Beacon Lights

Magazine of the Protestant Reformed Young People

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Strangers and Sojourners: Looking

Strangers and sojourners are lookers. You, young people, are lookers, along with all God's people.

So scripture describes us.

This makes sense. If we are strangers and sojourners, we look for something beyond the here and now. We have a goal, something to which we look forward, something we seek and anticipate. That goal is heaven.

The scriptural models of looking are the patriarchs, especially Abraham, who is singled out in Hebrews 11:8–16. We do well to attend to the looking of this hero of faith, because it instructs us concerning our pilgrim life.

Abraham had a good life in the region of Mesopotamia. It was good in a material sense. Abraham was prosperous, even wealthy. He was surrounded by his family, and a member of the church as it existed in that day and in that place. Scripture implies this in Hebrews 11:15 when it speaks of the country to which he could have returned after being called by God to depart. If his abode and his life were not prosperous and pleasant, why would he have wanted to return? Yes, for Abraham everything was good.

Then God turned his world upside down by calling him to leave his comfortable life and to go to an unknown land that God would show him (Gen. 11:8).

This brings into focus a sharp contrast between the seen and the unseen, between the here and now

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and the future, between the earthly and the heavenly (for Canaan, Abraham's ultimate destination, was a picture of heaven).

Let's pause here to drive home this contrast by making application to ourselves.

Young people, let's be honest: we have it pretty good, don't we? We live in a time of economic prosperity, which means that we have comfortable lives. We have plenty to eat, and we don't have to worry about where our next meal is coming from. We live in decent houses—palaces in comparison to the dwellings of many throughout the world. We wear respectable clothes and often the latest and greatest styles. Most of us probably drive adequate cars to school and to work. In short, our lives are affluent and quite predictable, so much so that often we run the danger of having our priorities backwards by looking for the seen and by seeking what is earthly instead of looking for the unseen and seeking what is heavenly.

Against this background, suppose that I came to you and said, "Rent a truck, pack up your belongings, and head south." Besides thinking that I have a few loose screws, you would probably respond, "What do you mean, head south? Where? And exactly why should I do this?" Suppose further that I answer,"I'll tell you when you get there. And you must go because someday you will own your destination."

Now you are walking in Abraham's shoes, according to Hebrews 11:8: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." Even after he arrived in Canaan, God's promise to give him the land was not fulfilled in his lifetime, for he was never anything but a stranger and a sojourner: "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [tents] with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise" (Heb. 11:9).

What would you do if you were confronted with such a situation? You must make a choice, you know; that is unavoidable. You must choose between the earthly and the heavenly, between the present and the future. You can't have it both ways, for the two are mutually exclusive.

Abraham had to make a choice too. It would be understandable if he chose the earthly option. He could see what he had in Ur of the Chaldees, for that was the here and now; he could see the country in which he lived and prospered. How tempting it must have been to make this choice! Speaking of the patriarchs, scripture points to this reality in Hebrews 11:15: "And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." In contrast, the other option he could not see. When he left Ur he did not even know where he was going. All he had was a promise that eventually Canaan would be his, and even that promise never came true for him personally, but only for his descendants hundreds of years later. Hebrews 11:13 teaches that the patriarchs all died in faith, "not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off." All they had was a distant glimmering of their fulfillment on the far horizon of history.

Yet Abraham made the right choice. He chose the path of obedience to God's command and the life of a stranger and sojourner. From a purely earthly viewpoint his choice was not logical; it was not even reasonable, and certainly not wise. But choose he did. What was the reason? Hebrews 11:10 answers, "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." He chose the permanent over the temporary, the divine architect and builder over the works of sinful man. How could he do this? Hebrews 11 says, "By faith." He received from God the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8), and in the power of that faith he walked as a stranger and sojourner, desiring a better, that is, a heavenly country (Heb. 11:16).

Abraham chose his goal. Remember: life always has a goal, as we have pointed out on numerous occasions. It is in the very nature of strangers and sojourners that they are going somewhere. Their pilgrimage has a destination, for they are only travelers in this world, passing through on their way to the heavenly country that is theirs through the finished work of Christ. They are lookers; they cannot see their goal now, but they await it and expect it, scanning the heavens for a glimpse of their future blessedness.

Heaven is the end of their journey. We learn from 2 Peter 3:12–14 that they are those who are "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." Again, "We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Because we "look for such things," we must be diligent that we will be found of God in peace, without spot, and blameless. Titus 2:13

instructs us that we are to live as God's people in the world, "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Finally, when Jesus in Luke 21 speaks of the signs of the end times, he admonishes that "when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." For that day we with Abraham long with anticipation, for then we will no longer look for the city that has foundations. It will be ours!

Much more could be said about heaven. Originally I intended to write at some length on this important subject of the goal of strangers and sojourners. Then I heard that Rev. Garrett Eriks of Hudsonville PR Church preached a series of well-received sermons on heaven. He has graciously consented to adapt these sermons for *Beacon Lights*. Therefore the next three issues of the magazine will include guest editorials on heaven by Rev. Eriks.

Ask Schuyler

Question for Schuyler

Dear Schuyler,

What are "prayer circles"? I have heard of entire congregations getting handed a book on it. It seems to be growing in groups that I thought were otherwise basically conservative. I heard it was even used and promoted at a True Woman Conference about a year ago.[1] What is its appeal? Should Reformed Christians be concerned about this idea and why?

Response

The idea of Prayer Circles was popularized by a recent book called *The Circle Maker*[2] by Mark Batterson of National Community Church, Washington, D.C. Do not be fooled into thinking that *The Circle Maker*, with the prayer circles spawned by it, is a new technique from the Bible on how to pray more effectively. The first red flag this book presents to the discerning reader is the identity of the Circle Maker. He is not an Old Testament or New Testament saint, but a legendary Jewish character from the Talmud. The Talmud is a collection of rabbinical writings collected between AD 200–500, consisting of two main parts, the Mishna and Gemara. They are the unbelieving Jewish oral traditions and rabbinical interpretations of the Old Testament.

Wikipedia describes the Circle Maker, a man called Honi from the Mishna:

> On one occasion when God did not send rain well into the winter (in the geographic regions of Israel, it rains mainly in the winter), he drew a circle in the dust, stood inside it, and informed God that he would not move until it rained. When it began to drizzle, Honi told God that he was not satisfied and expected more rain; it then began to pour. He explained that he wanted a calm rain, at which point the rain calmed to a normal rain.
>
> He was almost put into *cherem* (excommunication) for the above incident in which he showed "dishonor" to God. However, Shimon ben Shetach, the brother of Queen Shlomtzion, excused him, saying that he was Honi and had a special relationship with God.[3]

That really should be all the discerning Christian needs to know about the book and the prayer circle phenomenon in order to reject it. Do we need to learn new prayer techniques from unbelieving, possibly legendary, Jewish figures, when we have the completed scriptures? When the disciples asked Jesus how they should pray, he did not direct them to draw circles or pray like Honi the Circle Maker.

The technique espoused by Mark Batterson is

1 Kimberly Wagner, "We're In A State of Spiritual Emergency!," http://www.truewoman.com/?id=2250 (accessed March 22, 2014).

2 Mark Batterson, The Circle Maker: *Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

3 Honi ha-M'agel, *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honi_HaM%27agel (accessed March 22, 2014).

quite simple, and wicked. He advises people to draw a circle, either by marking a circle with chalk or by visualizing it. Standing in the circle, one should make prayers. Batterson suggests big, bold, audacious prayers, like the prayers of Honi, who would not take no for an answer. Another possibility is to walk around something that one wants to have, or that one wants to protect, or that one wants to devote to God. That is another way to "make a circle." Batterson makes circles around his wife, his children, and his church. He advises his readers to draw prayer circles around their family, job, problems, and goals.

Batterson begins outside the Bible with Honi. That is his first mistake. Then he compounds his error by applying the Honi principle to actual biblical events. It will come as no surprise that Batterson appeals to Joshua 6, according to which the Israelites marched around Jericho seven times before it fell. Identify your Jericho, that obstacle in your life. March around it while you pray. This is a shameful misuse of scripture.

Batterson tries to distance himself from the Prosperity Gospel preachers, but he sounds like them. "I have no idea what your financial situation is, but I do know this. If you give beyond your ability, God will bless you beyond your ability. God wants to bless you thirty, sixty, hundredfold." He even encourages us to visualize what we desire before we pray for it, which sounds very much like "Name-It-And-Claim-It" theology.

The appeal of this book is quite simple. Prayer is hard; any book that offers a quick way to "prayer success" is appealing to our flesh. But prayer circling is simply a wicked attempt to manipulate God. We are his children; he knows what we need, and he has promised to provide it. Let us be content to learn from *the Bible alone* how we must pray. In addition, we have excellent instruction to pray in our circles: we have the Heidelberg Catechism, especially Lord's Days 45–52; and if you would like a good, Reformed book on prayer, I recommend *When You Pray*, by Herman Hanko or *In The Sanctuary*, by Herman Hoeksema.

—Schuyler

Schuyler would like more of your questions. Please submit them to editor@beaconlights.org.

Christian Living — Abraham Kuyper

Implications of Public Confession

II

A Child's Confession of His Lord

"Make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers." Ezra 10:11

Public confession of your faith must take place between your baptism and your approach to the holy supper. That confession is a unique and important event because it represents the time when you rise in the assembly of believers and publicly assert that you desire to be one of them. It is also true that in that sense public confession is entirely necessary and perfectly appropriate. It is an event in your life, and is an important one. But that event should by no means suggest that it is your first confession, or that it is to be your last.

Have you ever heard the expressions: "I will make my confession next year," or, "I made my confession three years ago"? Such statements ought not to be made. They betray an improper attitude, for they suggest that public confession is a milestone which, once it has been passed, can conveniently be forgotten. They are expressions that seem to imply that the young man or woman who has not yet committed himself to the event of public confession cannot yet be held responsible for the moral implications involved in that event. They suggest also that he who has "made his confession" is thereby absolved of all responsibility in the matter.

That attitude is quite wrong. Confession is a lifelong matter. Responsibility for it begins early and never ceases. One's confession should be actively expressed each time one observes that Satan's voice and strength and machinations are being employed

against that Savior.

