psalter 261.

April 28 Read I Samuel 10

The events of this chapter clearly indicate that God made Saul king of Israel. Of that there can be no doubt. Saul shows that he is a mere man when, frightened by what is happening, he tries to hide from the people and God. Israel must learn that this man would be the authority that would be placed over them. Rebellion was one of the first sins. Rebellion is in everyone's heart. We must learn not to rebel against any authority that God places over us. We need to reread Romans 13 when we act like the men of Belial did at Saul's coronation. Let us obey the fifth commandment, and in obeying all authority, let us obey God. Sing Psalter 89.

April 29 Read I Samuel 11

We need not wonder the place of this incident in the history of God's people. God has decreed all that happens in this earth. What he has decreed is for his people's good and his own glory. While it appears that Saul is being elevated in glory, nothing could be further from the truth. While Israel won a victory in this incident, they still were being oppressed by Philistia. While Saul looks regal in this instance, he will show his true colors as time goes on. What is happening is that God in this incident, as he always does, is caring for the true believers. Let us give thanks for his gracious care over us at all times. Sing Psalter 87.

April 30 Read I Samuel 12

The time of the judges comes to an end with the incident recounted in this chapter. God used the judges to help his people. He always raises up faithful men who have God's glory at heart to care for his people. Samuel reminds the people to fear God and to serve him at all times. He gives to them the sign of the thunder as a reminder that God is sovereign, and that no earthly king can take that power unto himself. After Samuel prays for them again, he commands them that they fear God always. Do we obey this command? Do we bow before the sovereign king of heaven and earth? This we must do in obedience to God. Sing Psalter 65.

May 1 Read I Samuel 13

God was not finished showing Israel that he was their king. The Philistines were not in awe of Israel now that they had a king. They had taken away all of Israel's weapons and decreed that they were not to make any. They also came up to fight against Israel which caused Saul to make his foolish mistake. Saul, in the face of this problem, declares that he does not need God. For this mistake, God would take the kingdom from Saul's family and give it to one after his own heart. We see in this way God was preparing the church to bring forth the Christ from the line of David. May we ever know that to obey is better than sacrifice. May we more than know it, may we obey our sovereign God at all times! Sing Psalter 214.

May 2 Read I Samuel 14

God was not finished teaching Israel the lessons that they had not learned. He was still chastising them for wanting an earthly king. Philistia continued to plague them. Even though Jonathan acted by faith in the incident at the rock, Israel was not living by faith. Saul shows his foolishness in his vow. Israel shows their wickedness in eating meat with the blood still in it, even though that was strictly forbidden by God. Israel and Saul must be brought to Gilboa where God would say, "I am God your king." Sing Psalter 157.

May 3 Read I Samuel 15

Israel had been attacked by the Amalekites in the wilderness. For their treachery against his people, God had decreed their utter destruction. The time was now, but Saul refused to carry out the command. In saving some of the Amalekites alive, Saul further shows the depths of his depravity. Samuel had to show Saul his wickedness in rebelling against God. For this sin the kingdom would be taken from him. We are called to obey God in

all things. Do we carry out this command in every aspect of our daily lives? Sing Psalter 109.

May 4 Read I Samuel 16

From the sad state of affairs as recounted in the last chapter, God takes Samuel to Bethlehem. There was a family there that God had been preparing for this moment even from the time that Jericho was destroyed. The family of which Rahab was a part and the family of which Ruth was a part would now be elevated in Israel. From that family God would take his king. David was not the oldest. He was probably not the strongest at this time. As we will see later, he was definitely the most respected. David was a man after God's own heart. He was that because God had put that heart in him. It would be this man who would be the type of Christ, the conquering king. Sing Psalter 293.

May 5 Read I Samuel 17

What weapon do you employ as you fight the Goliaths of this age? Do you use this world's armaments? Do you arm yourself with the name of the Lord of hosts? Picking the correct weapon is essential in fighting. We must fight the battle of faith all through our lives. As we fight, let us use the weapon chosen by David as well as that which is described in Ephesians 6. Sing Psalter 334.

May 6 Read I Samuel 18

Like Joseph in Egypt, David's spiritual character soon became quite evident in the palace of Saul. Saul knew quickly that David was more spiritual than he. He also quickly could figure out that this was the neighbor who would take the kingdom from him. Once again we see Satan fighting against the seed of the woman in order to prevent Christ from crushing his head. Thanks be to God who gave Christ and therefore to us the victory! Sing Psalter 198.

May 7 Read I Samuel 19

Everything that comes upon us in this life is in God's hands and at his appointed time. David had to learn this lesson. It was becoming very evident that Saul would stop at nothing but killing David. As we saw yesterday, this is Satan fighting against Christ. David knew he would be king, but he had more lessons to learn. He had learned some in the fields, he had learned some in the palace, but now he has to learn some as he flees from Saul. We too have lessons that God teaches us in this life. Are we learning? Sing Psalter 155.

