

The
UNFAILING
FAITHFULNESS
of GOD

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“... the Lord hath made room for us ...”

[GENESIS 26:22]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When consideration for a commemoration of the one hundred fifty years of our congregation began, the committee first spoke of a memorial service of thanksgiving to be held as close as possible to the October 30, 2020 date. This focal point was the first requirement to begin speaking of God's care and faithfulness shown to the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids.

When tracing the history of our congregation, it became apparent that the story involved more than buildings and ministers. The study of the history of the congregation included 'people in the pew' who were beneficiaries of God's faithfulness and grace, who took their places as leaders in the congregation, and who exemplified God's grace in their life.

As information was gathered and documents read, the committee stood in awe of the examples of God's leading and faithfulness amid the many attacks of Satan, the world, and the members.

Gathering the information required diligence and focus. In addition to the committee members who gave of their time willingly, special thanks should be given to the following: Elder Jerald Fluit who was always willing to find information needed; historical picture assistance from Gary Swets and the Grand Rapids Public Library; current pictures taken by Jordan Knibbe; cover drawings designed by David Bazen; translation assistance offered by the late Rev. Gerrit Bieze and Mr. Cees van Steenselen; Cindy Engelsma and all who aided in proofreading; and the expertise of the staff of Calvin University Heritage Hall, Hendrina Van Spronsen and Janet Sjaarda Sheeres in particular. In addition, the layout work of M. J. Jacobs LLC was invaluable.

*"For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age,
and prepare thyself to the search of their fathers:
(For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing,
because our days upon earth are a shadow:)
Shall not they teach thee, and tell thee, and utter
words out of their heart?"*

JOB 8:8-10

INTRODUCTION

The history of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation (FNRC) of Grand Rapids, Michigan, does not begin in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The experimental truths proclaimed in God's word which were valued and established during the Reformation were non-negotiable to many living in the Netherlands. After laws passed in the 1800s in that country made it impossible for many to worship as they felt was according to God's word, immigration appeared to be the only way to remain true to their consciences. The immigrants coming to Michigan from the Netherlands remembered the laws that attacked the truths of God's Word and the persecution which followed; they refused to accept changes in their doctrine. However, not finding these truths in the churches of the Grand Rapids area, the immigrant's search caused a new church to come into existence. By tracing God's providence for 150 years in our congregation, it becomes clear that only by God's grace the new church was initiated and kept until today.

This book deals mainly with the origin, development, and the outward growth of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. The spiritual growth over the years is known to God alone. Compared to eternity, 150 years is only a small era in the history of time. However, 150 years times 365 days speaks of God's unfailing faithfulness and continued care for this congregation.

May the establishment and continuance of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation have been and remain to the glory of His name, to the comfort of His people, and to the building up of His church.



*“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place
Through all the ages of our race;
Before the mountains had their birth,
Or ever Thou hadst formed the earth.
From everlasting Thou art God,
To everlasting our abode.”*

PSALTER 245:1

January 2020

Beloved congregation,

I was requested by the 150-Year Commemorative Committee to write on behalf of the consistory a short introduction for the book which is in your hands. The consistory decided to publish the history of the 150 years of our congregation in the city of Grand Rapids. The first church building in this city was dedicated in 1834 after a group of New Yorkers had arrived. By 1837 the local settler population was about 500. From then on the population continued to increase for a number of years. Many came after a lengthy and burdensome voyage over the Atlantic Ocean to the New World, including many from the Netherlands. There was also a time that the major language in the city was Dutch. But what is more important, among these people the Lord had His dear ones who were chosen by Him from all eternity. They were chosen to be born twice: first a natural birth, which is common to all the inhabitants on earth, and then, which is the greatest of all, to be born again of the Holy Spirit. This new birth makes one a true citizen of the kingdom of God. That wonder, dear reader, had taken place in the city of Grand Rapids in a number of souls. This wonder brought them together, especially on the Lord's Day, where they found the two or three gathered in His Name. They experienced that the Lord Himself was in their midst, according to His own promise, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). These meetings resulted in the organization of several churches. Their daily lives were often hard, and they missed their dear relatives who stayed behind in the old country, yet, eternity will reveal how for many the Lord's Day was an Elim of refreshment. "And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters" (Exodus 15:27). Their souls, burdened with so many questions, were encouraged and refreshed in His institutions.

This book will tell you about the Lord's fatherly care for His people. There were manifold human errors and many shortcomings, which makes the wonder of His fatherly care and faithfulness the greater. They were in good hands, as we read in Psalm 103: "The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* for ever... Like as a father pitieth *his* children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm 103:8, 9, 13). From the early history of the church in the 1800s, they had God-fearing ministers. The one stayed longer than the other. The shortest stay was that of the late Rev. van der Spek (1892-93), and the longest stay was that of the late Rev. Lamain (1947-84).

On behalf of the consistory and congregation, we extend a hearty thank you to all who have compiled this book. It is a good thing to deliver it to the members of today, but also to the next generations as well. Dear reader, never forget that church life has two sides. In Dutch we say, *oordeel of voordeel*, which in English is *judgment or profit*. Oh, what a weighty thing to be an office bearer: minister, elder, or deacon. What a solemn thing to be a professing member or a baptized member. How necessary to know the Lord in sincerity and truth, and how necessary for each one of us to solemnly examine ourselves as to how we stand for time and eternity. The God-fearing ministers made themselves free of their audience by declaring death in Adam and life in Christ: "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27). See also Jeremiah 17:16, Ezekiel 3:18, and Matthew 23:37-38. The many elders and deacons, from the beginning of the church until today, chosen out of the midst of the congregation, were also tools in the Lord's hand. There were among them those who were as pillars in the church.

Dear boys and girls, read this book and read it again. The Lord is a covenant-keeping God. What you have received in your baptism is the outward sign of the Covenant of Grace, which is objective. Why are we separate from so many churches? Are we better than they are? In no way. What makes then the difference? Mainly it is in regard to Holy Baptism: they no longer emphasize the state of spiritual death in Adam, and they call the baptized ones children of the covenant. Is that wrong? No, as long as you take that outwardly. It is necessary to distinguish between being under and being in

the covenant. We can see this from the last verse of Psalm 95, where we read, “Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest,” and also from Romans 9:6, “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel.” Baptism puts one under the covenant, but we also must be brought into the covenant by God’s grace. Oh, dear reader, that over-estimation of the covenant of grace in which the necessity of the one-sided divinely wrought rebirth is denied or minimized, has been the main cause of our separation from so many churches. However, there can be an underestimation as well, which also is among us.

I hope that the Lord may bless your reading of this book regarding His merciful dealings with the congregation. As you read the pages of this book, please realize that it is here a church militant, not a church triumphant. Finally, we each will experience the end of our life on this earth. Then the main question, dear reader and fellow traveler to eternity, will be “Have you become by regeneration a true member of that church militant?” Is your answer, “By the Lord’s grace, yes, I am?” Then your strife will come to an end, and you will receive in the church triumphant a joy which “... eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). May He bless to that end the contents of this book. So be it.

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Rev. G.M. de Leeuw

Grand Rapids



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The
Ribbon of Names
running at the bottom of each page
lists the surnames of those who held
membership in the
First Netherlands Reformed Congregation
during the last 150 years.

CHAPTER 1

1870-1904

THE BEGINNING OF THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

*And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon
this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall
not prevail against it.*

—MATTHEW 16:18

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THE BEGINNINGS

“He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills.” This quote from Psalm 104 could have described the many creeks and tributaries which emptied into the stream now known as the Grand River. For hundreds of years, this river flowed through the dense forests of the southern lower peninsula of Michigan on its way to Lake Michigan. By God’s grace, the rapids of this river would cause a city to grow, people to immigrate, and God’s word to be proclaimed for over 150 years.

About the time of the birth of Christ, the Hopewell Indians had set up their encampments along the river just south and west of a mile-long stretch of rock-strewn rapids near present-day downtown Grand Rapids. They buried their dead in circular mounds, some of which still exist near the Grand River. Food was plentiful; large sturgeon could be caught in the river and venison could be found in the forests along the river. Wild geese, turkeys, and ducks

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were found abundantly in nearby ponds and streams. Much later, in the 17th century, the Ottawa (Odawa) Indians moved into the area, calling the river “O-wash-ta-nong” or “far-away-water” due to the long length of the river. Land was cleared along the west bank of the river, and crops of corn were planted and harvested by the Indians.

CHRISTIANITY COMES TO THE RAPIDS

French fur traders moved through West Michigan in the early 1800s without establishing a permanent presence in the area. The first permanent settlement by a European-American was started by a Baptist minister, Reverend Isaac McCoy, who made an agreement with Chief Noonday of the Ottawa Indians to open a mission station, which included a blacksmith’s shop. Additionally, a school teacher would be employed to teach the Indians farming skills and techniques, including the care of cattle.

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Reverend McCoy described how the site for the mission along the river was selected,

[Chief] Noonday had two canoes hid in the brush smaller than I had ever before seen. He brought one on his shoulder and, placing it in the river, directed me to lie down in it, as in a sitting posture there would be danger of capsizing. When I was thus adjusted, he said he believed he could get me across as I did not appear to be so heavy as a deer he had once taken over in the same canoe. I spent the night encamped and, assisted by the chief, made examination on horseback for the purpose of selecting a site for our mission station. Having marked out a place and giving the chief some advice in relation to buildings and fields which he desired to make, on December 2 [1824], I set out for home.

Observing Sunday as the Lord’s Day in the area was, evidently, begun by the Baptist mission. Reverend McCoy wrote,

[Chief] Noonday had said that he designed to put a boy, for whom he was guardian (having no children of his own) in our family. He delayed doing

so four or five days longer than we had expected. The boy was frequently at our house, and we wondered why the brief ceremony of saying, 'Here he is, take him,' should be delayed. These queries were all answered on the following Sunday, when Noonday and his boy appeared at our house very early. 'I wish,' said he, 'to speak to you. I have brought hither my son for the purpose of placing him in the mission family. Jesus, the Son of God, after His death, arose from the dead early on the day of prayer [Sunday]. On that account we meet every day of prayer, to pray, to sing, and to talk. It is not right to work on the day of prayer. Therefore, as Jesus arose early on prayer day morning, I have brought my son early this morning, to deliver him to you, to be instructed in things that are good. I thought that if I gave him to you on the morning of the day on which Jesus arose, perhaps He would have mercy upon him.' This was a rare method of honoring the Savior and the day on which He arose. It was an original thought and one that indicated sincerity, though not a well-cultivated understanding.¹



THE FIRST EUROPEAN-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT

The first permanent settlement of Grand Rapids was started in 1826 by Louis Campau, of French heritage from Detroit, who built a trading post, blacksmith shop, and a cabin on the east bank of the Grand River, where

¹ History of Kent County, Michigan, edited by Ernest B. Fisher, Chicago: Robert O. Law Company 1918.

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the river flowed over its rocky bottom creating the rapids. The rapids were located approximately twenty-five miles east of Lake Michigan. In 1833, Campau bought 72 acres of land from the US Government for \$90.00 and called the area “Grand Rapids.”²

This trading post lay near (at that time) the western border of the United States. The Treaty of Ghent, concluding the War of 1812, solidified control over the territories west of the Allegheny Mountains and north of the Ohio River, beginning an era that changed life on the Grand River for the Ottawa (Odawa) Indians forever.³ The mandate to begin trade with the Indians in the area came from the Chicago Treaty of 1821. As the area drew traders, Baptist and Catholic missions were started and trade with the Indians gradually increased.

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Campau then persuaded Joel Guild, who had left Herkimer County, New York, with his wife and seven children, to settle on a plot of land purchased from Campau near the river. Sometime, during the Christmas season in 1833, Guild wrote to relatives in the east praising the area and encouraging them to move and join him in western Michigan. Some of the relatives did just that, and soon, as more settlers moved into the area, Guild wrote in a letter, “People are flocking in from all parts. The country is settling very fast with respectable citizens.”⁴ As the local population of white people, with their skills as wood handlers increased, other workers with their accompanying building skills arrived. Increased population demanded land acquisitions and thus pushed the native Indians farther to the north. The missions in the area either dissolved or relocated.

The Grand River eventually provided power for a line of saw mills and other wood related industries. When the steamboat was introduced around 1837, trading continually increased. The village flourished because of the river

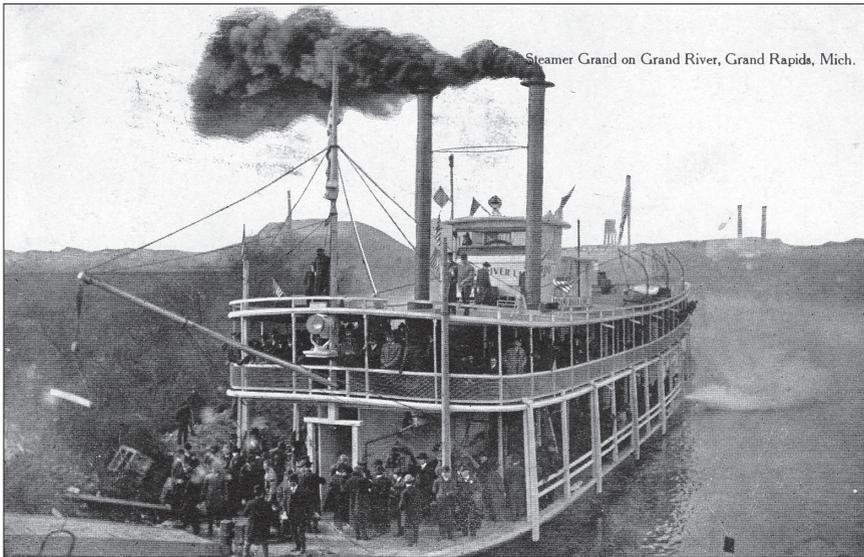
² <http://www.historygrandrapids.org/article/4597/corner-at-the-center> Grand Rapids Historical Commission

³ Heart & Soul: The Story of Grand Rapids Neighborhoods, Linda Samuelson, Andrew Schrier, et al. Grand Rapids Area Council for the Humanities, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2003, p.14.

⁴ “The Story of Grand Rapids” by Z. Z. Lydens, editor, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1966, page 12.

traffic below the rapids and the connections with the developing cities on Lake Michigan, such as Chicago. Hotels and shipyard forges, sawmills, livery stables and factories soon sprang up below the rapids.⁵

THE REFORMED CHURCH IN THE NETHERLANDS



The doctrine and beliefs of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation did not originate in 1870 with the formation of the congregation. These principles could be traced back to the Protestant Reformation, begun in the early 16th century by Martin Luther, and continued further by John Calvin and others. Providentially, the ideas and teachings of the Reformation penetrated into the Netherlands and eventually led to the formation of the national Dutch Reformed Church in 1571. However, in the following years, errors in church doctrine began to surface. These errors became major issues in the Dutch church when Jacobus Arminius, a professor of theology at Leiden University, began to teach students his ideas pertaining to the doctrines of predestination and election. The Dutch government called for a

⁵ Heart and Soul, p. 33.

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national synod meeting in 1618 to settle the debate and contention regarding these essential doctrines. The Synod produced a document now known as the “Canons of Dordt” which confirmed, using the Holy Scriptures, the biblical principles upon which the national Dutch Reformed Church had been founded. The Age of Enlightenment (approximately from the years 1715 to 1789) negatively affected the church by promoting errors which elevated man and his ability to reason for himself. Performing good (i.e. virtuous) works would result in a positive outcome for eternity at the end of life. These beliefs were tolerated in the national church even as sound preachers, such as Alexander Comrie and Theodorus van der Groe defended the true teachings of scripture and warned against the sins of those times.

Finally, in October 1834, the Dutch Reformed Church experienced a separation because a significant minority of members were concerned that the national church no longer followed the church order as established by the Synod of Dordrecht held in 1618-1619. The two keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, being the sound preaching of the gospel as well as the faithful administration of church discipline, had been neglected in favor of preaching the necessity of virtuous behavior, and the requirement of performing good works in order to earn one’s way to eternal life.

The people leaving the national church were termed “seceders.” The Dutch government, led by King William I, disregarded the idea of religious liberty granted in the Dutch constitution at the time, and called the seceders “schismatics, fomenters of unrest, and secret agitators.”⁶ Using an old law enacted when the Netherlands had been part of Napoleon’s French Empire, the government began to prosecute and punish anyone who held gatherings of over 20 people. Thus, unauthorized church services held by these “seceders” were considered illegal. Ministers were fined 100 guilders per offence, consistory members 50 guilders per offence, and those who allowed the use of their house or barn for services, were fined 100 guilders for each violation. Jannes van de Luyster, a wealthy Zeelander and the eventual founder of Zeeland, Michigan, was fined time and again for repeated violations of this law.

⁶ Robert Swierenga: https://www.swierenga.com/Grafscap_pap.html

DIVISION AMONG THE SECEDERS AND THE ORIGIN OF “THE REFORMED CHURCHES UNDER THE CROSS”

Disagreements in the seceding churches led to a separation among them in 1837. This schism was due to two main issues:

- The receiving of recognition by the Dutch government as “legitimate” churches if they disavowed any claims to being the true continuation of the national Dutch Reformed Church of the Netherlands.
- The adoption of a new church order replacing the 1619 Church Order of Dordt.

The Synod of the Christian Seceding Churches (as the original group of secessionists was designated) voted, in 1837, to seek recognition from the government and to adopt the revised church order. A number of congregations disagreed, feeling that they were indeed the continuation of the Dutch Reformed Church, and saw no need to seek official recognition or to amend the Dordt Church Order which had served the churches so well since 1619. Subsequently, they withdrew and formed a separate group of congregations known as the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross.” The designation “Under the Cross” referred to the cross (or burden) of persecution and harassment experienced by these dissenting congregations. The “Cross” churches were generally more conservative in doctrine and life, and experimental preaching (describing how the Holy Spirit works, and what is experienced in the life of a regenerated sinner) was heard more often in these churches.

THE FORMATION OF THE LEDEBOERIAN CONGREGATIONS

In the Dutch province of South Holland, Rev. Lambertus G. C. Ledeboer, a minister in the national Dutch Reformed Church, had experienced a spiritual awakening and was brought to conversion by the Lord. He felt he could no longer preach according to the unbiblical practices and false

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teachings of the national church. In November of 1840, matters came to a head in his church when he threw the 1816 Dutch Reformed authorized Psalter from the pulpit. This book contained hymns, as well as the “Form of Subscription” which, through its vague language, allowed unscriptural teachings to be brought into the church. Later that same day, Rev. Ledebøer buried the Psalter in the garden of his newly-purchased house.⁷ He was subsequently deposed from his office as minister; however, he did not recognize this deposition and continued preaching. In a Dutch poem, freely translated here, he wrote:

We are fighting for the Dordrecht doctrines, because they are from God the Lord! And what is outside of these doctrines, falls away. However, people are determined to invent doctrines from their own reasoning. In addition to the blessed doctrines of Jesus as the Fountain of salvation, these new doctrines shine another light. Nature does not teach what a child of God sees in Jesus, in His blood, in His cross, and in His death. Nature does not teach us to be contrary to our own honor!

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Although Rev. Ledebøer did have some contacts with the largest group of seceders in the 1840s, he decided to remain separate from them as he had serious reservations about the Christian Seceding Churches requesting recognition from the Dutch government. He said, “I did not want to withdraw from them as long as they adhered to the Reformed Confession, but I have seen that they did not adhere to it, neither were they Reformed, but a new sect — ‘Christian Seceders’.” Rev. Ledebøer did not want to organize another church or denomination; his prayer was for the Lord to restore the national Dutch Reformed Church in His time.

By the early 1840s, government persecution of those who did not attend the Dutch Reformed Church was becoming less. However, the effects of the persecution in earlier years were still felt. Membership in a Ledebøerian or a “Cross” congregation often brought economic and social oppression. These “seceders” were often described as “precise”, “strict”, and “pious.” Men could be fired from their jobs if they were suspected as being “afgescheidenen” (“separated ones” or seceders).

⁷ Sheeres, Janet, “Two Churches, One Heritage” *Origins Magazine*, Fall 2010.

The economic situation in the Netherlands gave cause for concern due to high taxes and expensive food costs. These depressive economic conditions affected the seceders significantly as they generally came from the poorer classes of people. To “get ahead” economically was very difficult in those days. Also, the public schools and their lack of a religious emphasis were causing parents concern.

THE SECEDERS INVESTIGATE IMMIGRATION TO THE NEW WORLD

In 1845, Rev. Antonie Brummelkamp, a seceding minister in the Netherlands, was visited by a young man who had stopped by to say farewell before immigrating to America. This visit and positive letters from recent immigrants to America inspired Rev. Brummelkamp to contact his fellow seceding ministers, Rev. Albertus van Raalte and Rev. Hendrik Scholte, regarding the possibility of forming an organization to research the idea of immigration to the United States. As expressed by Reverends van Raalte and Brummelkamp, “Our hearts’ desire and prayer to God is, that in one of those uninhabited regions in America there may be a spot where our people, by the culture of the land... may find their temporal conditions secured... [and] we would desire that they, settling in the same villages and neighborhoods, may enjoy the privilege of seeing their little ones educated in Christian schools...”⁸ Thus, this initial group of Dutch immigrants were looking for relief from religious harassment and the lingering effects left over from the persecution experienced in the 1830s. They also hoped to improve their economic status by taking advantage of the opportunities they had heard so much about in the reports received from earlier immigrants to the United States.

Jannes van de Luyster, who, among other Dutch immigrants, would found the city of Zeeland, Michigan, wrote, regarding the decision to immigrate,

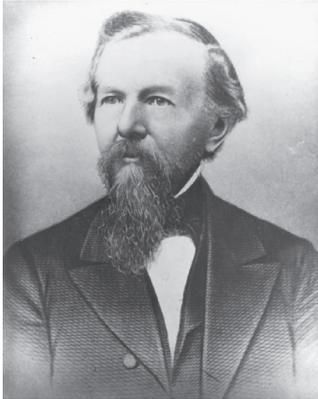
⁸ Lucas, Henry S., Netherlanders in America, Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1955, p. 61.

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...after the people of the Netherlands, and especially their government, deserted the Lord's laws and commandments, He sent His judgments: difficulties in the life of the country and an oppressively high price of life's necessities so that no one of the burgher⁹ class, married and having children, could support himself... I have thought that these people [earlier Dutch immigrants to America] were fortunate who thus were freed from these trials. Burdened by these matters, I turned prayerfully to the Lord to ask His advice for me and my children, if He would be gracious to us. And so the Lord, whose I am and whom I serve according to the desire of my heart, but with much weakness and sorrow of soul, was pleased to incline my heart [to make a decision to immigrate to North America] on the morning of January 1, 1847, when I sought the face of the Lord to offer Him thanks for all the kindness shown by Him to us and to ours during the past year.¹⁰

THE ARRIVAL OF THE DUTCH IN WESTERN MICHIGAN

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Rev. van Raalte

After making the dangerous and difficult journey from the Netherlands, Rev. van Raalte arrived with a group of immigrants on the shore of Lake Michigan, near today's city of Holland in December of 1846. This area was investigated regarding its suitability for the Dutch settlers, and construction of a new settlement began in February 1847.

Immigration to West Michigan from the Netherlands continued, and the Dutch population grew to 5,000 within the first three years of their arrival.¹¹ Due to their poor economic condition, the immigrants

⁹ A prosperous member of the community; a middle class citizen; Wiktionary contributors, "burgher," Wiktionary, The Free Dictionary, <https://en.wiktionary.org/w/index.php?title=burgher&oldid=57973657> (accessed November 9, 2019).

¹⁰ Lucas, Henry S. Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings, p. 400-401.

¹¹ New Netherland Institute. "Albertus Christiaan van Raalte [1811-1876]" <https://>

were hard-pressed financially to afford the costs associated with supporting a church and a minister. In the summer of 1849, the eastern Reformed Protestant Dutch Churches (now known as the Reformed Church in America or RCA) mission board reached out to Rev. van Raalte proposing a merger. The ministers, as well as elders and many church members, “literally shouted for joy,” reported the mission board representative back to the RCA synod. This affiliation allowed the wealthier eastern congregations to support the new immigrant churches in “the west.”

However, many of the immigrants wanted to continue worshipping separately, without affiliating with the American churches. They were worried about “Americanization” (i.e. assimilation to the beliefs and practices of the American Reformed churches which were not so orthodox at this time). The real fear was whether or not they (and their descendants) would be able to stay true to the Biblical doctrine and worship they held dear and for which they had suffered after the 1834 secession in the Netherlands. However, Rev. van Raalte supported this merger, in spite of a sizable minority who opposed it.¹² The Dutch settlement near the city of Holland (as well as the other outlying Dutch settlements in the county) were desperately in need of financial and material aid as many of the settlers were hardly able to support their families due to the immense amount of work required to clear the forest land for planting the crops from which they hoped to make their living. In April 1850, Rev. van Raalte was asked by his classis in Western Michigan to attend a synod meeting of the RCA to formalize the union of these two groups of churches. The food, clothing, and money from the eastern congregations helped the poorer Michigan congregations get through the grueling and back-breaking early years.

Although the affiliation with the eastern RCA churches had been finalized, there were simmering tensions due to notable differences in the more conservative Ottawa County congregations, as well as in the recently instituted RCA congregation organized by Rev. van Raalte in Grand Rapids, Mich-

www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/history-and-heritage/dutch_americans/albertus-christiaan-van-raalte/ (accessed November 9, 2019).

¹² Not a single elder in Rev. van Raalte’s Holland, Michigan congregation signed on to a document expressing desire to “live in communion” with the RCA (Swierenga: https://www.swierenga.com/Kampen_pap.html).

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igan. Many of the concerns and unease contributing to the tensions in the Ottawa County congregations were also present in the Grand Rapids church.

As more immigrants came to West Michigan during the 1850s from all Dutch seceder factions (e.g. the “Christian Seceding Churches,” “Reformed Churches Under the Cross” and the congregations organized by Rev. Ledebøer), previous members of the “Cross Churches” and the Ledebøerian congregations in the Netherlands noticed doctrinal differences in the preaching, compared to what they had been accustomed to hearing in the Netherlands. In the next decade, strong feelings associated with these differences would reach a critical level, resulting in the formation of a new Reformed denomination.

THE DUTCH COME TO GRAND RAPIDS

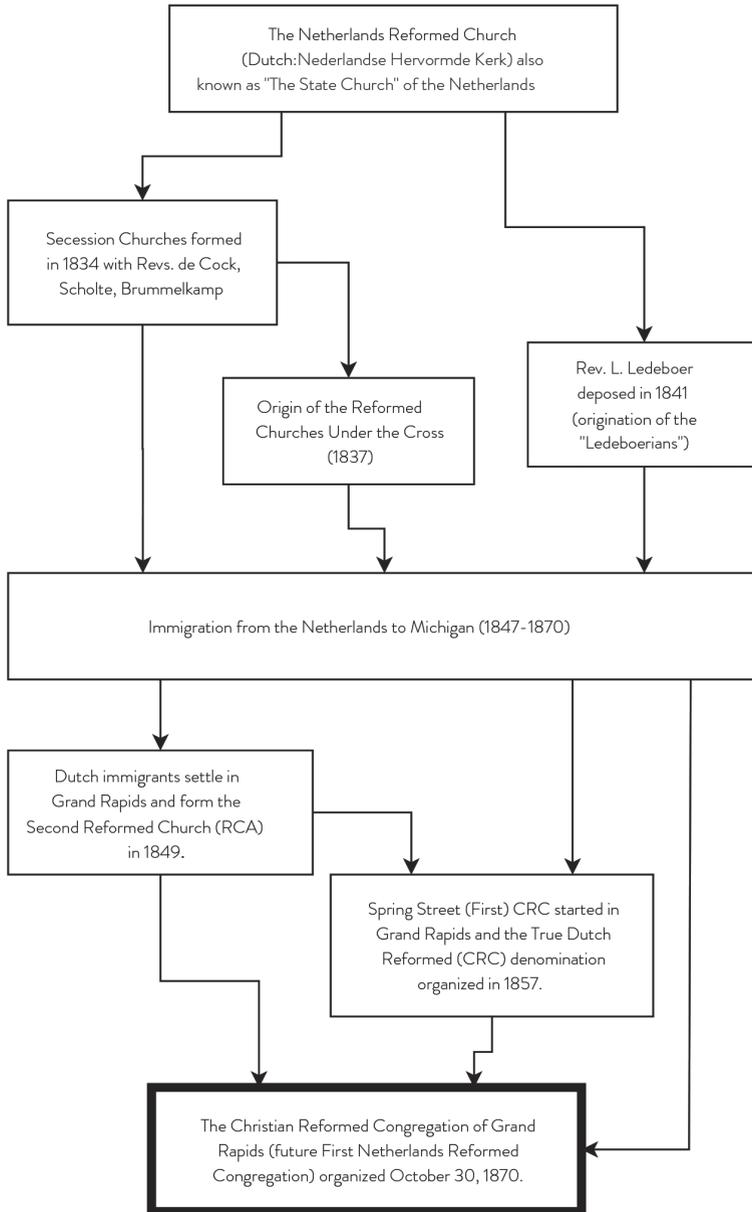
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While many Dutch settlers in Ottawa County fought the forests by clearing trees, removing stumps, draining swampland, and planting crops, others realized that they could not sustain this way of life due to their physical health or because of financial troubles. Many of these settlers were familiar with, or had heard about Grand Rapids, as it was the closest city to the new Dutch “Kolonie” and was visited regularly for supplies. Later, the city of Grand Rapids would become a market for the products raised and produced by the early settlers. At one point in 1849, a Grand Rapids newspaper observed, “During the past week, our streets have been taken [over] by the Dutch. The Hollanders have resorted here in uncommon numbers, and their ox teams have made quite a caravan. Large supplies of provisions, stoves, tools, and goods are carried to the colonies in Ottawa County in preparation for the coming winter.”

Dutch immigrants began to settle in Grand Rapids during the summer of 1848. However, there was no Dutch-speaking church in the area for them to attend even though the “First Reformed Protestant Dutch Church”¹³ had been formed by missionaries from the eastern RCA churches. This Grand

¹³ Known today as “Central Reformed Church” located on the corner of College Avenue and Fulton Street, east of downtown Grand Rapids.

THE ORIGINS OF THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION IN 1870





Grand Rapids as it would have looked in the 1860s.

DEBRUYN DEEMTER DEERING DEFOUW DEGLOPPER

Rapids congregation, known as “First Reformed,” was an English-speaking congregation. However, the minister of this church kindly welcomed the immigrants and allowed them to hold an afternoon service in the Dutch language in the church’s basement where sermons from the “old writers” were read. As this group became larger, they asked Rev. van Raalte in the summer of 1849 to organize them as a separate congregation. The new congregation, affiliated with the RCA, was known as “Second Reformed Church.” This church did not receive a minister until 1854, when Rev. Hendrik G. Klijn accepted their call. In the early 1850s, simmering troubles, mostly relating to doctrine, began to become more and more apparent in the newly-formed Second Reformed Church. Although many members of the congregation had no issue with what was taught from the pulpit, there were members with spiritual insight who took seriously the admonition to “try the spirits whether they are of God.” It would become clear that the Lord had people blessed with spiritual discernment in West Michigan for a number of years before the founding of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

FROM THE PROVINCE OF ZEELAND
TO MICHIGAN: JAN GELOK

One person involved in the difficulties and disagreements in the Second Reformed Church was Jan Gelok, an immigrant who had been born in the Dutch province of Zeeland and had completed the difficult journey to West Michigan in 1850. Although he never became directly affiliated with what would later become known as the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, he would be used by God for the preservation of “sound doctrine”¹⁴ in Grand Rapids. Among others, Jan Gelok would, unintentionally and indirectly, be used to bring into existence a church where the same truths for which he contended, would be proclaimed more than 150 years later.

¹⁴ “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (2 Timothy 4:3,4)

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The Lord had begun working in his life at age 14 after he had attended a gathering of God's people in a house (a "gezelschap" in the Dutch language) out of curiosity. While there, he felt "I was in a holy place... I was like one slain, and at the time, I did not know what was the matter with me. It was as if there was a sadness in my soul which I could not understand." In the summer of 1839, he was often found on his knees where his prayers became "pleas and complaints and moanings to God for mercy, for pardon of sins, and for peace and comfort in my soul... Sometimes I bewailed the fact that I had been born, because I was a sinner." He also struggled with predestination and election and "whether I was one of the elect. I could hardly hope that the Lord had thought of me personally. That seemed almost impossible. Then, I crawled around on my knees almost in despair: I would probably never be saved... I experienced nothing of what others were telling about assurance [of salvation]. I received none." However, he did receive a little encouragement from the Lord and then, "I lost that feeling [the encouragement] and sometimes I was very afraid whether I was doing what was right. That caused me to pray, 'Lord, search me and know me...'" Later that same year, under conviction of sin, he went upstairs to his room and bowing his knees, prayed, "I can no longer remain on earth and dishonor Thy name. Do not allow me, a monster and wicked person, to pollute the earth. It is Thy divine right to justly condemn me." Then, "lying there in such a condition, sighing [in agreement] with my own sentence [of condemnation], the thought came to my mind, 'Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.' It seemed that, for the first time, I had discovered that there was a Jesus who could save my soul."¹⁵ Having spent his younger years, prior to his conversion, in the national Dutch Reformed Church, he now began to attend the preaching of the seceders and heard Rev. Huibert J. Budding initially, but also listened to other ministers who preached in the area, including Rev. Lambertus Ledebouer. Some years prior to his immigration to the United States, Jan Gelok joined a Zeeland congregation belonging to the "Reformed Churches Under the Cross".

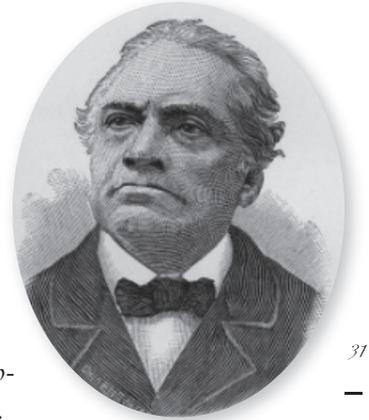
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¹⁵ Taken from a translated and unpublished autobiographical manuscript held at Heritage Hall, Calvin University. The entire document is worth reading as it gives more details of Jan Gelok's conversion, personal trials experienced as a religious seceder in the Netherlands, and how he lived in dependence on God as a resident of Grand Rapids.

On April 26, 1850, Jan Gelok set sail for America with his wife. “We arrived in Grand Rapids in safety on June 25, 1850, and even though there was not much work to be found, I got a job paying [the equivalent of] fifteen dollars a month without board. I received no money, only the necessities of life [as payment]. My father-in-law and I built a wooden house.” Jan lived for a short time with his wife’s parents near the “brickyard”¹⁶ on Fulton Street where his father-in-law had purchased seven acres of land.

LIVING IN GRAND RAPIDS

Jan and his family enjoyed living in Grand Rapids and, after a short time, joined the Second Reformed Church. However, they were not impressed with the Reformed (RCA) denomination to which they belonged. Gelok wrote,



Jan Gelok

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When I arrived here [in Grand Rapids], I soon noticed a trend with which I could not agree at all. People were so liberally inclined. They talked as if the secession in the Netherlands [i.e. the religious secession from the national Dutch Reformed Church] had not been necessary. They sang gospel hymns [in church services]. They considered Smytegelt to have been a stupid man, and the prayers I heard were so confusing – they assumed that all little children went to heaven – there was no need to pray for them, they were members of the covenant. And as for the sabbath, oh, how shamefully it was spent. Deceased persons were buried on Sunday, and people were permitted to celebrate the 4th of July just like other folks. The minister even said from the pulpit that he would be so bold as to stand under the flag and fire the cannons. Well, I came from [the province of] Zeeland, and from the time I was fourteen [his age at the time of his conversion], I never dared to go skating on Christmas Day. Having almost been imprisoned for the truth, I could not participate at all in that sort of thing.

¹⁶ A neighborhood at East Fulton St. and Lake Drive held the name of “Brickyard” because of its location near several brickyards and tile manufacturers. Heart and Soul, p. 67.

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Regarding the members of Second Reformed Church who professed to be believers, he wrote,

I thought, 'If those people are believers, their life does not show it; and it seems that everybody is busy trying to keep things running smoothly [i.e. compromising scriptural truth in doctrine and practice of life in order to maintain peace].' I was miserable. I was starting to become homesick when I thought about my friends in the Netherlands. [In Grand Rapids] on Sunday evenings, people visited each other and talked about America. It got to the point where, when I saw them coming, I would go into the woods... The sermons were so short that by 3 o'clock the services had ended, and the minister was no longer there. One Sunday morning, the Lord gave me courage to complain; and I received courage to believe that He also had His people here, and would have them worshipping here as well. This comforted me. In the evening, my father came home and said, 'Today, I have found some sincere Israelites.' That was good news for me, which later proved to be true...

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After losing their child, Jan Gelok's wife died in the summer of 1852 from sickness. He became sick with the same illness and felt that he was about to die. However, after about three months, he recovered and could resume his daily work. However, he realized that the Lord "had taken from me all that I accumulated in two years in an inappropriate life of continually working like a slave and not reserving one hour for the Lord. The Lord had taken it all away, including my wife..."

TROUBLE IN THE SECOND REFORMED CHURCH

Shortly after his illness, Jan Gelok was elected as a deacon in the Second Reformed Church. Rev. van Raalte preached for the congregation in 1854 and 1855 and asked the consistory to help with the printing and distribution of Luther's "Pearls," Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," as well as Richard Baxter's "A Call to the Unconverted." The consistory replied to Rev. van Raalte informing him that, although they were familiar with the works of Luther and Bunyan, they were not acquainted with Baxter's "Call." Rev. van Raalte responded, "If Bunyan is silver, then Baxter is gold." The consistory

then ordered sixty dollars worth of the books. However, after reading Baxter's "Call," Deacon Gelok and others decided that Baxter was not Reformed, but rather, promoted Remonstrant¹⁷ ideas. Deacon Gelok wrote, "The circulation of Baxter's book disturbed our congregation. When, about that time, Rev. [Cornelius] van der Meulen came to preach for us, we informed him of our grievances and protests, but he stoutly defended that book." When asked for a response, Rev. van der Meulen said that this book was "all right for the unconverted, not for the converted."

When asked at a classis meeting in the spring of 1855, whether or not Baxter's book was in harmony with the Reformed doctrinal standards, Rev. van der Meulen and Rev. van Raalte responded that they could not defend the soundness of Baxter's "Call."

FALSE TEACHING FROM THE PULPIT



Rev. Seine Bolks

Additional trouble developed when Rev. Seine Bolks of Grand Haven came to preach for the Second Reformed congregation. In addition to speaking in favor of Baxter's book, he preached a universal atonement, denying the total depravity of man by saying that man, in his fallen nature, is sick but able to accept salvation. Deacon Gelok said that, while listening to this preaching, "I asked the Lord what was wrong? I wondered whether I was hearing [Rev. Bolks] correctly." At the same time, in his thoughts, Deacon Gelok was accusing himself, "You always criticize... no minister suits you." But, after being afraid that the fault was his own and after asking the Lord for help in understanding the situation, the minister began [his sermon with] some introductory remarks by "using the example of a sick man for whom medicine was prescribed, who took it, and was cured. He said that the ministers were the doctors who recommended medicine to

¹⁷ Pertaining to the teachings of Jacobus Arminius and his followers known as "Remonstrants."

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

sick people.” Now it became clear to Deacon Jan Gelok who was in error, and he felt that he had to “free himself from that man” by confronting and admonishing him with regards to his errors. The thought of doing so became frightening: “I had never spoken to the man, I was afraid of him... I looked for him, in the hope that I would not find him – and I didn’t.” However, his trouble became greater, and the thought of confronting Rev. Bolks “became a burden. The Lord was hiding his face. I could not pray. The throne was closed as long as I did not do it. Oh, how afraid I was.”

Two weeks later, in the morning service, Rev. Bolks preached again, and Deacon Jan Gelok went to church heavy hearted. A sermon was preached about the prodigal son. During the sermon, Rev. Bolks mentioned that there were people who would say, “If I could only do this, or if I could only do that.” The minister then exclaimed that he would not give one cent for their faith. (Rev. Bolks was derisively referring to God’s people expressing their struggles with unbelief and their inability to willfully employ faith to appropriate any spiritual blessing or benefit for themselves.) At this point, Deacon Gelok “began to cry aloud in church. When the minister came down from the pulpit, I was not able to shake his hand as a deacon. I had to tell him that either he or I was not Reformed; my conscience had been bound for fourteen days to tell him that.” Half of the congregation, still in the church auditorium, saw what had happened between Deacon Gelok and the minister. Many people, including half of the consistory, were angry; some said that Deacon Gelok was out of his mind. Writing later about what had occurred, Deacon Gelok said, “The peace of the church had been disrupted... It was our aim to remain on the old paths, and to fight anything that would interfere with those old paths.”