Indeed, confession begins early. It comes to expression in the schoolboy who hears his Jesus insulted by one of his associates. He objects to the insult. He simply refuses to be told such things. His fellows tease him and mock him, but even though he is buffeted and beaten, he perseveres in his confession. Such occasions are presented to children—in school, on the streets, at their games—and they should rise to them. Baptized children must be Jesus' children, and must be indignant when any disparage the Savior they love. Confession begins as early as that, and those early confessions sometimes cost more of sacrifice and of tears than does the public confession in the church.

Unfortunately there are also indifferent children. There are children who are incapable of a righteous indignation. There is also that other, most unbearable type—those who always want to be teaching others, and who frequently do so by means of big words they themselves do not comprehend. Such practices represent no true confession, naturally, but only arrogance and pride. If these young Pharisees could, they would parade through the streets wearing their minister's wing collar and white necktie. We are not rising to the defense of these.

But the truth remains that a young child should be filled with childlike zeal for Jesus; he should bow before Jesus' name; he should foster reverence and respect in his heart for his Savior. Knowing that he belongs to Jesus, he may not be passive and indifferent when he hears his fellows reproach his Master. A good child allows no one to say anything disparaging about his own father or mother. And every child can and must know that Jesus said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me." Vaunted pedantry becomes no child, but love and ardor and zeal for Immanuel do. He must rise to defend the honor of his Jesus, and he must do it with an unwavering voice, with a flush of indignation in his cheeks, and with a sparkle in his eye. That is the true and natural way in which a baptized child confesses his Lord.

Fathers and mothers must augment that kind of confession in their children. None can be as loyal as a child, none as heroic, none as susceptible to indignation. Unfortunately all parents do not observe that, and do not assist their children in a constant confessing. Father, well, he once "made his confession." And mother "attends communion," but for the rest, she seems to take Jesus for granted.

If that is your attitude, parents, how will your child ever learn to confess? You know he must be encouraged to persist in making his confession constant. You know how hard it is for him to do that. Nothing hurts a child quite as much as to be laughed at by his fellows. There is quick justice in the world of children. They make their verdicts, pass sentences, and enforce them. Sometimes they enforce them by teasing, sometimes by vexing, and sometimes by coming directly to blows.

Your child needs encouragement. Stop to appreciate his situation. He leaves home to make contact with the world, and does so with the sure conviction that Jesus is supreme always and everywhere. Then he learns it is exactly because of his conviction that he is to be called into court by his fellows. That awareness shocks him and fills him with fear and temerity. If in that crisis you fail to sustain him by your love and your prayers, it is most likely that when he next hears his Jesus insulted, he will be less courageous in rallying to the defense. Later he will say nothing, and finally he will join with his comrades in laughing at some other boy.

Hence parents and teachers have a weighty responsibility in this matter. It would be quite appropriate if catechism classes and sermons were made more emphatically encouraging to young confessors. Do not forget that courage is a singular quality. Once it has gone, it seldom returns. Yet it is a noble quality of the soul, and without it there can be no true confession.

Here is a young man who has become twenty years of age. He has never risen to defend his Lord, has never by his actions testified for him, and has never sacrificed for Jesus. Now, having almost attained the legal age of maturity, he is accepted by his pastor, and he says yes before the congregation. He has "made his confession." But who would dare to call that a confession what obviously was a mere formal observance of a custom! No heroic courage entered into it, unless it was the courage to defy the embarrassment of rising before so large a group of people. And of genuine ardor, of heartfelt zeal, there was nothing at all.

Indeed, no one ever truly confessed whose experience as a child and as a youth was not characterized by frequent confessions of his Lord. He must have been previously mocked, despised, blasphemed, beaten, perhaps. He must have persevered

courageously in spite of these, being motivated solely by his love for and his loyalty to Jesus. His public confession then represents a public expression of what he has long fostered in his heart. This is the true confession of every young man and of every young woman. A young woman too, although manifesting it less drastically than a young man, should be full of courage, of loyalty, and of love, and should never allow herself to deny her Jesus.

It is to be regretted that many parents do not fully appreciate the fact that their children should be constantly confessing their Savior. Such parents have their children baptized and accepted by the church. They send them to school, to catechism classes, and to church. But they fail to appreciate that their children should be educated to become heroes and heroines of Jesus, and that unless they become such, their confession will be merely formal and illusory. These parents fail to respond to Ezra's dictum to Israel: "Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure; and separate yourselves from the people of the land."

Parents who fail to respond to that plea do not appreciate the fact that the service of the Lord involves a holy warfare, and that new recruits must constantly be trained and qualified for that conflict. Yet that is the situation. After paradise God put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. That combat continues from one generation to another. One generation passes away, and another rises in its place, but the holy war for the Son of God against his enemy must be fought from epoch to epoch.

For that reason, parents, the fact that you yourselves, as loyal servants, are fighting in that conflict does not suffice. You must also prepare your children for combat, must fit them out in suitable armor, must drill them, and, above all, you must inspire in them an unwavering loyalty to the Lord's banner and an unquenchable ardor for his holy name.

You say your child does not oppose the kingdom. But that is not enough. True confessing demands a positive attitude. He accompanies you in battle, does he? But he must take the initiative. The fact that he imitates your words and actions does not prove his personal valor. Remember that even a child, though he is but one in a world of others, must be the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

How foolish it is then to say to yourself, "I think my child will make his confession when he reaches maturity." Confession is a daily matter. It should come to expression as frequently as your child meets other children and other people. He confesses or he fails to confess as often as he is among "the people of the land." We know that these people shrug their shoulders when Jesus' name is mentioned.

The name of the Lord must be praised from generation to generation. The Lord's praises must be voiced by the seed of the church, and must be sung by the children who have been baptized in his name. Hence you may not permit your child to grow accustomed to indifference or to passiveness, but must teach him to sing his Savior's praise and to rise to his Lord's defense at every occasion. He must be always confessing if ever his public confession is to be genuine and true. That only makes confession a sincere and heartfelt matter.

Christian Living — Nathan Lanning

Letter to a Young Man in Waiting

Dear son,

I'd like to have a brief talk with you about your dating life. I know—you haven't started dating yet. But I know that you want to, so now is probably the best time for us to have this discussion. Before we start, you should know that I think it is okay that you are not dating right now—I don't want you to get the impression that you have to be dating at this stage in your life. Yet, you want to enjoy marriage someday, and dating is obviously the first step in that direction.

From talks that we've had before, I know that you would like to have your own family "when you get older." Scripture says that this is a good goal for you to have (Genesis 2:24, Proverbs 18:22, Psalm

127:3). As you know, this is a very serious goal—one that has to be approached in the right way (2 Corinthians 6:14). So, I hope that you are putting some real thought into approaching this in the right way. A lot of people your age have a difficult time knowing when to start seriously thinking about and pursuing this type of goal. Maybe you feel that you are not old enough to begin planning and preparing for something like marriage, which seems like it will take place far into the future.

There are a couple of things that we can say here. First, hopefully you understand that you have already been preparing for marriage for many years. Yes, really, you have. You have heard many sermons about marriage relationships (such as how the Lord provided a wife for Isaac in Genesis 24, or how Ephesians 5 describes marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church), you have been instructed about important principles of marriage during your catechism training (for instance, the applications associated with Lord's Day 41), and during your personal worship you have been praying that God will lead you in your life according to his will. Now it is time for you to begin using the knowledge and wisdom that you have gained from these past experiences to begin pursuing your goal of marriage.

Second, you have already made confession of faith, and by that you have proclaimed before God and men that you understand and subscribe to the Reformed faith. By your public confession you have shown that, by God's grace, you possess a certain level of maturity. That's right—your public confession of faith is evidence that you are mature enough to understand important aspects of life like dating. That is why we did not let you date before your confession of faith. I know—many of your friends have been dating for years before they made their confession of faith, and some of them still haven't stood up to confess Christ and the Reformed faith. And yes, I understand how you think this has put you at a disadvantage in your dating life. While some of your peers have been dating for years and have become really comfortable with the dating process, you had to sit on the sidelines. Now you feel that you are jumping into the dating arena late, after many others have gained lots of dating experience. But I still do believe that until you had both the understanding and maturity publicly to confess Christ and the Reformed faith, that you did not have the proper understanding and maturity to date seriously. The purpose of dating is to find a spouse. The relationship between spouses is one that reflects the relationship of Christ and the church. How could we let you participate in a dating relationship if you were not yet mature enough to confess publicly that you understood and believed what the ultimate purpose of dating is? You are now a young man who has confessed Christ. Now it is time for you to be a man in your understanding of dating. Put away the childish idea that dating is something you do in high school for fun. Use your Christian maturity along with the wisdom and knowledge you have gained about marriage to guide you as you think about dating—put your faith into practice in this respect!

So, what are some of the ways that you can put your faith into practice as you look towards dating? I know we already said that you have a certain level of maturity, but let's talk about that a little bit more. There is at least one way you should be looking to gain additional maturity. Don't ever pause in your own personal devotional and worship life. As a man, you know that you will be required to lead in the worship life of your marriage as you pray and study the Holy Scriptures together. Because this is such an important aspect of marriage, you should definitely be praying and searching God's word with the young woman that you date. So, you need to prepare yourself for this role now, before you start dating. Search the Scriptures now with an eye towards those passages that you think would be good to study during your dating life. For example, you can study the book of James for practical advice on living a sanctified life with the young woman that you date, or as your relationship matures you can study the many Scriptural passages that give direct advice on marriage itself. Pray for wisdom and confidence in this respect—it is a great responsibility and one that is necessary for a healthy dating relationship.

Let's move on to another way that you can put your faith into practice in your future dating life. As we've said a couple of times already: you have a godly desire to have a marriage and family of your own. This means that, at some point, you are going to have to approach a young woman and discuss this with her! This will take a certain amount of confidence on your part. So, you need to be confident in the type of young woman that you want to date. Obviously, you want to date a young woman, who, like you, has made it clear that she loves the Lord

and is committed to the same faith as you are. You've heard this said many times before, so I won't dwell on it other than to say that this is actually pretty important. You really do need to find a young woman who is both not afraid to demonstrate her love of God and who has united herself with the same Reformed faith as you have. The young woman that exhibits these characteristics is likely mature enough to date and is likely spiritually compatible with you. Remember, when you begin to date, you are not just out to have a good time; you are instead out to enjoy a relationship with someone and at the same time find out if they are compatible with you for marriage. This means that you should look to date a young woman you have a certain level of confidence regarding what type of wife and mother she would be. Make sure you evaluate these things as you consider young women that you might consider dating. Finding this type of relationship will make the dating experience extremely enjoyable! Having said all of this, having confidence in the type of girl you want to date isn't necessarily going to take away all of the anxiety associated with asking a girl out. If you are like me, there is really no way to completely get around that anxiety. But remember, the Holy Spirit speaks many times in the Scriptures about anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:6-8, Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 55:22). Go to your heavenly Father in prayer and cast your anxieties about approaching a girl on him. You will find help through searching the Scriptures and in prayer—even for nervousness about dating!