May 8 Read I Samuel 20

Do you seek godly friends, people of God and especially young people of God? Are you looking for friends who will be one with you in the faith? David had such a friend. That friend was the son of his enemy Saul. It is said elsewhere in Scripture that David and Jonathan's love for each other surpassed that of even a husband and a wife. It was a spiritual love that they had. It was a love that caused them to separate because that was God's will for David. We must seek such godly friends, knowing that God will bless only those relationships in this life. Sing Psalter 369.

May 9 Read I Samuel 21

There is much to discover about David's behavior in this chapter. We find him at the house of God. He knows where he must run and from whom he must seek counsel. But then David errs by fleeing to the heathen Philistines. There he could find no rest until God steered him back to Israel. Where do we go for help? Do we seek the proper answer to the question in Psalm 121, or do we seek help from those whom God hates? Let us confess that our help comes from Jehovah, who made the heavens and the earth. In that way we will find blessing in this life. Sing Psalter 347.

May 10 Read I Samuel 22

Even while seeking refuge for his parents in Moab, David could not find refuge there. Once again he is directed to return to Israel where he finds refuge in the caves and dens of the land of his spiritual fathers. Saul shows more of his true character when he has the priests of Jehovah killed. Yes, this was the sentence of God upon Eli's household, but they were the Lord's anointed, and that makes Saul's deed more despicable. Edom hates Jacob, and Doeg is Edom. David shows his true character when he takes Abiathar under his care, feeling responsible for his family's murders. Sing Psalter 227.

May 11 Read I Samuel 23

Once again we see God's care over the man whom he has appointed to lead his people. First, God sends Jonathan to minister and comfort David. You can imagine the tears of love that flowed between these two friends. We do not know what is said except that Jonathan told David that even Saul knew that God would give David the kingdom. Notice the words "strengthened his hand in God." Do we do this for the friends that we have? Are we willing to speak of God to them? Second, God caused the Philistines to draw Saul's attention away from David. God is good, and he surely cares for his people. Sing Psalter 241.

God's Mirror (2)

by Chelsea Kamps

To parents and loved ones

For many, your eyes may have just been opened to the complex world of ED. I hope that this helps you understand and have insight not just to the facts but the thoughts and sickness of one struggling. I know that insight into facts and causes doesn't make a loved one better, but I hope that seeing it through the eyes of a child that has suffered will help.

I have learned from the perspective of a child looking to my parents, during and after my struggle what I needed most from them and my loved ones. Looking back I wish I could take the hurt away from my loved ones. If it affects anyone the most it is parents. As a mother now it hurts deeply to see my child hurt physically. I try so hard to make that hurt go away. When a child struggles with an emotional and spiritual battle the hurt can only be intensified especially because the hurt is not so easy to take away.

I don't have the fix all or all the answers, but I know that God is the ultimate healer and a miraculous God. The best that you can do as a loved one is turn to God and pray. I know my parent's knees were calloused sending prayers on my behalf and I thank them for that. I also know that God is sovereign; he has all control and has a perfect plan. This may seem redundant; how many parents have prayed and God seems silent? God isn't silent; he always works his way in every heart, even in one who is struggling. I can see looking back God's spirit working gently and invisibly in my heart. He never leaves his child; in fact, during the times of struggle his presence is ever closer. "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:5b). He was holding me and he's holding your loved one.

Prayer to God on calloused knees is ultimately the most important thing a loved one or parent can do for a struggling child. Alongside I ask that you exercise patience, tenderness, and love. There are times when patience will be tested and when it would be easier to yell and become frustrated. So when those times come maybe all you can do is love, and tell them that, remind them of your love and God's love. The response may not be what you want, but love, especially God's love, penetrates the heart. Don't be their judge, be their upholder. This doesn't mean that you support their behavior or struggle, and it doesn't mean that you tell them everything they're doing wrong. Odds are they already know it. Instead, make sure they know that you understand that they are struggling and you are there if they need you. Don't expect to have lengthy conversations about their struggle. Many times parents are the last people, young people especially, want to talk to. But when those times come when they want to talk, listen; don't try to fix or have all the answers. Showing understanding and support for them goes a long way. Patience is a hard thing to accomplish especially when the struggle can be so frustrating, and sometimes things get worse before they are better. I don't want you to think you should just sit back and do nothing, especially when things can get physically bad. But, I want loved ones to think beyond impatience and frustration. With plenty of prayer and by God's grace it can make the storm seem a little less threatening from both sides.

To those struggling

From a heart, soul and body that have hurt with the struggle with ED, I want to talk to those girls who are struggling. If I could hug all of you and take the hurt away I would. I know the frustration and also the determination in your struggle. You may be at a point that you don't think there is anything wrong; I was there once too. You may not think you have a problem - that you're just trying to lose a little weight or that you don't know how to handle issues in life any other way. I want you to look at your goal: is it healthy, is it what God wants for you, or is it turning into an obsession, or a way to control or numb? If you recognize yourself in what I have told you so far, it's time to begin dealing with it. This may be difficult. None of us want to say we have a problem, or even more, deal with it; it definitely isn't easy. But facing your problems is taking the right step in the direction of healing and freedom from the bondage of ED and the devil. I'm not going to tell you to snap out of it and just start eating, to stop binging and purging, or stop hurting yourself, because I know it's not that simple or easy.