A SPLIT IN THE SECOND REFORMED CHURCH

Rev. Hendrik G. Klijn accepted the call to the Second Reformed Church shortly after the trouble with Rev. Bolks. Deacon Gelok recalled that Rev. Klijn was “a good preacher” and seemed orthodox and Reformed in how he carried out his work in the congregation. However, there were still troubling issues that were not being dealt with by the lo-

cal classis.¹⁸ Baxter's "Call" was still being circulated in the West Michigan churches, and members from other denominations were allowed to attend the Lord's Supper.¹⁹ A protest was submitted to the local classis by the Grand Rapids delegates. After some delays by the classis, the protest was declared to be "schismatic" and a day of prayer was recommended to the Reformed churches to "banish" this spirit of division which was causing this trouble.

Deacon Gelok had recently been elected to the office of elder in the congregation but now he had serious doubts as to whether the church, in his words, "was Reformed or wished to be." Unable to protest any further, he stopped attending services at Second Reformed. "I had left many friends behind," Deacon Gelok wrote, "with whom I was closely associated... Rev. Klijn also came to win me back, but I could not return, although I had nothing against him personally." Deacon Gelok felt very alone and prayed, sighed, and cried over what was happening. One time, while discussing the church troubles with an acquaintance, the Lord came to him with the words, "I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea" (Psalm 68:22).

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In January of 1857, almost half of the members of Second Reformed, as well as their minister, Rev. Klijn, left the church and the RCA denomination. The reason for this was that members from the local Congregational church and other people, total strangers, had been allowed to attend the Lord's Supper.²⁰

¹⁸ A collection of congregations from a specific geographical area which periodically meet to discuss church-related business.

¹⁹ Historically, the Dutch Reformed Churches (including the seceder congregations in the Netherlands) practiced "closed communion" where only members from the congregation were allowed to attend the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Non-members had to receive permission from the church consistory to sit at the Lord's Supper. The Netherlands Reformed Congregations in North America continue to follow this procedure.

²⁰ Hager, R. John, *Reformed Journal*: November 1963, p. 10. Mr. Hager, whose sympathies belonged to the RCA churches, wrote: "When these people [the Seceder immigrants from the Netherlands] came to America, they brought their animosities with them. Just as soon as Dr. [A. C.] van Raalte and the Classis of Holland, as the representatives of The Christian Seceder Church in the Netherlands, united with the Reformed Church in America, this was the signal for the Kruiskerken ["Reformed Churches Under the Cross"] and Ledeboerians to get

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THE TRUE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH
OF GRAND RAPIDS

In February of the same year (1857), Rev. Klijn organized a separate congregation (without a formal name) from those who had left Second Reformed. Jan Gelok was unanimously elected as an elder. In October, a total of five congregations (including Grand Rapids), having separated themselves from the RCA denomination, met together in a “classical assembly.” Rev. Koene van den Bosch was the only minister available at that time to chair the meeting and serve these congregations. Rev. Klijn, minister of the Grand Rapids congregation, had a change of heart regarding the separation that had taken place and had returned to the RCA denomination leaving that congregation without a pastor. However, the Grand Rapids congregation would unite with four other congregations in Ottawa County, who had left the RCA churches at the same time, and in 1864, these congregations agreed to call themselves the “True Dutch Reformed Church.”²¹ Some years later, in 1880, a synodical decision would change the denominational name to the “Christian Reformed Church” (commonly abbreviated as CRC).

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However, internal problems threatened the new congregation. The members, all emigrants from different areas of the Netherlands, came from diverse religious backgrounds. Even though the majority of the initial Grand Rapids CRC church members had come from Dutch churches formed as a result of the 1834 secession (i.e. the Christian Seceding Churches in the Netherlands), these churches were not homogeneously alike.²²

on the opposite side. One can make a good case based on historic fact that the Secession of 1857 [forming what would later become the Christian Reformed Churches in North America] was more a Netherlands Reformed secession (a combination of Kruiskerken and Ledeboerians who later united in 1907 to form the Netherlands Reformed Church[es]) than a Christian Reformed secession; and the original Christian Reformed Church was more Netherlands Reformed than it was Christian Reformed, as we understand these two worthy and respected Reformed denominations today.” Source: “Gysbert Haan: a study in alienation [Part I].”

²¹ Since the meeting and all of its acts were recorded in the Dutch language, the actual, approved name of the denomination was “Ware Hollandsche Gereformeerde Kerk”.

²² Sheeres, Janet, “Two Churches, One Heritage” *Origins Magazine*, Fall 2010.

Some members had emigrated from the northern area of the Netherlands (e.g. the provinces of Groningen and Drenthe) and were accustomed to the teachings and practices of Rev. Hendrik de Cock and Rev. Simon van Velzen. These men followed the teachings of the Dutch Second Reformation, emphasizing man's inability and unwillingness to contribute anything toward his salvation. They explained how the Holy Spirit used the law of God to prepare a sinner's heart for the revelation and application of Jesus Christ. Conviction of sin was necessary before the Lord Jesus could be revealed as the Savior. They also insisted on the need to examine one's self for a living faith and a knowledge of Christ prior to attending the Lord's Supper. Regarding church membership, parents who were not communicant members were allowed to have their children baptized.

Members who had emigrated from the Dutch province of Zeeland and had been affiliated with the "Reformed Churches Under the Cross" in the Netherlands, or those churches served by the ministers Rev. L. G. C. Ledeboer and Rev. Pieter van Dijke,²³ also found new homes in Grand Rapids. They followed, in many ways, the same teachings of Rev. H. de Cock and insisted on a lifestyle separate from the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

Other emigrants came from the area in and around the province of Gelderland where they had attended church services led by Rev. Anthony Brummelkamp or Rev. Hendrik P. Scholte (prior to his immigration to the United States). These men stressed the offer of salvation and taught that the church was to consist of believers only, and that only the children of those believers could be baptized. Any confessing church members who did not partake of the Lord's Supper were to be put under church discipline. Baptized adults who were not confessing members were pressured to make confession of faith.

²³ Pieter van Dijke (1812-1883) was ordained into the ministry by Rev. L. G. C. Ledeboer. He spent three months in prison for illegally holding church services. Jan Gelok was acquainted with him and had often visited him in jail prior to his emigration. Rev. van Dijke's son, Adrian, would later immigrate to Grand Rapids, join the Division Street congregation and eventually become an ordained minister in the Netherlands Reformed Congregations.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

With all of these different backgrounds, the new church in Grand Rapids (TDRC) experienced considerable instability. Different ideas on what constituted an orderly church life led to disagreements, and some elders withdrew their membership. Occasionally, Rev. K. van den Bosch would preach for them, but the congregation needed a pastor and shepherd of their own. Ministers were called, including Rev. Pieter van Dijke from the Dutch province of Zeeland, and Rev. Wilhelmus H. van Leeuwen from Werkendam in the province of Noord Brabant. Rev. van Leeuwen declined three calls from the True Dutch Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Elder Jan Gelok, recalling these troubled days of the early 1860s, wrote,

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We had some serious problems. Two of our elders wished to resign. They also tried to get me to join them. But I was determined that I would rather have all the people run over me than resign. They also ended up staying... Rev. van Leeuwen was called but did not accept even after [having been called] three times. The cause was dying... On a certain Monday we received the news [which later proved to be false] that Rev. van den Bosch had preached in the Dutch Reformed church yesterday and is going back [to the RCA]. That was the final blow... We had just had a consistory meeting that night and the Lord had bound it [the congregation] on my heart. I began to pray and was able to say, 'Hast Thou not brought us thus far, Lord? Hast thou not led us along this path?'

During this prayer, Elder Gelok felt that then was the time to present his case before the Lord and,

What an open throne I had, and how I was able to plead committing our situation to the Lord. I remembered Psalm 38:15, 'For in thee, O Lord, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.' I was so encouraged and believed the Lord would send relief. Rev. van Leeuwen was called again. Would he accept? I went to the post office expectantly... We did receive an acceptance letter from Rev. van Leeuwen, and our congregation struggled along and still exists to the present time as I write, and I have been permitted to serve all of this time, in spite of my faults.

During this time, the Civil War in the United States was underway. While the Union and Confederate armies were dealing with the aftermath of the battle

of Gettysburg in July 1863, the True Dutch Reformed Church welcomed Rev. W. H. van Leeuwen to the church and held a special service on July 5, 1863, to acknowledge the Lord for his safe arrival in Grand Rapids.

Although solid in doctrine and well received among the True Dutch Reformed Churches (CRC) in West Michigan, Rev. van Leeuwen had a rough character. The flaws in his character limited, from a human standpoint, the effectiveness of his ministry in Michigan. For the Grand Rapids congregation, other than some disciplinary issues among the members, Rev. van Leeuwen's service there brought some stability to the congregation. In the fall of 1866, Rev. van Leeuwen accepted a call to Patterson, New Jersey.

EMIGRATION FROM OUD VOSSEMEER AND THE ARRIVAL OF REV. R. DUIKER IN GRAND RAPIDS

About this time, a group of emigrants from the Dutch province of Zeeland, who had lived in and around the village of Oud Vossemeer, left the Netherlands, bound for the United States. Before their emigration, many of them had attended services at a church in the village affiliated with the "Reformed Churches Under the Cross" pastored by Rev. Cornelius Klop-penburg. According to the records of this church, their membership was "greatly reduced" after six families left for the United States. Later, in April of 1867, another group of families left the same village for America. Most of the emigrants in these two groups would make their way to Grand Rapids, and some would join the True Dutch Reformed Church (CRC).

Led by Elder Jan Gelok, the consistory realized that, in order to call a minister, they would have to contact one from the Netherlands. Using the best information they had at the time (which was not always accurate or reliable considering the limited means of communication between North America and Europe), they drew up a list of ministers considered "sound in doctrine" and "in harmony" with the congregation's status as a member of the True Dutch Reformed (CRC) denomination. Rev. Roelof Duiker serving the Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerk) in Niezijl, in the province of Groningen, received the majority of votes at a congregational meeting.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

As a minister, Rev. Duiker had not had much, if any, contact with the congregations formed by Rev. Ledeboer and his followers, as well as those congregations associated with the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross.” Although he was affiliated with the secessionist churches in the Netherlands, he



Spring Street CRC

was more sympathetic to the principles and beliefs held by Rev. Brummelkamp and Rev. Scholte, than to the more conservative beliefs taught by Rev. de Cock and Rev. van Velzen. He accepted the church’s call and was installed on Sunday, June 23, 1867.

Due to growth in attendance and membership, a new, larger church building, located on Spring Street, was built in 1867 which could seat 1,300 people. The congregation then became known as “Spring Street CRC.”

Dutch immigrants continued arriving in Grand Rapids, and, generally, those that had belonged to churches other than the national Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands joined the Spring Street congregation. However, this growth in membership gradually began to subtly push the church in a less orthodox direction regarding doctrine and the necessity of a personal, experiential knowledge of salvation. Members who had emigrated from in and around the province of Gelderland in the Netherlands and subscribed to the teachings of Rev. Brummelkamp, Rev. Scholte, and other like-minded men, joined the congregation in larger numbers. Some of the new members had joined the CRC denomination due to its rejection of membership in

secret societies (like the Freemasons), not necessarily because they were attracted to the denomination's distinctive doctrines and practices.

TROUBLE IN THE SPRING STREET CRC

The differences between Rev. Duiker and some of the members of his congregation began to become more apparent when concerns about the preaching were noted in the minutes of the meetings of the Spring Street CRC consistory. From a consistory meeting in November 1868, the following was recorded:

“Elders [Jan] Gelok and [Adriaan] Pleune are reporting that complaints are being made about the minister's preaching. Another member was not in agreement with what the minister says, but does not want to go into the matter deeper... Complaints [were made] about the minister preaching on Lord's Day 31.²⁴ Someone walked out during this sermon, and the consistory is asking why [that happened]?”

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A few months later, in February 1869, mention was made in the consistory minutes of dissatisfied members who, during a church service, had walked out, creating a noisy commotion in the process. One of the members who had been part of the disturbance that Sunday was Klaas Smit, originally from the province of Overijssel in the Netherlands, who had emigrated from the Netherlands in 1867 and opened a blacksmith shop in Grand Rapids. After leaving the national Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, he had joined the Christian Seceder church. Well-versed in doctrinal matters, Smit soon became a recognized leader and lay preacher in the Seceder circle in Overijssel. Before long, however, he broke his association with the Christian Seceders and joined the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross.” When Smit arrived in Grand Rapids, at age 51, he joined the Spring Street CRC in Grand Rapids. He then applied to become a minister in the CRC but was rejected because he had not been a member of the CRC for one year and six weeks. This stipulation was made by a CRC Classical Assembly meeting

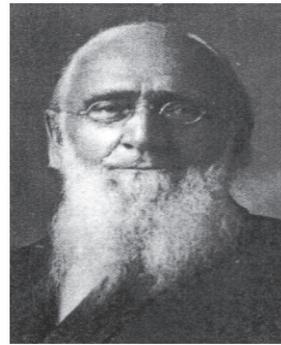
²⁴ Lord's Day 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism deals with the two keys of the kingdom of heaven: the preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

in October 1867. Klaas Smit then began to hold services on his own, and these activities were brought to the attention of the Spring Street CRC consistory.²⁵ The consistory secretary recorded the following in June 1869, “This month, Brother Gelok will talk to K. Smit about his church services.”

A CHAOTIC CONSISTORY MEETING

In January of 1870, Spring Street CRC member Jan Sinke expressed his wish to leave the congregation; however, his request was denied by the consistory. Later that year, his request would be granted, and he would become a charter member of the future Netherlands Reformed Congregation. More trouble developed in March 1870 when 30-year old Jacob Bierens and 37-year old Krijn Goudzwaard visited the consistory meeting that month to request their membership papers. Both men had emigrated from OudVossemeer in 1867 where they had attended services at the congregation affiliated



Rev. Roelof Duiker

with the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross” led by Rev. Cornelius Kloppenburg. They had joined Spring Street CRC shortly after arriving in Grand Rapids. After entering the meeting, Rev. Duiker asked what they wanted from the consistory. Goudzwaard replied, “We want our membership papers²⁶ in order to go elsewhere.” The minister asked whether they were moving to another place. Goudzwaard and Bierens answered, no, but they wanted to separate themselves from the congregation. Rev. Duiker then asked if they had trouble or concerns. Krijn Goudzwaard replied by stating that the consistory was not dealing with the complaints and difficulties regarding Rev. Duiker as a “Cross” church in the Netherlands would have done. The minister then asked, “In what way?” Goudzwaard responded, “I’m too ignorant [to explain it].” After this, the meeting seemed to become chaotic.

²⁵ Sheeres, Janet, “Two Churches, One Heritage” *Origins Magazine*, Fall 2010.

²⁶ They were requesting documents attesting to their membership in the Spring Street congregation of the True Dutch Reformed Churches (CRC).

Serious accusations were made, and the minister asked whether Bierens and Goudzwaard had sinned in going so far as to accuse the consistory of being unconverted. Elder Jan Gelok then asked the men if they could give any definite, solid accusations to back up their claim. Could they address their complaints in terms of what specifically had violated God's Word? Mention was then made of a member who had violated the Sabbath day and had been allowed to attend the Lord's Supper. Elder Gelok then admitted that he may have been mistaken in this case and did not have a clear conscience about how it had been handled. However, after some additional discussion regarding non-doctrinal matters, Goudzwaard and Bierens' request for their membership papers was denied by Rev. Duiker, and they left the meeting.

In April of 1870, the matter was brought to the CRC Classical Assembly meeting in Holland, Michigan. "Grand Rapids asks how to deal with two members who are in league with Klaas Smit and are seceding, whether they also should be censured." The classis gathering decided that "they must be censured." The Spring Street CRC consistory then delegated Elders Gelok and Pleune to visit Goudzwaard and Bierens and admonish them, as well as inform them, that they could not return to the church unless they made confession of guilt.

THE BEGINNING OF THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

At this same time, other immigrants who had not joined either the RCA or the CRC congregations were meeting in small independent gatherings. The language of these honest souls, who were instructed by the great Teacher of righteousness, was as written in Song of Solomon 1:7-8: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon; for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds' tents."²⁷

²⁷ Kersten, Rev. G. H. and Van Zweden, Rev. J. A Brief Historical Survey of the Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands and the United States of America, USA, p.63.

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An early historical account written in the early 1870s²⁸, described how

the dissatisfaction [with the local CRC and RCA churches] increased steadily. Each of us remembered how it had been in our native land under the leadership of our old ministers under which we had grown up. We noticed how very different it was here and often sighed, ‘Oh, if we had but stayed there,’ or ‘Oh, if only our ministers were here.’ Since we were in touch with each other from time to time, this was always the subject of our conversation. Inasmuch as the needs and the desires were the same, we decided, while looking to the Lord, to attempt to form a congregation, and then to call one of our old ministers out of the Netherlands.

Those who “were in touch with each other from time to time,” decided to call a minister and delegated Klaas Smit to write to Rev. Cornelius Kloppenburg who was serving in the village of Oud Vossemeer. The letter would give “a brief report of our condition here, and of our desire, with the reasons and causes which necessitated our taking this action [of forming a congregation and calling a minister].”

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Rev. Kloppenburg responded, but not as had been hoped. He did not wish to leave the Netherlands, and his consistory was not ready to allow him to leave. As described from the report quoted above, “At the time he received our letters, a combination of circumstances had placed him in a most difficult and sad position which made it impossible for him to explain himself as he would wish. The result was that we considered the matter ended.”

Rev. Kloppenburg was dealing with trouble in his family. His only daughter had eloped with a sailor to America. Her whereabouts in the United States remained unknown until she was spotted in Rochester, New York, by Rev. Willem C. Wust,²⁹ who had served a congregation in Rochester from 1859-

²⁸ This account was found at the beginning of the first “Notulen” (translated to English as “minutes”) book which recorded the business and decisions of the consistory of the newly organized church which eventually became the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

²⁹ Rev. Willem Coenraad Wust (1807-1886) was born in Utrecht, the Netherlands. After becoming a pastor in 1840, he served a congregation from the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross” in Den Helder. In 1848, he accepted a call to a con-

1864. He wrote back to her father informing him of her presence in Rochester. Once this became known, Rev. Kloppenburg then received permission from his consistory to make a trip to the United States.³⁰

Quoting again from the historical account,

Six months later we learned that Rev. Kloppenburg with his family had come to America, in Rochester, New York. Immediately our old desires were renewed, and we hoped that we now would be able to induce him to come to us. We wrote and kindly invited him but received a negative answer. However, we attempted once and again, and urged strongly that, even if he had no desire to serve us as a minister, he would nevertheless honor us with a visit as a friend. This he agreed to do...

The Spring Street CRC consistory became aware of the letter asking Rev. Kloppenburg to come to Grand Rapids. Acting on this information, a letter was written to the classis in the Netherlands from which Kloppenburg had left, requesting the details of his release from the OudVossemeer congregation. Additionally, Grand Rapids CRC classis delegates asked the local Holland [Michigan] classis, in early August 1870, whether Rev. Kloppenburg should be allowed to preach in the CRC congregation when he came to Grand Rapids. The delegates were counselled not to allow Rev. Kloppenburg to preach, as the classis believed that his sympathies lay with the Reformed Churches in America.³¹ Clearly, this advice was based upon inaccurate information.

gregation in South Holland, Illinois. This congregation later joined the Dutch Reformed Church (RCA). In the following years, Rev. Wust accepted calls from several churches in different Reformed denominations, both in the United States and the Netherlands. After returning to the Netherlands for the last time, in 1885, he died in Amsterdam the following year.

³⁰ Sheeres, Janet, "Two Churches, One Heritage" *Origins Magazine*, Fall 2010.

³¹ Sheeres, Janet, Harms, Hendrick K., Harms, Richard H. "Minutes of the Christian Reformed Church - Classical Assembly 1857-1870, General Assembly 1867-1879, and Synodical Assembly 1880." p. 261.

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OUR FIRST MINISTER,
REV. CORNELIUS KLOPPENBURG, 1870-1876

Rev. Kloppenburg arrived in Grand Rapids on the last Tuesday of August 1870. It was recorded that,

We were especially happy that we could meet each other here, and told the minister all that has been related, and asked his advice. He answered that being a stranger here and unacquainted, he was incompetent to judge. But he counselled us that because nothing here is perfect, we should join the church to which we had the least objection. We urgently requested him to preach for us, but he refused, and after being with us for three days, left again [for Rochester] on Friday evening.



Rev. Kloppenburg

Prior to Rev. Kloppenburg's visit, Jacob Bierens and Krijn Goudzwaard had been visited and reprimanded by the elders from Spring Street CRC. Two elders, reporting on a visit made in September, informed the consistory that Bierens and Goudzwaard "were hard and indifferent regarding the decision to place them under the first step of censure." Other discontented Spring Street members were warned not to follow Kloppenburg, the "grote scheurmaker."³²

However the small group who had initially contacted Rev. Kloppenburg was persistent and,

...we, holding to our intention of forming a congregation, appointed a temporary committee to make the necessary preparations, and invited Rev. Kloppenburg to organize us as a congregation. First, he refused, but after much correspondence and persistence, he came again on September 30, 1870, and upon the request and prayer of many, he preached three times for us on Sunday, the 2nd of October.

³² Dutch phrase translated as the "great schismatic" (i.e. one who promotes schism or division). Information from First CRC consistory minutes, Heritage Hall, Calvin University.

In the following week, the committee we had appointed called a meeting. Brother [Klaas] Smit, as a member of the committee, asked whether we held to our intention of becoming a congregation. The unanimous answer was 'yes'. Then he asked whether we wanted Rev. Kloppenburg to organize the congregation. Again, the answer was 'yes'.

The committee decided to present the request for organization to the minister. The committee approved asking two of their members, Jacob Bierens and Krijn Goudzwaard, to present our request to the minister. He answered that if there was no other way, he would not refuse, but advised us to wait until we knew each other better. Rev. Kloppenburg also informed us that he had written to the consistory of Oud-Vossemeer to tell them that circumstances made it impossible for him to return at the appointed time. He also told the consistory and the congregation that if they did not approve they could call another minister. If that minister accepted the call, it would be with his approval. If he did not accept, he would return to them early next spring.

Thus, we learned that he was planning to stay in America that winter, and we decided to ask him to stay with us. The minister answered that he would have no objection to do so, on the condition that his family and belongings could also come, and that we would pay expenses. We gladly accepted. For that Sunday we had used the church of the Swedenborgians and proposed to continue using it a few more Sundays. The minister preached the following Sunday, the 9th of October, the 16th, and the 23rd; on the 30th, he organized the congregation, consisting of forty members.

The congregation met on November 3 and chose a consistory of two elders [Klaas Smit and Jan Sinke] and two deacons [Willem H. Freeze and Gerrit de Graaf]. On the 28th, the consistory met with the members and asked them whether it was their desire to call a minister now, or to wait awhile. They all answered, 'Now,' and desired Rev. Kloppenburg.

The consistory wrote the letters of call and brought it to the minister. He answered that he could make no decision because an answer to his letter had not yet been received from the congregation of Oud-Vossemeer. Soon afterward he received it and was informed that the congregation had called Rev. Boon, who had accepted the call. They therefore thanked Rev. Kloppenburg

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for his zeal and faithfulness with which he had served the congregation for so many years. The consistory wished God's precious blessing upon him in whatever way or position God might want to use him.

Now the minister, with liberty and peace in his heart, accepted our call and the next Sunday announced it to the congregation. On the following Sunday he preached on Acts 16:9. Thus, the Lord formally fulfilled to us His promise, 'Thine eyes shall see thy teachers' Isaiah 30:20.

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The new congregation, established as the “Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids” had been organized independently from any denomination, including the Christian Reformed Church (from which many of the members had originated). In the years that followed, the name of the church would change, becoming the “Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church of Grand Rapids” in the late 1890s, the “Netherlands Reformed Church” in the 1920s with the beginning of the Ottawa Avenue church, and, eventually, the “First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in 1947 when the Ottawa Avenue church and the Division Avenue church combined. Throughout this book, in order to maintain readability, continuity, as well as historical accuracy, the designation “(FNRC)” has been placed after the historical name of the church which one day would become known as the “First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.”

Those who were charter members signed their names, recording their commitment to the formation of the new congregation:

Adriana Laurena Bierens	Maatje Paulina DeGraaf
Klaas Smit	Maarten DeBraber
Maria Fockert	Jannetje DeRooij
Gerrit Smit	Pieter Bierens
Luitje Oosterveen	Tona Baareman
Arn Smit	Dingenis Vanden Boogard
Engeltje Vrugink	Krijn Goudzwaard
Dirk Bijl	Neeltje Kunst
Janna Heijboer	Maria Keukelaar
Benjamin Oom	Adrian Piepers

1870-1904

Pieterella De Neef	Jozua Deurloo ³³
Jan Sinke	Jacoba Mullikhuyzen
Anthonia Nieuwenhuyzen	Dirk Geuze
W. H. Freeze	Cornelis Goudzwaard
Johanna Hofmeijer	Catharina DeZeeuw
Cornelis Lindhout	Arie Vetting
Jannetje Roggeband	Lena Gulyam
Jacobus Keukelaar	Gerrit DeGraaf ³⁴

However, Rev. Kloppenburg experienced sadness regarding the separation that had occurred. He informed the Spring Street CRC consistory that one night the Lord had instructed him from the 88th verse of Dutch Psalm 119 (which is translated in Psalter 428, verse 10 as, “Thy servant like a sheep has gone astray, yet Thy commandments I will keep before me.”) regarding his guilt in the schism that had taken place.³⁵

OUR FIRST CHURCH BUILDING

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The Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) held its services in the Swedenborgian Church³⁶ which was located on the corner of Division Avenue and Lyon Street.

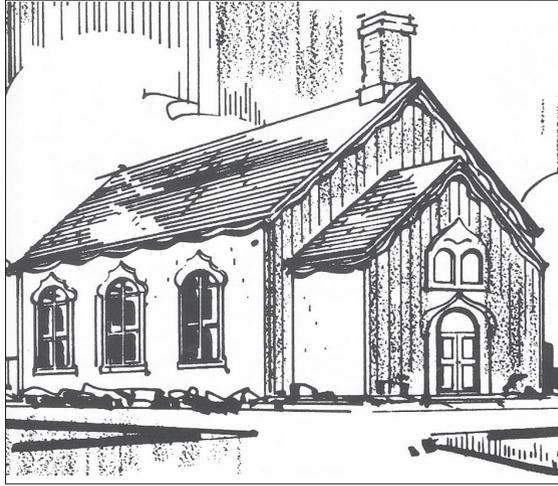
³³ Although many of the original members had connections to the Spring Street CRC, Jozua Deurloo and Cornelis Goudzwaard left the Second Reformed Church, Grand Rapids MI prior to becoming members of the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC). (Credit: Information compiled by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres in 2008-2009)

³⁴ *First Netherlands Reformed Congregation 100th Anniversary Booklet*, 1970, p. 5-7.

³⁵ Spring Street CRC minutes, Article 3, November 10, 1870.

³⁶ The “Swedenborgian Church” was a rented facility that was able to seat approximately 200 people. This building had been built by the followers of Emanuel Swedenborg (who claimed to have received “a new revelation”). However, the group dissolved due to internal conflicts. After the original group had disbanded, the church was rented to other religious groups until it was torn down in 1899. Plymouth Christian Schools, *With Wings as Eagles*, Grand Rapids: HeuleGordon, Inc., 2008, p. 19.

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Swedenborgian Church

Quoting further from the history recorded in the early consistory minutes,

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All went well with the new congregation and the minister; consistory and congregation were united with each other in love and peace. This however, did not please the enemy described in Matthew 13:24-28. Therefore, he soon sowed tares among the wheat. Five months after the organization of the congregation, difficulties developed which resulted in the discharge of the consistory. The minister also offered to resign, but the members refused to consider this. However, the King of the church did not permit the adversary to destroy His work and, except for one member, kept the congregation together. At a congregational meeting on May 3, 1871, a new consistory was elected consisting of one elder, Cornelis Lindhout, and one deacon, Jacob Bierens. The minister also suggested appointing a 'church warden' and C. Fernambucq was chosen because of his knowledge of the English language.

Every Monday evening the deacon and the church warden would come to the parsonage to discuss the congregational matters. The elder, because he lived so far away from the parsonage, would come only the first Monday of the month.

Near the end of July 1871, the minister made known that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper would be held. No objections to this announcement were received by the consistory, especially with regards to the recent troubles, and Rev. Kloppenburg reported how he had felt the Lord's special approval



(1)Swedenborgian Church, (2)Immanuel Lutheran Church, (3) Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC), (4)Butterworth Hospital

when making the announcement to the congregation. Each household was visited by the minister and Elder Lindhout. A preparatory service was held on August 6, and the first Lord's Supper was celebrated in the congregation on August 13, 1871.³⁷

The consistory minutes noted that *“at the end of 1871, a financial report listed total receipts for the year as \$873.15 and disbursements of \$809.73. In addition, the size of the consistory was increased with the election of Jan Proos for elder and Benjamin Oom for deacon.”*³⁸

On March 28, 1873, Rev. Kloppenburg preached a sermon after having served in the ministry for 25 years. He described what the Lord had brought to pass through his service and pointed the congregation to God's faithfulness.

The city of Grand Rapids continued to grow during the early 1870s. “The city keeps growing and this summer another six hundred houses will be built.” This quote, taken from a letter written to relatives in the Netherlands

³⁷ FNRC Consistory minutes

³⁸ *First Netherlands Reformed Congregation 100th Anniversary Booklet*, 1970, p. 5-8.

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by Jan Wonnink,³⁹ went on to describe what one would see in Grand Rapids on the Lord's Day: "If you should come to this city on Sunday, you would find it completely at rest. All the hotels and shops are closed except for the drug stores. If a hotelkeeper should dare to open his bar on Sunday, and if the police catch him, he must go to the police station and pay a \$30.00 fine – unless it is the first offense. That is law and order!" Immigrant Martin Schoonbeek⁴⁰ had arrived in Grand Rapids with his family on a Saturday evening in 1873. After spending their first night in a barn, Martin went out looking for a home the following day (Sunday). He wrote, "On Sunday, May

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Division Avenue parsonage and church building

³⁹ Jan Wonnink was a member of the Second Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. The quotes are taken from the book Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930 edited by Herbert J. Brinks and published in 1995 by Cornell University Press.

⁴⁰ Quote from letter by Martin Schoonbeek to his son in the Netherlands. The quotes are taken from the book Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930, edited by Herbert J. Brinks and published in 1995 by Cornell University Press.

25, I went out walking to find a home. But I couldn't do much because a person cannot buy a cent's worth of anything here on Sunday and no one was around to talk with. That is how strictly people observe the Sabbath here." It is almost impossible to imagine, now, how the city and its citizens generally respected the command, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

Although the young church continued to gather in the Swedenborgian building on Division and Lyon until 1873, the members were eager to have a church building of their own. Efforts were instituted to look for a place where a new church could be built.

In May 1873, a Mr. P. Steketee offered to sell his house and lot for \$4,000.00. He asked \$1,500.00 down and the remainder to be paid in three years. The minister suggested that the people buy shares of \$25.00, \$15.00, or \$10.00, without interest. These would be repaid by the trustees as funds became available. The sale was concluded on May 22, 1873. The house and lot were on Division Avenue between Bronson (now Crescent Street) and Bridge Street (now Michigan Street). The house was to be used for a parsonage and the space at the rear of the lot was to be used for a church building. The minister moved into the house on October 9, 1873. The church building was erected during the summer and was completed on November 24. The original address for the property was 202 North Division Street. This address was later changed to 322 North Division Street. Carpenter labor was performed at a cost of \$325.00. The pulpit was made in the elevated Dutch style.⁴¹

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Using a sermon [preached by Rev. Kloppenburg] on 1 Samuel 7:12, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us," the church was dedicated on December 7, 1873.

This building would serve the congregation for nearly 88 years. During that time, the church acquired the informal name of "Division Street", and later "Division Avenue."

In May 1875, Rev. Kloppenburg informed the consistory that his health was failing and that he felt that the time of his departure from this earth was

⁴¹ First Netherlands Reformed Congregation 100th Year Anniversary Booklet, 1970, p.11.

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not far in the future. He suggested that the congregation affiliate with the Mother-Church, the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands [the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland], so that they could obtain assistance and counsel. This was approved and a copy of the “origin of the Church” with an application was sent to the classical correspondent, Rev. C. Steketee of Niewerddorp, the Netherlands.

The minister, feeling that his end was coming closer, urged the members, at a congregational meeting in April 1876, to retire the debt associated with the purchase of the lot and parsonage, as well as the construction of the church building. The consistory proposed that each household commit to giving an extra ten cents, weekly, to help pay back the loans that had been taken out. A second “zakje” (collection bag) would be used to collect this additional money. The congregation approved this proposal.

54 — *In August, the minister, with his health further deteriorating, told the consistory he had met a student, Cornelius Vorst, who had received instruction in preparation for the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church. Rev. Kloppenburg invited Mr. Vorst to the parsonage on Sunday, September 3 where he preached a trial sermon before the consistory on John 3:3.*

On the following Monday, the minister made a proposal to the consistory. He proposed to have Mr. Vorst preach one time every Sunday, and to also perform the pastoral work during the week that Rev. Kloppenburg could no longer perform because of his poor health. The consistory agreed. For his work as an assistant-preacher, Mr. Vorst would be paid \$5.00 a week. However, Rev. Kloppenburg died on Wednesday, just two days later. Thus, all the labors fell upon the shoulders of Mr. Vorst.

A notice appeared in the *Grand Rapids Daily Eagle* stating: “Died – Rev. C. Kloppenburg, Pastor of the Holland Christian Church, died yesterday morning at 5 o’clock after a long lingering illness.”⁴²

The account of the loss of the new congregation’s first minister is quoted from the consistory minutes:

⁴² Grand Rapids Public Library, 12 Microfilm, July 1– Dec. 30, 1876.

REV. CORNELIUS KLOPPENBURG (1814-1876) SERVED THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CONGREGATION OF GRAND RAPIDS (FNRC) 1870-1876.



Cornelius Kloppenburg was born on September 15, 1814, in Maassluis, the Netherlands. He moved to Amsterdam 25 years later to set up a “tobacco-factory”, but shortly thereafter became a storekeeper. Three years later he married and moved in 1846 with his family to Meppel. There he and his wife made confession of faith in a Reformed Secessionist Congregation. Within months, Cornelis began teaching catechism and speaking an edifying word to the small Meppel flock of seceders. He was well received as an exhorter.

In December 1847, the Meppel congregation was organized and three months later extended a call to Kloppenburg to become their minister. Accepted for the ministry by the synodical gathering of the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross” in April 1848, Kloppenburg was ordained in his first congregation as pastor at Meppel.

The following year, Rev. Kloppenburg accepted a pastoral call to Amsterdam, where he labored for eight years to the welfare of his flock. In 1858, the independent church at Oud-Vossemeer became Rev. Kloppenburg’s next pastorate. In 1870, this consistory allowed him to travel to America for three months.

Rev. Kloppenburg, while in Rochester, New York area with his family, received invitational letters from Dutch immigrants in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to preach and offer advice regarding church formation. In August 1870, Rev. Kloppenburg visited Grand Rapids for three days and gave advice concerning the establishment of a new congregation. He left Grand Rapids without preaching but returned on September 30 to open the Word during the Sundays in October. In God’s providence, the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (our present day FNRC), consisting of 40 members, was organized on October 30, 1870.

Rev. Kloppenburg, being released from the Oud-Vossemeer congregation, could with liberty and peace in his heart accept the ministerial call to the newly-formed congregation. He served as the first minister of our church until his death on September 6, 1876, at almost 62 years of age.¹

¹ *Banner of Truth*, June 1990, p.155.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

Today, September 6, 1876, the Lord took from us by death our well-beloved and faithful minister, the Rev. Cornelius Kloppenburg. For some time he had foreseen his approaching end, and at moments he had a strong desire to depart and to be with his dear Lord Jesus, Whom as a youth he had already learned to know. The care and welfare of his present congregation weighed heavily upon his heart. He might indeed believe that his faithful Covenant God would fulfill His promise, so that he often comforted his consistory, pointing to God's faithfulness as was experienced by His humble servant. He promises no less than that when He took Moses away, He gave Joshua; and when He took away Elijah, He gave an Elisha, and would do the same for this congregation. This he spoke for their encouragement. But the blow was heavy and was keenly felt when the sad tidings went through the city, 'Rev. Kloppenburg is no more!'

Rev. Kloppenburg died at the age of 61 years, after serving in the ministry for 28 years. He served three congregations in the country of his birth before coming to America.

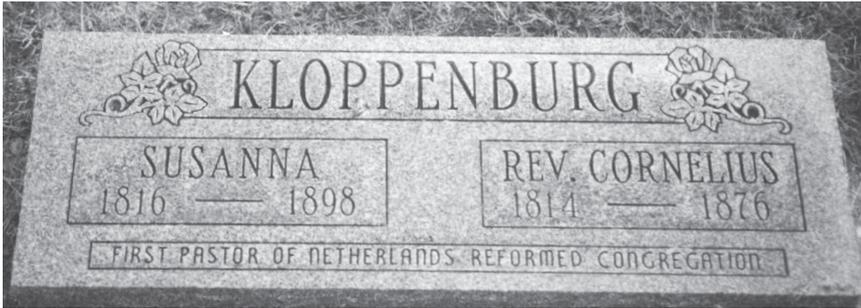
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On September 8, 1876, he was buried in Grand Rapids. Rev. Dosker spoke on Hebrews 13:7. Rev. Boer made a few concluding remarks. The church was filled to capacity with a mourning congregation. Burial records indicate that Rev. and Mrs. Kloppenburg were buried in Fairplains Cemetery.⁴³

Rev. Kloppenburg's burial place was unmarked other than a plot number for many years. Almost 75 years later, the consistory of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation decided it would be fitting to purchase and set a tombstone on the grave.

About two weeks after the death of their beloved minister, the consistory met and made several decisions. Rev. Kloppenburg's widow would receive her husband's salary for a period of six weeks. Mr. Vorst would be paid five dollars per week for the first six weeks, after which his salary would be doubled to ten dollars per week. The clerk noted in this meeting report that the consistory was delighted in how the Lord gave unity, peace, and concern in the congregation. All could see "God's good hand and concern for His Zion,"

⁴³ First Netherlands Reformed Congregation 100th Anniversary Booklet, 1970, p. 9.



in the arrangements made for Mr. Vorst to serve the congregation. Additionally, it was noted with thankfulness, that Rev. W. C. Wust from the RCA congregation of Lodi, New Jersey, had accepted “with liberty,” an invitation to come and ordain Mr. Vorst into the office of minister.⁴⁴

Housing had to be found in Grand Rapids for Mr. Vorst as he had originally been living in Holland, Michigan. Willem Spanjer⁴⁵ and Elder Wouter Dekker agreed to speak with Mrs. Kloppenburg regarding her occupancy of the parsonage. They reported her to be in a very depressed mental condition and decided to look for another home for Mr. Vorst. However, the following week, Mr. Vorst announced that he had contacted Mrs. Kloppenburg, and she, together with him and his wife, had worked out an arrangement which

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⁴⁴ FNRC Consistory Minutes from September 19, 1876.

⁴⁵ William Spanjer emigrated from the Netherlands in 1851, and, along with his wife and five children, settled in Grand Rapids. He became a teacher for some time in the school associated with the Spring Street CRC (True Holland Reformed Church). In 1865, Mr. Spanjer resigned his teaching position as he felt he could not make enough money as a teacher and a cabinet maker to support his family. He left the Spring Street CRC and joined the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids in February 1873. In March of the same year, he was appointed to be the scripture reader (voorlezer) and song leader (voorzanger) for the congregation. After the New Year’s Eve service in December 1873, he was elected to the office of elder. In 1874, tragedy struck his extended family when his son-in-law Willem Hendrik de Lange, was killed after being hit by a group of boys riding a bobsled down Michigan Street hill just east of the Grand River. A short description of the incident and a compassionate letter requesting financial assistance written by Mr. Spanjer on behalf of his widowed daughter to Mr. de Lange’s relatives in the Netherlands can be found in the book Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930, edited by Herbert J. Brinks and published in 1995 by Cornell University Press. He passed away sometime between 1880 and 1884 in Grand Rapids.

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would give Mr. Vorst's family the upstairs rooms of the parsonage for their living quarters until the following spring. This would save the congregation the cost of renting another house for the Vorsts.⁴⁶

A MOMENTOUS MEETING

God's faithfulness in granting wisdom and discernment to the consistory during the early years of the congregation was evident, especially when considering an event which took place shortly after the death of Rev. Kloppenburg. On Sunday, September 24, 1876, Willem Spanjer was approached by Rev. Geert Boer⁴⁷ requesting a meeting with the consistory of the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC). In 1873, Rev. Boer had accepted a call from the Spring Street CRC to be their minister, and in early 1876 had been appointed as "docent," or professor, of the True Dutch Reformed Church's (CRC) theological school. Prior to the death of Rev. Kloppenburg, in preparation for ministry in the CRC, Cornelius Vorst had attended this theological school and had, for a short time, received teaching

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⁴⁶ Consistory minutes from the meeting held on September 25, 1876.