Please know that your mother and I are praying for you in this respect. We pray that you will remember those things that you have been taught about marriage as you look ahead towards dating. We pray that you will have the confidence necessary to find and approach a godly young woman. We pray that you will find much enjoyment in your future dating life. And we also pray that you will come to us and ask us for advice if and when you need it.

—Dad

Nathan Lanning is a member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Christian Living — Sarah Mowery

Those Who Can, Teach

Our daughter Leah held my hand as we entered the school building on her first day of kindergarten. The place and faces were familiar to us—I'd spent nine years at the same Protestant Reformed grade school. Leah took in everything with an excited smile, and when the bell rang, I bravely left. As I drove home minus one child, I wept.

Our son Willem began kindergarten two years later, but in a different place. My husband, B.J., a teacher, had accepted a position in Loveland, CO, and we had moved there from Iowa early that summer. When we arrived at school on the first day of the 2012-2013 school year, Will gave me a slobbery smack on the lips, grabbed his backpack, and took off running.

"Wait," I called. "Don't you want me to take you to your classroom?"

"I know where it is, Mom," he hollered over his shoulder as he disappeared inside.

Parents—especially mothers—sometimes have a difficult time when their children start school. A flood of sentimental emotions, perhaps? In part, probably yes. But for Christian parents, those emotions are driven in some measure by a very solemn reality: they are entrusting the instruction of this God-given child, whom they've rocked, fed, potty-trained, disciplined, comforted—whose strengths and weaknesses and quirks *they* know—to another. Throughout this day and for many days to come, there will be another standing in their place.

Teaching is a high calling.

The Need for Teachers

Young people, our Protestant Reformed Schools are in need of teachers.

I've been told that some of our young men and women think that there are more of them seeking a teaching license than there are or will be positions in our schools to fill. This assumption is a concern of some of our administrators, whom I surveyed prior to writing this article. Nine out of the twelve principals who responded noted that they not only have had difficulty finding staff in the past, but that they anticipate difficulty in the future as well.

Why are teachers in such demand? First, our schools are growing. Ten out of the twelve schools represented in the survey predict growth in the next five years—some of them substantial growth. With the recent increase in the number of Protestant Reformed high schools, there is a special need for young people to pursue secondary education. One man noted that "as has been the case with…many ministers nearing retirement" so "many of our teachers are getting older and are near retirement age." Also, many positions in our schools are filled by young women who, in the Lord's providence, teach for a relatively short period of time before marrying and bearing children of their own. Other positions are filled by mothers who still have children at home but were recruited by school boards to fill positions for which there were no other applicants. That being said, young men, there is a need especially for *you* to consider teaching. Our schools are stronger when male authority figures are present on the staff and among the students, especially those students who are in the upper grades.

Need in the West

Some other interesting dynamics came to light in the administrators' responses to my brief poll. Three respondents replied that they have not had nor do they expect to have difficulty hiring adequate staff. Those schools, as you probably guessed, are located in Michigan. "There have always been multiple choices for interviews," one commented. Another, highlighting the quality of the candidates, said, "When I think about the last couple of interview sessions we had, I would be very happy to have secured many of the applicants as teachers."

In contrast, administrators of our Western schools noted the stress that accompanies the hiring process. "It is not uncommon to have zero or only one applicant for an advertised position," one wrote, noting that he initiated contact with over 30 people in an attempt to fill a recent position. "I think about the days when I was taking courses for my masters in administration and they were teaching us how to sort through the piles of resumes; that almost seems like comic relief to me now."

Why the difficulty obtaining teachers in the West? Well, most of our PR teachers are from the East. Besides that, Western schools are generally smaller, which means that teaching in a Western school at the elementary level likely involves the initially daunting prospect of a multiple-grade classroom. One who accepts a position in a Western high school will likely have to teach a variety of subjects at various grade levels with fewer prep periods (though there are teachers, my husband being one of them, who will attest how thoroughly they enjoy teaching new subjects every year). Also, Western schools have the reputation of paying less than schools in the East – a reputation not without warrant, fellow Westerners. (It is important to remember, however, that our Western schools were/are often supported by a single and sometimes small congregation.) One who taught at a school in the West many years ago noted that he moved back to Michigan when it became clear that remaining where he was meant financial ruin. In defense of the West, this is not the problem it once was. Western school boards have worked hard in recent years to meet the salary recommendations of the Federation of the Protestant Reformed Schools. Schools in the West now pay wages that are competitive with those of their sister PR schools in the East.

A Word to Those Who Live in the West

People of the West, our history shows that the staffing of our schools has depended heavily on men and women who move away from family and friends to teach our children. We've produced few teachers in our generations, particularly few male teachers. Do we value Christian education enough to encourage our own sons and daughters to pursue a career in education? Perhaps we should do away with a few of our jokes about schooling getting in the way of our children's "real education"—farming, hunting, etc.—and seriously consider if we are doing all that we can to see that our Christian schools are maintained.

A Word to Those Who Live in the East

Now to those of you who live in the East: you

comprise the majority of the members of our denomination. It is only natural that the number of teachers you yield is greater. True, you also have greater numbers of children to teach and more schools to staff. But if you are a young person who is considering teaching, please do not rule out the possibility of moving away and establishing yourself away from your roots. Such sacrifices are necessary if *all* of our schools are going to thrive.

A Word about Teacher Compensation

Shortly before writing this, I had a conversation with a mother of teenagers about encouraging our young people to become teachers. She reflected that some of our youth may be deterred from a career in education because they see teachers struggling to make ends meet. I have asked especially you, young men, to consider teaching. If in the Lord's providence you marry and have children in the future, you will also bear the responsibility of providing for your family. *Will you be able as a teacher in a PR school to fulfill that obligation?* I sent that inquiry—along with a couple of related questions—to all Protestant Reformed teachers who are also heads of households.

Nearly thirty men responded to my survey, some of them in length. They acknowledged that in answering that question, many factors come into play: the number of children one is given, what medical needs arise, etc. Overall, their answer was, briefly: "Yes, but it will require you to be frugal and have adequate summer work." Nearly every one of those men said that he depends heavily on a secondary income. Many of them not only work throughout the summer, they hold part-time jobs during the school year as well. Those side jobs – which include everything from bus driving to lawn care, constitute up to 30% of the respondents' total incomes and are deemed necessary, particularly to pay tuition. Some of them expressed concern that the additional jobs hinder the quality of their teaching, but another noted that financial stress has the same effect. Several of the men were troubled by the amount of time their multiple jobs take from their wives and children. Over half of the thirty who responded said that their wives also earn an income. Some of these women work a little each week cleaning houses; some of them earn incomes that surpass their husbands'; some of them are employed, though they would prefer to be at home.

I did not expect to be as moved by the testimonies of these men as I was. "No one who enters the profession of teacher in our PRC schools ought to think for one minute they might be doing it for the money," noted one teacher. Another echoed, "If you are in it for the money, look for employment elsewhere. Education is an intensely rewarding occupation, but those rewards do not come in the form of dollars." Yet some of these hardworking men conveyed bitterness regarding teacher compensation. "We hear so often in our circles that teachers have a high calling, which God certainly gives to us. But it is my feeling that too often this is simply lip service," one wrote. Others listed things that they and their children treat as luxuries though many others deem them necessities: a larger home, newer vehicle, dental care, family vacations, cell phone plans…

And yet not one of these men suggested that there was a simple solution to their financial difficulties. Many noted that they are fully aware that there are others in the churches who also have a hard time making ends meet, especially when the heavy tuition years hit. A couple advocated tuition discounts for teachers. One suggested that "our boards increase salaries for heads of household based on number of children, if children are in school, and other circumstances. Our churches do this so well. A minister in his early years with no children and late in life with no dependents at home will have a salary lower than a minister with many children at home who are of school age." Several expressed concern that too often the lines between church and school are blurred when school boards use diaconates as co-payers of their struggling employees.

Overwhelmingly, however, those teachers who answered my questions concluded that the benefits of their occupation outweigh the negatives:

> God always provided for us. I do not know what would have been our situation if we had had more children, but God did not give us others. We always felt that our calling was to teach, and that was part of our sacrifice for God's kingdom. That is no excuse for others in that kingdom to be stingy toward their teachers, but teachers must realize their high calling in God's kingdom as well. There must be a lot of trust and faith in all of us.
>
> I must say that many times I wondered where we as a family would get the money to make it through another year, and yet by the end, we had paid all our bills. With all this being said, I would do it all over again. I love teaching and working with others who are of like mind and faith.

> There are hardships and difficulties in every occupation, due to the curse. For me the benefits of teaching far outweigh the negatives. I have the ability to go to work early any day I want or need to. I can work late or take my work home with me. I can attend more of my children's games than many parents. I am in a Christian environment where I have the freedom and opportunities to worship and praise my Savior. I feel directly connected to working in his kingdom…I have neither riches nor poverty, and for that the scriptures comfort me in the knowledge that I am blessed.

Additional positives? A teacher's salary does not fluctuate depending on the business cycle or housing market. My husband and I know at the beginning of each month exactly how much money is coming in, and we budget accordingly. Not to mention that B.J. looks forward to his summer work with as much enthusiasm as he anticipates the start of the school year. The men in the survey noted that they've received boxes of clothes, food, monetary gifts – even tuition bills anonymously paid in full. Our family has been blessed with meat, countless meals, grocery cards, and gas money to get us "home" for Christmas.

A Blessed Life

There is great blessing to teaching in a *Protestant Reformed* school. The high school that I attended was affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church, and nearly all of my teachers there were members of that denomination. Most of my classmates also attended CRC churches, others the Reformed church, and one, a Lutheran church. Our Bible teacher presented the covenant as an agreement: would I say yes to God's "free offer"? Chapel speakers encouraged us to be active in "kingdom building." Lines between worldly and godly living were blurred.