I know what it feels like to spend day in and day out succumbed to ED. It feels like you're stuck, that your

mind has a mind of its own - it's frustrating. I know that it many times feels like your life wouldn't be in control or organized without the constant need to control your weight, what you're eating or not eating and how many calories each meal contains. You feel that life would be chaos if you didn't exercise for hours daily and burn so many calories at each workout. You feel you would go crazy if you didn't know how much you weighed and how much weight you lost in a week. The image in the mirror is constantly taunting; you'll go to extreme cases to lose any ounce of fat you see. You may struggle with guilt. If you don't get rid of the meal you ate you feel like things will spin out of control. You may feel that if you haven't skipped a meal you'll spend the rest of your day trying to lose those calories. The list could go on and on. I have had those same thoughts and feelings, and I struggled also. I also know that it takes over your life, your thoughts, feelings and actions. Without ED you would be lost.

ED may seem like your friend, but he isn't, he is your worst enemy. He isn't someone you want to spend your life with, and although life may seem like it will fall apart without him, it won't. ED is the devil's best friend and he is working so hard through ED to hurt you. He isn't going to give you what you are trying to grasp for. I know when I struggled I felt in control but had no peace. The devil is not a peacemaker, but he creates chaos. The thoughts and actions may seem so organized to one with ED, but looking at it from the outside, they don't make a lot of sense. And that is all part of what the devil wants when he uses ED. He wants you to feel a false sense of control; he wants you to look to him and yourself. He wants to fool you into listening to him and not God. Sound familiar? The devil has done that from the beginning of time when he told Eve to eat the apple and promised her she would be like God. "And the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4, 5). His ugly fingers are always trying to make us fall for his devices and ways. He wants complete control and he wants to define you and tell who you are. He wants you in complete bondage to him and to be brutally honest, the devil doesn't just want control, he wants your life. He will not stop till he wins.

We each face sin in our lives and the devil's devices to tempt us and make us fall. When you choose to give your life to an ED you are choosing to take the devil's hand. God tells us in his Word that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we are to honor God with our bodies. I Cor. 6: 19-20 The behaviors of an ED are a violation of one of God's direct commands. This is hard to hear, and I didn't want to hear it either, but it isn't meant to bring condemnation. I tell you this and God tells us this to bring a burning hope to your hurting life. You have a God who promises forgiveness, freedom and victory. Knowing that Christ died for your sins and already gave his chosen the victory shows us that true and complete freedom exists.

The devil enjoys placing a mirror in front of you, and wants you to see your image through his eyes. He wants you to believe that you are ugly and imperfect and that only he will give you what you need. His mirror is full of lies and bondage. Now look into God's mirror. His mirror is clean, it's perfect and it's full of truth. He tells you that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. 139:14). He tells you how much you are loved (Eph. 2:4, 5). He tells you that he is always with you (Heb. 13:5), that you have a purpose (Jer. 29:11), and it's absolutely wonderful. He tells you that you have nothing to fear (Psa. 91:4-8). He tells you that you are beautiful! You will be a shining gem in his crown of righteousness; he is polishing and shaping you in this life so that you fit into his place for you in heaven. You may feel dull and tarnished right now, but God is bringing you through this and will bring you out of this and the dirty and ugly spots on that gem will be gone. Throw away the chains of bondage and the mirror the devil has had you stare into, and walk in freedom, holding before you God's mirror. He loves you with an everlasting love and will give you grace to walk in freedom. You are his, and he will not let you go. Cling to his mercy. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psa. 103:17).

It may be difficult to believe that God has given hope to you especially when life is hurting and you don't feel you deserve or believe in God's mercy. But it's time to believe truth. God doesn't give things in our life according to our own merit. We don't deserve anything from God, but God still desires to give us good things and loves us, even when it's hard to feel! No matter what has led you to the point of hopelessness, God has always been there and he loves you.

I know what it is like to flinch at God's touch, to be unsure and not trust in his plan for me. It took me many months surrounded by God's Word and amazing people he placed through a place called Mercy Ministries. I finally had to surrender my control and realize that God was and is completely in control. I wasn't going to find

peace and freedom in an ED or anything else. It took me being fed wholly God's word and having truth spoken daily. The only one who could give me true peace and complete freedom was God. I had built walls; my walls were very high, and I thought that if I built them high enough I wouldn't be hurt and God couldn't touch me. I wanted nothing to do with him in my life, but God's presence and love doesn't have walls. He was constantly holding me, even when I was kicking and screaming and even when I denied him and took the devil's hand. He had already given me freedom when Jesus died and gave all his people the victory. I had to look directly at him and the cross and cling to that alone, not to myself or the devil. I had to see that God was healing me; I had to put my past in his hands and give up what control I thought I had. I had to forgive as he forgave me. I had to kneel with my face in the dirt and give my all for him. Only then could I experience freedom.