⁴⁷ Rev. Geert Boer was born on March 1, 1832, in Roderwolde, Drenthe, the Netherlands. He attended the theological school in Kampen, the Netherlands, and was ordained into the ministry in 1865. He served two churches in the Netherlands before accepting a call in 1873 to the Spring Street CRC in Grand Rapids. Three years later, the CRC Synod called him to take over the instruction of the theological students. With Rev. Boer's own books serving as the library, the theological school opened on the second floor of the Christian school operated by the Spring Street congregation. He retired from teaching at age 70 and passed away from a heart attack in 1904. In spite of the differences between the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) and the Spring Street CRC, Rev. Boer seems to have been respected and appreciated to some extent by the former as he took part in the funerals of Rev. C. Kloppenburg (1876) and Aaltje Adel-Vorst (1878), wife of Rev. C. Vorst. (Sources: Heritage Hall, Calvin University: https://library.calvin.edu/guide/collections/hh/about_crc_calvin/cts_presidents/geert_egberts_boer and Sheeres, Janet, Harms, Hendrick K., Harms, Richard H. "Minutes of the Christian Reformed Church - Classical Assembly 1857-1870, General Assembly 1867-1879, and Synodical Assembly 1880." Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co. p. 480.)

from Rev. Boer. However, Mr. Vorst had stopped attending the classes at the theological school.

The reason for Rev. Boer's request was not clear, and the consistory had some misgivings regarding Rev. Boer's motives for requesting the meeting. They sensed that he wanted to explore the possibility of opening a relationship between the CRC and the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC). This sense, coupled with apprehension centered around worrisome trends in the CRC denomination, led the consistory



Prof. G.E. Boer

to agree to the meeting, albeit cautiously. These “worrisome trends” were particularly perceived in the preaching which, in the 1870s, was beginning to change compared to what it had been previously. The experiential way of conversion in which the Holy Spirit brings a sinner to the knowledge of guilt and redemption was explained less and less in the preaching of the CRC congregations. The marks (or characteristics) of grace were not dealt with in a way which separated the “precious from the vile.”

On Wednesday evening, October 4, 1876, Professor Boer arrived at the church on Division Street to meet with the consistory. Accompanying him was Elder Jan Gelok, now 52 years old, from the Spring Street CRC. Elders Wouter Dekker and Cornelis Lindhout, along with Deacons Benjamin Oom and Hendrik Grebel, were present. Also, joining the meeting were Mr. Cornelius Vorst, as well as the church master Cornelis Fernambucq and former Elder Willem Spanjer. After Professor Boer opened with prayer, Mr. Spanjer, who would chair the meeting, asked Rev. Boer to explain why he had requested the meeting.

Professor Boer stated that he had not discussed what he was about to say with anyone, but felt in his conscience that he should bring this matter to the consistory in order to make himself free before God. He recalled that, at the funeral of Rev. Kloppenburg, he had heard Rev. Dosker say “now that you [the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC)] are without an under shepherd, we have to handle you carefully.” Professor Boer continued, “And now, I say that I am not coming to dictate to you, but this

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is the purpose of my coming; I thought that you people have to join another church denomination; then the congregation could call ministers. If you ask me, then [join] with us [the True Dutch Reformed Churches (CRC)].” Chairman Spanjer replied, “But what if Dominee Dosker comes to visit us, what are we to do? He will say the same thing that Rev. Boer says.”

The topic of discussion then switched to Mr. Vorst and his studies in the theological school. Mr. Spanjer asked Professor Boer, “What did you think of Mr. Vorst as a student?” Professor Boer admitted to not knowing Mr. Vorst very well; however, he did not approve of the way in which Mr. Vorst had acted in discontinuing his studies at the theological school and how he had begun pastoral work in the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC).

Mr. Spanjer explained how Mr. Vorst had become connected with the congregation. Rev. Kloppenburg had, before his death, believed with all his heart, that even as the Lord had called Moses and appointed Joshua in his place, and as the Lord had called Elijah, so would an “Elisha” be provided to succeed him in Grand Rapids. Professor Boer could not agree with this and went on to say that when Moses died, Joshua had already been anointed as his successor; so also with Elijah and Elisha; one could not draw parallels between Bible times and the current day.

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“Regarding Brother Vorst, we have no problem with what has happened [regarding the discontinuation of his theological studies and his speaking before the congregation]. The congregation is satisfied with him and our proposal [to have him ordained into the ministry]. Brother Vorst is satisfied and at peace,” stated Chairman Spanjer. Professor Boer countered by saying that although the congregation might be satisfied with the current situation, Vorst was not seeking ordination to the ministry in a proper or legal way and his actions were not in the favor of God so, naturally, the Lord would give no blessing on his ministry. Deacon Benjamin Oom then spoke up, “The Lord opened the way [to the ministry for Mr. Vorst] and we cannot say that the Lord is going to close the way [in not blessing Mr. Vorst’s ministry]. We have to agree with how the Lord opened the way.”

Cornelis Fernambucq, an emigrant from Zeeland, pointedly asked Professor Boer his opinions of Dominee Pieter van Dijke from Tholen and Dominee

Bakker, from Goes.⁴⁸ “What about their personal calling to the ministry? Do you feel that the Lord, under their ministry, converted many people? Yes or no?” Rev. Boer, avoiding a direct response, said that he did not want to say what God had done with the congregations in Zeeland, but these men did not have a legal sending or a proper calling from the church. Then, Chairman Spanjer gave “Brother Vorst an opportunity to speak in his defense, if he wishes.” Mr. Vorst replied sharply, that two years ago, he had been warned about Professor Boer by Rev. Douwe J. van der Werp, Rev. Koenes van den Bosch, and others. After moving to Grand Rapids to study at the theological school, nothing had changed [with regards to the applicability of the warnings he had received]. Rev. Boer shot back that he was warned, two years ago, against Brother Vorst; that he would come against the church.

Mr. Spanjer then asked Professor Boer, whether Mr. Vorst “was not Reformed?” “I can’t say whether he is Reformed or not. No confession of faith had been asked for [from Vorst] and I personally did not know him as a student,” replied Rev. Boer. Rev. Boer then questioned Mr. Vorst, as to whether the consistory had carried out their responsibility in examining him and his beliefs? Boer went on further to say that someone in the consistory should have said that Vorst needed to make confession of guilt and return to the theological school. Mr. Vorst then asked, “What would Rev. Kloppenburg’s congregation do then [if I returned to the theological school]?” “Let them go,” was the Professor’s response; Vorst’s duty and obligation was to finish his studies and return to the True Dutch Reformed (CRC) churches.

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Elder Cornelis Lindhout then remarked that if Vorst were to make confession of guilt and return to the theological school of the CRC, he could not “unite with such a man . . . because he would not be able to bring his friend, or brother [Vorst], before the throne of grace in prayer.” Professor Boer reacted that “we didn’t have to consider this from the dark side.” Elder Lindhout felt the differences between Rev. Boer’s denomination and the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) to be so significant that he could not be of one mind with a “friend or brother” who would return to the Christian Reformed churches.

⁴⁸ Tholen and Goes are both towns in the Dutch province of Zeeland. Dominees Peter Van Dijke and Daniel Bakker were ordained into the ministry without formal theological training. Moreover, Dominee Bakker had been unconventionally ordained into the ministry by elders.

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Elder Jan Gelok, who up until this time had said nothing, was asked if he had something to say. Elder Gelok replied, “A thought came to my mind, namely this: I believe we are not divided on the basis of the Reformed faith. I do not know of anything which could prevent us from living and uniting together; I think that to be more preferable than the way it is now [with two separate churches].” He went on further to say, “Until this day, we have had to strive against the Dutch Reformed Church (RCA) and I cannot do any different.” We know, from his writings, that Elder Gelok desired unity between the churches based on a sound doctrinal foundation. He preferred to focus on concerns with the Reformed Church in America, rather than debating Mr. Vorst returning to the theological school. Shortly after this, the meeting was closed by Willem Spanjer. Professor Boer and Elder Gelok⁴⁹ bid the consistory a “heartly farewell” and left the meeting. The Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) remained independent from the True Dutch Reformed congregations which eventually became the Christian Reformed Churches in North America. (Today, in view of the significant differences between the CRC, as a whole, and the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, we have great reason to be humbled by the goodness of God as we consider the wisdom, discernment, and foresight given by Him to these early consistory members.)

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A few months later, church member Krijn Goudzwaard wrote to relatives, “We still have His faithful servants who declare to us the truth as it is in the Word of God; they are the true servants of God and declare it according to the meaning of God’s Spirit; oh, they are so few in number. Due to the death of Cornelis Kloppenburg, we have received a new minister [Cornelius Vorst]. He has been studying but has left the theological school because of the false teachings that are being taught in such a school. Because, it [the false teaching] is, in general, a pushing into the flower garden.⁵⁰ One seldom hears the first Lord’s Day of the catechism purely explained.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ Jan Gelok continued to serve in the office of elder until his death in 1889, when he was serving in the LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

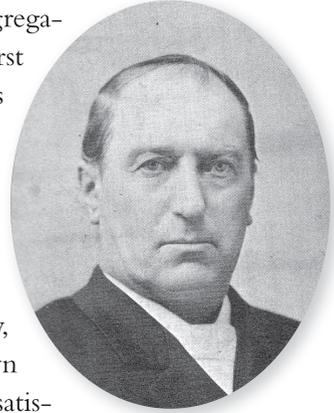
⁵⁰ This sentence is a translation of a Dutch metaphorical expression showing Krijn Goudzwaard’s judgment of theological teaching in the True Dutch Reformed Churches, which was trending towards promoting a ministry where man’s spiritual state of death (brought upon him through his fall in Paradise) is minimized. Living a Christian life, acquiring church membership, and using the sacraments, were considered to be the characteristics of one who had found salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵¹ *Collection of Letters by Krijn Goudzwaard*, Heritage Hall, Calvin University

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OUR SECOND MINISTER,
REV. CORNELIS VORST, 1877-1891

After the death of Rev. Kloppenburg, the congregation sought ministerial designation for Mr. Vorst and turned to Rev. W. C. Wust and Elder Boelaars from the conservative congregation (RCA) of Lodi, New Jersey, for the examination of Mr. Vorst regarding ordination as a minister. About five months after the death of Rev. Kloppenburg, Mr. Vorst was examined in the following subjects: Dogmatics, Apologetics, Practical Theology, Bible History, Church History, Homiletics, and concerning his own state of grace and calling. After finding his answers satisfactory, he was admitted to the ministry at the age of 51.⁵²



Rev. Cornelius Vorst

He was ordained during the morning service on January 14, 1877, with Rev. Wust preaching the installation sermon on Isaiah 62:6, 7: “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, And give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” In the afternoon, Rev. Vorst preached his inaugural sermon on 2 Thessalonians 3:1: “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you.”

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Who was Cornelius Vorst? He was not a member of the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) when he first came in contact with Rev. Kloppenburg. Cornelius Vorst was 51 years old, thus not a young man. However, in his younger years, he had lived through the split in the Dutch State Church described earlier. The doctrine of the seceders had been used by the Lord for the benefit of his soul, as he wrote, “The Lord was pleased to bless this doctrine to my heart, whereby the people of God naturally became precious unto me, and in proportion as the power of the Spirit was experienced in His work, in such a measure the acts of God in the way of secession could be observed and approved through faith, even though the

⁵² Vogelaar, L., *A Memorial Stone Set Up, Vol.#1*, Norwich, Ontario: GA Printing, 2012, p. 13.

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heart otherwise naturally feels for the old church walls. When God works, it is easy to follow, even if the flesh must be crucified.” Describing the separation

that occurred, he wrote, “It was God’s work, once begun by Him, and when He says, ‘Now shall I arise and hear thee, O Israel,’ then those people have a mighty king.”



Rev. W. C. Wust

As a young man, in 1856, he immigrated to Michigan from North Holland with his wife. After spending some time in the state of New York, he traveled west and settled in Holland, Michigan. After the split in the West Michigan RCA congregations occurred, Mr. Vorst joined the new True Dutch Reformed Church, which would eventually be known as the Christian Reformed churches. Mr. Vorst seemed to have been well off financially as he went into the publishing business in Holland, Michigan. He was requested, occasionally at classis meetings, to print catechism materials for the

churches’ classes, including question books by Rev. Jacobus Borstius and Rev. Abraham Hellenbroek – books still in use by our current catechism classes. Books of sermons for elders to read in the “leze kerken” (i.e. “reading churches”) were also published by Mr. Vorst. He began publishing a Dutch-language religious periodical called “De Wachter” (“The Watchman”) in 1868.

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Rev. Vorst was active at seeking to establish new denominational ties, but these efforts often met with complications. Rev. Vorst organized a congregation in East Saugatuck in February 1884. This affiliation did not last long and is not mentioned in the church minutes after 1885. The next year, 1886, the minister and Elder Boot met with the True Dutch Reformed Church of South Holland, Illinois. They agreed on several points: no Sunday schools; no men’s, women’s, boys’ or girls’ societies; no corpses to be brought into the churches; and only approved Reformed sermons would be read at the services when ministers were absent, besides the Bible, the Three Forms of Unity, and the Church Order of Dordt.

Rev. Vorst served the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) faithfully for 14 years. Throughout these years, Rev. Vorst encountered troubles within the church and in uniting with others denominationally.

However, his labors were blessed to the glory of God and the conversion of sinners. Rev. Vorst was a peacemaker much used of God to build up the church during the years 1877-1891.⁵³

During the 1870s, the consistory had to deal with sharp disagreements between members over financial matters, adulterous affairs among church members, and inconsistent church attendance among other things. However, there were other, happier times, including the occasions when members were gladly received into the congregation. One of these instances occurred on a Monday evening in April 1877, when a young couple, Frank and Jennie van der Hulle, came to the consistory requesting church membership. They had originally been members in the Spring Street CRC. According to the consistory minutes, “Both [husband and wife] are examined, especially in the experimental truths, which, for them, was the easiest. They are accepted with liberty. . . . After a brief prayer of thanksgiving by Brother Lindhout, both persons leave the meeting.”⁵⁴ However, life was not easy for the van der Hulle family; in 1890, their daughter Jennie, age 10, passed away from diphtheria.

During the 1880s, labor unions began to become popular. In Grand Rapids, the Knights of Labor began to attract many people, mostly unskilled laborers, to their organization which demanded an eight-hour work day as well as end to child labor. A newsletter for local members, titled “The Workman”, was published. However, many Reformed church leaders in the area were concerned and warned their people regarding membership in these organizations. Rev. Vorst published “a scathing indictment in *De Grondwet*⁵⁵, and editor Rev. Lammert Hulst of the *Wachter* followed up with a warning to members nationwide not to join this ‘secret’ brotherhood and ‘dangerous enemy of the Church.’ It stood condemned for the same reason as freemasonry; both required believers to be ‘unequally yoked’ with unbelievers. Worse yet,

⁵³ *Banner of Truth*, July 1990, p.185.

⁵⁴ First Netherlands Reformed Consistory Minutes, from a meeting held on April 16, 1877.

⁵⁵ *De Grondwet* (“The Constitution” in translation) was a Dutch language newspaper published in Holland, Michigan. Items relevant to the Knights of Labor and the Dutch were published on the following dates: 14 Oct., 4, 25 Nov. 1884; 20 Jan., 3, 10, 17 Feb., 3, 17 Mar., 21 Apr., 23 June, 14 Sept., 22 Dec. 1885; 6 July 1886.

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the Knights included radical socialists and even anarchists.”⁵⁶

In 1891, an item in the History of the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan by Albert Baxter stated, “The present strength of the church is: a membership of 180, parishioners 400, property valued at \$8,000.00 and an annual income of \$1,800.00. The present officers are: The pastor and Elders C. Lindhout, A. Arnoude, N.J. Stokkers; Deacons, A. Verhaar, M. DeFouw, C. Schryver, and C. Roselle; with John Oom as Clerk.”⁵⁷

Rev. Vorst accepted a pastoral call to Lodi, New Jersey, in 1891, where he served a CRC congregation before receiving emeritus status in 1895.⁵⁸ Later, he returned to Holland, Michigan, to be with family members. He became partially paralyzed and lost his ability to speak. He died in Holland, Michigan, on May 20, 1898. The consistory added: “He was given to retain a clear hope for a blessed future, and we may believe that he is now enjoying the reward.” He was buried at Pilgrim Home Cemetery in Holland, Michigan (Holland Township Cemetery), Plot PHI-OP-4.

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GROWTH OF THE NETHERLANDS REFORMED CHURCH IN GRAND RAPIDS

In 1870 and 1876 respectively, two congregations were established in the city of Grand Rapids. The church that would eventually be the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation on Crescent Street began in 1870 on the east side of the Grand River.

This river divided the city until bridges were established. As an item of history, the first plank footbridge was built across the Grand River in 1843 and became a toll bridge. A fire in 1856 destroyed the bridge completely. Canoes and small boats handled traffic across the river until free bridges replaced

⁵⁶ Robert Swierenga, “Getting Political in Holland” - a paper presented to the Holland Historical Society, April 11, 2006.

⁵⁷ Grand Rapids: Munsell & Co, 1891, p. 333.

⁵⁸ *Banner of Truth*, August 1890, p. 206.

REV. CORNELIUS VORST (1825-1898) SERVED THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CONGREGATION OF GRAND RAPIDS (FNRC) 1877-1891.



Rev. Cornelius Vorst was born in Sloten, the Netherlands, on August 17, 1825. He received his first theological instructions from Rev. S. van Velzen, a minister of the (Secessionist) Gemeente in Amsterdam. However, Mr. Vorst broke off his studies having doubts regarding his call to the ministry. He immigrated to America in 1856 and became the publisher of the church periodicals *De Paarl* and *De Wachter*. Mr. Vorst also published booklets and books. He studied for a short time at the Theological School of the TDRC so that he could serve in the domestic mission as a traveling minister.

Again, in 1876, Mr. Vorst broke off his studies.

On August 14, 1876, the aging minister of Division Avenue church, Rev. Kloppenburg, told his consistory that he had met a student, Cornelius Vorst, who had received instruction in preparation for the ministry in the True Holland Reformed Church. He invited Mr. Vorst to visit them and on Sunday, September 3, he spoke for the consistory on John 3:3. The following day, the consistory decided to ask Mr. Vorst to preach for them once a week and to perform other labors which Rev. Kloppenburg could not do because of his weak physical condition. Before Mr. Vorst was able to begin this work, Rev. Kloppenburg passed away on September 6, 1876, and was buried on September 8, 1876.

Less than five months later, Mr. Vorst was examined by Rev. W. C. Wust and accepted for the ministry at the age of 51. He was ordained by Rev. Wust and that same afternoon preached his inaugural sermon.

Rev. Vorst served the congregation on Division Ave. for 14 years. In 1891, Rev. Vorst accepted a call to Lodi, New Jersey. He passed away in 1898 from diabetic paralysis in Holland, Michigan, where he had moved to be close to his family.¹

¹ *Banner of Truth*, July 1990, p. 185

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temporary footbridges at Leonard, Pearl, and Bridge Streets in 1858.⁵⁹ The covered bridge at Leonard Street was built in 1879.

In 1876, the Netherlands Reformed Church, which later found itself on Turner Avenue, began as an independent gathering on the west side of the Grand River. In a rented storefront building on Bridge Street, a small group of people, who were dissatisfied with the preaching in the Reformed churches which underplayed the doctrine of predestination,⁶⁰ began to meet together for the purpose of holding worship services where the sermons of forefathers would be read.⁶¹ Most of the adults attending the services on Bridge Street originated from the province of Zeeland, the Netherlands, and had attended the ministries of the Reverends L. G. C. Ledeboer, P. Van Dyke, and D. Bakker. Thus, the Dutch worship services resembled the services of Zeeland and included the singing of the Datheen version of the Psalms until about 1967.

The two churches knew of each other and Rev. van der Spek, minister of

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⁵⁹ *Heart & Soul*, p. 34.

⁶⁰ Bratt, James D. and Meehan, Christopher H, *Gathered at the River; Grand Rapids, Michigan and its People of Faith*, Grand Rapids Area Council for the Humanities, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishers, 1993, p. 51.

⁶¹ *Banner of Truth*, October 1991, p. 264-5.

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the church on Division Avenue, preached for the Turner Avenue church at times. Perhaps the river prevented the parishioners of the church on the west side of the Grand River from joining together with the group established in 1870 on the east side of the river. More likely, the distance was too far to travel and transportation inadequate. In addition, most immigrants sought a place to worship near their own neighborhood.

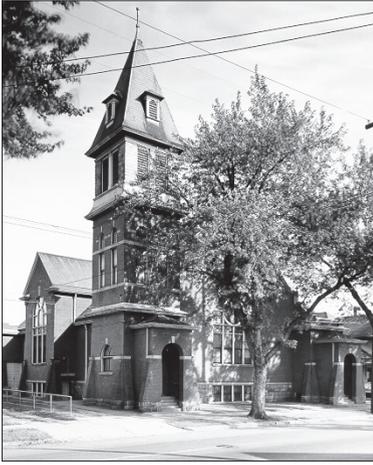
From 1878 to 1883, services at the Netherlands Reformed Church on Turner Avenue were conducted under the superintendency of a committee, which appointed two men to read sermons at the two Sunday worship gatherings. From 1883 to 1887, the services on the west side of Grand Rapids were led by the gifted, God-fearing Marinus Donker, who also catechized the children. By 1887, the group had increased in number to warrant the calling of a minister. Upon recommendation of friends, they contacted Rev. Teunis Meijster of Haarlem, the Netherlands, who had temporarily settled in Rochester, New York. After preaching for them a few times, he accepted their call in October 1887.⁶²



Turner Street Church

⁶² *Banner of Truth*, October 1991, p.264.

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Turner Avenue Netherlands Reformed
Church

The congregation welcomed Rev. Meijster on October 16, 1887. A few months later, he was installed in December by two men who had been chosen to be elders. On December 10, the statutes were signed by 43 male members and the Netherlands Reformed Church was established. A school on Turner Avenue was purchased for \$2,600.00 where the congregation gathered for worship [1040 Turner Avenue]. A parsonage was built on the south side of the building in 1888 for \$1,200.00. Rev. Meijster became sick in the summer of 1890 and died. Other ministers who served the early Turner Avenue NRC (later Covell Avenue) were Rev. Kasper Werner, Rev. Titus Hager, and Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer.

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The brick church pictured, built in 1908, replaced the original school building. At different times throughout the years, denominational ties were sought between the two Grand Rapids churches but to no avail. In 1918, under Rev. Wielhouwer, the Turner Avenue church joined with the Netherlands Reformed Congregations.⁶³



Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer

DENOMINATIONAL GROWTH FROM 1877-1918

It is remarkable how the Lord raised up those who were not satisfied with the superficially preached doctrines in different areas of the United States, and how these small groups were brought together.⁶⁴ The year 1877 was significant denominationally. The first indication of the forming of a

⁶³ *Memorial Stone* Vol. 1, p. 68-73.

⁶⁴ *Banner of Truth*, September 2007, p. 204.

DENOMINATIONAL GROWTH CHART

1877	Grand Rapids-Division Street(FNRC) and Lodi TDRC in New Jersey joined. ¹
1883	Passaic NRC in New Jersey established.
1884	East Saugatuck NRC in Michigan established. Lodi TDRC of New Jersey left.
1885	(about) East Saugatuck NRC in Michigan left.
1886	South Holland TDRC in Illinois joined.
1887	South Holland TDRC in Illinois left.
1893	Paterson-Peoples Park NRC in New Jersey established.
1895	(about) Passaic NRC in New Jersey left.
1896	Union with Grand Rapids-Turner Avenue failed.
1899	Fremont NRC in Michigan established.
1900	Paterson-Peoples Park NRC in New Jersey left.
1909	South Holland TDRC in Illinois rejoined.
1905	Contact with independent congregation of Grand Rapids-Turner Avenue again, but no union. Fremont NRC in Michigan left.
1907	Paterson-Haledon Avenue NRC in New Jersey rejoined. Sheboygan NRC in Wisconsin established.
1909	Passaic NRC in New Jersey joined again. Kalamazoo NRC in Michigan joined. Union with Grand Rapids-Turner Avenue failed again. Fremont NRC in Michigan rejoined.
1911	Union with Muskegon, Michigan failed.
1912	West Sayville NRC in New York established.
1913/14	Sioux Center NRC and Rock Valley NRC in Iowa established.
1916	Patterson-Peoples Park NRC in New Jersey rejoined.
1917	Corsica, South Dakota, a branch of Sioux Center NRC formed.
1918	Grand Rapids-Turner Avenue NRC joined ² .
1923-24	Fremont NRC in Michigan closed.
¹	In the early history of Grand Rapids, <i>Street</i> and <i>Avenue</i> were used interchangeably. Thus the church was often called Division Street church or Turner Street church as shown on maps in <u>Heart and Soul</u> p. 35. Later the churches were called Turner Avenue church or Division Avenue church as Avenue designated a north/south address.
²	Memorial Stone Vol. 1, p. 41-42.

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denomination in this country is recorded in the Division Avenue consistory minutes of January 8, 1877. At a consistory meeting with Rev. Vorst, Rev. W. C. Wust and Elder G. Boelaard of Lodi, New Jersey, the decision was made to unite under the name of Netherlands Reformed. The Grand Rapids church would keep its name, Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC), under which it was incorporated.⁶⁵

During the next few years, affiliations with other churches occupied the attention of the consistory. The growth of the denomination is shown below. Denominational ties were taken up with the Passaic church when Rev. Wust became its pastor.⁶⁶

OUR THIRD MINISTER, REV. MAARTEN VAN DER SPEK, 1892-1893

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A year following Rev. Vorst's departure in 1891, Rev. Maarten van der Spek accepted a pastoral call to the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC). He arrived in Grand Rapids on October 4, 1892, and was "received by a congregation, a people unknown, but that eagerly awaited the minister..." He was installed in Grand Rapids under the leadership of local elders. Elder Stokkers read a sermon based on 1 Kings 14:14, "But what? Even now." Elder C. Lindhout read the Form of Installation. A CRC minister of LaGrave Avenue, Rev. S. J. van der Beek, participated in the ordination,⁶⁷ "After having read the Form of Installation, and after Rev. van der Spek had said, 'Yes, truly, with all my heart,' the elder who installed him said, 'Congregation, we have prayed to the Lord for a minister, and He has given us one. May he be a saviour of life to us, and not a saviour of death. So be it!' Then Psalter 436 was sung."⁶⁸

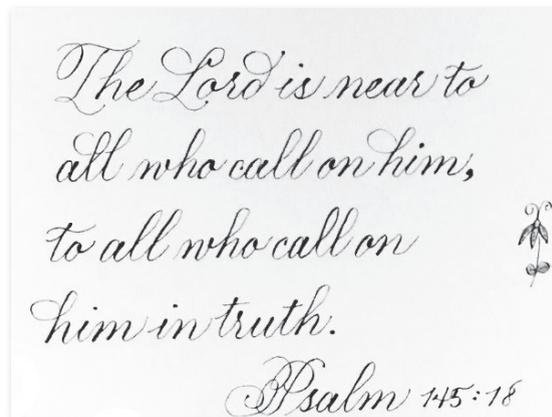
⁶⁵ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.10.

⁶⁶ *Banner of Truth*, March 1991, p. 61.

⁶⁷ *Banner of Truth*, 1991, p. 185.

⁶⁸ *Memorial Stone Vol. 4*, p. 7.

The first sermon preached in Grand Rapids by Rev. van der Spek was based on Acts 10:29, “Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” His daughter Jacoba wrote about this time: “The Lord was good and gave blessing and labors, but we so often see that when everything goes so well, frequently dark clouds hang above us. When the minister saw that the congregation was happy and there was peace, he sometimes said, ‘I have a fear.’ And notice, it has come, because shortly after the beginning of the year 1893, the minister’s strength began to wane. He suffered difficulties with his stomach, and none of the means used were of any help.” Rev. van der Spek continued preaching three times on Sunday and once during the week – one week he preached in his own congregation and the other week in “a congregation on the other side of the river which was without an undershepherd.”⁶⁹



Rev. van der Spek was talented in the art of calligraphy, and the Bible texts which he wrote out hung on the walls of homes of the members of his congregation. They were treasures as visible memories of him, for there is no known picture of this minister.

When Rev. van der Spek arrived in Grand Rapids, he was already in his early 70s. Jacoba van der Spek, his daughter, wrote: “However, the Lord continuously gave him strength and was near to him in the preaching by leading him into the hidden truths in His Word.” On June 18, the minister

⁶⁹ *Banner of Truth*, May 2012.

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preached his last sermons: in the morning from John 7:37 and 38 and in the afternoon from Isaiah 64:6 along with Lord's Day 24. He was unable to preach in the evening.

The congregation could not let go of their minister, nor the minister of his congregation, until the Lord Himself made the break. In this way we saw our dear father fail from day to day so that we had to help him because he had become so weak. It pleased the Lord to release His servant from all his concerns, to enlighten him with His grace, and to lead him into His sanctuary. . . In this he was submissive.⁷⁰

Less than one year after his installation, it pleased the Lord to release this servant from his earthly labors. The minister, Rev. S. J. van der Beek, who conducted the funeral said:

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We have the right to mourn before the Lord at a time like this, and if we love Zion, we cannot restrain ourselves from weeping when the righteous are taken from us. Our brother, for whom you had sent to worship among you as God's servant and to preach the glad tidings of the Lord Jesus Christ in your church, is no longer with us. How short has his stay been with you, about eight months, and he was called away. He was not called to another field of work; no, the great Head of the Church has called him to his eternal home. My acquaintance with the deceased led me to believe from his conversations and teachings from the first to the last, that he was a servant of God; one who was jealous of the King's honor, a humble man, simple in his speech and diligent in his life. I have met him not only in his home but also in his field of work. He was an old man; his high age was clearly shown. Nevertheless, the fire of love for the souls in his care led him onward through the cold of the winter. He was not kept home by ice and snow. From his conversations, we have reason to believe that you, as a congregation, were near to his heart.

. . . To you who have sat under his preaching, let me ask you what benefit it has been used for. Have you rejoiced only for a time, and wonder what you will hear again afterwards? Do you only hear the Word? Is that all? O be warned, the light that was given to you to lift your feet in the way of life, if

⁷⁰ Banner of Truth, May 2012.

this has not been your earnest desire, then let me urge you not to harden your heart today. If, however, you neglect this, if you reject the words of the Lord and the words of His servants, remember today that the voice of him who is now silenced by death will bear witness against you in the great day of the Lord. . .

*May the Lord now grant you in His grace to see the light, and urge you to walk in it, and His name be praised forever and ever. Amen.*⁷¹

Although Rev. van der Spek's tenure was relatively short, the Lord did direct that the van der Spek name would remain prominent in the service of the congregation for many years. Two daughters, Jacoba and Jannetje, lived to the age of 93 and 88, and their memory lingers as having served the church in many ways. The daughters also served the church as custodians of the Division Avenue church.⁷² After the minister's death, the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) on Division Street remained vacant for three years.



⁷¹ van der Beek, Rev. S.J., "Begravenis van Ds. M. van der Spek, In Memoriam," Grand Rapids, MI, 1893.

⁷² *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.10.

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REV. MAARTEN VAN DER SPEK (1822-1893) SERVED THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CONGREGATION OF GRAND RAPIDS (FNRC) 1892-1893.

*M*aarten van der Spek was working as a ferry boatman in Schiedam, the Netherlands, when the Lord called him to the ministry. He was an exhorter in Sliedrecht and later became a minister in the Free Reformed Congregation in the early 1880s when he was 60 years old. In 1886, he accepted a call to a congregation in Dirksland which later joined the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (the sister denomination, in the Netherlands, of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations of North America). Six years later, he came to North America.

Rev. van der Spek was installed in Grand Rapids Division Street church under the elders of the consistory when he was 70 years old. Less than one year later, the minister died on September 7, 1893, and Rev. van der Beek conducted his funeral.¹ Rev. van der Spek was buried in Fulton Street Cemetery.

In one of the sermon booklets written by him, Rev. van der Spek wrote that it was his wish and prayer that “the Spirit of Christ may shine upon thee, and that a true interest may be quickened in your souls to examine why the Lord will still have to do with a child of Adam. This only flows forth from the eternal good pleasure. Christ alone is the Centre point and the Revelation thereof, to convince children of men of the Way of escape from the eternal wrath, which the Triune God has opened only for His own sake.”²

¹ *Banner of Truth*, August 1990, p. 20.

² *Banner of Truth*, May 2012.

1870-1904

**OUR FOURTH MINISTER,
REV. GERRIT J. WOLBERS, 1896-1904**

Except for one call to Rev. Titus Hager of Paterson, New Jersey, calls during the next three years were sent to ministers in the Netherlands. In June 1896, God inclined the heart of 29-year old Rev. G. J. Wolbers from Ooltgensplaat to accept the call from the Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids (FNRC) and thus began his 13-year ministry in America.



Rev. G. J. Wolbers

From his childhood, Gerrit J. Wolbers was drawn by the Lord, and as a boy of five years of age, he sought out places of solitude to bow his knees and beg the Lord for a new heart. Especially his mother and older brother often displayed much anger about his lifestyle. At the age of 16 years, he was already requested to speak an edifying word in the religious gatherings of God's people in his neighborhood. The Lord blessed these endeavors and Gerrit J. Wolbers, in time, became an exhorter and later a minister. He was installed in November of 1896 by Elder Aarnoudse in Grand Rapids. These words were later spoken about Rev. Wolbers:

He had something strange about his person and manner. So often, he was occupied in the things of the Lord, and his soul was so busy with heavenly reflections and contemplations of peace, that he forgot where he was. One had the impression, considering how his lips were always moving when he thought others were not watching, that he was continually engaged in prayer. When he was walking in the street, completely immersed in his thought, then other passers-by would often hear him whispering or speaking to his God.⁷³

Others also remembered Rev. Wolbers as a minister with an independent and unique character. He avoided denominational ties whenever possible,

⁷³ Memorial Stone Vol. 1, p. 59.

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although he did assist with the organization of a church in Fremont, Michigan on September 20, 1899. Nevertheless, he was privileged to have a close walk of life with the Lord. It was said of him that he was walking with his feet on the earth while his soul was above the clouds.⁷⁴



Elder John Sporte

One of the members who joined the church and began his service to the congregation under Rev. Wolbers was Mr. John Sporte who later served as an elder in the church for 45 years. This story was shared by his granddaughter, Ms. Helen Kamp.

When John and his wife Janna, with their first child Cornelia, emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States in the late 1890s, it was a poor time in the country. There wasn't much work; they could not even buy a job. He finally found work delivering drinking water to factories, etc. The water was from the Hastings Street spring. The pay was \$8.00 a week, but they managed to pay off some debt. Delivery was done by horse and wagon. On one delivery, he had to cross a wooden bridge over a canal and the wagon broke through the bridge and the horse drawn wagon ended up in the canal. Mr. Sporte went under the water and came up for the third time when a man saw him and handed a board out to him which saved him from drowning. This made quite an impression on him because by that time he had a family of children who would have been without a father if he had drowned. It was at this time, he came to the knowledge of how good the Lord had been to him by saving him from drowning.

Later, Mr. Sporte worked for the City of Grand Rapids maintaining the sewer system. It is said that he knew the sewer system better than the city officials. They just had to tell him in what area there was a problem, and he knew what had to be done.

⁷⁴ Banner of Truth, August 1990 p. 206.

**REV. GERRIT JAN WOLBERS (1866-1922) SERVED NEDERDUITSCH
(NETHERLANDS) REFORMED CHURCH (FNRC) 1896-1904.**



Gerrit Jan Wolbers was born on September 23, 1866, in Markeloo, a village in Overijssel, the Netherlands. His parents were farmers and lived worldly lives, without the fear of God. From his early days, Gerrit was drawn by the Lord and sought out places of solitude to beg the Lord for a new heart. His mother and older brother often showed enmity against his lifestyle.

His parents were not at all pleased that their son sought the Lord. It became evident that he was seeking for things other than that which the world offered. His family accused him of laziness and made fun of him. Finally, they found a place for him to work, herding the sheep. After he started that job, his family concerned themselves very little with his education and necessities. However, under God's providing care, an uncle arranged that Gerrit might receive clothing and also some education. Thus, he came in contact with a number of God's people who supplied him with books of the old writers. Through the truth of these books, a desire was aroused in him to be a preacher of the Gospel.

At 16 years of age, he was asked from time to time to speak an edifying word in the religious gatherings of God's people in his neighborhood. The Lord blessed these endeavors, and many gathered to hear him.

He attempted to work in a factory but Gerrit Wolbers felt he was called to the office of a minister. He then studied for a few months but returned because he was not in agreement with his instructors. He moved to Rijssen and was taught by Rev. L. Spoel. He continued to lead services both on Sundays and during the week. In 1886, when he was only 20 years old, the congregation of Doetinchem invited him to serve them every Sunday. This he did, and the congregation flourished. Two years later he accepted a call to the congregation of Sliedrecht to be their exhorter and later moved to Ooltgensplaat where he was ordained into the full ministry.

In 1896, he received a call from the Grand Rapids congregation which he accepted and began his work in America. After eight years in Grand Rapids, he accepted a call to the congregation of Kalamazoo. Later, he moved back to the Netherlands. On Christmas Day, 1921, he spoke in his congregation on Luke 2:13-14 which proved to be his last sermon. He passed away on January 11, 1922, at the age of 55.¹

¹ Moerdyk, Garret, Our Hope for Years to Come, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, p.88-89.

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When the Sporte family arrived in Grand Rapids, they began attending Fourth Reformed Church which was near to where they lived. During Mr. Sporte's time of employment, he met a Mr. Dick De Bruyn who attended services at the Netherlands Reformed Church on Turner Avenue. Mr. De Bruyn talked with Mr. Sporte and gave him some books to read. Mr. Sporte soon felt that he was not hearing sound preaching in which a sinner is abased to the lowest and Christ is exalted to the highest. He then started to attend services at the Division Avenue church. He had to tell the Fourth Reformed minister that he could not stay there because he could not trust his soul nor the souls of his children under that preaching.

Mr. Sporte served the Division Avenue church as elder for 45 years. He was installed in January 1900 and continued in this office until his death in 1945. He resided at 1255 Penn Avenue NE, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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At a congregational meeting in November 1898, a new name for the church was approved. Until this time, the official name was: Christian Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids. The new name was to be: Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church (FNRC) of Grand Rapids, Michigan. This represented the historic name under which our fathers made their confession and fought for the truth; by adopting it, the congregation resolved in God's strength to continue in the doctrine, discipline, and service of our forefathers as based on the fundamentals of God's Word. To satisfy the official incorporation articles, the new name was ratified unanimously at a congregational meeting held on March 27, 1899.⁷⁵

In October 1904, after serving the Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church (FNRC) for eight years, Rev. Wolbers accepted the third call extended to him by the Free Nederduitsch Reformed Congregation of Kalamazoo which was then independent.

⁷⁵ First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet, p.10.