My husband's first teaching position was at a school that also bore the name *Reformed*: *Netherlands* Reformed. He enjoyed his work there and grew close to many of his students. However, both he and they were viewed by parents, board, and staff as those outside of the "saving benefits" of God's covenant. Because of this view, the children and staff members who were not NR were prohibited from praying their own prayers. B.J. was given simple form prayers to use, and when he and the students recited the Lord's Prayer together, they were required to first say in unison, "Lord, teach us to pray…" They were required to do this so that they, who were considered unregenerate, would not be guilty of the sin of addressing God as their Father.

In contrast to these two types of Reformed schools, our Protestant Reformed schools are founded on the truth that God's covenant does not depend upon man's agreement and that it is a promise made to believers and their children (Acts 2:39). Parents and teachers regard the students as God's children and together take seriously their responsibility diligently to teach them his commands as the rule for thankful living (Deut. 6:6-7). Since we view our children as those who have been regenerated, we rejoice when we see the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, and we comfort them with the knowledge that they belong to a sovereign Savior.

I reflected on this as I fixed supper the other day. Our daughter Leah, now a third grader, sat at the kitchen table. I watched as she pursed her lips and doodled on a corner of her paper.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I've picked my text for devotions and written a paragraph about it," she replied. "I just don't know how to begin my prayer!"

"Well, Jesus taught us how to pray," I responded. "He said, 'When you pray, say, '*Our Father*…'" Leah nodded, thought for a moment, and then began to write. I smiled. I knew her teacher will not object to that address.

> The life of a Reformed teacher is truly a blessed life. We get to work among other men and women of like faith, without having to deal with the world on a regular basis. We get to work with covenant children. The parental support is second to none! God truly blesses those who labor for a kingdom cause such as covenant Christian education!

Those Who Can

What does it take to be a Reformed teacher? A friend of ours will sometimes razz my husband, "Those who *can't*, teach." I know it's meant as a joke, but I'm always irritated when I hear that remark. It brings me back to my college days and those who really weren't sure what they were going to do with their degrees: "I figure if nothing else, I can always teach," they'd say.

Teaching is not a "default" position, young people. It requires men and women who *can*. Those who can, care enough about covenant children and young people to model godly living and spend day after day explaining God's world to them. Those who can, put themselves in the place of the student who

struggles. Those who can, graciously discuss that child's needs with his or her parents. Those who can, handle discipline issues in a God-honoring manner. Those who can, not only understand their subject material but can also convey it to their pupils in a way that they are able to appreciate it as well. Those who can, do all those things and trust that the Lord will bless their efforts and provide for their families.

Those who *can*, teach.

Can you?

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From the Classroom — Jesse Kamps

Modesty

Modesty should be one of the most important things a young person thinks about when he or she starts his or her day. Young men as well as ladies have to think about this and be careful to dress in a way that glorifies God. However, young women, I am talking to you from the perspective of a young man. Young ladies should be careful to be modest in their dress, for the world tells the Christian to dress for the pleasure of the human nature rather than the glory of God.

There are two types of young men. First, there is the young man who is godly, who looks at you and sees a wonderful personality from within. He sees inner beauty from the heart, the beauty that God has implanted into your soul. He sees your outward appearance as beautiful no matter what you look like, because he sees the inner beauty inside you, which overshadows the outer looks and makes all of you beautiful to him. He does not focus on the physical appearance, but looks at the heart to see the beauty of Christ inside. This young man will be solid in his love for you and does not let the imperfections of your outer looks, such as growing older, overshadow his love for the true beauty inside.

Then there is the worldly young man, although I will be the first to admit that the affections of the godly young man are not always as pure as they seem. But the worldly young man does not really care about what is inside, nor can he even see it. He looks at the outward appearance, to what seems "hot" to him and excites in him the lustful desires of the flesh. He does not care for true beauty, but he cares for the fake beauty on which our society today is based. He will see you as just another girl for him to look at and to use. He does not truly love; he merely loves the outward, and when that gets old to him, he moves on to whatever excites him more. He is not godly, and he does not care for godliness. He cares only for worldliness and lust. I myself will admit that each and every guy struggles with these thoughts, but the godly young man learns to push away such thoughts and look toward the inner beauty that God gives to the young woman he loves.

Modesty helps get rid of the temptations of the flesh that the ungodly young man desires so much, and instead attracts the young man who loves inner beauty. Ladies, if you would like to choose a godly young man, put on that which shows inner beauty, not outer. Do not try to show as much skin as possible to pull the young men around you into being attracted to your outer flesh. Dressing in a manner that does not pertain to godliness only attracts the world and exalts the old man of sin and the flesh, putting away the new man that governs our regenerated life in Christ. Instead, get dressed with the new man in mind; put him on, realizing that the godly young man you seek to attract is not looking for the outer flesh, but instead he looks for the inner beauty that flourishes in your heart. Show by your clothes that you seek this type of young man, not flaunting yourself like the world.

The godly young woman does not want to flaunt herself. She seeks to show her inner beauty instead, not spending hours on make-up and clothes that show just a little too much of her body, so as to attract the men around her. Instead hearken to the words of 1 Peter 3:1–4: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold

your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." These words tell women not to adorn themselves outwardly, but to show the inner beauty that is not corruptible. Ladies, if you want to be that godly woman, do not adorn yourself as the wicked do, but dress modestly, showing the beauty that Christ has put in you.

Young women, dress to show the Lord in your hearts. Dress to show that the new man has worked in your heart to change your desires from the lusts of the flesh to the glory of God. Dress to attract the godly young man who is attracted to you for the beauty of regeneration in your heart that is evident when you clothe yourself modestly. In all and through all, dress for the glory of the name of the Most High.

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Convention Discussion Outlines

#1: Awareness in the Last Days

Reading: 2 Timothy 3

Are we in the last days? What do you see around you that shows that we are in the last days?

Why do we need to be aware of these signs of the last days?

What are false ideas about the end of the world that you see or hear? What does the Bible teach? See 1 Thessalonians 5:2.

Who are your enemies?

What do you think of the world's definition and view of tolerance and equality? How do we respond?

What is false peace? Are you victims of false peace? How might we be drawn into lethargy and false peace? See 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

#2: How to Live the Antithesis

Reading: Colossians 3

What is a sanctified Christian walk?

How do you and how should you spend your time?

What are you talking about at church? During the week? Are you having spiritual conversations?

How should you interact with others? Should your actions be dependent on the actions of the other party?

Who or what distracts you from a sanctified walk? Who are your heroes? What are your time wasters/addictions? See 1 Thessalonians 5:8, 14-22.

How should you consider a vocation?

#3: Fighting the Good Fight

Reading: Ephesians 6

How do you equip yourself for the battle? See 1 Thessalonians 5:8

What is truth? How do you know it? How is it used in the battle? What is its importance in the last days? See Ephesians 6:17.

How is prayer used in our battle? In what frame of mind should we be when we come to God in prayer? See 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Are you dealing with persecution in your life? What about those around you? What battle are you fighting? See 1 Thessalonians 5:6.

What is your hope in the last days? How do you focus on this hope so you don't get caught up in the worries of the world?

How can/do/should you help each other put on the armor of God?

Watching Daily At My Gates

July 12 ***Read Acts 10***

After receiving the vision instructing him to preach to the Gentiles, Peter is sent into action immediately. Through the Holy Spirit he is sent to Caesarea. Peter must get over his shock of eating what previously had been unclean meats. Now he must go and preach to a Gentile. It is important that this is done in order that the way be paved for the work of Paul. Peter must learn the truth that we too must acknowledge. God is no respecter of persons. As we go through our daily lives, let us not respect a person for who he is other than if he is a child of God. Sing Psalter 176.

July 13 ***Read Acts 11***

Things were happening very fast for the church of Christ. Some might say too fast and seek to slow them down. But we must never hinder the work of the Spirit. When he leads, we must follow. The church had to become comfortable with the fact that Gentiles were to be counted among their number. By his providence and sovereignty God moved some away from Jerusalem so that the gospel would spread, as Christ instructed before his ascension. Saul would be used in this process as well. Finally, the new converts also had to learn about care for fellow Christians. As we work our way through this book of scripture we must always be asking, "What is the Holy Spirit teaching us about life in Christ's church?" Sing Psalter 287.

July 14 ***Read Acts 12***

Reread verse 24. Notice the little word *but*. Throughout Holy Scripture we see that word used to emphasize some point. The point in this chapter is that in spite of all Satan could do to halt the progress of God's word, it grew and multiplied. Of course, that is the work of the Spirit. Just as a small amount of leaven causes dough to rise, so the work of the Spirit caused the word to grow and spread in the hearts of many believers. That word must continue to grow until it is spread throughout the four corners of the world. When that happens, and the last child of God is gathered, then it will be time for Christ to return. There will be intense persecution in those days, but we know that Christ will triumphantly return to take us all to glory. Sing Psalter 407.

July 15 ***Read Acts 13***

In this chapter we see that Paul begins the work for which he was called. He was called to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. The manner in which he was to do this was to go to the Jews first, and when they rejected the gospel, to go to the Gentiles. Notice the progression Paul makes in his sermons. He leaves no doubt that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. In rejecting Paul's sermons, the listeners were rejecting Christ. May we never reject the true preaching of the word as we hear it from sabbath to sabbath. Sing Psalter 263.

July 16 ***Read Acts 14***

Paul finished the work of the first missionary journey by retracing his steps. In each church he encouraged the new believers and helped them to ordain elders. These men showed the ability to use the word for the good of the new believers. Office bearers are given by God for our good. They help us in our faith and carry out the work of Christ in our midst. May we thank God for such men as they preach the gospel, oversee the church, and distribute the mercies of Christ to those who are in need. Sing Psalter 348.

July 17 ***Read Acts 15***

The church of Christ has been given church government for its organization and care. When disagreements arise, it is imperative that we go the route of church government, acting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to solve those disagreements. Church government must use Scripture, as did James, to work out problems that arise. In this way Christ's church on earth will be preserved until he returns and takes us all to join the church triumphant. Sing Psalter 228.

July 18 ***Read Acts 16***

After separating from Barnabas, Paul retraced his steps through Asia Minor on his way to Europe. While in Lystra he was given a new traveling companion whom he instructed in the preaching of the gospel as he made his way where the Spirit led him. Bypassing many areas where he would return, Paul crossed from Asia into Europe and brought the gospel to Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and others. In doing so Paul, Timothy, and others faced persecution from all sides. But by God's grace the

gospel was preached, the church was gathered, and the word was spread. Sing Psalter 391.