It may seem easier said than done, and I know that personally. Complete freedom has been given to us by Jesus Christ, but we won't experience that complete freedom till we reach heaven. The life of a Christian comes with struggles. I had all the confidence in myself that I wouldn't struggle again. Here is where my fault lies; I need to put confidence in God. I realize that I am not insusceptible to the devil because I went to Mercy Ministries and because I went through some hard things at a young age. I am going to struggle daily and my whole life with sin, and with the wounds of sin. I am learning even now of the exhausting spiritual battle. The devil knows my weaknesses and knows when I am vulnerable. It is a tiring fight, but therein lies the key. We need to continue fighting, never give up and give in. We have the assurance that God is always on our side and is fighting the battle for and with us.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now I'm found
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, amazing grace.

The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, amazing grace.

My chains are gone, I've been set free
My God, my Savior has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy reigns
Unending love, amazing grace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The sun forbear to shine
But God who called me here below
Will be forever mine, will be forever mine
You are forever mine.

—Chris Tomlin ❖

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

"In Faithfulness"

by Catherine Kooiker

I want to start off my story with a passage that has meant so much to me throughout my journey. My title is also taken from this passage. It was what I had to remind myself of constantly—these afflictions were given to me, my family, and the church in God's faithfulness to us. "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me. Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according

to thy word unto thy servant" (Psalm 119: 75-76).

I was diagnosed around 5 years of age with asthma. Asthma is a chronic lung disease that causes inflammation and narrowing of the airways. Asthma attacks are often caused by spasms in the bronchi of the lungs. An asthma attack is often triggered by allergens (i.e., dust, molds, and animal dander) or other illnesses. An asthma attack often causes shortness of breath or wheezing due to the restricted movement of air through the inflamed airway. My asthma was greatly influenced by allergens that entered my body.

My family moved from Michigan to Iowa in July 2006. Due to the different allergens in different parts of the country, my asthma was triggered greatly by the allergens in Iowa, especially with fall approaching right after we moved. Starting already in August, I was in and out of the hospital constantly during the fall. If I recall correctly, I was in and out of the hospital six times in three months, oftentimes for weeks at a time.

In January 2007 I was in the hospital for a full month with asthma, pneumonia, and CMV. With this hospitalization, I was in the ICU for some time. I was not getting better but declining, so they had to look into my lungs with a bronchoscope. This is a minor outpatient procedure. However, for me it was a major life-threatening procedure because of my condition. My family was called to my bedside. We are called to be ready for the Lord to take us to live with him. Our sinful human nature causes us not to want to leave this earth; it is hard to be prepared to die. I didn't realize how unprepared I was to die until this time came. I had to say my good-byes to my husband, my kids, and our families. It was so hard to leave my loved ones in the Lord's hands. Meanwhile, that was my only comfort in going into surgery the next morning. The Lord gave me the peace that passes all understanding, which is spoken of in Philippians 4:7, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Through that incident the Lord worked greatly in my heart. At that time I did not know I would be battling many more hospitalizations and other moments of having to say good-bye. This peace worked in my heart strength so that I could endure whatever was to come to pass. I knew and was convinced that the Lord would take care of my family. This gave me strength to go forward that moment, as well as for many more moments that were yet to come. I have had many hospitalizations since—too many to count.

The tightening of my chest, the feeling of a rubber band tightening and squeezing the air out of me, and the pain associated with both was terrible. My chest would hurt so badly. My ribs hurt for weeks on end. Once the doctors intubated me without any sedation. All I heard was, "You have to let us do this or you will die." In the meantime I had to try to relax; otherwise everything would be worse. Another time I heard the nurses say "We're losing her."

It is amazing how when one is dying, it is possible to hear until the very end. I know from experience. When doctors and nurses would ask me to respond, I could hear them, but I could not move or talk. As much as my brain was telling me to respond, it just wouldn't happen.

Those are scary moments to us since we have a sinful human nature. However, during these times, the Lord made it so that I could not do anything except pray. I would lie there while the doctors were trying desperately to keep me breathing, praying for my family. I just prayed for the Lord to be with them and to take care of them.

The allergens that entered my system caused severe asthma attacks. The doctors had to put me on prednisone (corticosteroid) to help reduce inflammation and therefore to help me breathe better. The prednisone helped with inflammation, which helped to increase the airflow and decrease the wheezing. The prednisone saved my life; however, in many ways it took my life.

There are so many side effects associated with prednisone, especially with being on high doses of it for a prolonged period of time. I went from taking a couple of inhalers and pills a day to daily nebulizers and anywhere from 20-30 pills a day. Prednisone causes increased appetite that is hard to control. It is a must-have appetite. Prednisone also causes fluid retention, which also is associated with the increase in weight that most experience.

I gained 200 pounds on prednisone over the years, although most of it was put on quite suddenly. I would gain 10 pounds a week at times. It was very hard to see my body increase that much. The scale kept going up, and I did not know if and when it would stop. I crept up to over 400 pounds. Not many can imagine that.