RUS RYSDYK SANDEE SCHELLING SCHIEVINK

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CHAPTER 2

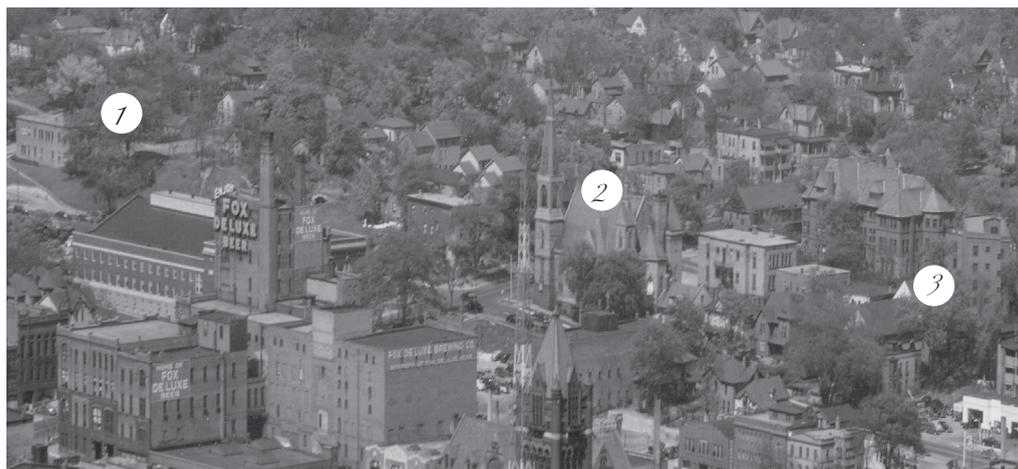
1905-1921

THE NEDERDUITSCH (NETHERLANDS) REFORMED CHURCH (FNRC) OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN EXPANDS AND PROSPERS SPIRITUALLY

*Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which
thou hast done, and thy thought which are to us-ward: they
cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare
and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.*

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PSALM 40:5



Grand Rapids around 1908: (1) Hastings Street Christian School, (2) Immanuel Lutheran Church, (3) Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church (FNRC)

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**OUR FIFTH MINISTER,
REV. CORNELIUS PIENEMAN, 1906-1909**



Rev. Cornelius Pieneman

The consistory of the Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church (FNRC) was without a minister in 1904 and decided to seek union with the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross” in the Netherlands so that they could call a minister from that denomination. Rev. Pieneman of Rotterdam answered their request by stating that denominational union would not be feasible because of the great distance separating them; however, the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross” were willing to have correspondence with the Grand Rapids church. In 1905, Rev. Cornelius Pieneman was experiencing an increasing amount of spiritual wrestling regarding the needs of the Grand Rapids church with which he had been in correspondence. These spiritual exercises included applications of Isaiah 54:5, Habakkuk 2:20, Genesis 38:25 and verses from Dutch Psalms 95:3 and 121:4.¹

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In an article entitled “A Short Word Over My Departure to North America,” Rev. Pieneman shared some of his spiritual struggles with his congregation in Rotterdam:

...Two days later [July 4, 1905], I received a newspaper from Grand Rapids in which three of the ministers for the congregation were listed there, in which my name was also mentioned. Anyone can understand the impression this made on me in connection with what I had experienced recently. It became a concern between the Lord and my soul. That evening in preaching, while singing Psalm 116:3 and 4, I had a feeling as if the Lord had already placed me clearly and freely in Grand Rapids. The next day I felt that my will had conformed [to His will], and I believed that I would receive a call from Grand Rapids now or later.

¹ *Banner of Truth*, November 1990, p. 286.

On the 11th of September, the consistory again received a letter from America about the association with our congregations, at the same time requesting one of the ministers to give time, even if only for a few months, in view of the urgent need for the ministry of the sacraments there.

I knew, however, that it would not be for a few months that I would go to Grand Rapids. On September 13th, I was thinking about the request from Grand Rapids, when the seed of the congregation was bound to my heart, and I believed that the Lord would send me to baptize those children. I firmly believed that there were believing parents who were struggling with their children at the throne of grace. It was, when I saw those children and others, that I begged the King of the Church that He might send a minister to administer the benefits of His covenant. Yes, the Lord showed me that He had not only taken care of me in relation to the call to America, but also that His Fatherly eye and Divine care would be over me and mine in the way of His providence. Another thing, an objection had been raised to me about how I would be confirmed in Grand Rapids, since that congregation is not in ecclesiastical connection with other congregations... That objection the Lord wanted to resolve by showing me that the Lord Jesus Himself, the King of the church, would put me in the office and the Holy Spirit would comfort me, so that I would not stand like a foolish rooster who cannot crow, but that the Holy Spirit would teach me, that I might proclaim the full counsel of God and the unsearchable riches of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Ghost.

...In this way all the objections, of whatever nature, when I had to put them before the Lord, were graciously dissolved. As a result, I lived day by day awaiting the call from Grand Rapids. In everything I felt that the separation was imminent, in the preaching and catechism as in the pastoral work as well. Oh, I have felt and experienced that separation clearly. Because of that feeling, I often had to restrain myself. It was with me in my sitting down and my rising up, my going in and my going out. I could not stay in the Netherlands because of the penetrating feeling of God's calling, which was lived through and wrestled much more clearly and forcefully than I could write down on paper. A few days later, I received a call from Grand Rapids with a majority of the votes. That was the confirmation of all the work, from February to that moment.

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...I received the call on Monday, and although there was not the slightest doubt in my heart, I waited until Friday with the acknowledgment that I had accepted the call. Thursday before that, because of that situation, I was led in that pure communion with the King of the Church, and where the Lord Himself gave His approval and Divine blessing to the matter, I no longer dared to make an appeal to the matter, I dared no longer to postpone the call because the Lord did it so forcefully.



Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI on Division Avenue

...With full boldness and complete sobriety of faith I have accepted the call to Grand Rapids. When I announced my decision Friday evening to the church consistory, the brothers were saddened, but knowing what had happened, they acknowledged that it was the way of God.²

Rev. C. Pieneman arrived in February 1906 and served the Nederduitsch

² Ds. Pieneman, "Een kort woord over mijn vertrek naar Noord-Amerika," issued by The Church Under the Cross, Rotterdam, 1906.

(Netherlands) Reformed Church until 1909, which was a period of great growth for the church on Division Avenue. The consistory met every week, with much of the consistory business considering requests by those who wished to become members of the church.³

With the increase in membership after the arrival of Rev. Pieneman, it became necessary to enlarge the church building on Division Avenue. An extension to the east end of the church was completed at a cost of \$1,200.00. Because some members had difficulty in obtaining a seat in the church, a decision was made to rent spaces in the pews: adults \$1.00 and children 25 cents. However, this process was discontinued in July 1907 because there were not enough pews to meet the demand.

Another expansion of the church facilities took place in October 1907, when a 50' x 50' plot was purchased north of the church building for \$1,500.00. Soon afterward, a building was erected at a cost of \$2,500.00. This building provided stables for the horses on the ground floor and catechism rooms on one side of the upper floor with an apartment on the other side. This apartment became the residence of the van der Spek sisters who were paid a weekly sum for keeping the building clean.⁴

A group of seniors who remembered Rev. Pieneman's time in Grand Rapids shared their memories for the 100 year anniversary of the church as follows:

The first Sunday Rev. Pieneman preached in the Division Avenue church in the afternoon, my father and I went to hear him. There were several steps – about twelve – and very wide. These steps were filled with people from top to bottom. We did not get to hear him that time because there was no room. Soon after he came, my parents, along with many others, transferred their memberships from 'Turner Avenue' to 'Division Avenue'.

The people used to talk often about Rev. Pieneman's sermons. They were always well-studied, moving, and beautiful. Some, however, thought his sermons were too thoroughly researched, but several people were converted

³ First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet, p. 11.

⁴ First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet, p. 12.

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under them during the few short years he was with us. The Pienemans were a friendly family. A Miss Anna Helderop lived with them. She and Mrs. Pieneman helped the minister with catechism, asking the children their questions. The young children attended catechism after school in a room to the right of the steps. The older children had catechism in what we called the horse barns where on the main floor the horses and buggies were kept during services. Catechism classes were held upstairs.

To the left of the front steps there was a pump with a tub of water which had two 'dippers'. Almost everyone took a drink before going into church – all out of the same dippers. I remember well that there were two people who passed away from tuberculosis who also drank from them.

There is also a well-known anecdote about Mrs. Pieneman. On a certain day, when her husband was gone, and visitors were present for the noon meal, she prayed that God might heal her sick bird. One of the visitors reprimanded her for praying for something so trivial. Mrs. Pieneman replied: "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel" (Proverbs 12:10).

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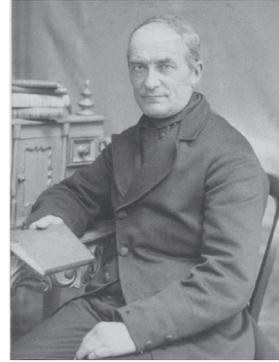
Rev. Pieneman was very instrumental in the commencement of our first Christian School on Hastings Street. He and my father and others worked together. It seemed like they were busy every night planning and taking care of all the things it takes to start a new school.

As children, we could feel that Rev. Pieneman loved us. He came to school often to teach catechism class. I remember several times that he would ruffle some boy's hair and say, 'Je moet tot God bekeerd worden' ('You must be converted to God.'). He came to our house a lot and one time gave me a quarter. My father often traveled with him. We were very sorry when he left us and went back to the Netherlands. Some people did not feel it was right that he left us so quickly.⁵

Denominational ties were extended during Rev. Pieneman's ministry. The minister and Elder Spote visited Sheboygan, Wisconsin in December 1906,

⁵ *Banner of Truth*, November 1990, p. 287.

where they laid the groundwork which eventually led to the organization of that congregation. A visit to Paterson, New Jersey in January 1907 by the minister and Elder Merizon resulted in the establishment of the Haledon Avenue church (now Franklin Lakes church). Another visit was made in April 1908 to install Rev. N. Beversluis as the first pastor of Haledon Avenue church. In May 1909, the Kalamazoo church joined the denomination.⁶



Adrian Merizon

The elder who installed Rev. Wolbers and continued as an elder under Rev. Pieneman was a man taught by the Lord. Elder Adrian Aarnoudse displayed leadership and godliness in his work in the congregation along with Rev. Wolbers and Rev. Pieneman.

Mr. Adrian Aarnoudse was installed as an elder in the Division Avenue congregation in 1883. Around 30 years later (1913), a young man whom God was pleased to quicken had promised Mr. Aarnoudse that he would visit him. This young man would at times experience much communion with Christ, and then again there was darkness and Christ was hidden from him. In the midst of much darkness and confusion he felt obliged to keep his promise and visit Mr. Aarnoudse. He decided that he would not speak a word about the confusion that filled his soul. He would let Mr. Aarnoudse do all the talking. This old man was very glad to see him and was soon asking how matters were with his soul. The young man replied that he had little to say and requested him to continue speaking. Mr. Aarnoudse was a very good spiritual leader and continued speaking about soul experiences, believing that the young man would soon receive liberty to speak about the things of God. When he continued to be silent, Mr. Aarnoudse asked him if something was especially wrong. His reply was that he could not explain himself and had decided before coming that he would remain silent about his ways. Mr. Aarnoudse then told him he could not leave unless he told him what was wrong. Before long the Lord gave him liberty to mention his darkness and confusion, saying with Heman in Psalm 88:8, "I am shut up, and I cannot come forth." Mr. Aarnoudse smiled and told him that he was

⁶ First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet, p. 12.

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speaking about such things as are in the Bible, telling him that perhaps some of his own experience would shed light upon his dark way. As he began to speak about the biblical ways and God's dealings with his own soul, light was thrown upon this young man's ways and his faith was strengthened and hope revived. Before leaving he was again speaking freely about the things of God. He could again believe that he was on the right path and that the Lord was teaching him by heavenly instruction many things which he had never known before. Before leaving for home they prayed together and the young man was full of courage.⁷

Another woman, Ida Rottier (formerly Mrs. A. Vogel of the Kalamazoo Netherlands Reformed congregation), visited Grand Rapids and shared her experience with Rev. Pieneman:

During the time that Rev. Pieneman was pastor in Grand Rapids I paid him a visit. He was very glad with my visit. However, I did not come without some things that burdened me, but they were known only to the Lord and myself. In the evening I was shown to the same bedroom where I had slept some years previously when Rev. Wolbers was at Grand Rapids. When I bowed my knees before the Lord, I prayed to be led into the steps of the humiliation of the Surety and Mediator as I had experienced before at that same place.

But no, it did not please the Lord to lead me into His humiliation this time but into His exaltation. So I found heaven opened through the Divine Advocate with the Father. I was granted free access especially with these words which fell so sweetly into my soul, "I will get me to the mountains of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense" (Song of Solomon 4:6). There all His people have a free access by means of the Divine intercessor and advocate. Yes, in that way the righteous people shall be presented to the Father without spot or wrinkle.

There was no thought of sleeping that night. He brought me to the banqueting house (Song of Solomon 2:4). And beloved, then we experience that physical needs are secondary. The following morning we went up to the house of prayer. Rev. Pieneman's text was Song of Solomon 1:12, "While

⁷ Van Zweden personal family documents.

1905-1921

the king sitteth at His table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof.” My meditations of the past night were so clearly set forth, that it seemed as if the minister had listened at my bedroom door. Of course this wasn’t so, but the Lord who gives the matters in the heart and the words upon the lips of His anointed servants, causes to be preached from the housetops what has happened in the inner chamber.⁸

Under the leadership of Rev. Pieneman, Hastings Street Christian School was established. The consistory minutes of January 31, 1908, record the



Hastings Street Christian School

appointment of a committee consisting of Mr. Post, Mr. J. Mol, Mr. John DeMeester, and Mr. D. De Bruyn. The committee met with the consistory on February 7 and were charged by the minister to make a thorough investigation of the possibility of establishing a school for giving Christian instruction to the youth.

One of the first requirements for committee members was that they be comfortable with carrying on business in the English language. After all, the government agencies that they must consult would be conducting business

⁸ Ida Rottier's personal autobiography written for her family.

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solely in English. Yet, it should be noted that at the same time, Dutch remained the language of choice in the churches and neighborhoods of those that had emigrated from the Netherlands. All of the consistory business continued to be transacted in Dutch, and it was not until the year 1943 that the minutes of the school board began to be recorded in English.⁹

Three weeks later, on February 28, the committee returned “with an encouraging report which prompted the consistory to call a congregational meeting on March 19, 1908, to elect a nine-member school board. The question of who should teach the children was brought up by the committee, but this was settled by Rev. Pieneman who suggested that Mr. Dick De Bruyn be engaged to teach English and Mr. K. Winters of Rotterdam be called to teach in the Dutch language. Mr. De Bruyn later declined this position, so Mrs. Kate E. Hogle was engaged to teach in English.¹⁰

92 — A school building was erected on Hastings Street (less than one mile north of the Division Avenue church) during the summer of 1908. On Monday afternoon, September 7, 1908, the minister officiated at a dedication ceremony to open the new school.

Hiring teachers, establishing curriculum, meeting state education standards, using the Dutch and/or English languages and financing the education of the children of the congregation were concerns which faced the new school and the consistory/school board members. However, the Lord provided wisdom, guidance, direction, and donations so that the school continued to exist and function. Because the collections for the school were sporadic, financial concerns for the school were voiced at each school board meeting and brought to the consistory meetings. It became the job of the teacher/principal to collect the tuition each Monday morning.

At the next consistory meeting, permission was granted to a group of young women to gather regularly in the consistory room to sew items for the

⁹ With Wings as Eagles, p. 24. [The complete history of Hasting Street Christian School/Plymouth Christian Schools is written in the book With Wings as Eagles]

¹⁰ *Banner of Truth*, November 1990, p. 286.

benefit of the school. At the consistory meeting of October 1, 1909, permission was granted to a group of young men to use the consistory room for the meetings of a young men's society. At this meeting, Rev. Pieneman announced that he had accepted a call to Charlois (Rotterdam South), the Netherlands.¹¹

On November 16, Rev. Pieneman preached his farewell sermon from 1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." He left for the Netherlands the following day. It was during this farewell sermon that Adrian van Dyke, with whom the departing pastor was closely knit, came to believe that he himself would one day proclaim God's Word from the same pulpit. Rev. Pieneman was also used as one of God's means to open doors for John Van Zweden to enter into the ministry in the North American Netherlands Reformed Congregations.

Historically, Rev. Pieneman's labors in the American Netherlands Reformed Congregations are most significant. His influence far outweighed his short pastorate. Rev. Kersten rightly concludes that he "laid the foundation of friendship and unity between the Netherlands Reformed Congregations in America and those of the Netherlands." Above all, God used him mightily for the conversion of sinners, the upbuilding of His saints, and the glory of His worthy Name.¹²

¹¹ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 12.

¹² *Banner of Truth*, November 1990, p. 287.

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REV. CORNELIUS PIENEMAN (1863-1912) SERVED THE NEDERDUITSCH (NETHERLANDS) REFORMED CHURCH (FNRC) 1906-1909.



Cornelius Pieneman was born in Zevenhoven, the Netherlands, in 1863. His father espoused a superficial reformed religion; his mother had more impressions of the truth but declared no experience of it. Cornelius, early in youth, lived a worldly lifestyle.

God began to work in a saving manner in the heart of Cornelius at 15 years of age. An elder asked him, “Dear boy, what if you were to be called before God tonight – before that God who is a consuming fire?” Cornelius immediately feared that he would drop into perdition and be eternally lost. He could do nothing but cry about his miserable state, and at the same time, felt a deep need for all his fellow travelers to eternity. Three evenings later, Cornelius was given to confess his guilt in uprightness of heart. He then saw a possibility to be saved, through the words: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15). From 1880-1886, Cornelius worked as a farm hand. During these years, the Spirit led him to see his inability of doing any good, stripped him of his own righteousness and taught him that spiritual life was only of the Lord. Soon after, the Lord revealed to him the complete finished way of redemption rooted in the three persons of the Trinity in the eternal Council of Peace. It was not long before the 23-year-old Cornelius felt called to the ministry. In May 1886, he commenced theological studies for a year before discontinuing and serving as an exhorter in Opheusden and other localities for many years. In 1894, Pieneman and his congregation were welcomed by the synod of the “Reformed Churches Under the Cross”, and he was ordained into the ministry. Rev. Pieneman served congregations in the Hague and Rotterdam before receiving and accepting the call from Grand Rapids (Division Avenue), Michigan. Arriving in the city in February 1906, God used Rev. Pieneman mightily for the glory of his name. Also, the first Christian school of our denomination was established in 1908 under the leadership of Rev. Pieneman. After a short pastorate of three and one-half years in Grand Rapids, Rev. Pieneman returned to the Netherlands in 1909 to serve in two other congregations. He passed away at the young age of 49 with Rev. Kersten conducting the funeral service from Revelations 7:13, 14: “And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”¹

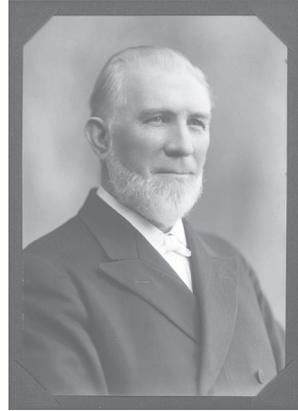
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¹ *Banner of Truth*, Aug, Sept, Oct, Nov. 1990.

1905-1921

OUR SIXTH MINISTER,
REV. HENDRIK ALBERT MINDERMAN, 1911-1921

During the pastoral vacancy which lasted two years, the congregation was served in word and sacrament at stated intervals by Rev. Beversluis of Paterson, New Jersey. The seventh call during this period was sent to Rev. Hendrik A Minderman of Rotterdam, the Netherlands. He accepted the call, and the new minister was installed on Sunday, November 19, 1911. He served the church for 10 years as the sixth pastor of the Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church of Grand Rapids (FNRC).



Rev. Hendrik Minderman

Some of the seniors of the congregation shared their memories with the committee formed to remember the 100 Year Anniversary of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, especially those memories of Rev. Minderman's time in Grand Rapids:

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I remember Rev. Minderman as a man of extraordinary gifts. He was a fine orator, and to my knowledge, never ascended the pulpit unless he was prepared. He always gave a good explanation of the text. He studied much, often late into the night, using a flat iron to keep his feet warm. Except for emergencies, his wife would allow no one to see him on Saturdays. I remember when someone complained about how much he studied, my father replied, 'You may think that way, but a minister must study for his sermons.'

In those days, most ministers preached for two hours. Rev. Minderman was no exception. Of course, he could not speak English, but he was really at home in the Dutch language. I can still recall many of his sermons, especially those on the parables and the Song of Solomon. He also preached a long series of sermons on Israel's leadings through the wilderness.

Most of the people liked Rev. Minderman's sermons, but some said that he missed the point. Under one sermon, my father had a special blessing and

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talked to us about it when we got home. It was on Isaiah 13:16. This also made an impression upon me. Rev. Minderman's applications were very compelling. As a young girl, I became instantly alert, hoping there might be something for me. There was quite a bit of fruit on his sermons. Several people were converted. I can remember how that Chris Van't Hof who later became a well-respected elder, cried aloud in church, 'Eternally lost!'



Rev. and Mrs. Minderman

By the grace of God, I may say that the minister also had to preach one unforgettable sermon for me. It was on John 1:48, "Nathaniel saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." Under this sermon I received a hope that Christ also saw me before I could ever see him.

Rev. and Mrs. Minderman had three daughters – Marie, Alyda, and Hendrika; and two sons – George and one son in the Netherlands. Alyda was a nurse. Hendrika taught in our school for a while. Everyone loved her. She would ask me to deliver

something to the parsonage for her, and then the minister or his wife would give me an apple or an orange. It was so wonderful because we were very poor.

Both the minister and his wife were meticulous and dignified in their appearance. The Mindermans had a horse and buggy. The horse's name was Bop. They also had a big white dog which would always run ahead of the horse.

Rev. Minderman was a very lovable man with a kind disposition. He especially loved children. As children, we felt free with him. He used to take me by the chin when he saw me. When my brother was two years old, he had such a severe case of pneumonia that the doctor feared he would not make the night. Rev. Minderman offered a very sincere prayer at his bedside, and the next morning my brother was much better.

He was often humorous with us too – especially with his cigars. When I asked him to marry my wife and me, he seemed pleased that I brought him

a handful of cigars.

As children, we highly respected Rev. Minderman. The 7th and 8th grade pupils of Hastings School always had their catechism classes above the horse barns next to Division Avenue church. Quite often we would get there early so that we could arrange for a few boxing matches among the boys of the class. This was kept a secret for some time but eventually someone told Rev. Minderman. He came very quietly downstairs and found us boxing. Naturally, he deplored this sport, and told us so. Having great respect for him, we stopped this immediately.

I made confession of faith under Rev. Minderman. The class was much smaller then, so we met in the parsonage study. He was an excellent teacher.

Several ministers from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) would often come to hear him preach, especially Dr. Beets of Calvin College and Rev. Veltkamp of Coldbrook CRC. I remember that Dr. Beets invited him to speak at a CRC Classis meeting and preceding his speech, Dr. Van Lonkhuyzen of Alpine Avenue CRC gave a lecture on baptism. This lecture did not please Rev. Minderman at all; he raised some questions but waited in vain for an answer.

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Rev. Minderman impressed me as living very close to his flock. For example, he would always choose a text at the burial of God's people which depicted their life. He buried my God-fearing father from Psalm 37:37, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."¹³

A year later in 1912, Elder Adrian van Dyke was given permission by the Classis to preach for the vacant churches in the denomination. In April 1913, Mr. van Dyke was called to speak for a group in Sioux Center, Iowa, where he found several families who showed a sincere desire to hear the preaching of experimental truth. In the autumn of the same year, Rev. Minderman and Elder Merizon organized the congregations in Sioux Center and Rock Valley, Iowa. In September 1914, Elder van Dyke was ordained into the ministry and became the first shepherd of the Sioux Center congregation.¹⁴

¹³ *Banner of Truth*, December 1990, p. 325.

¹⁴ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 14.

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THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In July 1914, the First World War began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo. By August, all of the major powers of Europe were at war. The Netherlands was able to remain neutral and did not suffer invasion, although the Dutch people suffered shortages because the war limited the use of civilian shipping due to unsafe conditions on the North Sea. *The Grand Rapids Herald* reported on September 9, 1914,

The Nederduitsch Reformed Church of which Rev. H. A. Minderman is pastor, has raised a generous donation for the benefit of the suffering in the Netherlands due to the war in Europe. The call for aid was promptly answered and a total of \$228.00 will be sent immediately. A call has been issued to all the Reformed churches in America for aid and details of the situation of the destitution are given. Among other things, it is described that in Rotterdam alone there are more than 30,000 Hollanders in need of help.¹⁵

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THE TWO CHURCHES UNITED BY DENOMINATIONAL TIES

It was during Rev. Minderman's ministry that the Division Avenue and the Turner Avenue churches were united by denominational ties. Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer was the minister of the Turner Avenue congregation when this occurred.

Throughout the years since the Turner Avenue congregation was organized, it was recognized that the doctrine professed by both churches was the same. Many times, throughout these years, there were overtures sent and meetings held between the two consistories to affect a union, but without success. In December 1917, Rev. Minderman was called to attend the consistory meeting in the Turner Avenue church where he informed them that the basis for unity would have to be in subjection to the Church Order and to come without reservations. At a joint meeting of the consistories held in the

¹⁵ *Grand Rapids Herald*, September 9, 1914; Grand Rapids Public Library Digital Collections

Division Avenue church on January 3, 1918, both churches were united by denominational ties. This association lasted about thirty years until difficulties developed which caused a separation.¹⁶

Also during the ministry of Rev. Minderman, the Lord continued to fulfill His word as expressed in Ezekiel 34:11, “For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.” Cornelius Boerkoel,¹⁷ a young man in the early 1920s, recalled in a letter written a few years before his death, how his father, having attended a Christian Reformed church, and,

...having heard of a Rev. Minderman at Division Avenue church, thought it wise to visit and listen. Mother, also myself and my younger sister attended and that for several months. Father mentioned, ‘Never have we heard such gospel preaching in the Christian Reformed Church’. What my father said was the truth. A few years later, my father passed away at the age of 62 years. My heart rejoiced when I heard this preaching, all according to God’s word and agreeable with the Puritan writers which I read. I told my parents that I no longer desired to attend the Christian Reformed church, and whereas I had not made public confession in that church, I would ask to have the baptismal papers mailed to the N.R.C. on Division Avenue. At this time Rev. Minderman had already left for the Netherlands. My desire had become to live with the children of God, and dwell where they dwell. I thus ventured one evening to go to the consistory of the N.R.C. on Division Avenue. Upon entering the consistory room, the chairman, my beloved friend Spote asked me, ‘Well young man, tell us what brought you here.’ I related my hearts desire. ‘Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.’ My question was, ‘Would you be willing to accept my baptismal papers, so that in due time I might become a member of this church?’ His answer was, ‘Boy, if you have first given your heart unto the Lord, then we welcome you to become a member of His church.’ My heart broke with joy and love to these dear

¹⁶ First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet, p.14.

¹⁷ Cornelius Boerkoel, later commonly known as “C. F. Boerkoel Sr.,” would be elected to the office of elder in the Division Avenue congregation and would eventually be appointed as an exhorter in the denomination. He also authored many tracts and pamphlets distributed by The Banner of Truth Tract Mission. The full text of the letter quoted above is included in an appendix titled “The Afflicted and Poor People that Trust in the LORD.”

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children of God. The office bearers, if I recall, were Mr. John Sporte, chairman, Mr. Adrian Merizon, John Van Zweden, and Kris Winters, along with some deacons. This was about the year 1922.

Many years later, at age 101, Mrs. Wilma LaBotz recalled how her father, Martin Faasse, had moved his family to a home on Batavia Place, a street bordering Fulton Street Cemetery, in the “brickyard” neighborhood. While working at a furniture factory, Mr. Faasse happened to express to his supervisor some dissatisfaction with the church he had been attending. The supervisor then said, “You need to go to that church on Division Street.” After attending services there, Mrs. Labotz recalled that her father was “so happy. That was just what he wanted to hear.”

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As a child, Wilma enjoyed running errands to Rev. Minderman’s house for her teacher (at the Hastings Street Christian School). “It was always nice, at noontime, to go to the minister’s house. He would always give me an apple or some fruit – we didn’t have fruit in our lunches.” Later, as a teenager, the Lord began working in her life. “I was concerned then... The minister would preach and then I would think, ‘How does he know what I’m thinking?’ He was saying things that came into my mind – I couldn’t figure that out. Impossible! I remember crying in church, because he touched me so hard, he was saying my very thoughts. That was Dominee Minderman... a lovely man.”¹⁸

Rev. Minderman served the congregation until 1921 and returned to the Netherlands. His final sermon in the Netherlands Reformed Church on Division Avenue, entitled “Paul’s Blessing Prayer for the Church in Rome” (Romans 16:24),¹⁹ was printed as a nine-page booklet with all proceeds going to Hastings Street Christian School. His son George was the custodian of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in the 1950s.

¹⁸ Interview given for the 100th Anniversary of Plymouth Christian Schools.

¹⁹ With Wings as Eagles, p. 94.

REV. HENDRIK ALBERT MINDERMAN (1856-1933) SERVED THE NEDERDUITSCH (NETHERLANDS) REFORMED CHURCH (FNRC) 1911-1921.



Rev. Minderman was the sixth pastor who served the Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church (FNRC) for ten years to the spiritual benefit of many. According to Rev. Kersten, Hendrik A. Minderman was born of godly parents and raised under the truth. At the age of 20, he was powerfully convinced of his guilt and sinfulness with his entire life testifying against him. After a considerable period of time, the way of salvation in Christ's sacrifice was opened to him, and he was privileged to be given reconciliation with the Father in the blood of the covenant.

In his adult life, Hendrik Minderman made his living in a leather business and did not want to give up this business to be a minister, thus resisting the Lord as long as he could. However, God directed His child in the way he had to go and Mr. Minderman was privileged to surrender himself unconditionally to the Lord.

As an "Article 8" minister (Church Order of Dordrecht; no formal ministerial training), Rev. Minderman was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in Gouda, the Netherlands where he served only one year. He served his second pastorate for 15 years in Rotterdam where separation and reconciliation with the Christian Reformed denomination occurred.

In 1911, Rev. Minderman received a call from the Nederduitsch (Netherlands) Reformed Church of Grand Rapids on Division Avenue, one of the American congregations which maintained correspondence with the Reformed congregations in the Netherlands. By accepting this call, he again severed ties with the Christian Reformed Church, a step never regretted.

In 1921, Rev. Minderman returned to the Netherlands to serve in two of our congregations. On March 23, 1933, the Lord released him into the church triumphant with Rev. Kersten conducting the funeral with the text of Revelations 7:15, "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."¹

¹ *Banner of Truth*, December 1990, p.325.

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VANDERTOORN VANDERVEER VANDERVLIST

CHAPTER 3

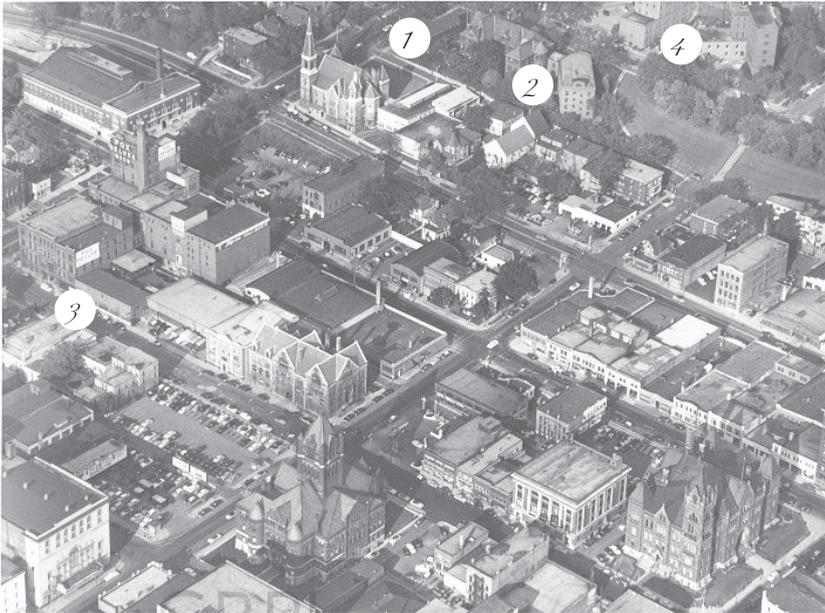
1922-1946

25 YEAR MINISTERIAL VACANCY IN THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

*Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him,
upon them that hope in his mercy; To deliver their soul
from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul
waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield.*

PSALM 33:18-20

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Grand Rapids around the 1940's (1) Immanuel Lutheran Church, (2) Netherlands Reformed Church on Division Avenue, (3) Ottawa Avenue church, (4) Butterworth Hospital

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AN ENGLISH SPEAKING CONGREGATION

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Until 1922, the two churches of the Netherlands Reformed denomination in Grand Rapids, located at 332 Division Avenue and at 1040 Turner Avenue, held their services in the Holland language exclusively. However, a number of members of both churches felt the need for English language services for their children, if the churches as also the common faith were to survive. Upon several occasions, members met and discussed the propriety and necessity of organizing a church where the truth, as professed by them, might be presented and heard in the language of the land.¹ The struggle to preserve the Dutch language or to change to the English language was felt throughout the Dutch communities in the United States. It was written of Grand Rapids alone that hundreds of people had left the congregations because they could no longer understand the Dutch language services and catechism classes. Rev Kersten, Rev. Kieviet, and Rev. Minderman gave the Synod of 1928 in the Netherlands a report which stated: “The American congregations have a very heavy strife against the spirit of the times, and it may well fill us with wonder that the Lord still continues to uphold His church. The [Dutch] language is also becoming a greater obstacle in many congregations.”²

It is interesting to note that proposals to consider an English service on Sunday evenings at the church on Division Avenue were presented to members at congregational meetings in 1934 and 1943. In 1936, Rev. G. H. Kersten visited North America and later wrote in the Saambinder; “To keep the youth, it is essential that the English language is preached and used in Catechism...I can understand where some do not wish to do without the Dutch services, but I also see the necessity of preaching and teaching [in English]...And so pastors are encouraged to preach both the English and Dutch [language].”

The Division Avenue consistory thought it best that a two-thirds majority was necessary to approve the proposal. This finally happened in the church at a meeting held on January 26, 1944.

¹ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.16

² Memorial Stone, Vol. 1, p. 248-9.

However, there were those who wished to attend a church where the services were conducted entirely in the English language. After many meetings, in which numerous difficulties were overcome, overtures were made to the consistory of the respective churches, to organize a church in which the truth and doctrine, cherished by them, might be heard to better advantage by the rising generation in English. The imposed conditions (from the consistories)³ were successfully met, and the first English service was held Sunday, November 12, 1922, in a rented hall at Abraham Ghysels & Sons Grocery Store located at 350 Leonard Street NW.⁴



From the beginning, the success of the undertaking was virtually assured. Large numbers attended the English language services, thereby manifesting a sincere desire to continue in the doctrine and faith as professed by them. Temporary officers were appointed by the parent churches: from the church on Division Avenue, Dick De Bruyn and John DeMeester, and from the church on Turner Avenue, Teunis Stehouwer and Peter DeMeester. These men diligently applied themselves to furthering the interest of the new group by organizing catechism classes, Bible classes and singing classes.⁵

These services and various meetings continued until April 6, 1923, when the Classis committee, composed of Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer, and Elders Kris Winters and John Van Zweden, met with the temporary officers to establish a permanent congregation, which took place at a public meeting in the church on Turner Avenue on April 16, 1923. At this time officers were chosen as follows: Elders – Dick De Bruyn, Teunis Stehouwer, and John Mol; Deacons – Peter Penning, John DeMeester, and Peter DeMeester. They were installed by Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer in the Netherlands Reformed Church on Turner Avenue on Friday night, April 20, 1923.

³ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.16.

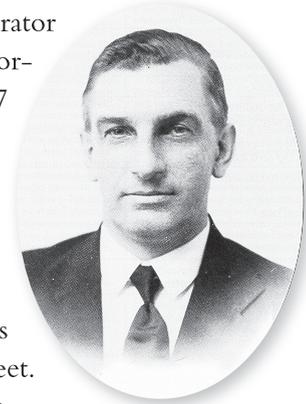
⁴ *With Wings as Eagles*, p. 95.

⁵ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.16.

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Following this action, Rev. Wielhouwer became moderator of the new congregation, by Classical appointment. Forty-seven members of the Division Avenue church and 67 members of the Turner Avenue church joined the new English-speaking congregation.⁶

Services in the hall at Leonard Street were discontinued at the end of 1922. In January 1923, services were held in a building located at 337 Ottawa Avenue NW as this building was a larger facility than the hall on Leonard Street. Catechism classes and other meetings held on weekdays continued at the Leonard Street hall. The Ottawa Avenue building was purchased for a church home in August 1924 and seated approximately 300 people.



Rev. Van Zweden

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Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer

The sacraments of Baptism and Communion during this period were administered by Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer who was moderator until his retirement from the ministry. After this, Rev. J. Van Zweden of Passaic, New Jersey, served at various intervals.

Considerable effort was put forth to locate an English-speaking minister of Netherlands Reformed persuasion but without success. Many leads were followed up with personal visits and by letters to ministers of other denominations who were recommended as sound in doctrine. However, investigation of these leads resulted only in disappointment. Nevertheless, the search continued because of the great need in the churches for instruction in the English language.⁷

⁶ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 16.

⁷ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 16.

MUSIC IN THE DIVISION AVENUE CONGREGATION

Music used in divine worship was a practice begun in the Old Testament. King David had trained choirs and musicians providing music for the services and ceremonies held in the temple at Jerusalem, “Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals...” (1 Chronicles 25:1). Further, in the same chapter a choir was described: “So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the Lord, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight” (1 Chronicles 25:7). The New Testament references Jesus singing a hymn with his disciples before going to the Garden of Gethsemane. Paul speaks in Colossians, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord...” (Colossians 3:16). It seems that music in the New Testament church became a part of the worship service in which the entire congregation participated in, rather than select individuals (i.e. a trained choir). The Protestant Reformation restored singing in the worship service to a role performed by the congregation as by that time, the Roman Catholic Church had perverted the role of music by limiting music participation during the mass to choirs or clergy only.

Beginning in 1870, the Psalms sung during the services held in the Swedenborgian church building, as well as those held in the Division Avenue church building, were chosen from the “1773 Rhyme” as opposed to the “Old Rhyme” translated by Peter Datheen and used in the Turner Avenue church. The Division Avenue church was served by a succession of “voorzangers” (songleaders). It was the consistory’s responsibility to see that one or more men were appointed to lead the singing. If he were not a member of the consistory, he would sit near the front of the auditorium. At the start of each Psalm, he would, without any gestures, simply start singing the first word of the Psalm and the congregation would start on the second word. As can be imagined, the quality of singing resulting from this practice was quite unpredictable.⁸

⁸ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.14-15.

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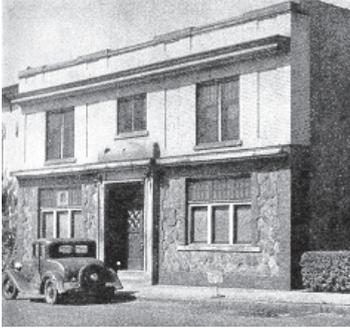
It was noted in the consistory minutes of 1912 that a request had been received from some members of the congregation to install an organ. This was considered and debated during two consistory meetings. The result was that the consistory, while not objecting to an organ, ruled against this request since it was not deemed advisable to burden the congregation with additional debt. When English language services began, it was decided that an organ would be necessary in order to assist in the singing of the unfamiliar music in the English Psalter. Thus, 74 years after the organization of the congregation, an organ was finally purchased. It was a portable reed organ with decorative pipes, with two manuals, and a pedalboard. This instrument remained in service (in the church on Division Avenue) until the church building was sold in 1951.

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The organ at Division Avenue church

OTTAWA AVENUE CHURCH ENGLISH LANGUAGE SERVICES



Ottawa Avenue church building exterior

Due to the close proximity of the Ottawa Avenue and the Division Avenue churches, the parents of some families attended the Dutch language services in the Division Avenue church, while their children listened simultaneously to the English language service in the Ottawa Avenue church which was two city blocks to the west.

A note taken from *A Brief Historical Survey* states:

The Ottawa Avenue congregation was first served by Exhorter James Wielhouwer, at the request of the NRC consistories. This was for a trial period of six months. He originally came from the Netherlands Reformed Church on Turner Avenue and was nicknamed “English Wielhouwer,” because he spoke English fluently. He was also referred to as “Little Wielhouwer” to distinguish him from his distant cousin, Rev. J. C. Wielhouwer.⁹

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After preaching for a few months, a disagreement occurred. Some thought Exhorter Wielhouwer brought the offer of grace too freely and laid too much stress on the responsibility of man. Others were convinced he was bringing the balance of Scripture in stressing both the sovereignty of God and man’s responsibility. As a result, Exhorter James Wielhouwer left the congregation with a group of 12 families to form an



Ottawa Avenue church building interior

⁹ Kersten and Van Zweden, p. 88.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

independent congregation. This new congregation first called themselves the “Rehoboth Reformed Church,” but this was later changed to “Old Reformed Church” which then met at 909 Scribner Avenue NW. Later still, the name became “Free Reformed Church”; this congregation moved to its current location on Ball Avenue NE.¹⁰

After Rev. Minderman left the Netherlands Reformed Church on Division Avenue in 1921, pastoral calls were sent in vain for 25 years (1921-1946). From 1937 to 1946 the Division and Ottawa Avenue churches sent out joint pastoral calls. During this time, the Lord graciously provided faithful office-bearers to lead the congregations. The names of many of the elders during this period are still spoken of frequently, such as Boerkoel, Boluyt, De Bruyn, DeMaagd, DeMeester, Kamp, Langerak, Quist, Sporte, VanderMale, Van’tHof, Vander Jagt, VanDyke, VanZweden, Wielhouwer, Winters and others. The churches were also served by exhorters Cornelius Boerkoel, Cornelius Quist, and John Nordyke.¹¹ Many of the descendants (and the names) of these office bearers have remained with the church until the present time.