July 19 *Read Acts 17*

As we read through this chapter we find Paul traveling to three cities in Greece. In two of the three cities he was chased away by those who want nothing to do with the word of God. Yet in each place God had his believers. We know that in Thessalonica a church was established and was later a recipient of two of the inspired letters of Paul. In Berea there were those who "searched the Scriptures daily." Finally, in Athens the unbelievers mocked the word of the true God of heaven and earth, but even there, a few of God's elect resided. As we read these words of grace, may we be thankful for the grace given to us in the scriptures. May we search them daily to grow in that grace. Sing Psalter 325.

July 20 *Read Acts 18*

Paul continues his journey through Greece and comes to the city of Corinth. This was an important city in the Greco-Roman world, and one that was very wicked. However, here too God was pleased to establish a church. Paul preaches, and those who are moved by the Holy Spirit cleave to that preaching. Once again, however, the Spirit has more work for Paul, and he travels to Asia Minor to the city of Ephesus. After giving to them a taste of the gospel, Paul leaves to return to Jerusalem. But out of that preaching comes Apollos, who is convicted by the Spirit to preach. He then goes to Corinth and fills the need for the word of God there. May all of God's young men listen for the call to preach, and hearing that call, obey. Sing Psalter 428.

July 21 *Read Acts 19*

On his third missionary journey Paul returns to Ephesus and spends a long period of time among the saints there. We know little about the work, but what we know shows to us Paul's zeal for and love of God's word. This is the zeal and love that we must have where God has placed us. We may not be ministers, missionaries, elders, or deacons, but each of us has a calling concerning the word of God. We must learn it and use it in our daily lives. While we may not be called into an amphitheater to defend the word, we must defend it in whatever place God puts us. Even as Paul learned to follow the Spirit in his work, so we must follow the Spirit as expressed in scripture in our lives. In this way we will be used to further the cause of God and to hasten the day of Christ's return. Sing Psalter 389.

July 22 *Read Acts 20*

Among the many circumstances of Paul in these chapters, two of them stand out in this chapter. First, we see the zeal of believers as it is expressed in the church at Troas as they listened to Paul preach all night. They soaked up those truths as a sponge soaks up water in a drought. Second, we see a good description of the work of ministers, elders, and congregations in Paul's farewell address to the elders of Ephesus. Reread that speech. See where you as an individual fit into that speech. We all have a calling in the church of Christ. Are we living out of that calling? Sing Psalter 350.

July 23 *Read Acts 21*

As Paul made his journey toward Jerusalem, we see a parallel to the journey our Lord made. Both were journeying toward the end of their lives. Paul had taken up Christ's cross, had fought the good fight, and was ready to be offered for the cause of the gospel. What about us? Are we willing to undergo persecution for the cause of the gospel? Do we endure scorn from neighbors, coworkers, and others around us? The day is coming when that will be more and more a normal way of life. We, like Paul, must not shrink from that situation. Let us be ready to face opposition, knowing that the Spirit will help us in whatever difficulty we may face. Sing Psalter205.

July 24 *Read Acts 22*

Young people, when you make confession of faith, sometimes the minister or elders reassure you not to be frightened as you face the consistory. Those men are your friends in Christ. Could you make a confession of faith as Paul did? Could any of us who are members of Christ's church face an audience as Paul did and confess our faith even when we know it will bring a firestorm of hatred upon our heads? We can, if we rest assured that Christ by his Spirit is with us. We need to immerse ourselves in the word of God, knowing that the Spirit will guide us in that word. Let us do that daily, never knowing the hour in which we will be called to give an account for our faith. Sing Psalter 204.

July 25 *Read Acts 23*

While Christ was on earth, he told his disciples that they would be brought before councils. These councils might even be acting in the name of God. But he also told them that they did not have to be concerned about what they would say, since the Holy Spirit would put the proper words in their hearts and mouths. Paul experienced this. He was visited by Christ at night with the most comforting words, "Be of good cheer." Paul was reassured that he would carry out Christ's calling to go to Rome. We too can know that the Holy Spirit will aid us when we are called to defend the truth. Let us learn that truth and be ready to use it when necessary. Sing Psalter 91.

July 26 *Read Acts 24*

For two years Paul was kept in custody by Festus. What does Paul do during that time? He does what he has been called to do. He preaches the gospel. He knows that God is no respecter of persons and has his people among all

kinds of people on this earth. Paul has instructed Timothy and us to pray for those in authority, as God will bring to salvation some of those people. God uses means, and Paul knew that he could be the means to bring some of Festus' court to salvation. May we be ever bold to speak the wonderful words of life to any with whom we come into contact. Sing Psalter 310.

July 27 *Read Acts 25*

God's ways toward his people are mysterious. They are not a mystery like a suspense novel, but they are mysterious according to our way of thinking. For more than two years a dynamic preacher and faithful servant was kept from spreading the gospel. But this was God's way. We will never know on this side of the grave what God's purposes are for much in our lives, but like the experience of Paul, they are for our good and for God's glory. When we have the opportunity to spread the gospel, let us make use of it just as Paul did in Festus' court. Above all let us know "that all things work together for good to them that love God." Sing Psalter 319.

July 28 *Read Acts 26*

In this chapter we have Paul's sermon to Festus' court. We do not know the outcome of that sermon for everyone who heard it. We do know that God's word never returns to him void. We also know that that word is a savor of life unto life and death unto death. Any elect in the audience that day who believed received life through grace. Any reprobate who was hardened received the judgment that they deserved without any excuse. May we attend to the preaching of the word faithfully from week to week. May we preach where we have an open door, knowing that salvation is of God and from God alone. Sing Psalter 223.

July 29 *Read Acts 27*

People of God and especially our young people, do you take the opportunity to spread the gospel by praying in the presence of strangers? Do you pray in a restaurant before you eat? For fourteen days Paul and his shipmates had been tossed by a storm sent by God. Now as their ship is about to be broken by the storm, Paul persuades the people to eat, and before they eat, Paul gives thanks for the bread that they will eat. We can imagine that he also prays for their safety. This should give us the impetus to pray before anyone for the food that God has given to us. In that prayer we should pray for the salvation of any who are seated around us. In that way we can be used as instruments for the salvation of one of God's own. Sing Psalter 272.

July 30 *Read Acts 28*

Paul had been assured by God that he would reach Rome. Now he is there. On the way to Rome and in Rome itself, Paul continues the work to which he has been called. He seeks to gather the elect through the means of preaching. The final historical book of the Bible ends with that action. That is the work with which the church is to be busy. If a church is not preaching, it is likely that it is no church at all. May we never give up that precious heritage that God has given to us. Let us preach the gospel and let us preach it in the confidence that God will use it to hasten the day of the coming of Christ. Sing Psalter 263.

July 31 *Read Romans 1*

Martin Luther drew from this chapter for his defense of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Paul begins the letter with the usual salutations found in his epistles. Then in verse 16 he begins a section about the deplorable spiritual state of the Gentile world and the only escape from it, as found in verse 17. In verse 20 we find a summary of much of what goes on in the world. People throughout history have seen in creation the necessity of God. However, because they were not given to know the one true God, they could not worship him as he should be worshiped. They also live in opposition to what they see in the world around them. What about us? Do we live as we should? Do we acknowledge the one true God, the creator of heaven and earth? Sing Psalter 86.

August 1 *Read Romans 2*

Paul not only shows the evils found in the Gentile world, but he also shows that those who had grown up in the church had fallen far short of the glory of God in their lives and worship. Again we must ask the question, "What about us?" Do we glorify God in thought, word, and deed? Do we take the treasure that we have been given in the word and use it properly throughout our lives? We must know the truth as found in verse 6 to be true. God will render to every man, without exception, according to his works in this life. How will we measure in the final judgement? Sing Psalter 162.

August 2 *Read Romans 3*

In this chapter the apostle Paul continues an argument about salvation for Jews and Gentiles. Some would argue that the Jews and anyone born in the sphere of the church has a right to salvation. Paul, however, using the doctrine of total depravity, shows that it is only by grace that anyone is saved. From total depravity, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," Paul moves to justification by faith alone. Is this doctrine precious to us? Do we try to thwart it by introducing even a small bit of works righteousness into it? We cannot and we must not. If we do, we remove from God his glory, and that cannot happen. Sing Psalter 253.

August 3 *Read Romans 4*

Paul continues with the argument of justification by faith alone. He introduces two Old Testament figures,

Abraham and David, into the argument. He shows that Abraham was justified before the law was written. It becomes obvious that his justification was without the law and only by grace. From David the apostle quotes from Psalm 32 concerning righteousness being imputed only by God through Christ. In order to combat the errors found in today's church world, we need to study Romans. Paul's approach is useful today, even as it was in the early church of the new dispensation. Sing Psalter 83.

August 4 *Read Romans 5*

Like the good preacher he was, Paul now turns to the application part of his sermon. After establishing the doctrine of justification by faith, he shows us the benefits of that doctrine for us. Being justified gives us peace with God. What a blessing that is! When we are at peace with our covenant heavenly Father, we can rest assured that no storms on this earth can reach us. We can be at peace because our sins have been removed by Christ through his sacrifice, and not even a stain remains on us. We also have as a benefit the hope of what lies ahead. All of our life here on this earth gives us a blessed hope. We go through all kinds of tribulation knowing that there is something much more glorious ahead. Thanks be to God for the gift of his son who has given to us hope and peace. Sing Psalter 24.

August 5 *Read Romans 6*

Once again we have Paul answering those who would argue. The next argument is that if a Christian is justified by faith only, then he can live however he wants on this earth. This idea is called licentiousness. Paul quickly forbids that thought and tells us that the next logical step after justification is sanctification. God's people are called to live a holy life on this earth. Because we are saved, we will want to live a life that is pleasing to God. This is the last part of the Heidelberg Catechism. Young people, you are called to live in a holy manner. You cannot sow wild oats, as some say, because it is a truth that what you sow, you will reap. A life of thankfulness is required of the Christian as a result of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Sing Psalter 217.

August 6 *Read Romans 7*

Since Christ has fulfilled the law, are we free from obeying the law? Paul answers that question with a resounding No! If that were the case, then his call to sanctification in the previous chapter would be for naught. We need the law to help us walk as sanctified children of God. That is why the law is found in the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism. That is why for us the law is read each Sunday morning. It shows us our need for a savior, and it shows us how to walk in gratitude for that savior. We need that law because as Paul states in verse 19, we are prone to sin in whatever we do. Sing Psalter 42.