With the weight gain came immobility. I came close to not being able to get out of bed. It took so much effort even to roll onto my side in bed. I couldn't clip my toe nails, clean myself, or put my socks on.

Prednisone also caused hypertension, low potassium levels, blood clots (deep vein thrombosis x 3), pulmonary embolism, sleeplessness, restlessness, gastric reflux disease (GERD), and steroid-induced diabetes. Prednisone can have an effect on your bones and cause osteoporosis, so I had to take Fosamax to prevent that.

Prednisone suppresses your immune system. Be-

cause my immune system was suppressed, I caught every "bug" out there, which in most cases required hospitalization again.

Prednisone also affects your muscles. It caused the muscles of my bladder not to function correctly, so that I was unable to urinate. I needed to have an indwelling catheter. Prednisone affected so much that it is hard even to think of all the side effects I have experienced.

In a way, I think that my burdens were greater burdens for my husband because he had so much to deal with. Kerwen would try to juggle being with me, the boys, and at work. Being the one that was ill, I couldn't think about anything else besides fighting to stay alive. My brain would not allow me to think of anything else: it was consumed with just trying to breathe. When one is so ill, your body shuts down and does only what is absolutely necessary.

The last couple of years, I would be hospitalized for asthma. I would feel very short of breath, at times not being able to breathe, but many times my oxygen would be okay and there was not much wheezing. However, I was not moving much air. When the doctor would listen to my lungs, he would not hear wheezing. He would just not hear much air movement. It came to it that I would enter the hospital fairly stable, but then suddenly could not breathe. The doctors ended up having to put me on the ventilator several times.

About a year and a half ago, I was placed on the ventilator for the first time, and I stayed on it for nine days. Even after getting off the ventilator it took me several days to come around, due to the sedation medication staying in my system. How hard that had to be for those staying by my bedside waiting for my eyes to open!

After being on the ventilator a long time, I was unable to talk. It takes quite awhile to get your voice back. So, I would try to whisper to Kerwen, mom, nurses, and the doctors. We'll just say they were not good at reading lips. I was off the ventilator, but I was unable to move my arms, legs, or anything, so I could not even write anything down for them. I was so frustrated with them because it was so difficult to communicate my needs for a time.

I was helpless. I came off the ventilator, but I ended up with encephalopathy. Encephalopathy is a disorder or disease of the brain. It is not a single disease, but a syndrome of brain dysfunction caused by severe illnesses. My brain had to be retrained on how to comb my hair, eat, sit up, stand up, and walk. I really had to relearn everything. I had to have rehab for two weeks after being in the hospital for three weeks. I did not know how much I would get back. However, every day I made huge strides. The first try at sitting up, I had five therapists holding me up. The first time I stood up, the therapist was holding me up with a gait belt and I was holding onto the parallel bars. That occurred at the beginning of the week, and by the end of the week I started walking a little bit with help of special walkers.

Since that hospitalization, I had several other hospitalizations during which I ended up on the ventilator as well, usually for just a short time, but nonetheless on the ventilator. In April 2011, I ended up in the hospital. I was being treated for an asthma attack again. I would be in ICU on the ventilator, then transferred out of ICU in stable condition, only to be transferred back to ICU that same day or the next to be placed back on the ventilator. This had happened before as well, but it is quite unusual. My pulmonary specialist, along with a pulmonary specialist at Mayo Clinic started thinking that something else besides asthma was going on.

After another visit to Mayo Clinic in March, they began wondering about my vocal cords. When I was hospitalized again in April, the doctors conferred and decided that it was probably vocal cord dysfunction and not asthma causing all the problems. In April they took extreme measures and did a tracheotomy, so that even if there is paralysis of my vocal cords, I can still breathe through my trach.

Little did we know that this would be the answer to our prayers. The trach has done wonders for my health. For the first time in five years, I was able to get off prednisone. I have been able to breathe without the help of prednisone. I have been able to lose weight (100 pounds in 5 months). I have been able to get off a few other medications. I no longer have to have insulin for diabetes. I am becoming more active. I have been able to stay home and out of the hospital. Our family has been able to stay together. I have been able to attend church again lately, even though it is only once a Sunday because I do not have full strength yet. Nevertheless, it has been such a blessing to be able to go up to the house of the Lord again on the Sabbath day and to have communion of saints.

There were a couple of things that I really struggled with. First, I did not understand why the Lord kept me away from his house so long. This was so difficult for me. I desired so much to be able to go to the Lord's house on Sunday, but time and again this was taken away from me. There were times when it was many months before I could go to church. Then the Lord would bring me up into his house once and then take it away again for many more months. I still struggle with this and often wonder why. However, I do know the Lord has worked in me

such a desire to be in his house that I pray will never go away. I am thankful for the means of DVDs, internet, and radio so that even if I am at home or in the hospital, I am able to here God's word preached by Protestant Reformed ministers and missionaries.