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During the vacant pulpit years, the Lord often blessed the reading services to hungry souls. Throughout the history of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, there has been remarkable evidence of those favored with God’s grace. A common characteristic of these people was their spiritual poverty and dependence on the Lord to lead them in the way everlasting. They often had to pray with the Psalmist in Psalm 139:23 and 24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Such people learned by the quickening work of the Holy Spirit, the corruption and deceitfulness of their own hearts, as well as the holiness, righteousness, and mercy of the Lord.

One member, Elder William Boluyt of the Division Avenue church, a father of 15 children, was converted when he was 30 years old. He worked in a factory and lived with few thoughts of eternity. One day at his work, a

¹⁰ Free Reformed Church, *Ebenezer*, 50th Anniversary Edition, 1944-1994 as quoted in *With Wings as Eagles*, p. 96.

¹¹ *Memorial Stone* Vol.1, p.328-9.

EXHORTER JAMES WIELHOUSER 1888-1957 SERVED IN 1926



James Wielhouwer immigrated to America as a child with his parents. After a short marriage, he was left a widower at the age of 26. He moved to Grand Rapids with his son in 1925 and remarried in 1928.

Soon, the consistories of Grand Rapids Division Avenue and Turner Avenue asked him to speak an edifying word in English. Called “little” or “English” Wielhouwer, he was a distant cousin to Rev. Wielhouwer. The two Wielhouwers bore a similar physical appearance and enjoyed a close friendship.

Exhorter Wielhouwer’s sermons were either warmly received or strongly opposed. After he left the denomination, James Wielhouwer was ordained by a minister from Kalamazoo and organized the congregation which met on Scribner Avenue from 1926-1944. However, in 1944, he felt the need to return to the NRC, even if it meant losing his ministerial credentials. Thus, from 1944-1946, he gave up his ministerial credentials and spoke as an exhorter whenever invited to do so.

Later, Exhorter Wielhouwer served the Passaic congregation as an exhorter from 1946-1952. He suffered a stroke in 1950. In 1952, he moved back to Grand Rapids and passed away in 1957 at the age of 69, trusting in the righteousness of Christ alone.¹

¹ *Banner of Truth*, August 1991, p.210.

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Elder William Boluyt

man named John suddenly died. A co-worker coarsely stated, "John will be six feet under tomorrow." This statement made such an impression on Mr. Boluyt that he was plagued by the question, "What if I died and was six feet under tomorrow? Could I meet God?" These words were used by God to convict and convert him. He served the Division Avenue and Crescent Street congregations for a period of 37 years. He lived on Shirley Street NE, just down the street from Elders Chris

Van't Hof and C.F. Boerkoel. These men often talked as they walked to and from church together. When Rev. Lamain conducted Elder Boluyt's funeral, the minister stated "the man of poor prayers in himself was ended."

Another member favored with a dependent life on the Lord, Mrs. Albert Vissia, wrote to a couple in the congregation:

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August 20, 1946,
Dear Friends,

With this I want to congratulate you, with your birthday. And I hope and wish that the Lord will spare you many more years for yourself [the mother in the family], and for your husband and for your expected child that I hope may live and that you will be spared. "They are hard nuts to crack," the old people used to say, but there is always great joy when everything is over and all is good; oh, may the Lord be with you both. Many times I am thinking about you, and praying that the Lord may work this out for your own good, and that your soul might be blessed above all. And you [husband is mentioned], we congratulate you too with your wife and that you may stay together for many years; and that your lives may be in the fear of the Lord because that is everything in this life; and the time goes so fast anyway, before we know it we are old and our young days past and not everyone reaches old age. And may we be among those. Oh, that the Lord may prepare us to



Gertrude Vissia

meet Him in peace because then life just starts and never ends. Oh, how rich are those people who know that they have a home forever hereafter. Sunday I was by Effie after church to see her because she is not feeling well; oh, I was so jealous, when she told me what the Lord had promised her, that the Lord was going to break her tabernacle, but that she will have a house, made without hands, forever in the heavens, and the Lord was so near. She said, "What a rich people they are."¹²

An additional member whose written testimony showed evidence of those favored with God's grace was Mary (Rottier) Van Zweden:

Mary Rottier was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on October 2, 1888, shortly after her family had emigrated from the Netherlands. About a year after Mary was born, the family moved to Fremont, Michigan, where they cleared some land and farmed north of the town.

Mary's parents, Adrian and Adriana, were members of the First Christian Reformed Church of Fremont. After some time, Adrian noticed that the spiritual death of man was mitigated, and the necessity of a sovereign God converting a sinner and working that true saving faith of knowledge, trust, and assent in the heart was not stressed. He found that the preaching did not include how God experientially teaches His people about misery, redemption, and gratitude. It was not taught that in this way those quickened by the Holy Spirit learn that they cannot believe unto salvation of themselves. Also lacking was how they must wait on God for all aspects of salvation, and so they experientially learn that faith is a sovereign gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Thus it was not proclaimed how these poor and afflicted people find, over and over again, that when God gives them something of His Son, Jesus Christ, they cannot but believe, for He gives them faith to receive Him. Adrian also believed that as



Mary (Rottier) Van Zweden

¹² Personal correspondence from a church family.

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Christ frequently discerned between true saving faith and its counterfeits, so must preachers do to the end of time.

This resulted in Adrian and his wife withdrawing from the fellowship of the First Christian Reformed Church and joining the Fremont Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

Mary had a friend in Grand Rapids by the name of Katie Sporte (later Mrs. John Kamp) who enjoyed visiting Mrs. Jacoba Van Zweden (nee Verkerke, married to Cornelius Van Zweden). Katie enjoyed hearing her talk about the wonders of God's grace that had been glorified in her heart. On Memorial Day, 1912, Katie took Mary to visit Jacoba. This began a series of visits by Mary to Jacoba that contributed to her becoming thoroughly convinced that the Netherlands Reformed Congregations taught the true doctrines of salvation from both a doctrinal and an experiential perspective.

114 *At the end of her life, Mary gave evidence of not only having a head knowledge of the doctrines of grace, but also of experiencing the converting grace of the Lord whereby she could die resting on the Savior of sinners.¹³*

On August 13, 1913, Rev. Minderman married Mary Rottier and John Van Zweden, a son of Jacoba and Cornelius Van Zweden. At that time, John was a schoolteacher at the Hastings Street Christian School. They lived in Grand Rapids until 1924 when they moved to Passaic, New Jersey, where John was ordained as a minister of the Passaic Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

Mrs. C. (Jacoba) Van Zweden (a member of the Grand Rapids Division Avenue church from 1907 to 1932 and who died in New Jersey) wrote in a letter to her children near the end of her life in 1937:

Oh, how incapable are we in ourselves of doing anything that is good. We do not know how to speak or write a good word at the right time. We need God's indispensable and reminding Spirit so very much for everything. We are not able to do good in and of ourselves, but our ability is from God. Oh, if we may learn that rightly in the beginning and by renewal, we will come

¹³ Mary Rottier's biography written by several of her family members.

continually as poor, foolish and blind creatures to Him, Who has said, 'Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.'... Oh dear children, may it be thus in your heart, or may the Lord bring you there. He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one will come to the Father, but by Him; and no one comes to Him, but by the Father... What is man without God, and what will he yet remain in himself even after he has received grace in his soul. Holy shame must often cover my face, considering what I should be and what I am not, even after the Lord has given me so many gracious benefits in providence and grace. But there is a quiet hope that I shall yet glorify the Lord, yea, a holy Triune God, forever with all the saved ones above... You wrote that you yet think about those times which we have spent together; yes, and we also. When we meet God's people here, we may speak yet about those solemn times. We may believe on that evening, when it got very late, the Lord was in our midst. Perhaps you remember that Van't Hof was there too. Also Bolk was there, and the dear Spirit of God gave witness within that He was with us.¹⁴

One more member who left a written record of her spiritual life moved to Grand Rapids with her husband from Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The family made this move so that their nine daughters and one son could attend Christian Schools.

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Paulina Kranendonk-Vander Waal wrote on August 28, 1945:

I hope to be 74 years old the first of September. Thus, the prayer may well be ours, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." But to receive a wise heart, we must first know that we are foolish. If the Lord opens our spiritually blind eyes and reveals unto us that we have sinned against a benevolent God, that weighs heavily, very heavily! Yet we try to make recompense ourselves and say, "Have patience with me, and I will pay it all." We labor and toil, stumble and fall and think, "If I were only a better person in some way." But we are always disappointed with ourselves. We would like to be at our best before God.

When my son Arthur (ten years old) died in 1914, these words came to me, "Give account of thy stewardship for thou mayest be no longer steward"

¹⁴ Banner of Truth, July 1973, p. 12-13.

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(Luke 16:2). Oh, what can we say when the Lord calls us to account? We are speechless!

In that way, I lived in a very depressed condition for a few years until I began to believe that the Lord had looked graciously upon me, and I hoped that what He had commenced in me, that He would also complete. That was a great blessing for me.



Paulina Vander Waal

During the influenza epidemic in 1918, ten of our family were stricken with the disease. My then 18-year-old daughter and my 13-year-old did not catch it. Then these words of Job came to me: "But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest, it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled. Is not this thy fear, thy confidence, thy hope?" (Job 4:6) After days of distress about this, the Lord showed me that if death came, I would be standing alone. I had no knowledge of the Mediator (I did not know the Savior).

Those were days, yes, even years of distress and fretting! I did not dare to speak to anybody about it. I always was very reserved by nature.

When I, at times, heard God's people speak and heard them converse about the beginning of the way of life (Christian life) then I could follow them but when they spoke about experiencing the Second Person of the Trinity, I had no knowledge of that. After a few years, the Lord showed me that I had never had a true need of the Savior, because I was always trying to work out my own salvation.

Then the real enmity of my heart was revealed to me and my robe of self-righteousness was torn from me. I had to confess that God would be just if He condemned me. For the first time I learned to flee to the Savior in total helplessness, and these words came into my soul, "I have found a ransom." Then I experienced that Christ has given Himself as a Mediator (to the Father) on my behalf.

I cannot describe what I then experienced. At one time, my soul was filled with, "I know my Redeemer liveth," then again, "That I am not my own but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; who, with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins."

Dear relatives, that is now more than twenty years ago, although the Lord continues to show Himself an [ever-present] help in time of trouble, especially now, when my son Hugo is so far away and sickness and difficulties plague our family circle; I must confess personally, that all these blessings are totally undeserved, and as Paul complains, "that which I will, I do not." May the Lord in His long suffering teach us to flee to Him with all our troubles, both of body and soul. May He give us a heart to call upon Him in all our needs.¹⁵

One of Arie and Paulina Vander Waal's older daughters, Mary, married John Vander Boon. Their oldest son Orie wrote a letter in 2003 to the descendants of John VanderBoon.

At our last reunion, when seeing so many of my father's descendants, I was convicted of my responsibility to tell all of you about your praying grandpa and great-grandpa.

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As the second oldest in the family, I became aware of (my father's) praying life when I was ten to twelve-years-old. For him, prayer was as necessary as breathing, and he took every opportunity he could to have communion with his Savior...

He spent much time pleading with God for future generations. I first became aware of this when we moved to the farm in 1936. Quite often, after supper devotions, he would go upstairs to be alone to pray. Also, when coming in for mid-morning and mid-afternoon breaks, he would have his tea or coffee and immediately go to his bedroom to pray. Sometimes, he would come back down looking sad, but other times, very upbeat; and sometimes, singing a psalm at the top of his lungs. I have seen him singing and looking up to heaven with tears flowing down his face. During the summer, he would often get up early Sunday morning and walk down our lonely gravel road,

¹⁵ Personal letter written to her family included in the Genealogical Records of Arie Vander Waal family.

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singing and meditating.

In later years, when I helped him in his meat market, doing an errand in the basement, I would find him praying behind the furnace during his break time. Later, after coming home from World War II, I worked with him some at the slaughterhouse; and still, at every coffee break, he would go upstairs to pray. Later, when the rest of the family moved to Iowa to start a bakery business, sister Pauline stated: "Pa spent short interludes, when the bread was rising or baking, in prayer in the furnace room."

I visited him three times (during) the last summer of his life as he was gradually starving due to liver cancer. What struck me was how vividly he remembered all the past rebellion and sin in his life. It seemed like God had



The VanderBoon family

it all pass before him in vivid detail. He expressed his mourning and sorrow for his failures in being a good husband and father. But he also expressed his quiet resting in the finished work of Christ on the cross; and that, in spite of the magnitude of his sin, he could believe they were all forgiven for Christ's sake, Whom he soon hoped to see and adore.¹⁶

John VanderBoon died in August of 1956 at the age of 63 years.

¹⁶ Taken from a printed booklet by Orie VanderBoon (oldest son of John VanderBoon) and used with permission from Orie VanderBoon.

On March 4, 1941, Rev. Van Zweden spoke of other members favored by grace. He came to know the Ten Elshofs in Grand Rapids when he administered the sacraments because Rev. Wielhouwer was sick.

There were some souls, among whom was Mrs. H. J. Ten Elshof, who truly had a need that the death of the Lord would be commemorated in the midst of the congregation. It had been more than a year since the Lord's Supper was held. It pleased the Lord to reveal His approval over the administration." Rev. Van Zweden continued: "For the first time, I was given to administer [the sacraments of] Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the congregation where I formerly sat under the precious Word so often, and where my soul was refreshed."¹⁷

In another letter from Rev. Van Zweden on June 9, 1947, to Mrs. Polderman of Kalamazoo, he recalled, "We had Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Ten Elshof here from Grand Rapids. She is a dear child of the Lord. It was so pleasant how we could talk continually about the way of coming to the assurance in the state of grace."¹⁸

Mr. Ten Elshof¹⁹ served as an elder in the Turner Avenue church. God's people, including a minister who visited Grand Rapids periodically, desired to visit Mrs. Ten Elshof and discuss the leadings of God. One man recalled witnessing their son, Ernie, speaking with his father just before she died. They were speaking about the evidence she gave during her life of knowing of God's saving work in her life. Her son said that this was a comfort for them knowing that, although she would soon die, she would meet a reconciled God.

At another time, in correspondence with J. K. Popham of England, Popham replied to Mr. H. J. Ten Elshof family:

It is most interesting to me to see what appears to be the Lord following you with convictions. This is a gracious work. He was ever showing Israel their sins. He sent prophets to them saying, 'O do not this.' And if He will

¹⁷ Memorial Stone Vol. 4, p. 67.

¹⁸ Memorial Stone Vol. 5, p. 68.

¹⁹ Mr. H. J. Ten Elshof was an elder at the Turner Ave NRC during the 1920s-1940 before joining the Division Ave. church.

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Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Ten Elshof

take the trouble to deal with you, with me (we much need He should), it looks hopeful as if He will be ever showing us our ruin, our powerful tendency to sin, in order to deeply humble us and make us know how utterly helpless we are and fly by prayer to Christ.

He instructed him, “Seek, then, dear friend, seek with your dear wife clear work, distinct teaching, from the Spirit, bright shining of the Sun of Righteousness.”²⁰

One additional member favored with grace was Mrs. Jacob (Tena) Westrate (Quist). Mrs. Westrate was described by her son in a letter to Mr. Chapman of *Zion’s Witness* after her death in 1979 at the age of 92.

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The Lord had begun with her in her tender youth, convincing her of sin, righteousness and judgment. As with many of God’s people, there was a cloud that cast a shadow at times at what the Lord had done. When she was in the valley of despair, then the Lord would come with the dew of heaven to refresh and encourage her. Many times she shed tears over her state for eternity, as it always weighed heavily on her mind and heart. Before her death, she said, “I am not tired anymore” and, “His rest shall be glorious” (Isaiah 11:10b).²¹

SERVICEMEN’S TIDINGS

Special callings were sent to the vacant congregations during the years of war. Young men of the Grand Rapids Netherlands Reformed churches were called to serve in World War II and the conflicts following. They were exposed to great dangers, but the Lord was pleased to spare most of them.

²⁰ Private letter to the Ten Elshof family.

²¹ Private correspondence from family member.

Members from the Division Avenue, Ottawa Avenue and the Turner Avenue churches, as well as those from the Kalamazoo church, who served in the armed forces were brought to the attention of the congregation through the publication of the *Servicemen's Tidings*, a pamphlet published four times per year. By God's grace, most of the military members returned to become active members of the congregations.

PLATSCHORRE DANIEL P. S2C USN USS SHAW

One exception was Daniel Paul Platschorre who was in the Navy on a destroyer (*USS Shaw*) just before the United States entered the war. He was aboard the ship when it was in a floating dry dock in Pearl Harbor on Sunday, December 7, 1941. The bow of the ship was hit by three bombs during the second wave of the Japanese aerial attack. This resulted in her forward ammunition magazines detonating in a spectacular blast, completely removing her bow. Soon after the Pearl Harbor attack, the United States entered World War II. Daniel was born in 1914 and was buried in St. Louis County, Missouri. He was the son of Paul and Lena Platschorre.



Daniel Paul Platschorre

PFC ALBERT BARENTS

Another exception was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Barents. On February 26, 1945, the Barents family received a War Department telegram that their son Albert was killed in action on January 16, 1945, the day he previously had been reported as missing. "Thus the slight hope to which they had clung that he might yet be alive was taken away and replaced by the news of a grievous reality. This is a great loss. A son and brother will not return to them. He was one who was taken away in budding manhood even before reaching the prime of life."²²

²² *Servicemen's Tidings*, April 1945, Vol 1, No. 4.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

In the last letter Albert sent to his mother before he was sent overseas, he expressed his thanks for a package his mother had sent which included some small books,

You don't know what it is to have good parents like I have... a mother who loves her children with a Christian love, who prays for them, and who desires for them the greatest of all gifts, the Lord Jesus as their Savior and Redeemer; not in the way of modern beliefs, but in the true life... my mother has that desire in her heart that her children may be safe for time and eternity.

There is only one thing that matters and it is if we are prepared to die. Worldly positions and money mean nothing, church rolls and records mean nothing, for the Lord looks within not on the outside. We are not prepared so easily as most people believe in accepting the Lord. Nay, we cannot come, we will not come, we haven't the desire to seek the Lord unless it pleases the Lord to give that desire.

*Your son,
Albert*

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EDWIN BAATJES

A third exception was paratrooper Edwin Baatjes, a son of Elder Henry Baatjes who served Ottawa Avenue church. Before going overseas, he was in an airborne unit but was transferred later to an Armored Engineer Battalion. His death occurred in Europe after his group jumped from a plane. He was listed as killed in action.

HARRY LANGERAK

Another exception was Harry Langerak. His parents received word on Sunday, March 11, 1945, that their son had lost his life on the western front in Europe. He was 19 years old and had entered the service in June of the previous year. A young man from the Ottawa Avenue church, Harry served in the Army. He was a younger brother to Henry Langerak who was an elder in the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation for many years. The records list his death as being from wounds sustained. Mrs. Peter Kamp, a neighbor

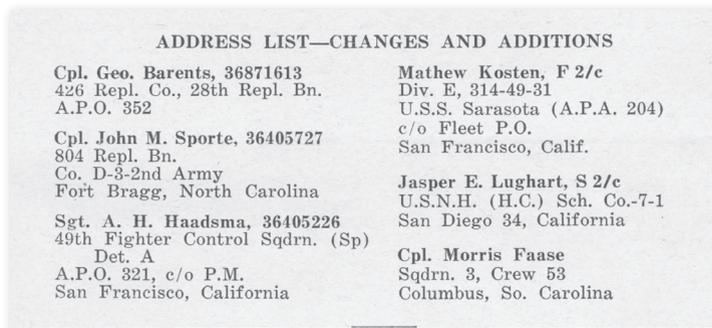
to the Langerak family, remembered the great grief displayed by the parents over the death of their son, Harry.²³

PFC DANIEL DIRK MAST - KOREAN WAR FATALITY

A later exception was Daniel Mast. He was born on December 13, 1924, and served with the American forces in the Korean conflict. Private First Class Mast was a member of Company D, 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He died of non-hostile causes in a friendly fire incident on June 9, 1951, at the 805th Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. His sister-in-law Joan Mast stated, "He was deaf in one ear. Perhaps he did not hear a command given." His body was returned to Grand Rapids and buried in Washington Park Cemetery in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Each quarterly issue of Servicemen's Tidings began with a meditation from Scripture. At the end of each issue were listed addresses, encouraging members to remember the servicemen with prayers and with mail. This is a partial list of addresses listed in the Tidings.

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²³ *Servicemen's Tidings*, November 1945, Vol. 1, No. 7.

²⁴ *Servicemen's Tidings*, August 1945, Vol 1, No. 6.

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ADDRESS LIST — CHANGES AND ADDITIONS

John Barents
160 Farnham St., S. E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Cornelius De Blaay
5626 East Paris, S. E.
R.R., Grand Rapids, Michigan

A. Fred Van Dyke
820 Eastern Ave., S. E.
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Cpl. John Dole, Jr.
43rd General Hospital
A.P.O. 420, c/o Postmaster
New York, N. Y.

Joseph E. Lughart, S 3/c
McIntire Unit Ward, N.W.
U.S.N.T.C.
Great Lakes, Ill.

Kenneth Ripma, Phm. 3/c
Yard Dental Clinic
Mare Island, California

T/5 Wm. Schol, Jr., 36179976
Hq. Battery F. A.
Training Det. No. 4
Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Pvt. Henry VandenToorn, 46021562
A-34-8 F.A.R.T.C. Brks No. 3
Fort Sill, Oklahoma

Cpl. Carl VanderMale, 36889502
1st Ord. Squadron
509th Composite Grp.
A.P.O. 247, c/o P. M.
San Francisco, California

Pvt. Hugo Vander Waal, 36466290
A.P.O. 403, c/o P. M.
New York, N. Y.

Cpl. Abram C. Wyll, 16086772
9427 T.S.U. Sig. C.A.C.S.
550 Federal Office Bldg.
Seattle 4, Washington

Arthur J. Stoutjesdyk, F 1/c
Ships Repair Unit
Navy 3205, c/o Fleet P.O.
San Francisco, California

Pvt. Dan DeMeester, 36941173
Co. B, 59th Med. Training Bn.
Med. Training Group, A.S.F.T.C.
Camp Crowder, Mo.

Jack Verheulen
Ind. Command
Naval Repair Base
San Diego, Calif.

Pvt. Peter Baas, 46027447
Sqdrn 2-3706 A.A.F.D.U.
Sheppard Field, Texas

Anthony Westrate, M.O.M.M. 3 c
Ward 63 B, Naval Hospital
Oakland, California

T/3 Mathew Stoutjesdyk, 36458150
237th Engineers, A.P.O. 513
c/o Postmaster, New York, N.Y.

Cpl. Wm. Noordyke, 36191170
A.A.F. Field Team No. 4
c/o 1918 Quartermaster Trk. Co.
A.P.O. 331, c/o P. M.
San Francisco, California

T/5 James J. Westrate, 36895774
Co. B-32nd Arm'd Reg't
A.P.O. 253, c/o P. M.
New York, N. Y.

Ensign Glenn L. Quist, 402062
L.S.T. No. 500, c/o Fleet P. O.
New York, N. Y.

Pfc. Alvin H. Hossink, 36461814
746 South Cox,
Memphis 15, Tenn.

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ADDRESS LIST — CHANGES AND ADDITIONS

Pfc. Henry Wm. Wielhower,
36452422
62nd Air Serv. G.P. Prov.
4511 A.A.F. Base Unit
A.A.B. Stinson Field
San Antonio, Texas

Pvt. John Keuvelaar, 36914164
187 Para. Glider Inf.
A.P.O. 468, c/o Postmaster
San Francisco, California

Pfc. George J. Kik, 36181268
3853 QM, Gas Supply Bn.
A.P.O. 464, c/o P. M.
New York, N. Y.

Mitchell C. Byl, F 1 c (EM)
3142945
Bkts 204 - Receiving Ship
San Francisco, California

Tony Karel, A/S
Co. 696, U.S.N.T.C.
Great Lakes, Ill.

25 *Servicemen's Tidings*, November 1945, Vol 1, No. 7.

26 *Servicemen's Tidings*, November 1945, Vol 1, No. 7.

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1922-1946

FURTHER GROWTH OF THE DENOMINATION

The first synod of the American Netherlands Reformed Congregations was held in 1910 after Rev. C. Pieneman returned to the Netherlands. Several years later the congregations were divided into three classis. The Lord has visibly blessed the union of these churches over the years. There were actions taken by the early church fathers which were not in accordance with church order and can not be condoned. For example, it is not proper for elders to install ministers, and proper church order also should be followed in the calling of ministers. In spite of these shortcomings, many of which occurred because of ignorance or out of necessity, the Lord granted His approval.²⁷

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²⁷ *Banner of Truth*, September 2007, p. 205.

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FURTHER GROWTH OF THE DENOMINATION

1928	Corsica NRC in South Dakota established.
1941	Sunnyside NRC in Washington organized.
1950	Netherlands Reformed Church in Grand Rapids withdrew from the denomination.
1950	Norwich NRC in Ontario organized.
1951	West Sayville NRC in New York closed. Waupun, Wisconsin organized.
1951	Lethbridge NRC in Alberta organized.
1952	Bethel NRC in Chilliwack, British Columbia organized.
1952	St. Catherines NRC in Ontario organized.
1954	Calgary NRC (branch of Fort Macleod) in Alberta organized.
1955	Artesia NRC in California organized.
1957	Markham NRC in Ontario organized.
1961	Ebenezer NRC in Fort Macleod, Alberta organized.
1971	Lynden NRC in Washington organized.
1975	Bethel NRC in Brant County, Ontario organized.
1982	Sioux Falls NRC in South Dakota organized.
1987	Netherlands Reformed Church in Grand Rapids rejoined.
1999	Picture Butte NRC in Alberta organized.
2004	South Holland/Lansing TDRC dedicated a new church building.
2016	Rogersville NRC in Missouri organized.
2019	Nobleford NRC in Alberta organized.

CHAPTER 4

1947-1984

COMBINED CHURCHES OF THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to
dwell together in unity!*

PSALM 133:1

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OUR SEVENTH MINISTER, REV. WILLEM CORNELIUS LAMAIN, 1947-1984

In the fall of 1946, a call was sent for the fifth time from the Division Avenue and Ottawa Avenue churches in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Rev. W. C. Lamain, as the need for a minister was very great in both churches. Moreover, the task of visiting and serving all the congregations in America fell upon the shoulders of Rev. Van Zweden, the only active NRC pastor in America, and the task was becoming too much for him.¹



Rev. W. C. Lamain

¹ A Brief Historical Survey, p. 65.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

A REMARKABLE ANSWER OF PRAYER

A very remarkable answer to prayer concerning the calling of Rev. Lamain to our congregation was shared by Mrs. Joanne Spaans concerning her father, Mr. Albert Vissia.² The Dutch ministers, Rev. Lamain and Rev. Kersten, were on a duo to be voted on by the joint congregations to “come over and help.” Mr. Vissia struggled with whom to cast his vote for, as he had respect for both ministers. It was made an urgent matter of prayer for him. Shortly before leaving to go to the congregational meeting, Mr. Vissia once more bowed his knees and laid this matter before the Lord. He felt he was given insight to cast his vote for Rev. Lamain. And, very remarkable to him, after the votes were counted, Rev. Lamain received exactly one more vote than Rev. Kersten. Rev. Lamain accepted the fifth call of the congregations placed at that time.

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1935 Plainfield NE, Grand Rapids, MI

Ottawa Avenue, the English-speaking church, and Division Avenue, the Dutch speaking church, were filled with joy and thanksgiving when the call was accepted. There were many obstacles to be overcome and legal requirements to be completed before Rev. Lamain and his family of seven children could embark on the long ocean voyage to their new home.³ Meanwhile, the two rejoicing congregations had to prepare for the new minister. At a congregational meeting led by Rev. J. Van Zweden held on October 28, 1946, committees were authorized to spend up to \$20,000.00 for a parsonage and to purchase the necessary furnishings. A home at 1935 Plainfield NE was purchased for the parsonage.

On February 11, 1947, Rev. Lamain preached a farewell sermon to the

² See Appendix E for more on the life of Albert Vissia.

³ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.17.

congregation in Rijssen from the apostolic blessing of 2 Corinthians 13:13, "All the saints salute you." On February 21, the Lamain family began their voyage on the *SS Veendam*, which arrived on March 4 in New York. After spending a week in New Jersey and preaching in the congregations of Peoples Park, Clifton, and Paterson, a train trip of 18 hours brought them to Grand Rapids. Here Rev. and Mrs. Lamain arrived with their seven children on March 11, 1947.⁴ Since the next day was the annual day of prayer, Rev. Lamain preached at all three Dutch services. The following week, he also preached for the Prayer Day services in Kalamazoo.

Cloudy <small>On St. Haven Report Page 53</small> <small>NOVEMBER TEMPERATURES</small> 8 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 24 23 22 24 23 26 26 49	<h1>The Grand Rapids</h1>	Assas Oj Fo 'Airliner Crea	
FIFTY-FIFTH YEAR	GRAND RAPIDS, MICH., TUESDAY, MARCH 11, 1947.—20 PAGES		
<h2>Six Trapped As Building Falls Apart</h2> <p>Cincinnati Firemen Dig Ruins After Structure Collapses</p> <p>Cincinnati — (AP) — A five-story building collapsed in the bottom area of downtown Cincinnati Tuesday and Fire Chief Barney J. Houston said he believed six men, trapped in the debris, were still alive.</p> <p>At least six persons were injured. They were taken to General Hospital, where they were identified as:</p> <p>Nate Tonkovich, 51, forehead and legs injuries. Earl Borras, 30, back injuries. Henry C. Kesson, 26, foot and arm injuries and shock. Frank Hambordough, stomach injuries. Fred Williams, 51, head and possible internal injuries. Richard Gilday, 38, water works employe, face lacerations and body bruises.</p> <p>Fears Five May Die.</p> <p>Chief Houston expressed doubt that five of the trapped men could be reached in time to save their lives.</p> <p>Houston, whose firemen still were digging several hours after the collapse of the brick structure, said:</p> <p>"I talked with two of the men who are trapped on the first floor but their voices are getting fainter by the moment. I believe there are four others under the wreckage in the basement."</p> <p>The fire chief said all buildings</p>		<h2>Vandenberg Asks Extent Of Aid Plan</h2> <p>Sees Greek Step First in Series of "Chain Reaction"</p> <p>Washington — (AP) — Senate President Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan called on President Truman Tuesday to tell the nation frankly whether the proposed Greek loan might touch off a "chain reaction" of aid for other friendly governments.</p> <p>The Republican foreign policy spokesman told reporters that plans to bolster the tottering Greek monarchy might symbolize a new United States policy "which may have to be pursued all around the world."</p> <p>"I hope," Vandenberg said, "that President Truman will give congress and the country the benefit of the total implications involved in this wider area."</p> <p>Await Truman Talk.</p> <p>He spoke as Mr. Truman and his advisers were whipping into shape the foreign policy address he will deliver to a joint session of congress Wednesday. Congressional sources said the president also would seek a loan for Turkey as part of a program to save the near-east from Communist domination.</p> <p>Vandenberg insisted the near east crisis was no isolated case. He felt if the United States moved to block the growth of communism there, it might be forced to act elsewhere as well. He mentioned China and Korea as two examples.</p> <p>Vandenberg addressed the sen-</p>	<h2>Hijack T Admits C</h2> <p>Captives in Hold Await Sentence</p> <p>The trio of Chicago men here Sunday after seek ject a supposed cache pleaded guilty Tuesday</p>

For the Lamain family, who had lived in the Netherlands during the war years, many restrictions applied to their immigration to the United States. The large family was restricted on space to transport many household items. The family could only bring clothing, dishes, silverware, and blankets. The congregation was more than generous in supplying furniture for the new parsonage.

⁴ *Banner of Truth*, September 1991, p. 38.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

“The Lamain family members were welcomed at the Union Depot station by a thick throng of people. Those are moments which we will not easily forget. Many people were so choked with emotion they could not speak, and it was difficult for us, too. It was 25 years ago that the congregations which we are now going to serve had a minister of their own,” wrote Rev. Lamain in *De Saambinder*.⁵

A welcome for the minister was planned soon after the family’s arrival, encouraging gifts of food for the family’s food cupboards.

On March 19, 1947, Rev. Lamain was installed by Rev. John Van Zweden from Ezekiel 3:17, “Son

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of man, I have made thee a watch-

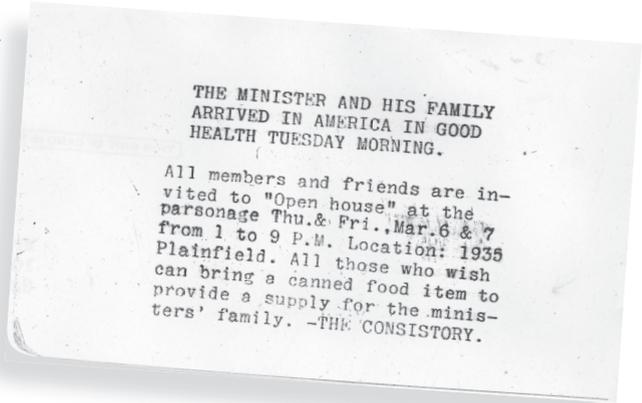
man unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.” The next evening, Rev. Lamain preached his inaugural sermon in Dutch for the Grand Rapids congregations based on 1 Corinthians 3:11, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” At the time that Rev. Lamain was installed, Rev. John Van Zweden was the only active minister of the North American congregations. Thus, the congregations in America received a second minister. Rev. Lamain stated: “It was not strange to hear the congregation sing Psalter 440:5,

*Holy in Thy Habitation
Are Thy ways, Lord of creation.
There’s no God, O God, like Thee.*”⁶

Rev. Lamain described his new flock as a “starved host, who yearned after the truth. So many of them had become discouraged when the living [preached]

⁵ As quoted in *Memorial Stone Vol 1*, p.355.

⁶ Lamain, J. W., H. Beijeman, and H. Natzijl, *The Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain*, Stevens Point, WI: Worzalla, 2003, p.286.



proclamation of the Word had been missed for year after year, and when they had called in vain so many times.”⁷

Thus was accomplished the object of many prayers which had been sent up for so many years wherein the Lord of the Church was called upon to fulfill His promise, “Thine eyes shall see thy teachers” (Isaiah 30:20). The members of the congregation had at times shown their impatience, even to the extent of causing trouble and division, but the faithful Shepherd proved that He would come at His own time to answer prayer.

It was agreed that Rev. Lamain would preach at Division Avenue on Sunday mornings and evenings in the Dutch language, and at Ottawa Avenue on Sunday afternoons and at the mid-week services.

Two weeks after he arrived, Rev. Lamain began his studies of the English language under the tutorship of Professor Albertus J. Rooks of Calvin College.⁸



Rev. and Mrs. Lamain

The trials for the new minister naturally began with the English language,

When I came to America, I was placed before the great problem of how to learn the language. I pleaded so often for that same grace which was experienced by the apostles of Christ. On Pentecost, they simply began to speak in other tongues. But the Lord did not give that. I had to learn every single word, and how to pronounce it correctly so that people would not laugh... The first thing I had to do was pronounced the Votum in English at the beginning of

⁷ As quoted in Memorial Stone Vol 1, p.356.

⁸ *Banner of Truth*, September 1991, p.38.

the worship service and Benediction at the end of the worship service. After that I had to learn the Apostle's Creed and read the chapter from the Bible.

He found himself studying from the same book that his daughter used in the primary grades at Hastings Street Christian School.

“How strange and difficult it all was,” wrote Rev. Lamain after his arrival in America. “In the ‘Psalter’ from which they sing here, there are more than four hundred numbers. I did not sing along at first, for I really did not understand a thing of it. How often I thought back to Holland.”⁹

One month after his arrival, his wife faced death with a difficult delivery of their third son. However, the Lord spared the mother and the son.¹⁰ In June, three months after coming to America, Rev. Lamain addressed the graduates of Hastings Street Christian School in halting English.

In addition to serving the two churches in Grand Rapids, Rev. Lamain was appointed as the moderator for the congregations of Kalamazoo and South Holland, Illinois. Even more, the entire vacant Classis East was given to him also, a classis which included congregations 900 miles away from Grand Rapids.¹¹

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On August 16, 1947, Rev. Lamain underwent an appendix operation. For himself, Rev. Lamain wrote,

I could not believe it was a sickness unto death, even though I was standing before it too. I did receive grace to give my wife and children over into the hand of the Lord, but I was not made free of them... But oh, what an eternal wonder, the Lord was nearby. I was enabled to be quiet and submissive as I was lain upon the operating table. The Lord gave me to believe there, that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). Oh, how I wept over the goodness and the compassion of God shown to me, such an unworthy one.¹²

⁹ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p.287.

¹⁰ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p.291.

¹¹ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p. 286.

¹² As quoted in Memorial Stone Vol 1, p. 360-1.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

After a period of recovery, Rev. Lamain was able to preach again. He later wrote, “In my serious sickness, I was enabled to experience that the Lord knew my address, and that He in His condescending goodness, visited with the Dayspring from on high. God is neither bound to time nor place.”¹³



The Lamain Family (1951)

With one minister serving two churches with separate consistories, it soon became apparent that joint action would lead to union. The Division Avenue consistory called a congregational meeting on May 19, 1947, to consider union with the Ottawa Avenue church. This was overwhelmingly approved. The Ottawa Avenue church approved the consolidation at a congregational meeting on May 26, 1947. The new consolidated church was to be officially known as the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

¹³ As quoted in Memorial Stone Vol 1, p. 361.

Seven months after Rev. Lamain arrived in Grand Rapids, the order of worship services was changed. Rev. Lamain preached in the Dutch language in the Division Avenue church on Sunday mornings and afternoons. He conducted the evening service in the Ottawa Avenue church in the English language. At first, he read his sermon which had been translated.¹⁴

By the summer of 1949, the large attendance at the Ottawa Avenue Sunday evening services made it necessary to seek larger accommodations. Consideration was given to expand this church building, but a more permanent solution was sought. A



The Herpolsheimer House, formerly standing on Crescent Street.

congregational meeting was held on June 13, 1949, during which members approved the building of a new church and the sale of the two existing church properties. Until the new church could be completed, Fountain Street Baptist Church (later called Fountain Street Church) would be used for the Sunday evening English worship service.

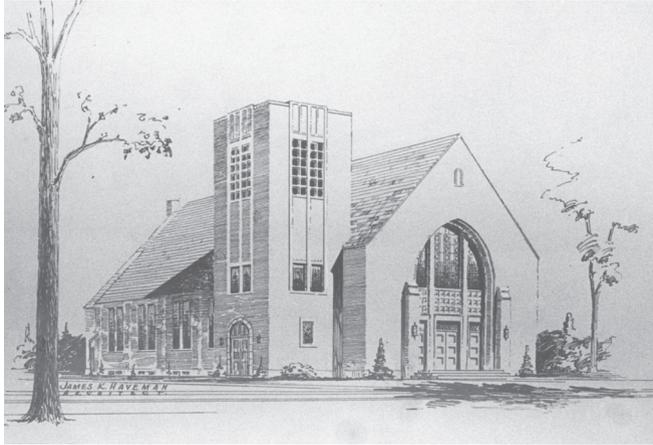
Already in 1946, the congregations had looked forward to building a new church in a more favorable location. At a congregational meeting held on May 13, 1946, in the Division Avenue church, approval was given for the purchase of property at Crescent Street and Union Avenue as a site for a new church for the price of \$10,000.00. The vacant lot formerly held a family home known as the Herpolsheimer House along with its carriage house.

Although the official union of the Division and Ottawa Avenue congregations did not take place until 1947, the proposals to jointly call a minister could be considered a forerunner of this event. In retrospect, it could be seen that the near locations of the two churches made it logical for the two

¹⁴ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 18.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

congregations eventually to unite.¹⁵ In 1949, a building committee, headed by Cornelius Van Zweden, was appointed to work with Architect James K. Haveman for the design of a new church to be built on the site at 540 Crescent Street.



The design for a new church to be built at 540 Crescent Street.

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The contract for the new church building was signed on April 7, 1950. Work began on the construction of the building which was then completed and occupied in April 1951.

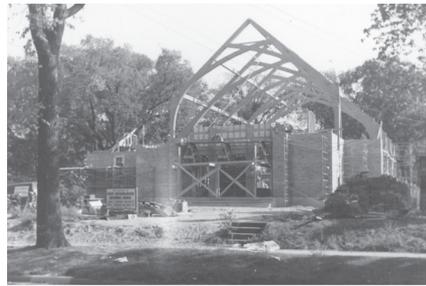
After the foundations of the new church building were in place, Rev. Lamain placed the mortar for the cornerstone laying ceremony which was held on Saturday afternoon, June 19, 1950. This occasion also commemorated the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Division Avenue congregation.¹⁶

Although most members were looking forward with anticipation to worshipping in the new church, there was a feeling of nostalgia in the closing of the old buildings, especially the building on Division Avenue. This building had served the congregation for 77 years; even though it was not an elaborate structure, many regarded it as the house of God.

¹⁵ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 17.

¹⁶ *A Brief Historical Survey*, p. 65.