August 7 *Read Romans 8*

In this chapter there are many thoughts that the child of God can cling to in living his life in this world. Look at verse 28. Can there be any more comfort than in knowing that all things work together for good to those who love God? The next verses show to us the golden chain of salvation. That too is a comfort, as it shows to us that the work of salvation is all God's; nothing from us sinners is required. Finally, reread verses 31 to the end of the chapter. What a comfort! Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 204.

August 8 *Read Romans 9*

Once again Paul answers an objection. Was God unrighteous in condemning some, especially Jews? By using the beautiful doctrine of election and reprobation, as well as the doctrine of the sovereignty of God, Paul shows that God is not unrighteous. Many in today's world do not want a sovereign God. They do not want a God in control of all things. What is your conception of God? Is it a god who loves all men, or is it the God who loves those whom he has chosen from the foundation of the earth? Our God is truly gracious, as the apostle Paul demonstrates. Let us never take away from his grace to exalt man's works. Sing Psalter 187.

August 9 *Read Romans 10*

The crux of Paul's dissertation in this portion of the epistle to Rome is whether righteousness comes by faith or by the deeds of the law. Once again there can be no doubt in the reader's mind that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. People of God, do you confess with your mouth this truth? Do you do this not only before the church as you make your public confession of faith, but do you do this every day in whatever situation God leads you? This we must do. We are led to such a confession by the preaching of the word. That preaching is God's way of bringing his people to salvation. Do we listen attentively from Sabbath to Sabbath? Sing Psalter 191.

August 10 *Read Romans 11*

Another objection is raised from those to whom Paul is writing. In the Old Testament God had called the Jews his precious treasure; has he cast them away? Paul uses himself as an example to show that he had not. While doing so he uses the doctrine of election to show that salvation is not man's work but God's alone. To make the Gentiles, to whom he is writing, understand this truth, Paul shows that this truth is also from a God whose ways are past finding out from man's perspective. Read the grand doxology in verses 33–36 once more. Has not God been merciful in our lives? We do not deserve what we have been given, but it is ours nonetheless. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift. Sing Psalter 271.

Interview with Alvin Rau
Part 2, March 18, 2008

Mark H. Hoeksema: So, at one time there were churches in Loveland, Isabel, Leola, and Forbes, correct?

Alvin Rau: Isabel and Leola were always separate from Loveland.

MHH: But there was a total of four German churches at one time?

AR: No, Leola became the Forbes congregation.

Phyllis Rau: By that time Leola was out of the picture.

MHH: Maybe I should say it this way: There was a Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland and in Isabel; for a while in Leola, but that folded into the Forbes congregation? Is that correct?

AR: But Leola never became Protestant Reformed. We were sitting under Mensch's preaching while we were there yet, but we really had no officebearers. Rev. Lubbers drew up an Affirmation, or something like that, that we signed that we would support him (Mensch) because at that time, it looked like everything was going to fall apart, that everybody was going to go their own way. Mensch ministered to that group, but without any officebearers. We had voted for officebearers, but then we were instructed by the Protestant Reformed Churches: "Don't install those officebearers because then *you* are creating the split." But then we left shortly after that. I know I signed that document at that time. [*Most of this is not clear as to the intricacies involved*].

MHH: Would it be fair to say that it was a struggle?

AR: It was a struggle, that's right.

MHH: Was it worth it?

AR: Yes (laughter), there is no question about that. As far as we are concerned, we haven't regretted it one bit, and later on when those congregations were organized, we had no hard feelings. I often questioned myself. There was disagreement between Mensch and ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches; he didn't think there was any future there. Some felt there was, and that we should organize and get synodical assistance, and in that way afford to have a minister. But Mensch didn't feel that he wanted to lay that burden upon the Protestant Reformed Churches. It didn't look like there was much of a future here, and from that point of view, he didn't think it was well to organize and to go into the Protestant Reformed Churches.

MHH: Explain that to me. He was not in agreement of the idea of organizing small congregations, I understand that.

AR: Congregations here and there, yeah.

MHH: So what happened? What did he do about it or what was the result of the disagreement?

AR: Well, the result of the disagreement was that he finally resigned from Isabel. As far as Leola was concerned, he was suspended from office and the consistory upheld that suspension, so there was no problem there. But as far as Isabel was concerned, they were an organized congregation, and they said he laid down his office by resigning, and therefore he could not be a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches. But it was his intent to get in the ministry. But, in all fairness, he had been warned: Don't resign, because if you do, you're done with the ministry. But he did it anyway. On the one hand I could understand that. In fact, I even at one time tried to protest on his behalf, which never works because, you become a busybody in other men's matters and so forth. But he couldn't become a minister, so after awhile he moved again to South Dakota and was going to get this cleared up. He probably felt he was called to the ministry and could preach some place. But when he did, that still didn't work out, so he came back to Michigan again at that time. Then I asked him, What are you going to do about church? He said he didn't know. The next thing we knew, why, they were members of Hanley Christian Reformed Church, which was contrary to what he had taught us, but nevertheless, bitterness developed and be-

cause of that, he went there. But he was never fully happy there. He also developed heart problems. We didn't talk too much about it after that. But I have respect for what he taught us. He taught us the truth, and he taught it to us in a way that we, who could understand hardly anything, could understand it. But, I could not go along with it [*his leaving the PRCA*]. In other words, he couldn't live here and be a member in the Protestant Reformed Churches rather than to go someplace else: "If I can't be a minister there, I don't belong there." I don't want to put those words in his mouth, but that was his action, which I didn't think was right because he had taught us earlier that if you ever have any disagreements, you protest to the greatest assembly. If your protest isn't upheld then you humbly submit and you let God be the judge of the matter. But when it came to his own case, he didn't do it.

MHH: Do you think that he was correct in his attitude that nothing would ever come of the Dakota churches?

AR: Yes, I do. I do believe that the handwriting on the wall for the future didn't look good to us. Later on they were organized into churches and into the Protestant Reformed Churches. I could sit in their midst and worship with them whenever we came out to vacation there, but as far as I was concerned, we didn't want to go back, although we could have because we had our farm for quite a while yet. Later we sold it to Florence and Madeline [*Alvin's brother-in-law and sister-in-law*].

The first public event that we took in when we came to Michigan in the Protestant Reformed Churches was the all-school program of the Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School. And at that time, we thought, if this is what our children are going to learn here, this is where we want to stay and find our church home. We did, and have never regretted it.

MHH: (laughter) That was going to be my next question (more laughter). But do you think it's fair to say that through the work of Lubbers and Mensch, even though the churches in the long run turned out not to be viable, yet many were gathered?

AR: Yes. Many were gathered through that work and also the word was proclaimed, and it never returns void. Those who lived in the area that knew about it and still would not unite themselves with it, they stand answerable for that. We rest content with that. But we could never see a future there.

MHH: Mr. Rau, I want to follow up a little more on the issue of the viability of the churches in the Dakotas. You have made it clear that Rev. Mensch was a bit skeptical about the future. The part that I don't quite understand is, who was pushing for the continuation of those churches?

AR: Rev. Lubbers was of a different opinion. You could organize as Protestant Reformed Churches, a small group, and you could get synodical assistance so that you would be able to afford to support a minister, because that was a big question at the time. How were we going to afford supporting a minister with just a couple of families here (two families with their children)? We could get synodical assistance? Well, I really don't know how to put that right now. Anyway, we didn't feel that we ought to. When it comes right down to it, for the truth's sake we forsake all. And we simply go and trust in the Lord. We had never even been to Grand Rapids when we moved here. All we did was hear about them from Mensch—this is what these churches teach: sovereignty of God. But, we thought, if this is what they teach, this is where we are going to find a church home, this is where we will feel at home. And we did. As I mentioned earlier, that first school program that we went to was an eye-opener for us because we had never in all of our education—of course, we didn't go to a Christian school—it was public school—envisioned anything like that, that you could instill within the minds of little children Psalter numbers and teach them to recite Bible verses. And these children knew it. That was amazing to us. That strengthened us and, hey, we're going to stay here. We'll find a job.I had shoveled manure and had pitched hay, so I was willing to do anything as far as that goes. But the economy was slow right then here. I had a hard time to even get a job. But the Lord did provide. And we didn't even have to go to the diaconate and say, we have to have some assistance. That was one fear that we did have—that we probably would have to. We didn't.

MHH: Nevertheless, that must have been a difficult decision because, isn't it true that you and others were tied to the land?

AR: We were. We were. And that's the only work we knew was farming.

MHH: And you owned your own farm?

AR: Yeah, we owned our own farm; we weren't get-

ting rich, but we were making the farm payments. One of my brothers said at that time that he was sure that we had just simply gone bankrupt and that's why we were selling out. But it wasn't so. It was the poorest time to sell out. We were selling hogs for nine and ten cents a pound. And there were farm sales galore, so equipment didn't bring a whole lot. Cattle prices were pretty good yet. But anyway, when we got to Michigan, nobody was hiring anybody. Sam Reitsma was doing janitor work in the East Grand Rapids schools. He was also a landscaper, and this fit in good with his landscaping over the winter months. But spring was coming and he knew I wanted a job. So he said, "Well, you come with me and I'll tell them that I am going to be quitting for the summer, but that here's a man who just came from South Dakota, he's got a family and he needs a job." And it worked. They hired me (laughter). First it was night duty. Then of course you hardly ever saw your family, so this isn't very good at all, after growing up out there on the farm, being your own boss, and now you're going to work nights and hardly see your family. So I asked to get on days, and I did. But then I got under a different foreman. But I couldn't agree with the language that he used, and it was impossible to please him. Then I went to Keeler Brass and asked there. I had applied there earlier and said, "It isn't working out where I'm at right now." They said that as soon as they got an opening, they will give me a call. And they did. In July I started working there. It was about three months that I worked at East Grand Rapids public schools.

MHH: And meanwhile, what happened to your farm?

AR: Well, at that time they had a farm program called "the soil bank." You signed up your farm ground into that [*land put into the soil bank could not be farmed, but had to lie fallow*]. We signed a ten-year lease into that soil bank program, which paid enough money to make the land payments, pay the taxes, and keep up the insurance on the buildings. That way, whatever I earned we had to live on. But it was a change from being your own boss to working for somebody else, subjecting yourself to somebody else, and even if you see a better way of doing somthing because the boss said this is how you're going to do it, this is how it's done. That was hard for me, for a while.

MHH: You apparently had to pay the price for moving here (laughter).