Another tough struggle was that I was unable to perform my duties as a wife and mother. For quite some time God has taken away my husband's wife and my children's mother. I tried to show God's faithfulness and instruct the boys when I was able, but most of that was taken out of my hands. I was too sick to perform the basic duties of tucking children in bed, getting them ready for school, doing homework with them, and playing with them. I was unable to perform the duties of a wife. I wasn't able to tend to the house, dishes, laundry, or groceries. My husband ended up caring for me. I am thankful the Lord has given me a measure of recovery to start doing the duties of a mother and wife once again.

I want to go into what I have learned from all this. First and foremost, God is good. He has a perfect plan in our lives. He will care for us both body and soul. He has picked me up when I have fallen and could go no more. God has carried me and my family through this. God's promises are sure. They always have been and they always will be. God has brought me and my family much closer to him. I have felt closeness to God that I have never felt before. God is omnipresent. He never forsakes or leaves me. Thanks be to God!

Secondly, I learned not to question the "what ifs". We do not always know what is right. However, we do what we think is the way in which the Lord wants to lead us. It is not right to question the "what ifs," because the Lord willed for everything to happen at a certain time in our lives. All things are in God's hands. Even before we were born, he had our life planned. Everything in his perfect plan for our lives must come to pass for our place to be prepared in glory with him.

God also made it known to me that there were many others watching how I dealt with my affliction. I had to deal with it in a manner that others around me could see that I was a child of God. God used me to be a witness to fellow patients, family, nurses, doctors, and therapists. What a humbling thought! I hope and pray that God uses me and my affliction to help others in their afflictions. What a weak means to fulfill his will!

God has also taught me to look at others differently. I am obese, and what people say and even the looks on the street hurt so much. I look at overweight people differently now. Many of them can't help being heavy. There are many underlying causes that we do not know. I ask that you all please not be judgmental. God has given each and every one of us different situations in life. Many of those situations are unknown to others. Instead of looking at a person's appearance, look into the heart. Many whose outward appearance is not perfect or even repulsive may have a heart that is beautiful. Many times it is the ones who are less than perfect from an earthly standpoint who have hearts that shine. It is someone's heart that makes them beautiful. Our actions come from the heart. If our heart is beautiful, then our actions will glorify God.

Another important lesson that God has taught me and my family is to treasure one another. Nothing on this earth matters. It will all be taken away. When I was ill, I wanted to do things as a family. The Lord did allow us to have many special moments together. I wanted to leave my husband and boys with memories of us together. We had several vacations, including trips to Wisconsin Dells, Colorado, and Yellowstone. These were trips full of memories that we will always treasure. I encourage everybody to take time as a family. Show the love of Christ to one another first in your own family.

The Lord has also taught us to number our days. It became very real to me that we do not know what the next moment will bring. Not tomorrow or next week, but today, set your heart on wisdom's ways. Take time to have fellowship with God. Pray and study his word. There is nothing that will bring more happiness to your heart. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom," Psalm 90:12.

Another significant lesson God taught me was that I learned to rely on him. Our sinful human nature wants to try to fix everything ourselves. I was placed flat on my back. I could only look up. God is my help. It is to God that I have to go to in affliction. It is God who gives me the grace that I need to bear the affliction that he has sent me. God's grace is sufficient. It is not sufficient for the next five years, but it is sufficient for the moment. That is why we have to live life a moment at a time. There were many times that I could not even live life a day at a time. We do not know what God has in store for us. However, we do know that he will give us grace to bear that moment.

Through undergoing severe affliction, the Lord has taught me to encourage and pray for others in affliction. I now know how much it means to get the encouraging words, cards, phone calls, emails, etc. from fellow saints. I cannot express how much these were appreciated. It has opened my eyes to make sure that I encourage others that are in deep affliction. The truth that we are all one

body really impressed itself on me. I never felt as if I was bearing this affliction alone. I felt that the whole body of Christ was carrying it with me. Thank you all! This affliction has helped me more fully to understand what others who are in severe affliction are going through. I pray that the Lord will use my affliction as a means that will help others to bear their affliction as well. I rest assured that he will.

God is good. God sends us affliction. We must be thankful to God for these afflictions and his care of us in them. These afflictions are another step in our earthly life. They keep us on the straight and narrow pathway. They bring us one step closer to the place now being prepared for us in heaven. They are shaping and molding us so that we will be fit for our place in heaven. God has created heaven with all of his children in mind. We each have our own specific place. The puzzle can't be complete until each piece, perfectly shaped and molded, has taken its place. May the puzzle be complete soon! I can't wait for that day of no sin, suffering, and pain, and to be reunited with all of God's children in heaven. What a glorious day that will be! Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! ❖

Catherine is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Update from the Federation Board

by Jonathan Langerak, Jr.

Greetings once again from the Fed Board.

Our update in the January issue of the *Beacon Lights* informed you of the identity, purpose, and membership of the Fed Board, and gave a preview of our duties and work for this year. This second update is to inform you of the work of the Fed Board thus far.