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BOUMA BOUWER BOUWMAN BRADLEY BRANDT

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

CHURCH MEMORIES

JOANNE VISSIA SPAANS, MADELYN VISSIA BOUMA
AND JOHN (JOE) VISSIA

As far back as Joanne, Madeyln, and John Vissia could remember attending church as young children, they attended the Division Avenue church. Their recollection of the building was that it was a very plain building with many steps. They remembered the church not having an organ and Mr. Mol as the song leader. The long-handled collection bags were also a favorite memory! They recalled walking approximately a mile and a half one way to church three times a Sunday. On a more solemn note, in their young minds, they thought they were attending a perfect church where many of the older people were converted.

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Some years later they attended the Ottawa Avenue church building because the Division Avenue church services were held in the Dutch language, whereas in the Ottawa church, the English language was introduced. As time progressed, there was more and more a need to transition to English-only services.

When the Vissia family transferred from the Division Avenue church to the Ottawa Avenue church, they felt as if they had left their home. They had felt a closer bond in the Division Avenue church which they missed very much when they attended the Ottawa Avenue church.

Later the family moved to the new church building on 540 Crescent Street. They did not have much to say about this move other than they were impressed by the big, new, beautiful building. The three siblings all currently attend the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation on Beckwith Avenue.

John Spaans (the future minister) and Joanne Vissia were the first couple married by Rev. Lamain in the new church building on Crescent Street.

With sadness, Joanne Vissia Spaans made the comment that there seemed to be a closer bond within the church community in earlier days than currently today.

CLOSING OF THE DIVISION AVENUE AND THE OTTAWA AVENUE CHURCHES

After preaching an appropriate sermon on Sunday, May 6, 1951, based on Psalm 72:20, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended," Rev. Lamain ceremoniously closed the Bible for the last time in the old Division Avenue building.

The sermon preached on the same Sunday which terminated the use of the Ottawa Avenue building was based on Revelations 21:6: "And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."¹⁷

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THE FAREWELL OF THE CHURCH BUILDING ON DIVISION AVENUE 1873-1951

[Although the rhyme and meter are lost during translation, the thoughts of our church history are included in the poem, written originally in the Dutch language by a member of the congregation.]

For more than 80 years
Through storms and dangers,
Men have been privileged to come;
Men could come into this house
And hear the joy of the righteous
But also, what the end will be
Of those that do not fear God.
Through the preaching of God's servants

¹⁷ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p.17.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

That walked upon this ground,
Seekers as Ruth were instructed.
Also, it has been clearly shown
How God desires [us] to live
And receive His blessings.
Kloppenburg was first heard
Bringing the message of holiness from God's Word.
He was allowed to work six years
And during the time was also privileged to see blessings.
Vorst was seen for four and ten years after him.
Van der Spek, one of God's servants
Brought the Word for one year.
Wolbers, small of stature,
Also sounded a solemn [truthful] message.
After him came the fire of Pieneman
Who captured the hearts of God's people.
Minderman stood here ten years
As a servant of God.
With much faithfulness and care
He sought the welfare of God's house.
In this house, Densel,
Van Dyke and Beversluis.
Also VandeHoef, Van Adrichem,
Kersten, Beaton¹⁸ and Hager preached here
As did Wielhouwer, Vreugdenhil, and Bel.

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¹⁸ "Beaton" refers to Rev. Donald Beaton (1872-1953), a minister in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Rev. Beaton made several trips to North America, visiting the USA on his final journey outside of Scotland sometime during the years 1939-1940. The Ottawa Avenue congregation hosted Rev. Beaton in 1940 (and, evidently, he must have preached at least once in the Division Avenue congregation as well). Mr. John Mieras, a deacon in the Ottawa Avenue church, wrote to the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*: "We had Rev. Beaton with us for three Sabbaths, and enjoyed his services very much and in token of our appreciation to the Free Presbyterian Church for allowing Rev. Beaton to preach for us, we took this collection. May the Lord bless you in these troublous times and give that you may be enabled to look up to Him who has all things in His hand."

1947-1984

From all, a message of well and woe was heard.
Van Zweden spoke first about the Kingly beauty
That is required of God's people.
About four years ago in Rijssen
God pointed out a servant to go
To this foreign land
In order to bring God's Word there.
Lamain came as God's servant
Led here with his family to this land.
Many times, he extolled the banner
Of Christ crucified, of free grace.
All in God and nothing in man
Came out in every sermon
That he brought here week by week.
Many times in this church there was
A prayer for self and family members,
For daughters and for sons that
Did not want to live in this house.
Many of those beggars are now above
To love their God eternally.
The leaders in this building
Have served as people in trust,
Alert on Zion's walls.
How much was endured.
They met much bitter and sweet
During these 80 years.
Now we are saying farewell to this church.
The only thing we are leaving is the wood and stone.
May God go with us;
For where God dwells, [it] is always best,
Whether it be in a barn or a beautiful church.

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AUTHOR UNKNOWN¹⁹

¹⁹ www.digibron.nl

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

A NEW CHURCH BUILDING

In the evening of Wednesday, May 8, 1951, a time filled with thanksgiving and joy occurred when the congregation assembled in the new church. The large Bible lay closed as Rev. Lamain ascended the pulpit platform for the first time. After he spoke the familiar “Our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth,” he formally opened the book, thus signifying that the Word of God was to be dominant in the life of the congregation as they dedicated the new church. The text for the dedication was, “In this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts” (Haggai 2:9).²⁰ Rev. Lamain wrote of this special day,

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We now have a building with 850 seats and also a room that could accommodate 250 people and can be used for reading services...The greatest thing of all would be that the Lord Himself comes into this new building because where God is missing, everything is empty and poor. Only the coming

of God can make our salvation complete for our personal life. That is also true for a church building. When God shows His favor in such a place, then it is good. We hope



Commemorative Tile issued when the new church was dedicated in 1951.

²⁰ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p.402.

that there may be many children born into the favor of God and that all false grounds are uncovered and God's people may be built in their most holy faith. Above all, that God's Name may be glorified, Christ may be exalted and the workings of God's Spirit may be seen. ²¹

When the Crescent Street church building was finished in 1951, the Möller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland, installed a new pipe organ, their Opus 8217. This instrument consisted of 16 ranks controlled by a stoptab console with two manuals (keyboards) and a pedalboard. Due to the instrument's small size compared to the large auditorium, pipe scales were generous and the voicing was broad. Looking towards the front of the auditorium, the Swell and Pedal stops were installed in a chamber to the left of the pulpit, while the Great division was installed on the right side. The specification of this organ follows:

GREAT		SWELL		PEDAL	
Stop	Pipes	Stop	Pipes	Stop	Pipes
8' Principal	73	8' Geigen Diapason	85	16' Diapason	prepared *
8' Melodia	85	8' Chimney Flute	85	16' Sub Bass	44
8' Gemshorn	85	8' Viole de Gambe	73	16' Rohrbourdon	(Swell)
4' Octave	73	8' Viole Celeste [TC]	61	8' Bourdon	ext.
4' Flute	ext.	4' Geigen Octave	ext.	8' Rohrgedeckt	(Swell)
4' Gemshorn	ext.	4' Rohrflote	ext.	4' Rohrflote	(Swell)
2 2/3' Grave Mixture II	122	2' Plein Jeu III	183	Great to Pedal 8'	
Tremolo		8' Trumpet	85	Great to Pedal 4'	
Great to Great 16'		8' Vox Humana	73	Swell to Pedal 8'	
Great to Great 4'		4' Clarion	ext.	Swell to Pedal 4'	
Unison Off		Tremolo			
Swell to Great 16'		Swell to Swell 16'			
Swell to Great 8'		Swell to Swell 4'			
Swell to Great 4'		Unison Off			

* Never installed.

It is interesting to note that the Ottawa Avenue church set its morning meeting time at 9:30 A.M. The starting time for morning services at the Division

²¹ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lelain, p.348.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

Avenue church was set at 9:00 A.M. An elderly member mentioned that when the two congregations combined, the compromise for the morning service start-time of the combined churches was halfway between these two times. This resulted in the morning services of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation commencing at 9:15 A.M., a practice which continues to the present time.

Shortly after the Ottawa and Division Avenue churches combined and began worshipping at the Crescent Street church, a group of women asked permission to begin a ladies guild. The purpose of the guild, named the Esther Guild, was to assist those in need in the congregation. The women also remembered those serving in the armed forces of the country. At different times during the existence of the congregation, the women came together in one group or in two, during the calendar year, to fill a need in the congregation.

Additional building programs had been authorized by the congregation at

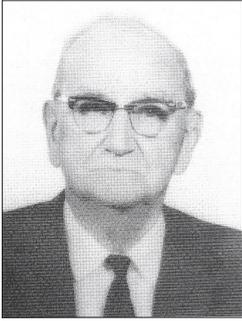
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2115 Romence Street NE, Grand Rapids, MI

various times since the completion of the church at 540 Crescent Street. In 1955, the church parking area was extended by the purchase of two lots facing Union Avenue. In 1960, a new parsonage was built at 2115 Romence Street NE where the Lamain family lived until the death of Rev. Lamain in 1984.

In 1974, a chapel was added to the main sanctuary increasing the seating of the sanctuary by 250 places. Also, in 1974, a compact Allen digital computer organ was donated by a church family in memory of their father who had passed away. This organ was installed in the chapel of the Crescent Street building and was used in church services held during the week, as well as for choir practices and programs.



Abe DeBruyn

When looking at the history of a congregation, many individuals come to mind including those that served the church as elders or deacons, who, along with the minister, were privileged to touch many lives. One elder, whose family also came from Oud Vossemeer in the Netherlands and who served the congregation for many years, was Abe DeBruyn, a man who had formerly lived a very wicked life. Rev. Lamain spoke of Abe DeBruyn,

... after his conversion, it has happened that whenever the only name Jesus Christ which is given to salvation was spoken of, he dissolved into tears... Many times he read sermons in Dutch as well as in the English language when the congregation was vacant... He taught the catechism classes, conducted Bible classes, and performed funerals. He translated many sermons from Dutch to English. Whenever it involved the truth, he was not afraid to defend it.

Near the end of his life he spoke to Rev. Lamain and said, "I have never been able to understand that you accepted me as an elder, that you took me along on house visitations for so many years, etc. If you had known what a miserable man I was, so depraved, so sinful, so guilty, then you would have never associated with me."²²

Rev. Lamain also spoke of Elder John Kamp, who served the church and exhibited God's grace in his life. Both Elders Kamp and DeBruyn passed away in 1969,

*My soul was closely tied to Elder J. Kamp. During his whole life, he remained a concerned person. He was a man of few words but in regard to the truth, he was not afraid to express himself... He did not speak so many words; he had more tears... He was respected in the congregation because of his humbleness and fear of God. He testified against sin and was valiant when it concerned God's honor and truth.*²³

²² Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p. 405.

²³ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p. 402.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD



Dr. Gordon Deur

Dr. Gordon Deur, a former deacon and elder in the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, wrote a tender, loving letter to his family before his death entitled: “God’s Wonder of Free Grace to a Poor Sinner.”

In his letter, he relates his upbringing and how he had grown up believing the false doctrine of “presumptive regeneration” promoted by the Christian Reformed Church. In God’s providence, he was married to Ruth Vogel in 1950 by Rev. Lamain, and they attended the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

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Almost immediately I became very uneasy under the preaching of Rev. Lamain and hated to hear his preaching because it was beginning to tear off my fig leaves (my comfortable outward religion). I sincerely believed that he was speaking directly to me though he remained on the pulpit. I did not like what I heard, but neither could I stay away from the preaching. At this time, Rev. Lamain’s English was very poor since he was a recent immigrant from the Netherlands. However, I could understand enough, and I knew that if what he was preaching was true (and I was convinced it was) that I was missing everything. This realization became reality; if I was missing what he preached, then I was lost. Lost! Lost! Under the wrath of God! Oh, what a change took place in my life. When God opens the eyes of a sinner, he comes into contact with a holy, righteous God who can have nothing to do with a sinner but righteously condemn him. This causes the sinner to cry out, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ He will do anything and everything. Yet each sinner must learn by grace that nothing is required and all that we bring is filthy, loathsome, and cannot stand the light of day. Saved by grace only! I found it impossible to speak to any person about what was taking place in my heart. I became very confused with religion. Previously, I had attended many other churches, even from other denominations, and found many of them very sincere about their religion. They were all convinced they were right in their doctrines. Who was right? This question plagued me causing me to ask Rev.

Lamain how I might know whether his preaching and the doctrines taught in the Netherlands Reformed Churches were true. His answer to me was as follows: 'Do you find your life in God's Word? Do you find your life or what takes place in your heart in reading some of the old writers? Do you hear your life explained from the preaching of the Word?' He could say no more; the Holy Spirit had to seal and apply it to my heart.

I had to question myself, 'Why am I so confused and so restless in my soul?'

One Sunday morning in 1956... I was so discouraged and restless. I picked up the Zion's Witness and read a short answer to a letter. The contents were as follows: 'Has the Lord never done anything for you? Has it never become a wonder to you that God has not cut you off, but that you are still under the means of grace?' That was the Lord's time; I broke down before the Lord and wept bitterly. The Lord showed me how I had been fighting and rebelling against His ways my whole life. Then it truly became a wonder to me that the Lord had such patience and was so long suffering to me. The following year, at the age of 37, I was installed as an elder. I was privileged to teach catechism classes and the young people.

A few weeks later Dr. Deur, a "rebel", was given to see a way to be saved under a sermon on Psalm 68:18 by Rev. Lamain.

In his letter, Elder Deur wrote many instructive warnings to his family which are applicable to all.

How many in the religious world are brought to hell with a head full of religion but still missing the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit raising up a dead sinner to spiritual life... So many people can speak about being saved but it is only lip work, words coming from head knowledge... When God opens the eyes of a sinner, he comes in contact with a holy, righteous God who can have nothing to do with a sinner but righteously condemn him... All who shall enter heaven must be stripped of everything that is of man so that the Lord may receive all the honor, praise, and glory... May we always keep in mind the basis of true conversion, i.e. a godly sorrow that we have sinned against a well doing God. We deserve only eternal destruction. The Lord brings His people in contact with a holy and righteous God Who is

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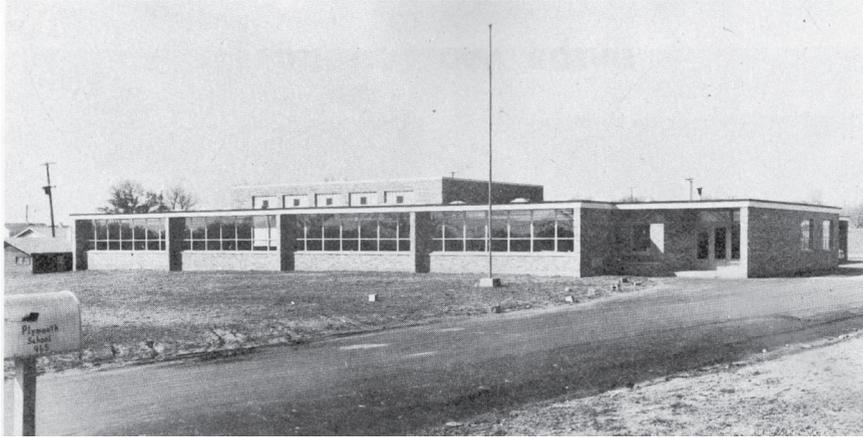
angry with the wicked every day. By the working of the Spirit, each must be led to sign his own death sentence. Only then is the way opened for the revelation of Christ. Salvation is being saved by grace and grace alone.

Dr. Deur served as a consistory member in the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation until his death in 1988, at age 62, from colon cancer.

A NEW SCHOOL BUILDING

As the church membership increased, Hastings Street Christian School gained more students. The purchase of buses made it possible for more children of the congregation, from outlying areas, to attend the school which soon became overcrowded. It was decided in 1955 to proceed with the construction of a new school on a four-acre site located on Plymouth Avenue to be purchased from Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Stoutjesdyke.

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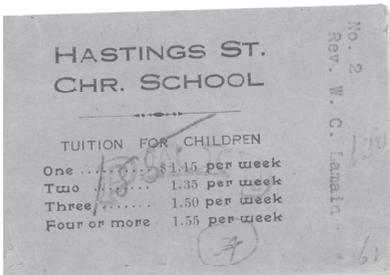
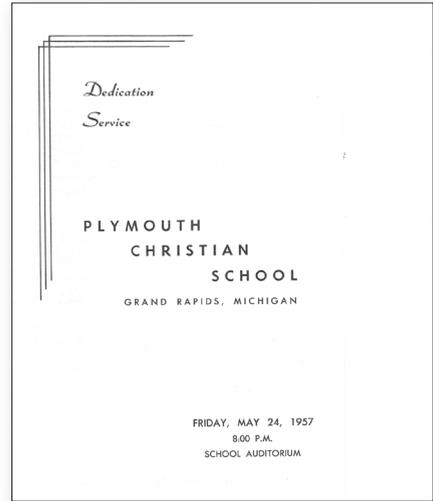


Plymouth Christian School

The new school was to have six classrooms and an all-purpose room, in addition to sky-lights in the hallways and in every classroom. This detail made the new school much different from Hastings Street Christian School, which at times did not have enough light in each classroom.

May 24, 1957, was a wonderful day for the congregation of Grand Rapids when people gathered in large numbers to attend the new school dedication. Rev. Lamain spoke at this occasion with the words from Genesis 26:22: “And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.” His main thoughts were these: first, the divine leadership; secondly, the divine care; and thirdly, the divine approval.²⁴ Mr. Jacob Westrate, the builder, gave the keys of the school to Elder C. F. Boerkoel, the chairman of the school board.

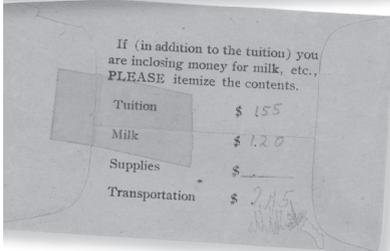
A few days after the dedication, the congregation assembled at the new school to witness the graduating class receive their diplomas. A system of monthly tuition payments became part of the families’ expenses in supporting the school operating fund.



Rev. Lamain commanded much respect among the students in our school. He always took time to come to conduct chapel sessions every week. These were serious moments as the students were instructed in what they were missing by nature and what they needed to ‘live in comfort and die in peace’.

In 1970, to remember the 100 year anniversary of the congregation, Rev. Lamain wrote in the school year-book:

As we observe the hundredth anniversary of our congregation, it is fitting that we humbly acknowledge the Name of the Lord. It was in God’s counsel and in God’s will from eternity to institute the congregation.



Tuition Envelopes

²⁴ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p. 369.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

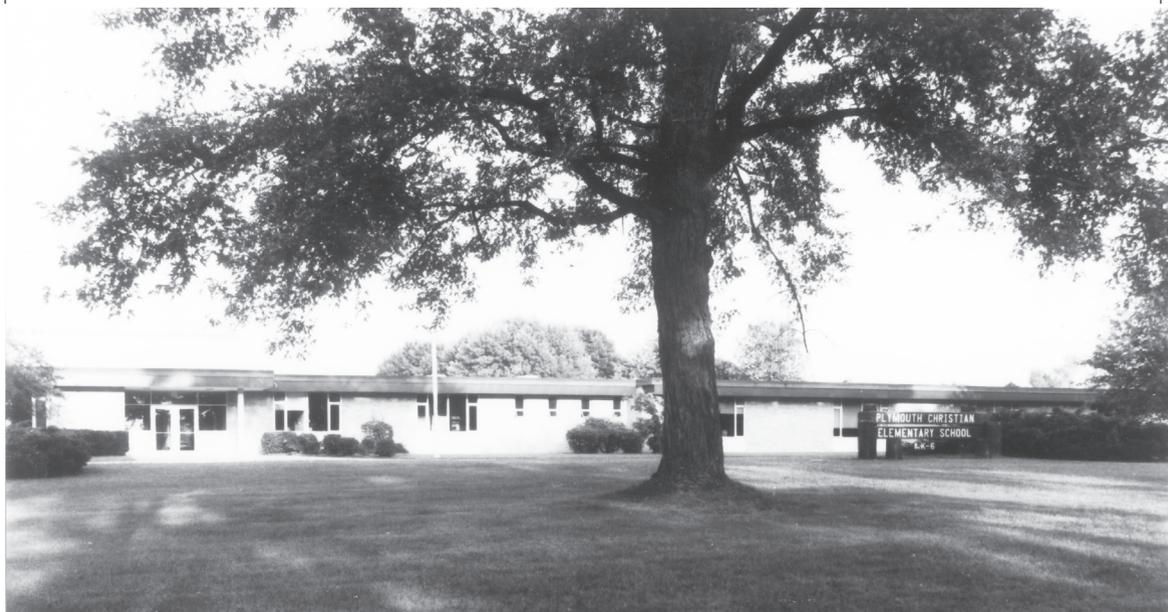
Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. But it has also been His will to maintain the congregation all these years. We cannot ascribe it to our wisdom, strength, or prudence, or to any merits of our own; far, far from it. If the Lord had done according to our unfaithfulness, then years ago already we would have come to naught.

... A generation is growing up that is seeking something new. They would forsake the old paths and find a much easier way to heaven. We can say it very simply: man in the foreground and God in the background. More and more we see revealed the enmity against the doctrine of predestination, in which the sovereignty of God shines forth. They would believe in and accept a Christ for Whom no place has been made. In practice, the state of spiritual death is denied, also the necessity of a perfect Savior, and the indispensable ministration of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of a lost sinner in that only and wonderful way opened by the Father in Christ Jesus.



Rev. and Mrs. Lamain

... In the course of the years, many have become estranged from the congregation, but on the other hand others have found a place among us; may it be a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters (Isaiah 56:6). Outwardly it may be called a wonder that such large numbers still gather to hear the truth which is after godliness. It is our constant prayer that the preaching, the reading, and the instruction of the youth may not be to their condemnation, but to their eternal salvation, not a savor of death unto death, but a savor of life unto life. May many still be born in Zion, and may the rising generation, our children and grandchildren and their posterity remain with the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. May the God of the oath and covenant, the God of our fathers be and remain with the congregation. May God be glorified in our midst in the greatness of His Divine perfections. May many pearls be added to the mediatorial crown of Jesus Christ, Who has purchased His church with His blood. May the working of His Holy Spirit be seen in the drawing of sinners, but also in the confirmation of His work in the hearts of His people.



Plymouth Christian Elementary School

May the Lord also in the future be as a fiery wall around the congregation, keeping them from all kinds of heresies, putting hell to shame, and frustrating the onslaughts of the Prince of Darkness.

*Your well wishing minister,
W. C. Lamain*

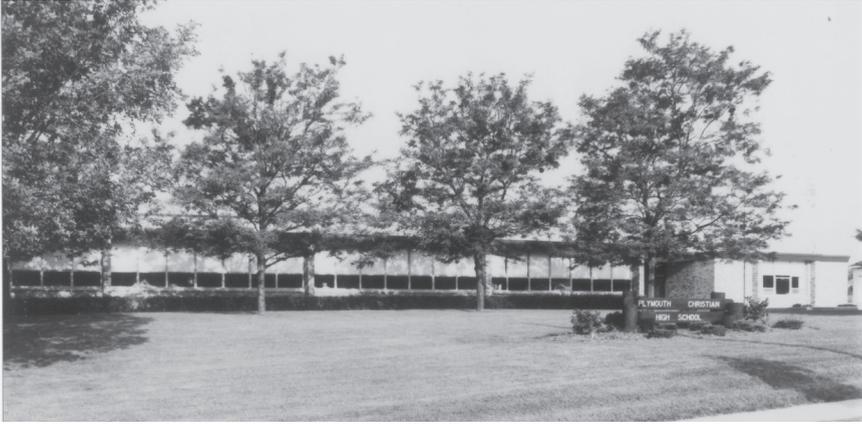
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During the last chapel sessions held by Rev. Lamain, he instructed the students to seek seriously the “one thing needful”. In the school yearbook of 1984, Rev. Lamain wrote,

Dear children, boys and girls, I hope from the bottom of my heart that you will appreciate that your parents have sent you to such a school where the teachers instructed you in the right doctrine. And above all, children, may all the instruction received in our schools never testify against you. Later, some boys and girls leave the true doctrine and deny what they heard in the days of their youth. Thus they step on the hearts of their parents, transgressing also the fifth commandment without any shame. Oh, how terrible it shall be, in this way, to fall in the hands of the living God. Remember a Divine miracle must take place in our heart through the work of the Holy Spirit.²⁵

²⁵ As quoted in *First Netherlands Reformed 125th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 4.

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Plymouth Christian High School

Enrollment at Plymouth Christian School continued to grow until the building was filled to capacity. As a result, an addition was built in 1963 consisting of three classrooms and some smaller rooms.

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Later, a science room and library were also added. In 1982, a nearby public school building located on Ball Avenue was purchased, which led to the development of a high school program. The school on Plymouth Avenue was remodeled and a large gym was added to better handle the high school classes.²⁶ The elementary students moved to the newly purchased facility on Ball Avenue. By 1984, Plymouth Christian School offered a kindergarten through grade 12 education.

A few years later, further additions of classrooms, a computer lab, and a music room were made to accommodate a growing elementary enrollment.

The following memories of Hastings Street Christian School/ Plymouth Christian School memories were shared by Henry Kamp, Sr., a president of the schoolboard for many years:

“Remembering how God has providentially provided for our school in the past in so many different ways should give courage and strength for those involved with new projects.

²⁶ First Netherlands Reformed 125th Year Anniversary Booklet, p.16.

At the very beginning, there were people who supported starting our own Christian school and those who opposed starting our own school. Rev. Pi-eneman was involved at the beginning. There were some financially hard times a few years later. One instance recorded was that the school would only continue if there was coal delivered. Providentially, the coal was provided, and the school could continue.

The School Board members made many visits to the consistory for funds to run the school. Sometimes, they would receive help and, at other times, they received no help. At one time, they were told to go from door to door to collect some funds for the school. What they received was a small amount of money, but combined, it was enough to continue on. One of the teachers gave their earnings back to the School Board and said, "You need it more than I do."

A big step forward in the mid-1950s was a new school that was planned and built at 965 Plymouth Road. Again, the needed money became available. The school building was opened on May 24, 1957. The dedication program is on page 167 of With Wings as Eagles, printed in 2008 to commemorate the 100th year anniversary of our Christian school.



Rev. and Mrs. Lamain

Rev. W. C. Lamain held a large place in the school. He led numerous chapel sessions, graduations, dedications, etc. The school was always mentioned in his prayers during the church services.

From 1955-2016, about 10 building projects were undertaken. From 1955-1992, these building projects were voted on and passed by more than a two-thirds majority. One member recalled that, of all the school building projects proposed over the years, only two projects were not approved.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

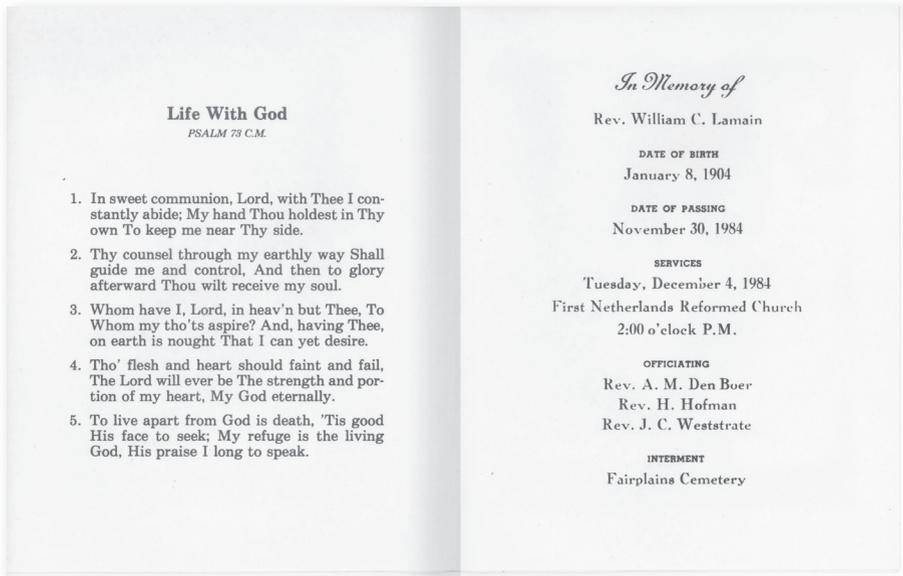
The 1980s was a very active time for Plymouth Christian School. In 1981, the suggestion was raised to make Plymouth Christian School a K-12 school, which was approved by the School Board, consistory, and the church membership. While various implementation plans were being considered, the Burr Oak school on Ball Avenue was put up for sale. This school, and the surrounding property, was purchased from the Grand Rapids Public Schools at the same time that the remodeling of the original school facility on Plymouth Avenue was taking place. All of these activities comprised a very large project which required a substantial amount of funding from the congregation. However, with the Lord's providence and blessing, the work was completed by September 1982 so that both high school and elementary school buildings could be used to begin the new school year.

On November 30, 1984, Rev. W. C. Lamain passed away at the age of 80 years. The book With Wings as Eagles relates much about the 37 years in and how he served Plymouth Christian School.

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In 1982, the School Board thought that the newly purchased Burr Oak school had plenty of extra room for the Plymouth Christian Elementary School's future growth, but, after only four years, more classrooms were needed. In 1986, plans were made to add five classrooms to the elementary school. God had blessed us with an increase in students. However, in April 1987, there was a sudden, unexpected turn. The elementary school experienced a fire which caused very much smoke damage. With the help of a large number of people, the school was sufficiently cleaned enough so that students could resume classes on the following Tuesday. God inclined the hearts of many people to work together and that morning, a prayer of thanksgiving was offered that we still had a school building. In spite of the fire, the planned addition was built the same year. It was a time of unity among the members of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

Through the years, many students of Plymouth Christian returned and took teaching positions at our school. Some spent their entire careers at Plymouth Christian Schools. Other former students have held offices in the church as elders and deacons; still more have served as School Board members. We must confess now, as in the past, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." I Samuel 7:12.



Life With God

PSALM 73 C.M.

1. In sweet communion, Lord, with Thee I constantly abide; My hand Thou holdest in Thy own To keep me near Thy side.
2. Thy counsel through my earthly way Shall guide me and control, And then to glory afterward Thou wilt receive my soul.
3. Whom have I, Lord, in heav'n but Thee, To Whom my tho'ts aspire? And, having Thee, on earth is nought That I can yet desire.
4. Tho' flesh and heart should faint and fail, The Lord will ever be The strength and portion of my heart, My God eternally.
5. To live apart from God is death, 'Tis good His face to seek; My refuge is the living God, His praise I long to speak.

In Memory of

Rev. William C. Lamain

DATE OF BIRTH

January 8, 1904

DATE OF PASSING

November 30, 1984

SERVICES

Tuesday, December 4, 1984

First Netherlands Reformed Church

2:00 o'clock P.M.

OFFICIATING

Rev. A. M. Den Boer

Rev. H. Hofman

Rev. J. C. Weststrate

INTERMENT

Fairplains Cemetery

November 30, 1984, was a very difficult day for the members of the congregation, the staff and students at Plymouth Christian Schools when they were informed that Rev. W. C. Lamain had passed away. "It was something we all knew would happen, but what a blow it was when it came. For 37 years, Rev. Lamain had preached to our congregation and taught the youth in Grand Rapids faithfully and lovingly." Truly, Rev. Lamain was one of those known as God's spokesmen in the world: he was one of the watchmen set upon the walls... "which shall never hold their peace day nor night." (Isaiah 62:6).²⁷

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"Thus, an era came to an end in Grand Rapids, as well as in our denomination. May each of us meditate on his death as a warning to prepare for it. Our day of death is approaching, and what will we do with all the warnings and admonitions he gave us? May we experience what Christ said in Proverbs 8:35, 'For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord'."²⁸

On November 30, 2016, Rev. J.M.D. de Heer wrote about Rev. W. C. Lamain. On this day, it was 32 years ago that Rev. Lamain had passed away. He

²⁷ *First Netherlands Reformed 125th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 4.

²⁸ *Netherlands Reformed Christian Educators Association Journal* as quoted in *First Netherlands Reformed 125th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 4.

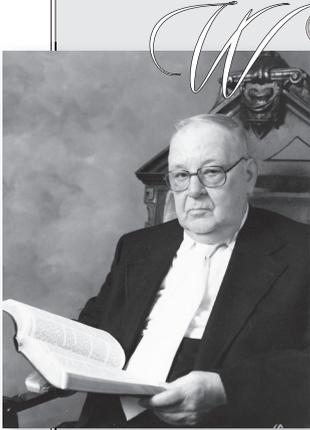
The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

stated in the review of a book Forsake Not What Thy Hand Began (written in Dutch),

Actually it is quite remarkable that various publishers consistently bring books by Rev. Lamain to the market. And this is thirty years after he passed away. There is now a whole generation which has never heard him preach. The explanation for this must lie in the contents of Rev. Lamain's books. Scriptural-experimental instruction never grows old. Exactly this sort of instruction causes many to read the books by Rev. Lamain. He had received very much instruction at the feet of God's children. With his great capacity for memory, he was still able to recall these things many years later. Much more important was the instruction which the Lord Himself gave him. Rev. Lamain did not copy what others said, but from the treasures of the heart he could bring forth new and old things from God's Word. This ensured that a child of God once said, 'Lamain always edifies'.²⁹

²⁹ Memorial Stone Vol. 5, p. 372-3.

REV. WILLEM CORNELIUS LAMAIN (1904-1984) SERVED THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION 1947-1984.



Willem Cornelius Lamain was born on January 8, 1904 in Kamperland, the Netherlands, in the province of Zeeland. During his grade school years, he was bothered by his sins; he learned what it meant to be without God, Christ, or hope in the world. In his early teens, he was made acquainted with the root of original sin that plagued his soul. He lived in much sorrow because of missing God and of the righteous judgment of God that lay on him. He expected to be eternally cut off from God which was more than he could bear, and yet he had to acknowledge that the Lord was righteous in casting him away forever. His sins greatly

oppressed him, but at the same time the love for God pulled him. It was not for him a matter about heaven or about hell, but his soul desired God. His desire was not to have something from God, but to have God Himself and to have that peace and fulfilling communion as it was in the state of rectitude, before the fall of Adam. His captive bands were loosened under two sermons preached by Rev. Kersten from 1 Kings 17:9 and Micah 6:3 on Thanksgiving Day, 1920. His heart was then broken under the gospel message of grace in Jesus Christ for sinners who deserved condemnation in the first Adam.

At 18 years of age, Willem Lamain made confession of faith in the congregation of Kortgene. At the same time, he struggled with a personal calling to the ministry. In October 1923, he sought consistorial permission to be allowed to lay his calling before the Particular Synod.

A few weeks before his twentieth birthday, December 23, 1923, he proclaimed the Word of God publicly for the first time in Bruinisse. In 1924 he was given permission to speak an edifying word in the congregations. By May 1924, he became the first ministerial student of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations (Gereformeerde Gemeenten) under the instruction of Rev. W. den Hengst. One of Student Lamain's first tasks was the memorization of 600 Bible texts. During his student years, Student Lamain established close ties of friendship with Rev. G. Van Reenen while being instructed by Rev. den Hengst. When Rev. den Hengst's illness disallowed further instruction, Rev. G.H. Kersten was assigned to instruct the students. In later years, Rev. Lamain expressed thankfulness for the invaluable instructions received from these instructors.

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On August 28, 1929 Rev. Lamain was ordained in Leiden by Rev. Kersten from Isaiah 62:6, "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night."

On October 4, 1930, Rev. Lamain married Miss Aagje G. Tromp of Lisse, and they were blessed with eight children. They meant much to each other for 54 years. After the first congregation of Leiden in which he labored for three years, Rev. Lamain served the congregation of Rotterdam-South for 11 years. This was followed by a pastorate during World War II in the Wal church in Rijssen for four years. In the fall of 1946, a call came for the fifth time from Grand Rapids, Michigan. The call was accepted and Rev. Lamain was installed in 1947 by Rev. John Van Zweden with the text of Ezekiel 3:17: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." Rev. Lamain proclaimed 'free and sovereign grace for lost sinners' for 37 years at the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids.

In addition to serving the congregations in Grand Rapids lovingly and faithfully, Rev. Lamain made regular visits to serve the vacant congregations of Kalamazoo, South Holland, Illinois and the congregations in Wisconsin. God also granted him strength and opening to preach and administer sacraments in the Iowa and South Dakota congregations. As he did not enjoy driving long distances, he usually relied on members of the congregation to bring him to these places. At other times, he traveled by bus, by train, and occasionally by hitch-hiking to reach his destination or his home. After many requests, the congregations of the Far West, Lethbridge, Artesia, Sunnyside, and Chilliwack also received his pastoral visits. He scheduled several trips to the Netherlands to serve congregations throughout the country. Later, he planned opportunities to serve the congregations in Ontario, Canada as well as the congregations awaiting him in New Jersey. He often traveled through the night to reach his next destination. All of this was completed with "the love of my heart."

The parsonage was open for members of the congregation, for friends and family from the Netherlands, and for fellow ministers. Funerals, hospital visits, mid-week services in Dutch and English, adult Bible Classes, catechism classes as well as weddings filled his calendar. Almost every day, time was spent writing articles for the *De Saambinder*, a Dutch paper, as well as for the *Banner of Truth*, of which he was editor for many years. He wrote multiple letters to individuals from various congregations, always seeking the welfare of their eternal souls.

1947-1984

Rev. Lamain spent his life proclaiming God's Word, ministering to each member, each consistory, and each congregation. The congregations were bound upon his heart.

On November 30, 1984, Rev. Lamain died in his sleep at the age of 80 years old. One of his last words to his family were, "Don't put your trust in man." Truly, Rev. Lamain was one of those who was known as God's spokesman in the world, a true example of his ordination text: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night" (Isaiah 62:6).



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HINES HOEK HOEFAKKER HOFMEIJER HOFMAN

CHAPTER 5

1985-1993

CHANGES IN THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

*And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and
the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed
into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers:
And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This
is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand,
and when ye turn to the left.*

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ISAIAH 30:20, 21

OUR EIGHTH MINISTER, DR. JOEL R. BEEKE, 1986-1993

After a two-year vacancy, in which Rev. H. Hofman of Kalamazoo served the congregation faithfully as moderator, Rev. Joel R. Beeke of Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, accepted the call to pastor the congregation. He was installed on December 9, 1986, by Rev. H. Hofman from 1 Corinthians 16:10, "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do." Rev. Beeke preached his inaugural sermon the following evening from 2 Corinthians 4:5: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

During the time that Rev. Beeke served the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, the congregation expanded. A youth group was formed and later divided into two groups by the age of the participants. In 1987, Rev. J. Beeke and Rev. J. Spaans were instrumental in bringing The Netherlands Reformed Church (formerly Turner Avenue) on Covell Avenue to join the denomination again. A bond was established between a significant portion of the congregation and the new minister. However, as time went on, considerable unrest developed in the local church and in the denomination.

THE 1993 SEPARATION

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In 1986, Rev. J. R. Beeke held the office of minister at the Ebenezer Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Franklin Lakes, New Jersey. During that year, he received a call from the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation (FNRC) in Grand Rapids, and he accepted the call. However, 1986 was also the year that Rev. Beeke and his first wife separated. In spite of this, Classis East allowed Rev. Beeke to go to Grand Rapids before completing a thorough investigation of what had taken place with him and his wife.

In 1988, Dr. Beeke and his wife divorced, and he remarried in 1989 while his first wife was still living. At the Netherlands Reformed Synod in 1988, this matter was again placed on the agenda. Again a thorough investigation into what really happened was not undertaken, but a study committee was appointed to see what God's Word teaches about such a case. The findings of the study committee were adopted at a second meeting of the 1988 Synod, and this case was considered closed.

Due to continual unrest and new information that came to light, it was decided in 1992 to reopen this case. This resulted in the formation of another study committee which found several reasons for the unrest. Rev. Beeke's divorce was found to be one of the chief reasons of unrest. Doctrinal issues with his preaching were also found to be of great concern.

The 1993 Synod dealt with the results of this report. This resulted in the consideration of whether or not to form another study committee to de-

cide on how to deal with this situation. Before a vote was taken, Dr. Beeke read a prepared statement from the consistory of the FNRC. This statement declared that they objected to the Synod taking a vote whether or not divorced office-bearers were permitted to serve in the offices of the church. If the Synod would decide that a divorced office-bearer could not serve in our congregations, even though he was considered blameless, they would not submit to such a decision. Furthermore, if this decision resulted in the Synod deposing Dr. Beeke, the consistory felt obligated to announce that they would not accept such a vote of deposition.