AR: Keeping the job kept the bills paid, it kept the tuition paid. For a while, it was church and tuition, and then what was left over, that was for groceries. And if one of the children needed shoes, well, if there was enough left over, fine. If not, that was put on the back burner until the other two weeks were up and you got your next paycheck. We lived from paycheck to paycheck (laughter).

MHH: Apparently. Are there any events, particularly while you were living in the Dakotas, that stand out in your mind?

AR: Oh, yeah. I did miss farming when we moved here. What would you call it? The quietness of it and just the simple way of life. And you worked with your family. That I missed very much when we came here. And here it was busy, busy, busy. The roads were busier and everything else. But compared to the hours that we used to work when we were farming, hey, this was great. Went to work at Keeler, started at seven o'clock in the morning, so that meant that we had to get up about six in the morning. When you were farming, sometimes you would get up at five in the morning, and you would work until dark. Here, at four o'clock/four-thirty, the whistle blew and we went home and you had the *whole* evening (laughter) to do things. So that was a different way of life. But I did miss the farming part for awhile. Very much so, in fact. Especially in the spring of the year—you came out of the shop at the end of the day and somebody would say, "Boy, it was a nice day." And all you could say was, "It must have been. I didn't see a bit of it." (laughter).

MHH: Did the issue of church membership in the Dakotas have any effect, in the sense that it divided families or communities? Were there difficulties connected with this or was everything peaceful? What is your memory of that?

AR: The German Reformed church, you mean there?

MHH: Anything.

AR: Well, I never heard of families being divided because of church matters. I remember one neighbor who was married to a Roman Catholic. He didn't go to church at all, but he didn't go with his wife. She went to the Cathoic church, and I imagine the children were baptized there. There were a few divided families like that. But, other than that, I never heard of a family being split up because the one wanted to go for truth and the other wanted to go for error. But I could see where it would make division in families.

MHH: So you personally didn't have hard feelings within your own family?

AR: Well, folks went back to the German Reformed church for a little while before we moved, and then they came back to that group in Leola. There was some misunderstanding there too. But yet, later on in life, they were talking of moving to Michigan too.

MHH: That is going to conclude our conversation. Mr. Rau has given us the history and the background of how the German churches came to be in existence and how they were integrated, at least for a number of years, into the Protestant Reformed Churches. His personal knowledge and participation ended in 1957 when he moved to the Grand Rapids area.

Federation Board Update

Another Federation Board year is nearing its close, which means that it is time to introduce our new nominees. This is also the time publicly to thank those members who will soon be retiring from their 2 year terms on the Fed Board. Thank you to Brian Feenstra, Joe Holstege, Erika Schipper, Dan VanUffelen, and Rev. Haak for all your hard work and for making our meetings run smoothly and efficiently! You will all be missed, but it is time to look forward now.

Our two nominees for the spiritual advisor position are Prof. Dykstra and Rev. David Overway. Professor Dykstra is the professor of Church History and New Testament Studies at the Protestant Reformed Seminary. He has served there for about 18 years, serving previously as Pastor of Hope PR Church in Grand Rapids and of Doon PR Church in Iowa. Rev. Overway has recently moved to the Grand Rapids area to be pastor in Hope PR Church, and also previously served in Doon PR Church. Both of these men have expressed their love for the people of God and their desire to serve on the Federation Board, assisting in the spiritual growth of the young people.

Up for nomination as youth coordinator we have Mr. Brett Van Koevering and Mr. Brad Bruinsma. Brett is a member of Holland PR Church, where he currently serves as an elder. He is employed at Kamps Tile and Stone. He values the role the Federation Board plays in encouraging and building up the next generation in the truth. Because of this he informed us that he would enjoy working together with the Board. Brad Bruinsma lives in Grandville, Michigan along with his wife, Trisha. They have three daughters, Kari (15), Skyler (13), and Emma (11). They moved to Grandville around 8 years ago from Kalamazoo, MI, which is where Brad started out his married life. Kalamazoo is also the place where he spent the most time in one place. His dad is a minister (Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma) so Brad moved around a lot as a kid. The neat thing about that is that he was able to get to know many people and even live in unique places such as Jamaica. Brad is self-employed as a tile and flooring specialist, which takes up much of his time. He enjoys tinkering on his house (yes, that means there are many half done projects at his house at any given time.) During the summer months his family looks forward to many camping trips around the area where they spend time fishing, swimming, and enjoying friends and family. Brad also expressed his love for the young people of the churches and his desire to be able to serve them, if the Lord's will is that he joins the Fed Board.

Next, for vice president, the Fed Board has nominated Taylor Dykstra and Stefan Bodbyl. Stefan is a member of Grandville PR Church, and he wrote this:

> I am excited for the possibility to serve on the Board. I look forward, if elected, to the joys of serving our Lord and the Protestant Reformed Young People. I thoroughly enjoyed the conventions that I attended and look forward to helping in the provision of a spiritually beneficial convention in the future for our young people, through the work that goes on behind the scenes. There is an abundance of work to be done from what I understand from my brothers who previously

served on the board, and I express my appreciation to you, the current members, for your hard work. I am thankful to God for the nomination and the ability potentially to help in this work.

Taylor attended Heritage Christian School and Covenant Christian HS (2011). He is a member of Trinity PR Church and currently attends GVSU, studying Mechanical Engineering. He hopes to graduate in August, 2015, Lord willing. Last August he married his wonderful wife, Erin. Taylor enjoys fishing, reading, carpentry, and working around the house. He expressed his willingness to help out on the Fed Board if that is God's will for him.

Nominated for vice treasurer were Joel Rau and Zachary Kuiper. Zach is currently a member of Hudsonville PR Church. He attends Davenport University, majoring in Accounting. He sees this opportunity, if he becomes elected to the board, as a way first to help become more involved with the churches and the young people, but also as a way to prepare him for the career path that the Lord is leading him down. Joel, a member of Hope PR Church in Grand Rapids, is currently in his second year at Calvin College. While working on his business degree there, he enjoys working for Kregel's Landscape and Garden Center on the side. Possibly being on the Fed Board excites him because he too sees this as a great opportunity to serve the young people of our denomination, to encourage them to be active in growing in their faith and love for God, and to promote the communion of the saints among the young people through the work of the Fed Board, *Beacon Lights*, and the Young Calvinists.

Finally, our nominations for the vice secretary position are Annica Bosveld and Nicole Kamps. Annica attends Hope PR Church in Grand Rapids. She is currently pursuing an Elementary Education degree at Grand Valley State University. She works part time at Motman's Greenhouses in Allendale. She is excited to be offered an opportunity to be more involved in our denomination and with the young people in particular. As a potential member of the Federation Board, she would like to gain experience in promoting good Reformed literature for our young people. Nicole is a member of Southwest PR Church. She is studying to obtain her nursing degree through Davenport University. As possible vice secretary she looks forward to working along with the young people as we all grow together in our faith in Jesus Christ.

The Fed Board would like to thank each one of these who have so willingly accepted these nominations. Now we await the voting to take place at the convention to see which of these will be serving with us. We ask for your continued prayers and support as we go forward, working always to glorify God in every way.

Lynette Kleyn is vice secretary of the Federation Board of the Young Peoples Societies.

Poem Thelma Westra

Called To Be Saints

Could there be a greater blessing
Ever given mortal man
Than to know he has a calling,
One that's even higher than
That of angels, who attend him,
Though they heav'nly creatures be;
They protect sons of the Father—
Sons and daughters, you and me.

Oh, how great a love has bought us
While in filth, depraved, we stood.
He has cleansed us through the life-blood
Of His Son, the only good.
What a glorious, holy calling:
To be saints, who sinners are;
Let us strive to walk each moment
Consciously within His care.

If we truly seek to serve Him
We will turn from sinful ways,
And the words we speak will ever
Echo our Redeemer's praise.
Every wicked thought dispelling,
Let's proclaim His praise abroad,
For we have a high vocation—
Called to be the saints of God.

Called to the Ministry

Throughout my grade school, high school and college years, the words, "Every young man should consider the ministry," or some variation thereof, penetrated my heart as the sower's seed the hard path. That word never received even a momentary or passing consideration. I never considered *why* the ministry was *not* for me because I never considered the ministry period. Yet the Lord had ordained me for the gospel ministry and therefore he would in his time exercise his almighty providence in powerful ways and by his Spirit forcefully lay hold of my heart to call me and make me a minister of his sacred word. It was not until I was around 22 years of age that I began to experience the power, the sometimes frightening and confusing, but always irresistible power of the Spirit. I resisted. Vigorously I resisted. But the Spirit had his way with me. Over nearly two years he sweetly bent my will so that the seminary life and gospel ministry I feared and studiously avoided became more and more the desire and joy of my heart. In September of 2011, at age 30, I was ordained into the gospel ministry. My wife Michelle and I with our four children happily serve Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

I was born and raised in Grand Rapids, MI. From junior high onward I was determined to become an architect and design buildings. The Monday after my high school graduation I began working for a Protestant Reformed businessman at Baroque Residential Designers. Later that summer I would enter Grand Rapids Community College and after two years and one semester receive an Associate's Degree in Architectural Drafting. Through those two years of college and in the years following I continued working at Baroque as a draftsman, though according to God's good purpose only part-time, since full-time work was unavailable. The rest of the time I worked for my father as a drywall finisher. There I was working two part-time jobs. One (the one involving sanding) I tolerated; the other (the one involving drawing) I enjoyed. I met Michelle Dykstra and in the summer of 2003 we married. I was 22. My father told me I really ought to find a full-time job. There was no full-time work in residential design. Drywall was for others. I pondered returning to school to become a licensed architect. At least four more years of school, while married, was too much.

It was during this time that the Lord used a host of circumstances to start turning my heart toward the ministry. Among the many, I mention only a few. Four years of coaching high school cross country led to the discovery of a then unknown God-given ability to work with, teach, and motivate young people. There was a growing sense of frustration that sitting at a drafting table drawing houses, though enjoyed, was stifling God-given abilities. There was a growing excitement over and profound love for the Reformed faith that came through attendance for a time at Prof. Hanko's Monday night class in the basement of Hope church, listening to old sermons on cassette tapes at work, and the weekly worship services at my home church, Grandville PR Church. The call to prepare for the ministry—although at that time I was not sure that is what it was—became stronger and stronger. But there were so many doubts: "I? How could I be a minister? I am not holy enough. I am not intelligent enough. I am not gifted enough. Besides, I am not willing to make such great sacrifices." The call became yet stronger. Somewhere in there I had to open up my heart to my wife. Whatever future we may have envisioned the day we exchanged rings and vows, it certainly did not include seven and a half years of school for me and then the gospel ministry.