First, the work of the Fed Board has been revision of the Constitution of the Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee and of the Convention Funding Policy. The Constitution of the PRSC has been updated, especially with regard to the criteria given in that document for what an application for the PR Scholarship must include. For example, the requirement that the essay not exceed 300 words has been changed so that the length is now to be left to the discretion of the committee. Changes were also made concerning how members are replaced and how the PRSC may make constitutional changes in future.

Revision was made as well to the Convention Funding Policy, which governs how and in what amounts funds are transacted between the Fed Board and the host church for each year's convention. The changes made were of a clarifying nature: sharpening the language describing the amount of money the host church may expect to receive, and delineating a clear process of how those funds are to be dispensed. A copy of this new policy was sent to all the churches of our Federation.

Second, the Fed Board's work has included beginning work on forming a standing committee whose duties it will be to 1) help the host church locate a camp for the convention, and 2) provide advice and assistance to the host church on all the aspects of planning and operating a convention. Details are still very much in the working-out stage, and there is still quite a bit of work to be done, but the Fed Board is excited by the prospect that such a committee presents in terms both of simplifying the process of camp location—perhaps by working out a rotating schedule of returning to certain camps that have worked well in the past—and of drawing upon the considerable expertise of those who have steered conventions in the past to assist host churches in the future.

Third, the Fed Board has overseen changes to the *Beacon Lights* staff. Especially noteworthy is that after many faithful years as willing, competent, and dedicated Editor-in-Chief of the *Beacon Lights*, John Huizenga has resigned. We take this opportunity to thank John for his zealous labors on behalf of the *Beacon Lights* and wish him God's blessing in his home and in his teaching duties at Trinity Christian High School in Northwest Iowa.

Replacing John as Editor-in-Chief is Mr. Mark Hoeksema of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan. Mark serves as copy editor for the Reformed Free Publishing Association, a post he has filled with distinction for many years, and will bring to the *Beacon Lights* prodigious editing experience and ability fueled by a love of the Reformed truth. We welcome the chance to work with him on *Beacon Lights*.

Finally, the Fed Board is pleased to announce the 2012 Young People's Convention, hosted by Hope PRC in Walker, Michigan. Further information can be found on the back cover advertisements of *Beacon Lights*, beginning with January 2012.

The Fed Board is keenly aware of our inability to execute our labors without the grace and Spirit of God our Father. We know that God is pleased to use the prayers of his people to build up his kingdom causes. We covet your prayers as we strive to lead the Young People's Federation in being distinctly Reformed—and especially Protestant Reformed—even in their youth, to the glory of God alone and the strengthening of the church of the future for the battle of faith that is our calling and life.

In Christ, for the Fed Board,
Jonathan Langerak, Jr., President ❖

Jonathan is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

Church News

BAPTISMS

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body..." I Cor. 12:13

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Seth Michael, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason VanOostenbrugge—Faith, MI

Liam Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Key—Grandville, MI

Selah Esther, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David Mahtani—Providence, MI

Reeve Wesley, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan Schipper—Providence, MI

Charlotte Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jared Langerak—Southeast, MI

Elsie Leann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin Kuiper—Southwest, MI

Baylah Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brian TenBrock—Southwest, MI

Clara Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Pete Cnossen—Southwest, MI/Pittsburgh, PA

Isaac Jay, son of Mr. & Mrs. Phil Steenwyk—Trinity, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses." I Tim. 6:13

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

David Terpstra—Crete, IL

Joshua Griess—Loveland, CO

Darren Heystek—Lynden, WA

Joelle DeBoer—Lynden, WA

Jeanetta DeBoer—Lynden, WA

MARRIAGES

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh." Gen. 2:24

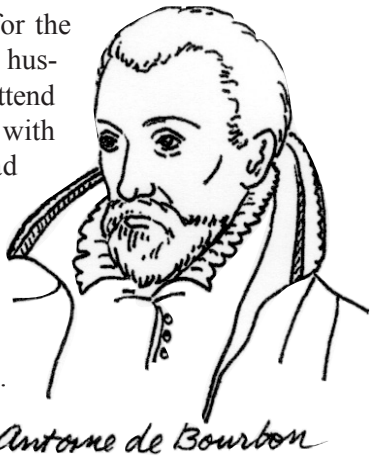
United in the bond of holy matrimony were:

Mr. Brad Gritters and Miss Amanda Vugteveen—Hudsonville, MI

A Royal House (3)

How matters may change in the affairs of men and in the providence of God. Jeanne d'Albret's kingdom, and all French Huguenots, were in serious danger. The new sixteen-year-old king of France, Francis II, had almost been overthrown. Some Huguenots had been involved in the plot. Now the powerful Catholic men in the court of the young king were determined to use this opportunity to destroy all Hugeunots and the Reformed faith once and for all. In only a few days—Christmas Day, 1560 to be exact—anyone who refused to be Catholic could be legally killed. Victory was in their grasp! But all days are in the hand of the Lord. The young king suddenly became sick and died on December 9. He died before any harm could come to anyone. The plan could not be carried out. This plot, too, had failed.