After the Synod requested the consistory to retract this statement, the FNRC consistory presented a new statement. The substance of the newly revised statement was that they would abide with decisions of the Synod, provided they deemed these decisions were according to God's Word and the church order. Their evasive response was taken to mean that they would not unconditionally submit to the Synod's decisions, and in so doing, would not be acting consistent with God's Word and the church order. After another failed attempt to change the FNRC position, a vote was taken on whether or not to depose the FNRC consistory. By a large margin, the Synod voted to depose the consistory. After the Synod recessed for lunch in the basement of the FNRC building, the delegates were denied return access to the meeting area. Thus, the Netherlands Reformed Congregations' Synodical meeting was reconvened at the Netherlands Reformed Church on Covell Avenue. New appointments were made to fill the vacated positions that resulted from the deposition. The three FNRC consistory members that could not agree with the actions of their consistory were designated, with strong support from the representative attending from the Gereformeerde Gemeenten in the Netherlands, to be the lawful continuation of the FNRC consistory.

Following the separation, approximately 180 members of the congregation, who wished to remain with the FNRC, met the following Sunday in a local gymnasium. The services were held under the leadership of the three remaining consistory members, Elder Jerald Fluit, Deacon Henry Rosendall, and Deacon Daniel Breuker, who had been reinstated by the Synod as the ongoing FNRC's consistory. The missionary minister, Rev. P. L. Bazen, also remained with the continuing FNRC. These 180 members worshipped for

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

six months in a rented facility,¹ starting the following Sunday, July 4, 1993, because they were barred from using their own building. Worship at this meeting place continued until January 1994, when a church building at 1261 Beckwith NE was purchased.

On Saturday, February 12, 1994, in a major meeting of consistory representatives and lawyers, a comprehensive settlement was reached between the two groups. The group which followed Dr. Beeke adopted a new name: Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation (later the name was changed to Heritage Reformed Congregation). The remaining group maintained the name of First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. The Plymouth Christian Schools were re-incorporated under a joint ownership with a school board made up of six members from the Heritage Reformed Congregation, five members from the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation and one member from the Netherlands Reformed Church on Covell Avenue. This agreement was ratified by both congregations in March of 1994 and these changes continue until today.

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Also in 1994, the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation established the Treasured Meditations committee in place of The Inheritance Publishers which had been taken over by the new Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregations. Treasured Meditations publishes and distributes sound sermons in the English language.

In parallel with this turmoil, there was a deepening concern about the trend in the preaching that was observed at the FNRC before the deposition of the consistory in 1993. After the separation, the FNRC chose to continue with the traditional doctrines of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations which represent the doctrinal substance of the Scriptures. These can be summarized by the following points: God's absolute sovereignty over all things, fallen man remaining fully responsible and accountable to his Creator, and that life eternal is in knowing "the only true God, and Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). This apparent dichotomy, or seeming contradiction, is not to be mitigated and is to be maintained as manifested in the Scriptures in spite of the enmity of fallen man. This prevailing enmity is to be shown in order to point

¹ *First Netherlands Reformed Congregation 125th Anniversary Booklet*, p.15.

out the need for the miracle of regeneration, whereby this enmity is broken. Since fallen man is spiritually dead, no appeal, suggesting man is capable of generating saving faith, is to be made to his responsibility. Meanwhile it must be maintained that his state of death must become, by grace, his guilt rather than his excuse or fate. The preaching is to include the gospel call to repent and believe, and must show discernment in which the precious are separated from the vile. It is to be accompanied with the prayer that the Spirit, who “bloweth where it listeth” (i.e. willeth), will be pleased to cause many to be born of the Spirit that they may bring forth the fruits of repentance, faith, and gratitude. The work of the Holy Spirit by which He cuts off all hope on the side of the awakened sinner, and leads him to rest entirely on the Savior for reconciliation with God is to be explained. The goal of the FNRC is for these truths to be proclaimed from both a doctrinal and experiential perspective. Thus the FNRC has striven to maintain the experiential doctrines of Scripture as explained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt. Further explanation of these doctrines is found in Appendices A and B located in the back of this book.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

GRIEVING FOR ZION

Thy Church, O Lord, is scattered
Its walls in ruin lie;
There's strife and there's contention
And where are those that sigh?

Thy name has been dishonored
In all that has transpired;
Since we connived among ourselves
With spirits uninspired.

Our honor and our glory
Has had the upper hand,
And if this shall continue
Not one of us shall stand.

There is no expectation
If we do not confess
That we have caused dissension
With our unrighteousness.

Grant us true supplications
Before Thy throne of grace,
That Thou wilt not forsake us
Nor leave us in disgrace.

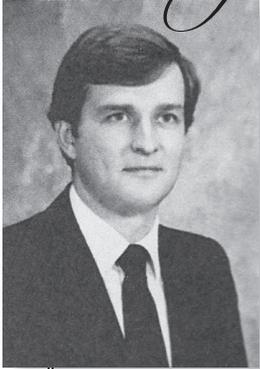
Cast out the little foxes
That spoil the grapes and vine,
Come feed among the lilies
Thy heritage refine.

Oh, come into Thy garden
Revive our souls once more;
And may we smell the myrrh
That's dripping from the door.

O Lord of hosts restore us,
Unite and heal the breach
Among all those who fear Thy name
And Christ's salvation preach.

(This poem was written by Jack Swets in July 1993 after the First Netherlands Reformed
Congregation separation had taken place earlier that month.)

DR. J. R. BEEKE (1952-) SERVED THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION 1986-1993.



Joel Robert Beeke was born on December 9, 1952, and raised in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Joel Beeke experienced a change in his life during his teenage years and later felt a call to the ministry. In 1974, he was accepted to study in the theological school of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations.

He received instruction from Rev. Weststrate in St. Catharines until 1977, and was ordained and installed in Sioux Center, Iowa on March 29, 1978. After accepting a call to Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, and being installed by Rev. den Boer in Franklin Lakes on August 13, 1981, he requested and received approval to continue his studies at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in order to study church history extensively. He received his doctorate in Theology, entitling his thesis, "Personal Assurance of Faith: English Puritanism and the Dutch Nadere Reformatie from Westminster to Alexander Comrie 1640-1670." Due to his studies and time spent in commuting, his personal contact with the members of the Franklin Lakes congregation was limited, also among the elderly and sick. His pulpit ministry had wide appeal among the young people, especially since he was American born and spoke without a foreign accent.¹

In 1986, Rev. J. R. Beeke received a call from the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids. He accepted the call and was installed by Rev. H. Hofman on December 9, 1986.

Dr. Beeke was the pastor of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation until June 1993.

¹ Ebenezer - 100 years of God's mercy and faithfulness - 1906-2006, published by Franklin Lakes, p.150-51.

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KIK KINNEY KLAASEN KLAASSEN KLADDER KLAP

CHAPTER 6

1994-2019

GROWTH AND A NEW BUILDING FOR THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

*And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I
will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will
make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.
These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.*

ISAIAH 42:16

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After the Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations had deposed all but three members of the FNRC consistory in 1993, the continuing 180 attendees met each Sunday in a rented school gymnasium for church services. Each Saturday, the gym floor was covered with a tarp, chairs were set up, and a piano wheeled in for the Sunday services. Members willingly brought their own Bibles and Psalters for use in the worship



First Netherlands Reformed Congregation
1261 Beckwith Avenue, Grand Rapids, MI
As of January 1994

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services. This process continued for six months until the Lord opened a way for the remnant congregation to purchase a small vacant church at 1261 Beckwith Avenue where they could meet for worship services.

Services began in the Beckwith Avenue church on January 26, 1994. Yet, the congregation and consistory were yearning for confirmation that the Lord had been with the congregation during the tumultuous times after the separation. Elder Jerald Fluit related a special remembrance during these early months:

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As the new congregation began meeting, it was made known to the consistory that Rev. Kleppe from the Netherlands was visiting his family. Rev. Kleppe had been advised by some that he should not preach for the 'rebels.' However, he was contacted by the consistory and asked if he would lead the congregation for one service while he was in Grand Rapids. He agreed to preach the next Sunday. Because he did not feel confident preaching in the English language, he read most of his sermon that morning. When he came from the pulpit, Elder Fluit wished him the Lord's blessing. As Rev. Kleppe shook his hand, it seemed as if Rev. Kleppe would not let go but asked "Are there God's people here?" Elder Fluit assured him there were God's people present. He then said, "I am amazed!" He then repeated it, "I am really amazed." When Elder Fluit asked him the reason for this remark, he replied, "I could feel it this morning while I was preaching." What a wonderful confirmation! The Lord gave such a clear testimony of His presence through one of His servants from a far country. We heard later that he told other ministers that he felt strongly that our congregation would surely receive a minister. This happened the next year when Rev. C. Vögelaar was called and accepted the call to the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

Soon after the purchase was finalized for the church building and property on Beckwith Avenue, an Allen Organ, from the 1960s, in good condition, was donated to the church by one of the members. This organ served the congregation in the new, larger auditorium constructed in 1997, prior to the installation of the pipe organ. As of today, this organ still serves the ladies' societies, as well as the youth groups, in the church all-purpose room.

Initially, the sanctuary provided seating for about 250 persons. However,

with increased attendance and membership, extra seating was required. An expansion on the north side of the sanctuary made room for 100 more chairs.

Little extra room was available for the activities after the Sunday morning services. Catechism classes filled every space, even the consistory room and the small kitchen.

The congregation purchased a modular classroom which was placed at the rear of the building and served as a nursery during services and a place for the ladies'



The Allen Organ

Lydia Guild to meet

during the week. On Sunday, the babies in the nursery were quickly moved out after the service, and a group of children entered for catechism instruction. As more people desired to hear the experimental truths of our forefathers, the congregation increased in numbers. Clearly, the recently purchased building with the 100-seat expansion was but a temporary solution for the



Beckwith Avenue church interior

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needs of the growing First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

At the September 1995 congregational meeting, approval was given to design and build a new sanctuary and additional catechism rooms on the north side of the original purchased building.¹ When plans for the larger sanctuary and catechism rooms were finalized and the necessary finances obtained, construction began in 1997.

In addition to approval for the new sanctuary, the congregation sent a call to Rev. Cornelis Vogelaar, minister of the Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, congregation. The Lord clearly showed Rev. Vogelaar the way to Grand Rapids. On October 14, 1995, the congregation was informed that Rev. Vogelaar had accepted the call to the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. Plans were immediately made for the installation of the new minister and for the purchase of a parsonage.

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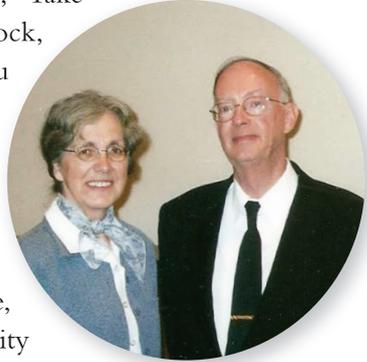
The first parsonage purchased for Rev. and Mrs. Vogelaar

¹ *First Netherlands Reformed Congregation 125th Anniversary Booklet*, p.16.

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OUR NINTH MINISTER,
REV. CORNELIS VOGELAAR, 1996-2003

It was in God's faithfulness and providence that Rev. Vogelaar was sent to the congregation. Rev. Vogelaar was installed on June 13, 1996, by Rev. J. Spaans with the text from Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Rev. Vogelaar's inaugural sermon given on June 14, 1996, was based on Jeremiah 21:8, 9. "And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. He that abideth in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth out, and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey."



Rev. and Mrs. Vogelaar

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Rev. Vogelaar began his ministry at the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in June of 1996. During the months after the 1993 separation, there were many letters, rumors, ill feelings, questions, injured family relationships, as well as severed friendships. Receiving Rev. Vogelaar to lead the congregation was a wonderful gift from God, a sign of His unfailing faithfulness, as the minister presented a focus on true conversion. His leadership, stability, and compassion cultivated a healthy attitude in the congregation. Mrs. Vogelaar's involvement with the Lydia Guild and visits with her husband to hospitals, programs, weddings, families with new babies, and funerals also brought the congregation together. She held a special place in the congregation and was used by the Lord to give spiritual encouragement. In addition, under Rev. Vogelaar's influence, other churches in the denomination were bound together to withstand the effects of the separation that first manifested itself in Grand Rapids. One of the first tasks of Rev. Vogelaar was to officiate at the funeral of Mrs. W. C. Lamain, the wife of the former minister of the congregation on August 27, 1996.

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As construction of the new church structure began, members of the congregation witnessed the building project's progress each Sunday. Many volunteered their services by cleaning the site as needed so that worship services were not hindered.



Construction progress
of the new church



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Daily progress on the new church structure allowed the cornerstone to be placed by Rev. Vogelaar on September 20, 1998. The words on the cornerstone read: "Rehoboth, for now the Lord hath made room for us" (Genesis 26:22b).



The cornerstone is placed by Rev. Vogelaar on September 20, 1998

After holding services in the crowded building on Beckwith Avenue for approximately 18 months, Rev. Vogelaar shared a special time with the con-



Setting the steeple at 1261 Beckwith NE

gregation by dedicating the new sanctuary on December 19, 1998, explaining the text from Psalm 84:1-3: “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God.”

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Rev. Vogelaar wrote:

Everything is new and somewhat strange. But it was the desire that many would be given to come up to the new house of prayer with the longing of the poet of Psalm 84, to be given to see and to praise the gloriousness of Christ there. Only the Lord can build His church. We can only ruin and spoil everything. Yet the Lord gave hope on the first Sunday in the new church building. I was given to speak of the angel's message to Mary. There in Nazareth, from where no good could come, she received a visit from on high. An angel from the heavenly courts, sent by God Himself, came with a message: 'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.' Truly, that is a one-sided work.²

In addition to the new sanctuary, the congregation enjoyed expanded catechism rooms and an expanded nursery. The main floor of the new sanctuary

² Memorial Stone Vol. 4, p. 231.

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was designed to seat about 640 people. Upstairs, the balcony was designed to seat another 240 people. The room used formerly as a sanctuary was then changed to an all-purpose room. In addition to expanding the facilities inside, the parking lot was also enlarged.

On the last Sunday in May 1998, the Sunday services in the new sanctuary faced a unique challenge. During the previous night, a series of strong thunderstorms moved through the north end of Grand Rapids. The storm damage left the area of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation without power. However, three services were held in the new church without the aid of an organ, amplifiers, or microphones. The windows were opened, the blinds pulled up, and special lighting allowed the use of the rest rooms. The congregation sang together as had happened in the Division Avenue church, without the use of the organ.



The Kilgen-Lauck pipe organ

Initial plans for the sanctuary built in 1997 did not include provision for an organ. However, this omission was remedied shortly before the final plans were approved with the addition of long narrow chambers to be constructed on both sides of the chancel/pulpit area. Initially, the speakers of the Allen organ used in

the old auditorium were installed into these chambers. The Allen organ was used in the worship services for almost six years before its replacement in 2003.

During the summer of 1999, a family in the congregation was made aware that Second Congregational Church, in Grand Rapids, was looking to sell their 1954 Kilgen pipe organ. After making arrangements with the church, this family spent many hours carefully removing and storing the pipes, chests, console, and other components of this instrument. Local organ builder, James Lauck was contracted to refurbish the three-manual console and pipework,



provide new chestwork and a winding system, and install the instrument into the chambers at the front of the church's auditorium.

The instrument was completed and installed in early 2003. Tonal finishing in the church was completed by James Lauck and Jonathan Tuuk, and a dedication night was held in the spring of 2003. The specification of the organ is included as Appendix D.

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In God's providential care, the congregation continued to grow and soon numbered over 600 persons.³ The children and young people of the congregation filled the catechism rooms and nurseries. Plymouth Christian Schools also instructed the children of the congregation in God's Word.

In 2000, the congregation of First Netherlands Reformed Congregation voted to build a new parsonage at 2339 Deer Trail Drive NE for Rev. and Mrs. Vogelaar. Various health reasons suggested a parsonage without steps would be a better choice for the minister and his wife. The new parsonage was completed and ready for occupancy in May 2001.

On August 30, 2002, the congregation celebrated Rev. Vogelaar's 25 years in the ministry of the Word. For this special milestone, Rev. Vogelaar spoke from Acts 26:22: "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue



The parsonage at 2339 Deer Trail Drive NE

³ Memorial Stone Vol 4, p. 226-231.

unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.”

After serving the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation for seven-and-one-half years, Rev.Vogelaar received and accepted a call to the Kalamazoo Netherlands Reformed Congregation. Rev.Vogelaar preached his farewell sermon on October 12, 2003. He used 2 Thessalonians 3:16 as his farewell text: “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.” By accepting the call to Kalamazoo, Rev.Vogelaar became our moderator.

When a minister leaves a congregation, the question often arises as to why the minister had to move away. Was the Lord removing his candlestick from our congregation? Were there no reasons to hope that even though Rev.Vogelaar, our undershepherd, was leaving, the “Great Shepherd” of the Church would remain? One member recalled how, in the fall of 2003, the Lord gave clarity that He would not, at this time, leave His church in Grand Rapids:

The Lord had called Rev. Vogelaar to the congregation of Kalamazoo and so the Lord's Supper was held in our congregation for the last time, in the fall of that year. After the sermon and after the opening of the Communion Table, there was much feeling in the hearts of God's people, who felt a strong spiritual tie with this dear minister. Everyone knew it was the Lord's will that he had to go to Kalamazoo, but it was hard to part with such a faithful under-shepherd. Although I longed for a token, yet I did not receive anything special during the service. After partaking of the Lord's Supper, I went back to my pew and, when I sat down, looked up to see Rev. Vogelaar putting the cloth over the remaining bread. Then it fell powerfully in my heart that there was “bread enough and to spare” (Luke 15:17) in His house! It became so clear that even though the minister was leaving, the Lord, with the manna of His Word, would not depart from us. It was a comfort that has since been fulfilled.

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REV. CORNELIS VOGELAAR (1942-) SERVED THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION 1996-2003.



Cornelis (Kees) Vogelaar was born on June 5, 1942, in the Netherlands, as the oldest of nine children to Laurens Vogelaar and Sophia Johanna Bac. His father was accepted to the theological school of the Gereformeerde Gemeenten in 1948, but due to a long period of sickness and trials, did not become a minister until 1962. The sickness of their father was also a difficult time for the children, and left a lasting mark on the family. Kees had to leave school early, and peddled books and dry goods to help support the family. He continued his studies in the evenings.

After high school, Kees worked in the office for several companies, and then as a corrector for a publisher in Wageningen. On April 21, 1966, he was married in Wageningen to Aaltje (Alie) van Amersfoort. In the meantime, he continued his studies and obtained a teaching degree. He became a high school teacher in 1967. The young family moved to the small congregation of Mijdrecht in 1968, where Mr. Vogelaar served as an elder from 1969-1973. In this time he was called to the ministry with the words of Ezekiel 3:17, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." He was accepted to the theological school of the Gereformeerde Gemeenten on his 31st birthday.

Rev. C. Vogelaar was installed in his first congregation, Genemuïden, in 1977 by his father, Rev. L. Vogelaar with the words of Isaiah 62:6a: "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night." Benthuizen became his second congregation in 1981, where he was again installed by his father, this time with the words from 1 Timothy 4:16a, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine." In 1984, God's way led across the ocean to St. Catharines in Ontario, Canada. Rev. Vogelaar preached his inaugural sermon from Luke 5:5b, "nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net." During this time, Rev. Vogelaar was appointed as theological instructor for the newly-accepted student, Mr. Peter L. Bazen. In 1988, the Vogelaar family emigrated again, this time to Franklin Lakes, New Jersey, in the United States.

It was during a trip to Michigan in 1995, as Rev. Vogelaar was driving from Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo, that the Lord impressed upon him the words which had been spoken to Abraham: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it" (Gen.13:15). But only a few weeks later, a call came from First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. On October 14, 1995, Rev. Vogelaar accepted the call to the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.

Rev. Vogelaar served the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation until 2003, when he accepted a call to Kalamazoo, Michigan.

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OUR TENTH MINISTER,
REV. JOHANN B. ZIPPRO, 2006 - 2013

After Rev. Vogelaar accepted a call to Kalamazoo, the congregation was vacant for three years. In 2006, the Lord led Rev. Johann B. Zippro to accept the call from the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. He was installed by Rev. C. Vogelaar on April 26, 2006, as his own successor, using the text 2 Timothy 4:1, 2, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." The inaugural sermon preached by Rev. Zippro was based on 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us."



Rev. and Mrs. Zippro and family

Rev. Zippro began his ministry at the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in the spring of 2006. Adjusting to American life and the English language seemed to go well for the minister and his family. "The English language was not such a problem, and yet in practice, it was more difficult than I expected. It was especially when the Americans talked to each other that I initially had difficulty to follow them and to partake in the conversation." Rev. Zippro preached the three Sunday services held in our church. "Preaching in the English language was not a heavy task, but a great pleasure. I spent much time struggling, looking in my dictionary. Yet the Lord gave His help and strength."

Driving to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, and Lansing, Illinois, the minister experienced the many miles between congregations. He also experienced the many miles between his family members still residing in the Netherlands. However, "I also felt that the Lord had given [me] a place within the NRC denomination. A bond of love was laid with the brothers in the ministry. Also, I was a member of the Curatorium. During my stay in Grand Rapids, there were no students at the theological school, and this was a burden for me."

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During his own theological studies, Rev. Zippro had spent time with Rev. C. Sonneveld in Nigeria, Africa. His interest in mission work gave him a place on the Mission Board and brought him to visit the American General Mission in Bolivia three different times. “Mission work continues to have the love of my heart.” However, on June 12, 2009, Rev. Zippro was called to lead the service closing the Baldwin Mission post.

Coming from the Netherlands, Rev. Zippro and his family found themselves in different cultures. “Birthdays were not such a big deal. On Thanksgiving Day, it was the custom to have special meals, such as a turkey dinner. On Christmas Day, there was only one church service.” As a trained musician, Rev. Zippro enjoyed singing the Psalters, in addition to the Dutch Psalms. “Many people do not realize that the singing on notes of different length is something not practiced in the Netherlands.” Another part of Rev. Zippro’s pastoral work was the work among the young people. “I loved the young people in the NRC. They were not so critical as the Dutch youth. I supported the youth work; not as the ‘devil’s entertainment’, but to study God’s Word and to have a discussion about issues which are not so fit for the catechism class.”

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While Rev. Zippro was our minister, “the congregation on Beckwith Avenue continued to grow. I had a good relationship with the brothers of the consistory. I have always attempted, in love, to maintain the unity in the congregation. May God receive all the honor. The office of a minister can never be without cares and difficulties.” While serving the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, Rev. Zippro celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary with the congregation by attending a special dinner prepared by the ladies of the congregation.



Plymouth Christian High School

Another celebration took place a few years later in September 2008 as the Plymouth Christian Schools were remembered on their 100th Anniversary. The congregation witnessed the special service of thanksgiving led by Rev. P. Bazen, a former student at the school. This service was followed by an anniversary dinner attended by many alumni of the school and members of the congregation. In addition, the front of Plymouth Christian High School received new windows and a new facade.

Rev. Zippro recalled,

Quite often we hear the well-known words: God bless America! However, how can God bless a country when that country turns its back on the Lord? The same can be said of the Netherlands. We have left the Lord, the God of our forefathers... Only in the way of conversion and returning to God and His holy commandments [can we receive a blessing]... May God remember America in His infinite mercy!

During Rev. Zippro's stay in America, a new unfortunate development appeared in the United States. Due to some attacks in and on churches which later were designated as acts of terror, our consistory was urged to form a security committee. The deacons organized a schedule in which members were assigned to watch over the premises before, during, and after each service on Sundays and other special days. These members also supervised the parking lots and the entrances of the church so that suspicious circumstances could be dealt with immediately.

Looking back on his stay in Grand Rapids, Rev. Zippro asked,

Was there any fruit on the labors during the years of my ministry among the Beckwith flock? I was called with the words of Christ to Simon Peter: 'feed my sheep, feed my lambs...' The greatest wonder will be if true conversion may be wrought during the ministry of a servant of the Lord. The sinner must be drawn out of bondage to God's marvelous light... The preaching must be a rich Christ and a poor sinner. However, the Arminian will also agree with that statement. Therefore, it must also be preached how these two are brought together... True conversion is not the work of a minister. We cannot bring one sinner to the feet of Christ.

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Rev. Zippro also recalled,

I once said in the beginning of the Beckwith ministry in a sermon that if I had to come to Grand Rapids only for the salvation of one sinner, it would not have been in vain. When I took leave from the congregation in 2013, someone came up to me in the narthex with tears in his eyes. He said: 'Reverend, I may believe that I am that one of whom you spoke. Thanks.' And then he disappeared.⁴

Rev. Zippro preached his farewell sermon on Thursday, June 13, 2013, using the text from Romans 8:35a, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" He then traveled with his family to Groningen, the Netherlands.

The vacancy, after Rev. Zippro left for the Netherlands in 2013, was again a burden for the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. Yet the Lord was not willing to leave the pulpit empty but inclined the heart of Rev. G. M. de Leeuw of Opheusden, the Netherlands to accept the call that was sent to him in February 2016.

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⁴ Letter from Rev. Zippro, also found in Memorial Stone Vol. 5, pp.138-153.

**REV. JOHANN BERNHARD ZIPPRO, (1961 -), SERVED THE FIRST
NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION 2006-2013.**

Johann B. Zippro was born on September 21, 1961, in Oostzaan, the Netherlands. The Zippro family left the congregation of Lisse after having had a conflict with the consistory.



After 20 years of living in various areas of the Netherlands, Mrs. Zippro began attending the church at Lisse again. After attending a memorial service for a pilot killed in the 1977 Tenerife air disaster, both parents returned to the church.

At the time his parents returned to church, Johan Zippro had little interest in religion. He lived in the music world and had plans to attend conservatory with a goal of becoming a guitarist. However, he also had a friend that was required to attend catechism classes in the Lisse congregation. The friend asked Johan Zippro to accompany him to the catechism classes to keep him company. Johan Zippro said, "I did [attend the classes], but I understood very little of it." His sister was friends with Marjo Hakkenburg the daughter of Rev. D. Hakkenberg, the minister of the Lisse congregation at that time. Thus, Johan not only came to the church but also to the parsonage.

In 1979, Johan Zippro was filled with questions about his life and where he would spend eternity. The questions presented in Psalm 77 (Psalter 440) filled his mind. He became a sinner before God. "I walked over the earth as a miserable one, an outsider, and the sorrow after God filled my heart." At the inaugural service of Rev. G. A. Zijderveld in Hoofddorp on August 15, 1979, the minister quoted Galatians 1:10b, "For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Johan thought, "That is my greatest desire; to be a servant of Christ." Johan was drawn to the church and hungered after the Word of God. He was baptized and made public confession of faith on April 8, 1980, and married Marjo Hakkenberg in 1984.

In 1988, Johan Zippro went to Nigeria for a co-operative work period. After completing the work period, he submitted his master thesis for theological studies at the University of Utrecht, receiving his degree in missiology. He then worked as a teacher of religious studies until he was admitted to the theological school in Rotterdam in 1989. J. B. Zippro was ordained to the ministry by his father-in-law, Rev. Hakkenberg, on September 9, 1992.

Rev. Zippro served the congregations of Scheveningen, Moerkapelle, and Scheveningen again before accepting the call to the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation.¹ Rev. Zippro served our congregation for seven years before accepting a call to Groningen in Friesland, the Netherlands.

¹ Memorial Stone Vol. 5, pp.138-153.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

**OUR ELEVENTH MINISTER,
REV. GEERARD M. DE LEEUW, 2017 - PRESENT**

Rev. G. M. de Leeuw accepted our call in 2016, and the congregation looked forward to his arrival. However, there were many obstacles to overcome in applying and obtaining a visa for him and his wife. Thus, because of stricter immigration requirements, the congregation was forced to wait for more than one year for his arrival. The following is Rev. de Leeuw's personal account of his calling to the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation:



Rev. and Mrs. de Leeuw

I was asked to write some details regarding my coming from Opheusden, the Netherlands to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the United States.

I started this short outline with the call from Beckwith [i.e. the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation], and the acceptance of that call, not knowing what the future would bring. Only the Lord knows. He knows all things. More and more we all have to experience our shortcomings in everything. Yet, one thing is certain: "For

I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:6). I may not deny the help of the Lord hitherto. Never would I have thought to come in the congregation where, for many years, with other ministers, the late Rev. Lamain served. For about eight years we wrote letters to each other. His letters were very precious to my soul.

The male members meeting of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation held on February 22, 2016, was instrumentally used by the Lord to send out the call: "Come over into Macedonia and help us," Acts 16:9b. It was in the Lord's providence that, together with my wife, we flew into Grand Rapids late that same evening when the male members meeting was held on February 22, 2016. We were then on our way back from Calgary to Amsterdam, after we had visited our children in Alberta and preached in

the congregations there. It was our intention to make a short stop in Grand Rapids to see our children and grandchildren since our son was a student at the theological school in that city. I took this call with me when we left Grand Rapid a couple of days after the male members had held their meeting.

The calling letter had been given to us on February 23, 2016, by the clerk, Elder W. Greendyk. When leaving a couple days later to Amsterdam, the congregation in Opheusden already knew what had taken place. They knew our relation to the congregations in North America as well. The call caused much strife inwardly. I had no light upon it until it pleased the Lord to lead to His Word. I read Isaiah 46 on Monday the 7th of March. First, I thought, while reading, that it was a wrong chapter. But reading further, I came to the 11th verse. And, dear reader, then it was made clear in a split second: this is the undeserved, but also the indispensable direction of the Lord. Oh, that speaking through His Word is, at such a moment, so suitable and powerful. But, as usual, to our shame, reasoning, questions, and unbelief arose. These things were not present at that very moment, but they came. So again, while asking the Lord for guidance, the objections arose. Having a good place in the consistory and congregation, as well as becoming older, along with all of the bother of immigration again, etc. This was a great mountain. Yet, I knew very well that I had not to reason with flesh and blood, but only to ask, "What wilt Thou have me to do?"

Dear reader, then, mainly, two things are necessary: Scripture and prayer. Asking for direction brought me to Daniel 9 and 10. Especially the 19th verse of chapter 10 was instructive and encouraging. And to whom? It came to an unworthy, guilty, incapable, unwilling, blind, stubborn, unbelieving creature. Ah, dear reader, there is no end of our blindness, unwillingness, stubbornness and opposition. From man's side it is all wrong. But what comes from the Lord's side is totally undeserved and yet so suitable. Oh, that deep fall in Adam has bitter consequences. You cannot imagine what man is, office bearers included; how miserable they are in themselves. But, and this is always the wonder, that the Lord Jesus Christ once took clay to heal a blind person. And if, spiritually, we become greater than clay, that is too much. He directed us to accept the call, in dependence upon Him Who is faithful to His own work, Who never forsakes the works of His own hands. The decision was made to cross again over the Atlantic Ocean. I had to leave behind a beloved

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

REV. GEERARD M. DE LEEUW (1949-) SERVED THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION 2017-PRESENT



*G*eerard M. de Leeuw was born in Yerseke, Zeeland, the Netherlands on September 16, 1949. He grew up in the Gereformeerde Gemeenten. At the age of 16, he went to Rotterdam and was employed in a trade involved with steel scaffolding for building restoration projects. Nineteen years later, he still worked in the same profession, but then as a safety inspector. When he was 20 years old, he married Cornelia Adriana Daane on April 10, 1970. They moved from Zeeland to Rotterdam and lived on a small houseboat. Here, he turned his back to the church. But, it pleased the Lord to stop him at the age of 22, during a reading service in the church at Rotterdam-IJsselmonde. A sermon of the late Rev. B. Smijtegeldt was read on Matthew 3:9, “And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” Rev. de Leeuw said, “That morning in the house of God will never be forgotten.” From that time on, he regularly attended church, not only on Sunday but also during the week, and in surrounding congregations when God’s servants preached. He diligently searched the writings of the church fathers. It pleased the Lord to open His Word at Ecclesiastes 3:15b, “And God required that which is past.” This text showed him a way of salvation outside of himself at the age of 23. Also, under the reading of a catechism sermon of Rev. Smijtegeldt that same Sunday, the Lord brought him into the chapters of John 14-16, with a precious opening for his seeking soul. Faith was given to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Ten years later, in 1982, the Lord came back upon His work on a Tuesday evening, when the Mediator revealed Himself more clearly with the words of Psalm 45:1 (Psalter 124):

My heart doth overflow,
A goodly theme is mine;
My eager tongue with joyful song
Doth praise the King Divine.
Supremely fare Thou art,
Thy lips with grace o'erflow;
His richest blessings evermore
Doth God on Thee bestow.

In 1980, he served as an elder in the congregation of Rotterdam-Ijsselmonde. In that congregation, he had the privilege of having people of God around him, who, as Aquila and Priscilla, expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. Also, he felt the support of Aarons and Hurs in the congregation.

However, it pleased the Lord to call him to a higher office. Using Isaiah 6, the Lord called him to the ministry. In 1985, at age 35, he was accepted by the Curatorium to begin lessons at the theological school in Rotterdam. The study was rigorous but useful. In June 1989, he was declared a candidate for the ministry. The Lord clearly led the way to Barneveld, the Netherlands, where he labored with love for seven years. Then the shepherd's staff in that congregation had to be laid down, as the Lord sent him to Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. He served the Lethbridge congregation for four years, the congregation of Rock Valley for six years, the congregation of Ridderkerk for five years, and the congregation of Opheusden for five years when he received a call from the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was installed in Grand Rapids on March 22, 2017.¹

¹ For His Covenant's Sake, Fifty Years of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Lethbridge, 1951-2001, independently published, 2001.

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congregation, children, grandchildren and an old mother. It took a long time before we had the required documents to move, but it all fell into place. Eben Haëzer, hitherto the Lord has helped us.

Rev. G. M. de Leeuw was installed on March 22, 2017, by Rev. H. Hofman, Jr. The text used for his installation was 2 Corinthians 2:14: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.” Rev. de Leeuw’s inaugural sermon delivered that same evening was based on John 10: 16, 17: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.”

Today, the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation remains a congregation that involves its members not only in worship services but in a variety of endeavors that assist the members in spiritual needs, educational needs, and in ministering to others. Following are some of the important activities of the congregation:

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LYDIA GUILD

A ladies group began meeting when Hastings Street Christian School was built in the early 1900s. At that time, the ladies met to work on proj-



ects that could be sold to support the expenses of Hastings Street Christian School. This group received formal recognition in the congregation during the time of Rev. Lamain and worked under the name, Esther Guild. The focus of the ladies' group was to assist the members of the congregation when needed, remember the members who were in the service of the country and members who served in the mission, design and make projects that would benefit the school, and provide fellowship for the ladies of the congregation. After the separation in 1993, the ladies' guild chose the name, Lydia Guild. The Lydia Guild continues to meet together and provide assistance to those in need in the congregation and to work on projects to benefit our missionaries, our service people and our schools.

MUSIC IN THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION

*“Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.
For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.”
Psalm 47:6-7*

CHOIR

The church choir began in the 1960s under the direction of Jerry Hoogerheide. The yearly schedule consisted of weekly practices, program presentations, and visits to the elderly in area nursing homes. The



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choir brought many persons of the congregation together, and friendships developed among young and old. The programs at the nursing homes were welcomed by many who still knew the Psalters and the Dutch Psalms. Others that were involved in directing the choir were William Schol, Russ Ripma, Dan DeMeester, and Mrs. Wm. Lamain. The organists that contributed time to the choir included Lois Mieras, Wilma VandenToorn, Dave Engelsma, Dr. Jeff Knibbe, and Nicholas Rozendaal.

The choir continued under the leadership of Mrs. Wm. Lamain, Kevin Knibbe, Mrs. Tom Fluit, Jonathan TenElshof, and Dr. Jeff Knibbe. Initially, drawing members from both the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation and the Netherlands Reformed Church on Covell Avenue, the choir met at the Covell Avenue church; later the choir met at the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. During the last ten years, a children's choir directed by Mrs. Tom Fluit and later by Mrs. Tim TenElshof was also begun. Programs which involved the children and adult singers are enjoyed by the congregation.

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HIGH SCHOOL AGE YOUTH GROUP

The youth group for high school age youth has been active for many years. The group meets monthly with approximately 50 in attendance. The topics are generally given by the elders of the congregation, but occasionally by students for the ministry or by others.

Topics are chosen that are age-appropriate to the attendees and the temptations that they face. Often questions are distributed that lead to valuable discussion among them, with the presenter explaining what God's Word says



ROODVOETS ROSE ROSENDALL ROTIER ROZEBOOM

regarding it. Throughout the season, the young people often get together for activity evenings as well. In December, the tradition has been to go caroling to shut-ins and older people in the congregation, which is enjoyed by all. Periodically, over several years, the Netherlands Reformed Mission Board offers the opportunity for 12 of the young people to visit and work at the mission in Bolivia.

POST HIGH SCHOOL AGE YOUNG PEOPLE'S GROUP

In recent years, a post-high-school-age young people's group has begun meeting with young adults and young married couples attending. This group also meets monthly with approximately 25 in attendance. Presenters are again ministers, students for the ministry, elders, and occasionally a member from the congregation. The members of this group provide input regarding the topics they feel are pertinent to their circumstances. They enjoy having open discussions regarding their struggles in daily life as well as church life.



The devil works tirelessly to draw our youth into the world and away from the church. May the Lord preserve our teenagers and young adults under the truths of His word and use young people from the congregation in His service and for the building up of His Church.

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DENOMINATIONAL ACTIVITIES

FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

The theological school of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations in North America was started in 1972. Over the last 48 years, the school has graduated 11 students as ministerial candidates. In 1996, when planning for the addition to the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation on Beckwith Avenue, a special room was set aside for the instruction of students in the theological school. Since then, the theological school has been located in the building of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, located on Beckwith Avenue NE in Grand Rapids, Michigan. As of January 2020, the three instructors involved in the school are Rev. P. VanRuitenburch, Rev. A. H. Verhoef, and Rev. C. Vogelaar. The school is governed by the nine-member Curatorium of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. These nine members are selected and appointed by the Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations of North America.

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MISSION WORK

Support for mission work has always been present in the history of the church. Consistory minutes reveal that most calls for help received support, and many collections were taken for various causes throughout the 150 year history. During the early years, collections did not bring in great amounts, as most members were laborers in a time when wages were meager. Nevertheless, there was a concern for the support of mission projects.

BLUE BOOKS – SERMONS FIRST PUBLISHED BY THE MACEDONIA MISSION SOCIETY

In the early 1930s, the Netherlands Reformed congregations in New Jersey started the Macedonia Mission Society. They adopted bylaws stating that the purpose of the society was “to distribute Bibles and biblical literature or to perform some work to the extension of God’s kingdom.” During the first 31 years of its existence, the society was busy at work in the New York City metropolitan area. Some of the work conducted by the society during

those years included the collection of funds that were then dispersed to other mission organizations such as the American Bible Society and The American Scripture Gift Mission.

In 1932, the mission work of the society included visiting persons in need and distress, but also encouraging those who expressed spiritual needs as well as temporal needs. Visitations were also made to the local county jails. Rev. J. Van Zweden was involved with the society during this period. Members made trips to the New York City harbor front to visit and evangelize the sailors who were in port at that time. In 1938, Rev. Van Zweden and Mr. Adrian Breeman undertook a trip to Kentucky to do mission work there.



In the latter part of the 1930s, the Macedonia Mission Society helped with the mailing of the *Banner of Truth* which was started by Rev. Van Zweden.

The Netherlands Reformed denomination had to deal with many empty pulpits during the 1960s. It was difficult, during these years, to find English sermons written by ministers of our denomination (or the Gereformeerde Gemeenten in the Netherlands) which the elders could read in the vacant congregations. Mr. John Van Grouw, a member of the Macedonia Mission Society, was appointed to oversee the translation of Dutch sermons into the English language. This appointment was approved at a classis meeting, and it was agreed that the sermons would be distributed to our churches in the United States and Canada. These are now known as the “Blue Books” which, originally, were printed at a cost of five cents per copy. The first printing of the booklets occurred on June 21, 1963, when 520 copies of Blue Book #1 were printed. A series of more than 400 sermon booklets have been published, amounting to more than a million printed sermons. These “Blue Book” English sermons have been, and continue to be read in the denomination and in Grand Rapids. Copies are also sent to others

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that request them.⁵

Later, the Macedonia Mission Society undertook the translation of the Bible history books written by John Vreugdenhil and later his church history series. These lessons were formatted for individual study. These Bible and church history lessons were designed to reach young people of the congregations but, later, grew to be used on the mission field of Rev. Kuyt in Irian Jaya and in Africa. Most of the typing was done by Mr. Van Grouw, and the publishing of the booklets was completed on machines in the basement of his home. When he was no longer able to continue this work, the Macedonia Mission Society became a synodical committee in 1990, and was placed under the supervision of the North American General Mission Board in 2000, until it was dissolved on December 31, 2010.⁶ The work of publishing “Blue Book” sermons is now directed by Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing Committee.