Sometime in the first year of our marriage, I enrolled at Grand Valley State University and pursued secondary education with the hope of teaching Bible for the Spirit's satisfaction. Before I could finish a year, the Lord took my fifty year old father to heaven, shaking my selfish, earthly-minded heart and bringing me to see and appreciate the precious promises of the gospel as never before. Months later I said, "I am willing." I altered my college courses a bit and fearfully began taking some foreign languages. The

languages were much enjoyed. Eventually I entered seminary, and though seminary humbled me again and again, as it properly does every man, I loved it there and eagerly anticipated the gospel ministry.

If the Lord calls a man to the ministry, that man will be a minister. Not all men who believe (even strongly) that they are called *are* called. That makes it hard. Time will tell. Through life experiences and people of the church who speak (speak, people!) God reveals. Those whom God has called to the ministry he will lead to seminary, through seminary, and into office. And even if a man goes to seminary but never enters the ministry, as many did during my years in seminary, that time is never squandered. Not only do those men gain valuable experiences and instruction for their future life in the church, but they benefit, in more ways than they might know, the students who do graduate and enter the ministry.

Other men who have written in this series have ably identified various objective factors for those aspiring to the ministry to consider. For brevity, here are only two to add or reinforce. A man must love to study. No workman can rightly divide the word of truth without study. I doubt a minister can survive, much less flourish in the ministry if he can merely tolerate studying. He must love it. Be aware, some college courses may lead you to think you dislike studying when actually you have only a strong aversion to the particular class, not to studying as such. Second, a man must be able to teach ("apt to teach"). Not every brilliant mathematician can *teach* math. Similarly, not every man who loves the Reformed faith and loves to read, study, and discuss it can *teach* it to others. In considering the ministry, look for opportunities to teach, even something like Sunday school, and honestly weigh any feedback God's people give. The ministry is fundamentally teaching—in sanctuaries, catechism rooms, Bible study halls, living rooms, hospital rooms, cemeteries, counselling rooms, etc.

There are pressures felt and burdens borne by the minister. To be very general, they include the burden of one's own sinfulness, the weight of setting forth the God and Father of Jesus in all of his glory in every single text at least twice every week, the disappointment and pain of seeing sin and the consequences of sin and wrong attitudes and reactions to sin, and people hurt by another's sin. Because sin is so dreadful and souls are so eternally valuable, there are times of disappointment when the work makes your soul feel squeezed like a sponge, so that nearly every drop of moisture is emptied; yet faithful Jehovah has many buckets of grace into which to dip the pastor's soul again and again.

The joys are numerous. Every Monday morning the next sermon texts await like a treasure chest bursting with treasures new and old. Uncovering them is thrilling. Working long and hard with devoted, selfless elders, enjoying the fellowship and communion of a congregation knit together in love, laboring among people who truly love God and his preached word and are willing to give themselves in service to the church, learning from those who humbly and quietly bear up under enormous burdens, working with young people for confession of faith or marriage, and learning from the aged and little ones are great joys. It is truly delightful to watch the word of God, as the power of salvation, work in the congregation, transforming lives and bringing fruit. Then come the moments of reflection unto gratitude, "Who am I to be a herald of Christ proclaiming the truth, and in the Protestant Reformed Churches?"

The climactic experience of the ministry is without a doubt to be found in the pulpit. I am no revivalist preacher who urges and celebrates radical, mystical experiences as the mark of a true Christian. But there are the genuine experiences of the Christian life, and there are those moments in preaching when it is as if the new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven and one beholds the stunning glory of the triune God himself. I think it was to such an experience that Charles Spurgeon referred when he said,

> If I were forbidden to enter heaven, but were permitted to select my state for all eternity, I should choose to be as I sometimes feel in preaching the gospel. Heaven is foreshadowed in such a state: the mind shut out from all disturbing influences, adoring the majestic and consciously present God, every faculty aroused and joyously excited to its utmost capability, all the thoughts and powers of the soul joyously occupied in contemplating the glory of the Lord… (*Lectures to My Students*).

Blessed are you who know that from the pulpit or the pew.

May God preserve the ministry and congregations, and give ministers.

Rev. Huizinga is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

BAPTISMS

"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children." Psalm 103:17

The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:

Saydie May, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Caleb & Deeana Spriensma—Byron Center, MI

Leah Jordan, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. James Kooienga—Crete, IL

Reuben Gene, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Kara Van Den Top—Doon, IA

Nadia Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Rockford & Andrea Wigger—Faith, MI

Jennifer Sue, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bruce & Alisha Doezema—First, MI

Maya Jaielle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. David & Mary Anne Flier—First, MI

Kase Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jake & Mellissa Baxter—Georgetown, MI

Madison Kay, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Elizabeth Warren—Georgetown, MI

Augustin Timmer, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Courtney Eldersveld—Georgetown, MI

Kenslee Dawn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Josh & Jessalyn VanOverloop—Grandville, MI

Jaxson Allen, son of Becky Quinton—Holland, MI

Cora Noelle, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Brooke Boverhof—Holland, MI

Dean Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kelsey & Ashley VanBemmel—Loveland, CO

Rylen Nathaniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff & Maruso Hendriks—Redlands, CA

Nora Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Kate Bleyenberg—Sioux Falls, SD

Nicklas James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Connie DeVries—Southwest, MI

Lilee Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ben & Andrea Ver Strate—Trinity, MI

Addison Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan & Kaylynn Dykstra—Trinity, MI

Adult baptism was administered to Mr. Mike Peters—Kalamazoo, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1

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

Joshua Fischer—Byron Center, MI

Jeremy Miedema—Byron Center, MI

Gwen VanBaren—Crete, IL

Jeremy Flikkema—Georgetown, MI

Trenton Wierenga—Georgetown, MI

Sharon Kleyn—Grace, MI

Davinia Lotterman—Grace, MI

Jacilee Andringa—Hull, IA

Kayla Kooima—Hull, IA

Kindra Oostra—Hull, IA

Patricia Span—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

MARRIAGES

"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Psalm 127:1

Mr. Brad Vogel and Miss Kerri Koole—Hope, MI

Mr. Andrew Ezinga and Miss Jessica Van Donselaar—Loveland, CO

Mr. Matt Kaiser and Miss Renae Rau—Southwest, MI

As of June 1, 2014, the new address of Prof. David J. Engelsma is:

6290 Gentry Court - South
Hudsonville, MI 49426.

His new telephone number is:

(616) 379-5186.

Tricia Mingerink

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

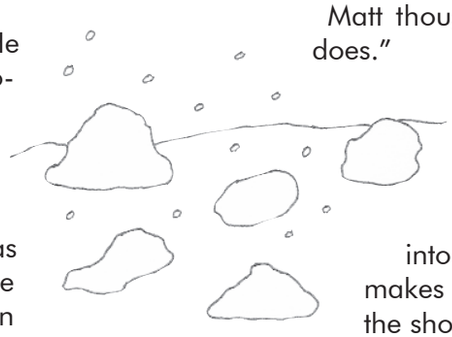
Soft Soil

Matt swiped his forehead with a dirty arm. His knees, arms, and hands were covered in dirt. He'd had fun helping his dad plant their garden for a few hours, but now he was hot and sticky. "Dad, I'm bored."

His dad straightened. "We have been working hard. Let's take a break."

They sat down under a nearby tree. Matt's dad waved at the garden. "Jesus told a parable about planting seeds."

"He did?" Matt leaned closer. He liked when his dad told him Bible stories.



"Yes. The story is about a sower. Back then, they tossed the seeds on the ground to plant them." Matt's dad waved his hand as if he was scattering a handful of seeds on the ground. "This sower threw his seeds on the ground. Some of the seeds landed on hard-packed dirt. The birds came and ate them before the seeds could grow."

Matt thought about the rows he and his dad had been walking on that morning. They were packed down and too hard for seeds. "That's why we plant in soft ground."

His dad nodded. "Some of the seeds fell onto ground that was filled with stones. The seeds grew, but they died before they became big plants because they did not have enough dirt for their roots."

"Is that why you had me pick up all the stones from our garden? Because our plants wouldn't grow?" Matt pointed at the pile they had built from the stones they'd pulled from the garden.

His dad nodded again. "A few of the seeds fell onto ground that had lots of thorns and weeds. The weeds wouldn't let the plants grow, and they died."

Matt remembered helping his dad weed their garden last summer. It had been a lot of work in the hot sun. But their corn had grown nice and tall by the end of summer.

"Finally, some of the seeds landed on good soil. These seeds grew into big plants." His dad pointed at Matt's chest. "In Jesus' parable, the different kinds of grounds are different kinds of hearts. God's people are the ones who have good soil as their hearts. The seed of God's word grows in their hearts. Who makes our hearts good soil?"

Matt thought about it for a moment. "God does."

"That's right." His dad smiled at him. "God makes our heart good soil. He is the one who takes out the rocks and the weeds and turns our hard-packed hearts into soft ground. He plants the seed and makes it grow." Matt's dad patted him on the shoulder. "Time to get back to work."

Matt picked up a handful of seeds and began to place the seeds in the soft soil of their garden.

Just for Fun:

Draw a picture of each of the four kinds of soils. How does God work in your heart to make your heart soft ground?

Word Search

BIRDS DIRT GROW HARD HEART PLANT
SEEDS SOIL SOWER STONES THORNS WEEDS

T	X	U	P	N	R	T	W	J	Y	S	S
R	L	S	S	J	E	T	M	O	E	Z	D
A	Q	N	D	G	W	U	N	N	R	D	E
E	L	R	E	J	O	T	O	A	I	G	E
H	H	O	E	E	S	T	V	R	L	L	S
T	J	H	W	U	S	D	T	Q	I	P	P
D	T	T	Z	D	B	B	R	O	Q	R	G
Q	R	Q	I	I	P	K	S	A	S	I	F
X	M	U	R	X	T	L	I	Y	H	W	S
E	S	D	Y	L	D	W	W	X	Q	A	N
Q	S	H	O	S	B	K	P	R	X	V	O
F	K	H	M	W	L	O	A	O	W	F	L

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan.

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"Ye are all children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

I Thessalonians 5:1-8

http://prcconvention.com