In Jeanne's great distress over these events, she had prayed to God. On Christmas Day, 1560, instead of the Reformed faith being destroyed, Jeanne was at a council where she openly confessed her faith in those Reformed doctrines. No longer would she merely help the Huguenots, now she would be one of them. Things had changed for Jeanne, the Queen of Navarre.



But things had changed for the queen in other ways, too. Her husband, Antoine, had refused to attend any sort of Catholic worship with Jeanne all the while they had been married. Now, after being arrested for his possible involvement in the plan to overthrow young Francis II, Antoine had been persuaded to return to the Catholic faith. He was on the side of the Catholic party now. He had friends in the Catholic French court. Jeanne and Antoine were no longer one in belief. It was a difficult time for the queen.

Antoine ordered her to join him in Paris and bring ten-year-old Henry along. Antoine wanted to persuade her to become Catholic, even as he had been persuaded himself. She was reluctant to go. She needed to stay in the castle at Pau and attend to matters of government there. Navarre needed her. But finally she knew she must go. She was a queen, but he was a king. And, being older than his brother Louis, Antoine was actually in the blood line closest to the throne of France. She joined him there.

Both Antoine and the very Roman Catholic Queen Mother of France tried to persuade Jeanne to attend a Catholic mass. Jeanne would not budge. Henry dearly loved his mother, and he refused to go to mass as well. Jeanne could stay in Paris no longer. There was no more point to her visit, and there was danger mounting for her besides.

She bid farewell to her husband. Henry was ordered to stay behind with his father, but Jeanne made him promise to never go to a Catholic mass. It was a difficult, tearful, good-bye.

She did not know it would be her final good-bye to her husband. The walls of the royal house at Pau would never see him return again.

Find the underlined words in the puzzle below:

"Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy. The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head. The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil: so do stripes the inward parts of the belly. The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Proverbs 20:28–21:1).

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Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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by Connie Meyer

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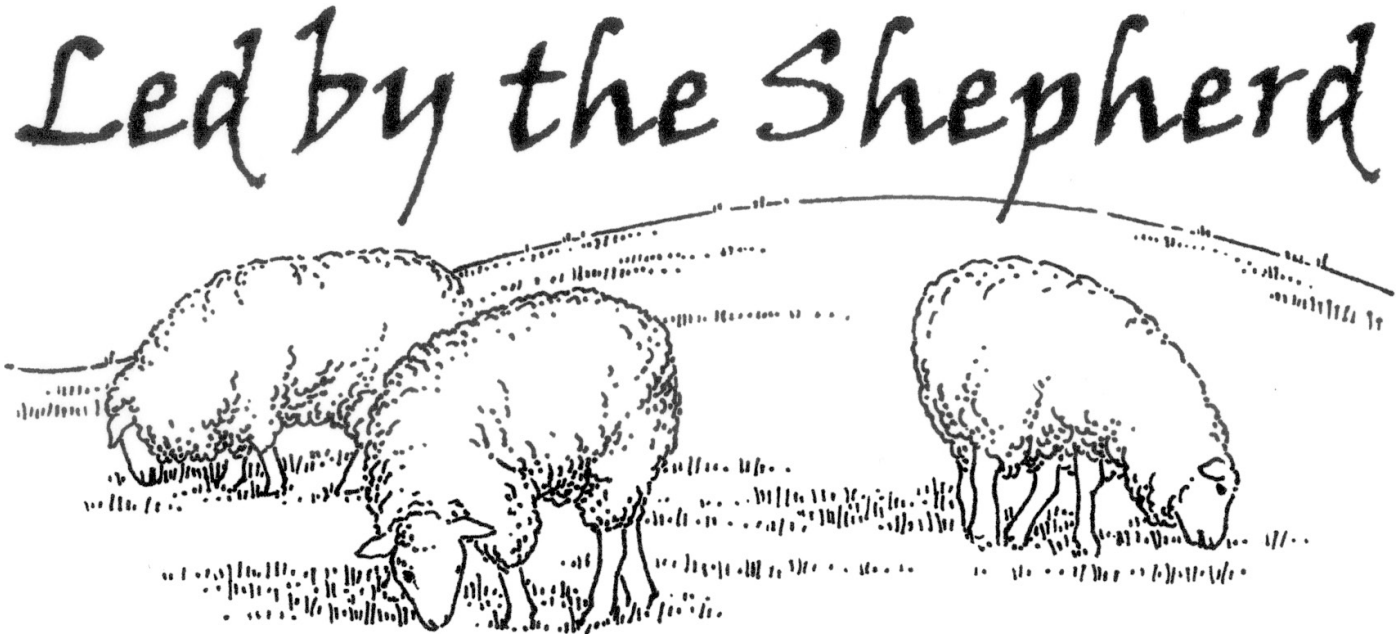
2012 Young People's Convention

August 13-17



The Shepherd
The Sheep
The Blessed Relationship

Michindoh Conference Center
Hillsdale, Michigan
www.campmichindoh.org

Hope PRC Walker, Michigan

Check out the convention website at prcconvention.com