INHERITANCE PUBLISHERS / TREASURED MEDITATIONS

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In February 1929, the Inheritance Publishing Company was formed by Mr. Kris Winters, Sr. for the purpose of publishing sermons and treatises. This purpose was emphatically stated in the very first booklet published, “The publication of sermons and treatises, NOT FOR PROFIT, but for the dissemination of the Truth as expounded by the old writers, in order to carry the Gospel by means of the printed page, where church privileges are wanting or not embraced.” Mr. Winters operated independently until 1932 when he went to the Netherlands. At his request, a committee of men from Grand Rapids was organized to carry on the work. In June 1934, Classis West recognized this endeavor and appointed a committee to oversee the publications in accordance with Article 51 of the Church Order of Dort. In addition, the committee was given the privilege of placing its financial needs before the various consistories in the denomination when necessary. In 1948, the name was changed to “Inheritance Publishers.”⁷ As the workload increased, the Inheritance Publishers’ supplies and equipment were moved

⁵ Ebenezer, p.74-102.

⁶ Memorial Stone Vol. 3, p. 224.

⁷ First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet, p.21.



to the Ottawa Avenue church. After the Ottawa Avenue and Division Avenue churches were combined under Rev. Lamain, the Inheritance Publishers continued their work by transferring their operations to a basement room in the church on Crescent Street.

The sermons were printed in small booklet format. Copies were mailed to individuals and churches in various parts of the United States and Canada, as well as to individuals from foreign lands, who had expressed a desire to receive the booklets for personal use. There were usually four mailings per year. In earlier years, all the work of preparing the printer's copy, proofreading, maintaining mailing lists, stuffing and addressing envelopes, and mailing the booklets was performed by the committee members and assisted by friends of the organization who volunteered their services.

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Rev. Lamain made the following comments, regarding the committee's work, in 1974:

Generally, there are about fourteen hundred sermons sent out each mailing. Sometimes, we do receive notice that some no longer desire the sermons, but we also receive new requests and new addresses... At times, there are letters that give some hope that the distribution of the sermons is not in vain. It is according to God's own Word that His Word will not return to Him void but shall accomplish what He ordains. God will attain His purpose and receive His honor.⁸

In 1992, the Inheritance Publishers reported,

This worthy cause began in 1929 with a humble beginning of 100 copies. Today it has grown to 17,000 booklets per mailing. Our mailing list in-

⁸ Life and Work of Rev. W. C. Lamain, p. 412.

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creases by word of mouth or when a copy is handed to a “fellow-traveler”. Recently we had two requests accompanied with a check for \$100.00. From a prisoner in Ireland, we received a request for copies to be sent to 100 ministers in Nigeria, whose addresses he submitted to us.” In the previous two years, approximately 154,000 booklets had been mailed.⁹

The following information was included in a Synodical report by the committee,

One of our readers found a booklet at a truck stop and has requested more sermons to be sent to him. The Lord works in mysterious ways to perform His wonders. In this way the seed is being sown. Only eternity will reveal the fruits, and God will receive all the honor. A special request from a retired gentleman in Baltimore, Maryland, for 3,000 copies of a particular sermon have been sent to him. He distributes them as a mission endeavor.

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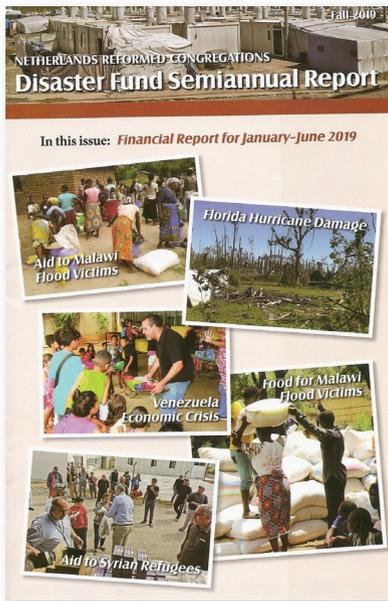
Because of the separation in our denomination in 1993, the Heritage Reformed Church continued with the name of “The Inheritance Publishers” and incorporated it under the State of Michigan. In May 1993, our Synod authorized the reorganization of this committee and its work under the name of “Treasured Meditations.”¹⁰ The number of sermon booklets published and sent throughout the world has run into the hundreds of thousands.

INTERNATIONAL DISASTER FUND

In 1972, Classis East asked the Synod to establish a fund to provide relief to national and international disaster areas. The Synod unanimously approved this request. Appointed as administrators of the fledgling committee were Rev. Harinck, Rev. Heerschap, and Elder Gordon Deur. The congregations of the denomination willingly donated funds for assistance as new calamities arose. However, in 1982, the Synod advised this committee to continue with its policy of donating strictly to reputable organizations (not individuals), and then only in disasters of national or international magnitude. The generosity

⁹ Memorial Stone Vol. 4, p.126.

¹⁰ *First Netherlands Reformed Congregation 125th Anniversary Booklet, p.17.*



of the churches has allowed this committee to send funds around the globe to areas of need. In one of the recent publications of the International Disaster Fund, it was noted that funds were sent to:

- Help with the malnutrition crisis in South Sudan.
- Assist those affected by a volcano in Guatemala to alleviate hardship due to the Venezuelan economic crisis.
- Offer aid to those needing basic food supplies in Malawi.
- Aid Syrian refugees under hardship brought on by fighting and multiple conflicts in their country.

Rev. E. Adams wrote in the Fall 2018 publication,

Through the Disaster Fund Committee, our denomination may also hear the numerous and pressing groans of many in distress. By means of different organizations, we hear the desperate cries of those who are sinking away in the mire. Many have been cast into the pit of hunger and want because of drought or civil unrest. Others have been cast into prison on account of their testimony of Jesus Christ. Through the Lord's providence we may, in a small way, be as an Ebed-melech whose name means "servant of a king." We are extremely privileged that we may still be an Ebed-melech on top of the pit instead of sinking in the miry clay. Who maketh us to differ (I Corinthians 4:7)? May the Lord humble us and our children under the countless blessings we still so liberally and undeservedly receive out of His merciful hand.

The International Fund Committee publishes a semi-annual report detailing the distribution of the funds and includes messages of thanks received from the organizations benefited by these funds.

EARLY MISSION ENDEAVORS

Most efforts and initiatives dealing with international mission work before 1965 were generally coordinated with the Dutch Mission Board. The North American General Mission Board had not yet been established, although mission work was being performed by individuals. In 1968, the *Banner of Truth* mentioned mission collections for Miss Ann Herfst who was from Chilliwack, British Columbia. Her work in Nigeria under the Dutch Mission Board generated interest in mission work throughout the denomination.



Miss Ann Herfst

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The congregations donated funds to support her work. Lest members of the denomination should look at mission work through rose-colored glasses, Miss Herfst wrote realistically of the mission's efforts and described how native Nigerians thought that, "a person turning to Christianity should not have any sickness or troubles after that, and if this does happen to a person who became interested in Christianity with this in mind, the person seems to wonder why he or she should continue being interested in becoming a Christian."

The *Banner of Truth* presented descriptions of her challenges each day, "Sick babies are transported to the clinic in a large bowl. The mother puts the bowl on her head and starts her journey on foot through the bush to a 'main road.' At the clinic, we take care of them to the best of our ability, but above all, we pray the Lord might open their eyes for the need of their never-dying souls."

Miss Ann Herfst finished her work in Nigeria in 1974.

The reports of the mission work in Nigeria, published in the *Banner of Truth*, continued when Tom Moerdyk and his family arrived in Izi, Nigeria, in 1976, to join the members of the Dutch mission team sent out from the Gereformeerde Gemeenten. Tom Moerdyk came as an agriculturalist but also wore the hats of administrator, builder, lay preacher, agricultural and Bible



Tom and Meta Moerdyk family

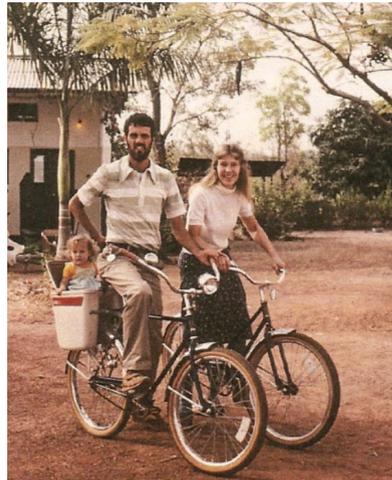
school teacher, and mechanic when needed. Tom's wife, Meta, worked at a medical clinic because she was trained as a nurse/midwife. In 1978, Tom was visited by his brother Bill, who witnessed the work being accomplished in Izi.¹¹

Later, Bill Moerdyk and his wife Cheryl applied to work with the team in Nigeria as a builder/technician for the

mission field. Bill and his wife and daughter were accepted and found themselves working immediately. Many times, situations arose that required on the spot decisions, with little knowledge, parts, or materials. Fixing a Peugeot station wagon, building homes, finding materials, cutting lumber, performing vehicle repair, repairing bridges and roads, as well as supervising local workers and sharing the gospel filled every day. One particular incident stood out in their mind.

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One Sunday morning, several of us went to the Nduowala church for a Lord's Supper service. On the way, we crossed the Odidi River which was dry. On the way, it started raining and since we were already over the river and on our way to church, we thought nothing of it. By the time we reached the church, we were soaked to the skin. We attended the service and started returning to our homes when the sun came out. Traveling and coming around the last bend, we saw the river. Instead of a dry bed, we now had five feet of water and no bridge! We had to cross as all our homes were on the



Bill and Cheryl Moerdyk family

¹¹ Memorial Stone Vol. 3, p.124.

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other side. We parked our motorcycles at the nearest compound and walked across using a long bamboo branch which kept each of us from being pushed down the river as the current moved very fast.

While Bill Moerdyk's family worked in Nigeria for nine years, they shared accounts of their daily work and related experiences that most North Americans had difficulty understanding. Yet, God protected the mission team through all of their endeavors.¹²

In 1988, mission work in the South American nation of Bolivia was considered by the North American Mission Board. Miss Marlene Van Veldhuizen applied to the North American Mission Board but was sent to Nigeria to assist the medical team until the Bolivian mission work began. There was minimal health care in Nigeria, and she joined a medical clinic operated by the Dutch (Gereformeerde Gemeenten) mission. People from the surrounding areas arrived at the clinic each day. A large part of the work involved obstetrical work, but the team also visited surrounding villages to offer assistance. Her job involved training local people to work in the clinic. Each day through the work of the Mission, the seed of the Word of God was sown. In 1990, Miss Van Veldhuizen left the Nigerian mission field and began work in the Bolivian mission field.¹³

In 2015-16, two ministerial students from Nigeria who were seeking advanced degrees came to the United



Rev. Joseph Nwibo and family



Rev. Ignatius Onwe and family

¹² Memorial Stone Vol. 3, p. 272.

¹³ Memorial Stone Vol. 3, p. 31.

States and studied in Grand Rapids, Michigan. These men began their studies in Nigeria under the Dutch mission with Rev. Sonneveldt as their instructor. The congregation welcomed Rev. Joseph Nwibo and Rev. Ignatius Onwe and assisted them, as they were part of the congregation for four and two years, respectively. After their theological degrees were completed, both men returned to teach in the theological school in Nigeria and pastor their own congregations.

WEST IRIAN JAYA

To the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids during the 1960s, Rev. Gerrit Kuijt was considered “our” missionary. Although Rev. Kuijt was sent out by the Mission Board of the Dutch Gereformeerde Gemeenten, he was able to speak fluent English and spent time in the United States while he was on furlough. This allowed the congregations in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo to hear Rev. Kuijt preach and lead mission evenings with photo slides and films depicting his work.

REV. KUIJT IN GRAND RAPIDS

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One member, a teenager during the 1960s, recalled Rev. Kuijt’s visits to Grand Rapids:



Rev. Gerrit Kuijt

My first recollection of Rev. Kuijt as missionary minister occurred when I was a teenager and attended a mission presentation given by Rev. Kuijt in the gymnasium of Grand Rapids Central High School. Rev. Kuijt unfolded, to a large audience, a whole new world of Christian endeavor in a land so distant, so primitive and so isolated that we had difficulty taking it all in. Rev. Kuijt spoke of the burden God had laid upon his heart to bring the gospel to these Papuans who had never heard it before. In a very engaging manner, he expressed the calling he felt

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and the love in his heart for the souls of those people.

Rev. Kuijt's visit to Grand Rapids was blessed to awaken a strong interest in missions in our congregation. Later, in the 1970s, Rev. Kuijt often spent part of his furloughs visiting Netherlands Reformed congregations in the United States and Canada. On several such occasions, he came to Plymouth Christian School to give mission presentations and films of his work in Irian Jaya.

Using photo slides and films, we saw the tremendous amount of labor involved in opening a new mission area. We were captivated as we viewed scenes of building an airstrip with shovels and picks, erecting grass shelters to live in, and of trying to speak to the natives not knowing their language. We saw films of the natives and the jungle in which they lived. For the first time, we saw color film footage of the smaller Papuan men with their bows and arrows. Women were holding their babies, cooking over open fires outside of their grass huts with roofs of grass and leaves. Somehow, Rev. Kuijt was able to film two warring tribes confronting each other with drawn bows and lowered spears as they fiercely threatened each other. For the first time, we heard the names of native believers such as Kokpan and Mepdanbuk; of mission villages with names of Landikma and Nipsan, all of which were brought under the sound of the gospel. The dangers and the isolation Rev. Kuijt and his wife lived with while bringing the gospel to the Papuans became very real to us. Students were fascinated by his films and dynamic presentations. In the evening, the small Plymouth Christian School gymnasium would be packed wall to wall as families and senior citizens gathered to hear and see what was happening with mission work performed halfway around the world from their homes. The audience could almost sense the fear and danger in the films he showed of the men of a Papuan village holding drawn bows or spears, ready to repel the enemies from a neighboring tribe poised to attack. He was very expressive and demonstrative in his presentations, and on the pulpit – pretending to draw a bow and shoot an arrow to show how the natives were fighting against each other.

Later, there was great sadness when the news came of the terrible slaughter of mission workers at the Nipsan station in 1974. Our minister, Rev. Laimain, immediately called Rev. Kuijt to express his sympathy on behalf of the Netherlands Reformed Churches in North America.

Yet, despite this awful setback, Rev. Kuijt pressed on. The Lord later enabled him to bring the gospel to Nipsan again and gave fruit on his labors for eternity. Rev. Kuijt visited Grand Rapids again in 1994 when he conducted Sunday services for us in the church building located on Beckwith Avenue. At that time, he was suffering from a lung disease and was quite short of breath. He still said at that time, 'If I would receive ten more years, O what I would do with it'.

On one of his visits to Grand Rapids, Rev. Kuijt visited Plymouth Christian High School and was taken to the former Red Hot Inn, a local diner-style restaurant, for lunch by the high school principal and a teacher. The restaurant was busy with the usual lunchtime crowd, as Rev. Kuijt and the faculty members entered and ordered their food. Upon receiving the food, Rev. Kuijt stood up in the restaurant and audibly asked a blessing for the meal. He also prayed, with heartfelt love for the people around them in the restaurant; the prayer seemed to flow out of him. Even many years later, this prayer was remembered by the school staff who had been present at that meal. It was clear to them that Rev. Kuijt was accustomed to openly praying in public situations where others might have felt more inhibited in seeking the Lord's blessing.

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In 1998, Rev. Kuijt preached in the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation for the last time from Philippians 2:9-11, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

NORTH AMERICAN GENERAL MISSION

Although the North American Netherlands Reformed congregations did not have their own mission field or missionaries, it had been the desire for some time to begin an organization with that being the goal in the future, if it were according to God's will. Therefore, a mission board was formed, members and officers were chosen, and an official organization became reality in approximately 1955. This newly-formed mission organization later became known as the North American General Mission (NAGM). First, for many years the NAGM helped to support the mission work of the Dutch congregations (Gereformeerde Gemeenten), besides giving gifts to other worthy mission

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organizations. Several trips were made to attend the mission meetings of the Dutch congregations, whereby the NAGM gained valuable insight into what was involved in operating our own mission.

In February 1990, Rev. J. Spaans stated in a sermon,

It is almost twenty five years ago that we were first appointed to be on the Mission Board of our denomination. And I can tell you that we have prayed and longed to see the day that we, as the Netherlands Reformed Congregations would send out our own missionary minister to a foreign land. Twenty-five years ago. How many times we thought we would never see the day. And as this all developed, throughout the years, we tried to pray on. And, if all is well, in a couple months, then we may have the opportunity, if we may live, to ordain Student Bazen to be our first missionary minister of the Netherlands Reformed Denomination of North America.¹⁴

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It wasn't until 1991 that the North American congregations were able to open a mission field of their own. Prior to 1991, several investigative trips to the country of Haiti were made with the possibility of establishing a mission there. However, the attempts made seemed to be cut off, and it was concluded that the door of opportunity was closed to that country. Nigeria also was considered as a possible place to start, but that effort was cut off as well.



Rev. and Mrs. Bazen

Many times it seemed the longing for our own mission field and team would never be fulfilled, but the NAGM felt that the Lord would open a way when it was His time. In June of 1986, Mr. Peter Bazen from the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation was accepted to begin studying at the theological school as a missionary minister. For the mission board, this was very encouraging even though they did not have a mission field to which a missionary could be

¹⁴ Memorial Stone Vol 4, p.110.

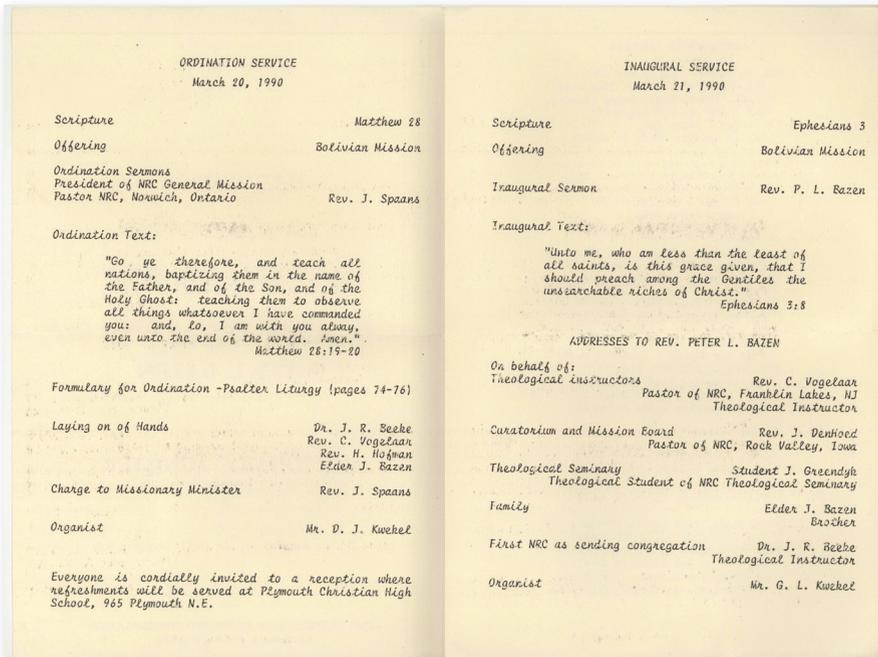
sent. It was always the desire and prayer of the mission board that the Lord would direct them to some place where they would not have to work under the umbrella of another mission organization, but would be able to establish a mission controlled and operated entirely by the NAGM and subject to the decisions of the Synod of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations. In 1987, the NAGM felt inclined to do some research in South America. They had heard from different organizations that possibly Ecuador, but especially Bolivia, were countries to investigate in order to possibly start a rural mission. After extensive research was completed and presented to the members of the board, it was decided to send delegates to these two countries. Rev. J. Spaans, President of the NAGM, Missionary Student P. Bazen, and Mission Administrator, Mr. J. VanBrugge were asked to make the initial trip. This memorable trip began in January of 1988 and was not made without difficulties and trying circumstances. However, there were also encouragements, and the delegates felt the Lord was with them. They were inclined to believe that not Ecuador, but Bolivia was where they were being directed. In July of 1989, Rev. H. Hofman Sr., Rev. J. Spaans and Mr. J. VanBrugge made another trip to Bolivia. The mission board had decided, based on the Lord's providential dealings during the last visit to Bolivia, that more research should be done to see if the Lord would lead them to a location in that country. The result of this journey was that the NAGM members felt drawn to the remote area containing a village named Loma Alta in rural Bolivia.

INSTALLATION OF REV. BAZEN

On March 20, 1990, Student P. Bazen was ordained as the first NAGM missionary minister in a service led by Rev. J. Spaans. The service was based on Matthew 28:19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." It was a memorable time in the history of the North American congregations and for our congregation.

In July of 1990, another trip was made to Bolivia to try to begin the proceedings of establishing a mission field for the newly-ordained missionary to begin his labors. After much prayer, negotiations with government officials, and providential encounters, the delegates again felt led to Loma Alta, Bolivia. Later, after Rev. and Mrs. Bazen and the team, which included the

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Jake Nijse family, had been sent out to Bolivia in April of 1991, they too, after additional investigation, felt drawn and directed to Loma Alta. This area became the first established mission post of our denomination. Rev. Bazen held the first church service in Loma Alta on October 13, 1991. Rev. and



William and Marlene (Van Veldhuizen)
Greendyk

Mrs. Bazen, along with the team, were truly “pioneer missionaries” in this area of Bolivia. Rev. Bazen labored in this area of Bolivia until May 2000. Miss Marlene Van Veldhuizen joined the team in Bolivia from 1991-2002.¹⁵ William Greendyk also worked with the Bolivian team from 1992-2002.

During Rev. and Mrs. Bazen’s time in Bolivia, they were joined by Mr. G. E. Bron and his family from 1994-1998.¹⁶ Before Rev.

¹⁵ Memorial Stone Vol. 4, p. 110.

¹⁶ Memorial Stone Vol. 4, p. 116.



Connie Stam, Lona Nijse, Jake Nijse, Sharon Nijse, William Greendyk,
Mrs. Bazen, Rev. Bazen

Bazen left the mission field, another student, Herman Hofman, Jr. from Kalamazoo, Michigan, was accepted into the theological school and began studying to become a missionary minister. On August 3, 1999, Student Hofman was ordained in a service led by his father Rev. H. Hofman, Sr., with the text of Joshua 1:9, "Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." The sending out portion of the service was led by Rev. J. Spaans.

Rev. and Mrs. Hofman and their family moved to Bolivia in September of 1999, and faithfully labored among the Bolivian people until April of 2008. A church was established in Loma Alta, Bolivia, and gradually grew to have its own consistory. Some years later, the sacraments were administered and a Christian school was also established in this small village which continues to this day.



Rev. and Mrs. Hofman and Rev.
and Mrs. Bazen

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

The mission work performed by the North American General Mission has become well established in Bolivia, and through the years has branched out into other areas of the country. Many workers have come and gone, including the first two missionary ministers, Rev. P. Bazen and Rev. H. Hofman Jr., who both faithfully gave many years to the mission work. It was with humble joy that in September of 2014, Mr. Marco Rojas, a Bolivian associated with the mission since the very beginning, was accepted as a ministerial student to study for the ministry. What a remarkable time it was for the mission when a native Bolivian began studying to become an ordained minister to labor among his own people. On July 15, 2016, Student Rojas was officially ordained as a Bolivian minister in a service led by Rev. H. Hofman, Jr. with the text, Isaiah 42:1, "Behold, my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth, I have put my spirit upon him, he shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles." Rev. Rojas currently labors in Santa Cruz and Loma Alta.



Rev. and Mrs. Maljaars family
the text, Isaiah 19:22-25. Rev. Maljaars, with his wife and part of his family, left for Bolivia in September of 2017 and are now currently working in Tarija, Bolivia.

Also at this time in North America, another student in the theological school, was studying to become a missionary minister. After four years of study, Student Edward Maljaars was ordained in a service conducted by Rev. P. Van Ruitenburch using

THE BALDWIN MISSION

Mission work in Baldwin, Michigan, began with a newspaper advertisement in which a woman, Willie Mae Hunter, an invalid supporting her two grandchildren, asked for assistance so that she could try to make a living for herself and her two young grandchildren, named Arizona and Georgia. Mrs. Jane Roodvoets responded to the ad in 1954 by bringing money and food to the woman. Along with thanks for the gifts, the woman invited Mrs. Roedvoets to come and visit again, and so her years of assisting people in the area of Baldwin, Michigan, began. Although the Baldwin area is known as a summer vacation destination because of the many lakes in the

area, many of the people who stayed year-round in the area lived, and continue to live below the poverty level. Many were raising grandchildren left behind by their parents. Jane Roodvoets, Wilma LaBotz, Cleo Post, Maude Gibbs, Margaret Scamehorn, and Betty Kik faithfully made the trip to Baldwin to offer assistance, visit with the people, and share Bible stories mainly with the children. For one year, friends of Mrs. Roodvoets who were also members of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Van Zweden, lived in the Baldwin area with their family, to offer assistance to the residents of the area, especially to the children living in poverty.

The ladies continued their frequent trips to Baldwin to offer assistance and to teach the children. After struggling to find a suitable place to hold their meetings with the children, land was purchased on Yale Avenue for \$500.00. On this property, Jim Rosendall and other volunteers built a white building naming it "The Bethlehem Mission Chapel." Dedicated on July 4, 1955, the new gathering place was a comfortable building, and the atmosphere was enjoyed by the children and others. Pews in the mission came from the Netherlands Reformed Church on Turner Avenue in Grand Rapids. Later, a thrift store was built nearby to help meet the needs of children and families and as a place to establish contact with families in the area. For many years, volunteers drove the 90 miles to the Bethlehem Mission every week. They instructed the youth and visited the sick and elderly.¹⁷

In 1973, the ladies invited Elder John Spaans, from Corsica, South Dakota and a member of the North American General Mission Board, to present a topic in Baldwin. On the return trip from Baldwin, Elder Spaans and his companion Elder Van Voorst from the Corsica congregation, met the ladies in a restaurant where they had all stopped for coffee. The conversation that followed resulted in a request that led to the Baldwin Mission becoming part of the North America General Mission. Once approved by the Synod, these ladies agreed to give everything, assets and all, to the mission board. The denominational Synod then advertised for a married couple to live in Baldwin so that services could also be held on Sundays. On October 3, 1973, the mission deputies appointed Mr. Bert Warmenhoven as a full-time evangelist. Mr. Warmenhoven held the post of evangelist from 1973-1979.

¹⁷ Memorial Stone Vol. 2, p. 204.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

In September 1974, the Young People's Society of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation began their many trips to Baldwin, bringing donations of food, clothing, bedding and other materials to the residents of Baldwin. It seemed that the services and assistance offered to the residents had the biggest impact upon the children, although many adults were also befriended and assisted.



Bethlehem Mission attendees

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In the beginning of 1978, an appeal was published for another home missionary couple to work in Baldwin, Michigan, because the work was becoming too heavy for Mr. and Mrs. Warmenhoven (1973-1979). No one applied; therefore, the mission deputies decided on May 8, 1979, to close the mission post the coming summer.

However, the work continued for another 30 years. Volunteers came forward to serve by turns every Saturday to visit the people and to lead a Bible study. The names of James and Peter Bazen (the future Rev. Peter Bazen), Elizabeth Mast, Henry Roelofs, Jane Roodvoets, Dick and Jim Spaans, Bob Vander Boon, Elder Ben Densel, Walter Rozeboom, Ron Van Unen, Bruce Kwekel, Peter Vander Jagt, Sr., Bill and Joanne VandenToorn, Herman and Madelyn Bouma, Steve Boluyt, Elder Jerry Fluit, and many others became familiar to the people attending the Baldwin Mission. In 1980, Deacon Peter L. Bazen was given permission to speak an edifying word during the Friday evening Bible classes. Attendance at the beginning was small, grew slowly, but finally,

approximately 40 people attended these classes. In 1985, the average attendance was close to 50 persons. When Mr. Peter Bazen was admitted to the theological school in 1986, Dr. Gordon Deur took his place. Later Elder Henry Langerak took over this position.¹⁸ After the death of Elder Langerak in 1990, various groups of people continued a biweekly Bible study on Friday evening.

In 2007, Elder Jan Groenendijk, from Alberta, Canada, was appointed by the denomination's Synod as a mission worker. He and his wife moved to Baldwin from Canada, and started Sunday services in addition to Friday evening services. Each attendee at the Friday evening service at that time received a bag of groceries, along with literature such as the *Banner of Truth*, *Paul*, and *Insight Into*. After a

year, 12-15 people attended the Friday evening study and 6-8 attended the Sunday service.¹⁹ Friends from Grand Rapids came to help the attendees at home with yard work, cleaning



Mission workers: Herman and Madelyn Bouma, Bill and Joanne VandenToorn and Elder Steve Boluyt

windows, and other odd jobs. They took care of the mission buildings and the surrounding yard also. However, by 2009, the Friday services were disappointing, and there was little interest in worshipping on Sunday, as most of the residents wanted to remain with their own churches for Sunday services. The Synod made the decision to close this mission post. Rev. J. B. Zippro led a farewell service on June 12, 2009, and the Baldwin Mission post was closed.²⁰

¹⁸ Memorial Stone, Vol 3, p. 208-210.

¹⁹ Memorial Stone, Vol 5, p. 185-186.

²⁰ Memorial Stone, Vol 5, p. 180-191.

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

BANNER OF TRUTH

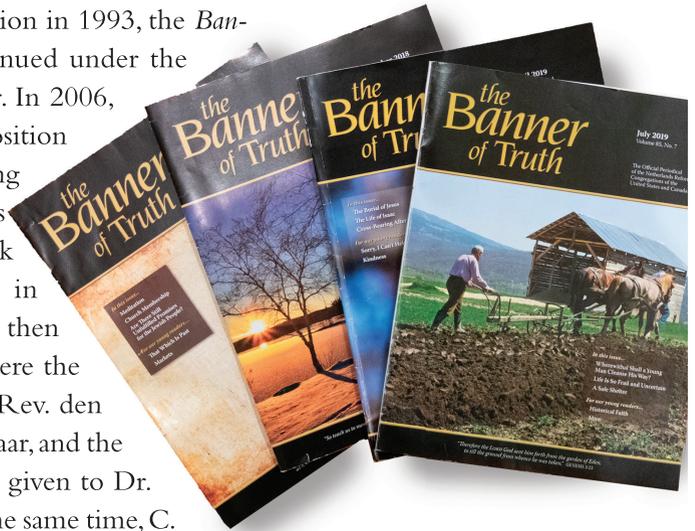


Elder and Mrs. Garrett Moerdyk

During the early 1930s, Rev. Van Zweden began publishing a denominational magazine called the *Banner of Truth* (Banier der Waarheid). The contents and the scope of the early versions were instructional and “served to the building up in the most holy faith.”²¹ By 1952, the *Banner of Truth* had both an English section (edited by Rev. Van Zweden) and a Dutch section (edited by Rev. Lamain). In the 1960s, the *Banner of Truth* was combined with *Timothy*, a magazine for young people. This young people’s section continues in the *Banner of Truth*

until today. Later, Rev. Lamain was the chief editor until 1984, assisted by Elder Garret J. Moerdyk of Kalamazoo. After the death of Rev. W. C. Lamain, the magazine was edited by Rev. J. R. Beeke, and assisted by Rev. C. Vogelaar and Elder Moerdyk.

Following the church separation in 1993, the *Banner of Truth* publication continued under the editorship of Rev. C. Vogelaar. In 2006, Elder Moerdyk gave up the position of assistant editor, after holding that position for many years and in 2007 stopped his work on the Bible quiz included in each issue. The periodical was then transferred to New Jersey where the editorship was appointed to Rev. den Hoed assisted by Rev. C. Vogelaar, and the managing editor position was given to Dr. Edward R. Nieuwenhuis. At the same time, C.



²¹ Memorial Stone, Vol 4, p.47-48.

Bleeker, D. L. Engelsma and Dr. J. G. Hoogerheide also stepped down from the Editorial Committee. Elder Moerdyk remained on this committee until his death in 2012. The Bible quiz and children's section was taken over by Mrs. A. E. Mol-Vogelaar of New Jersey.²²

The *Banner of Truth* has continued as a monthly publication. Some years ago, all copies of the magazine became available on Digibron, a digital archive set up by the Reformatorisch Dagblad in the Netherlands. The Digibron archive is searchable and can be found at the following URL: <https://www.digibron.nl>. Another website was set up by the church's Modern Media Committee in 2018. Periodicals, published by the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, are available on the website. The URL for the website is <http://firstnrc.org>. This collection is made up of more than 13,000 articles.²³

THE TRINITARIAN BIBLE SOCIETY

Our denomination has supported and continues to support a society for spreading God's Word around the world using trustworthy translations derived from the original languages in which the Bible was written. The Trinitarian Bible Society was founded in 1831 with the principal aim of promoting the glory of God and the increase of His Kingdom through the circulation of Protestant or uncorrupted versions of the Word of God. Today they still carry forward that vision, which is so well expressed in their motto, 'The Word of God Among All Nations.'

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The late Pastor Jay Stehouwer related the following;

The Trinitarian Bible Society was originally organized in England. Mr. Torrance Brown was the president of the society. He knew many languages and was a humble and patient man. A little over 50 years ago, Mr. Brown made a trip to the United States and was introduced to Mr. Knight from the Baptist church in Grand Rapids. Through this relationship, TBS was introduced into the United States. The society began in the area of Grand Rapids with correspondence to people about the King James Bible. Rev. Pronk from the

²² Memorial Stone, Vol 5, p. 137-138.

²³ Memorial Stone, Vol 5, p. 373-374.



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Free Reformed Church gave assistance in this endeavor at this time, also. After some time, Mr. Knight decided to return to England and asked Mr. Jay Stehouwer to replace him. At this time, Mr. Stehouwer was exercised with a call to the ministry. He asked Mr. Knight to come back a week later, and he would give him an answer for the TBS request. This brought Mr. Stehouwer in prayer, seeking God for direction. The Lord broke through, and he was given the freedom to take the place of Mr. Knight. Due to Rev. Pronk accepting a call to a Canadian congregation, the work of the TBS was now fully placed in his hands. He received assistance from Mr. Jack Swets as the orders for Bibles were received. Later, Mr. Michael Edwards from California moved to Grand Rapids and provided assistance as well. Since the work of the TBS in the United States was growing significantly, an office was found in the YMCA building on Leonard Street, with a later move to an office on Walker and Leonard Street which soon was too small as well. A gift of \$100,000.00 was received which enabled them to purchase the current office located at Alpine and Four Mile Road.

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In 2003, after returning from the mission field in Bolivia, William Greendyk became an elder in the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation and was appointed as General Secretary of the USA Branch of the Trinitarian Bible Society. Mr. Greendyk is active, with others, in translating the Spanish Bible and, having completed the translation of the New Testament, continues to work on translating the Old Testament.

As Pastor Stehouwer further stated, “Today TBS distributes the Bible in the United States and South America. The organization is faithful to the original languages. It is non-denominational with a board of trustees from the Baptist Church, the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Free Reformed Church and the Providence Reformed Church.”

CHAPTER 7

2020

FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION CONTINUES

*Thy name, O Lord, endureth for ever; and thy memorial,
O Lord, throughout all generations.*

PSALM 135:13



Front row (from left to right):

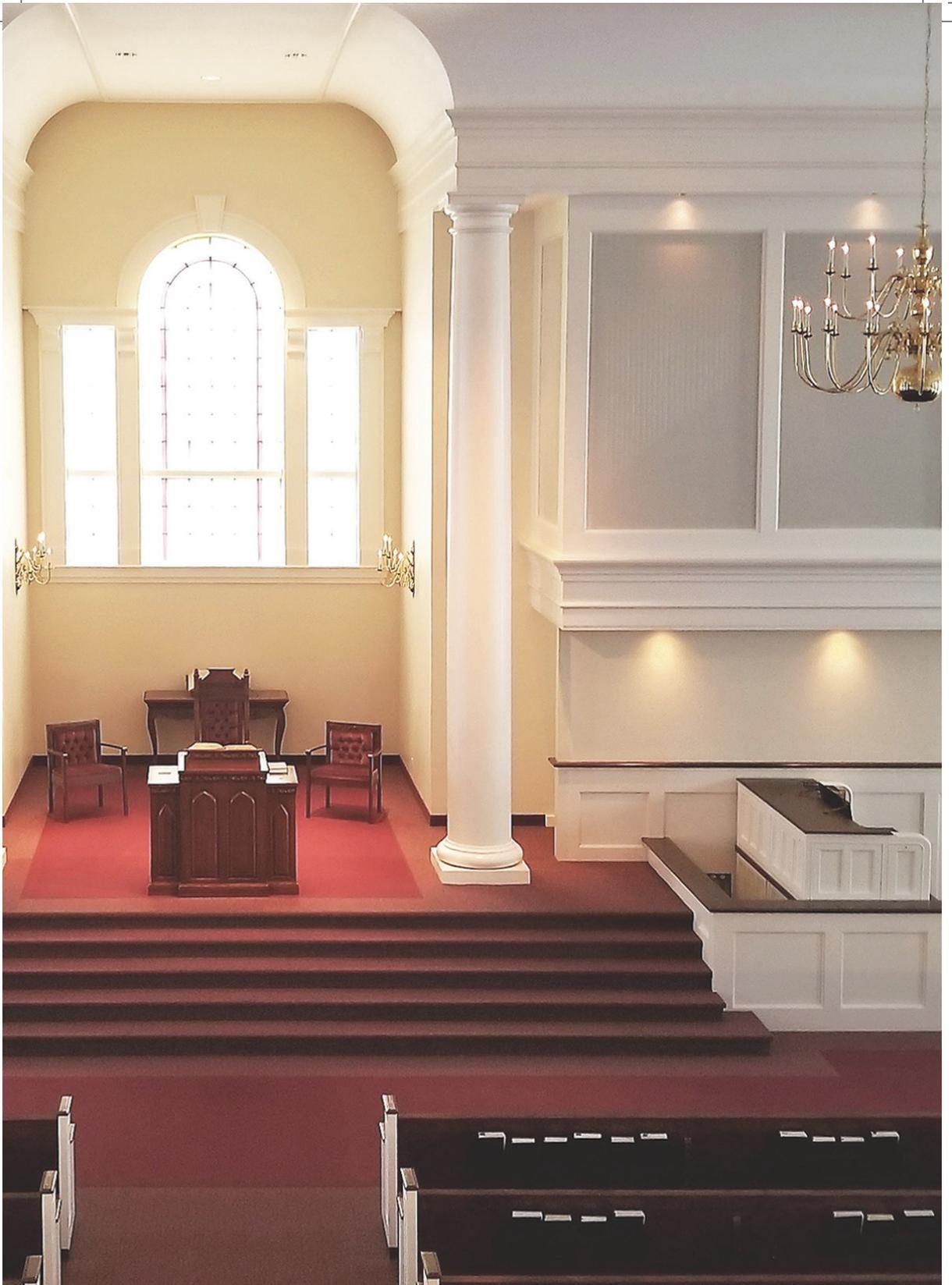
Melvin Blom, Richard Ten Elshof, John Van Zweden, Rev. G.M. de Leeuw, Steven Boluyt, William Greendyk, Jerald Fluit

Second Row (from left to right):

Daniel DeMeester III, Gerrit Bleeker, Dr. Willard DeBraber, Raymond Kleyn, Daniel Engelsma, Paul Timmer

VANESS VANGROUW VANHAMBURG VANHOUTE





The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

The year 2020 brings the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation to its 150-year anniversary. As the congregation faces the future, the eyes of the church must be on the Lord for “Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth” (Psalm 124:8). Early in the year 2020, the congregation was faced with an unprecedented challenge: all church services were restricted countrywide in March/April due to the COVID-19 (a respiratory virus) pandemic. And yet the Lord in His unfailing faithfulness provided that the congregation could worship and hear the Word of God using modern technology. The future remains in God’s hands. He is the covenant-faithful Jehovah and “His name shall endure for ever” (Psalm 72:17a).

In *De Saambinder* of May 31, 2007, Rev. Moerkerken wrote in commemoration of 100 years of our denomination:

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There is much in the history of our denomination for which we must have reason to be ashamed. So often we have left our first love, so often we have loved the world and brought the world into our hearts and our homes. We have departed so far from the simple lifestyle of our forefathers. As ministers we must bow our heads in shame as we think of those old ministers who have gone before us who served and edified the congregations in simplicity. This is also true of elders and deacons. Over against so much of God’s long-suffering there has been so much human unfaithfulness and stubbornness. We have not kept our unity, but in the middle of the century of our existence, there was a sad and painful division. We feel far too little longing for those of God’s children with whom the break occurred. That is what must be said of us.

There is, however, also something to be said of the Lord, ‘Thou, nevertheless...’ He brought us together in the beginning of the twentieth century; time and again He sent us His servants. At times His Spirit worked richly amongst us. He granted us, even as the congregation of Sardis, some who have not defiled their garments; He did not find our works without blemish before His countenance, but He did not do with us according to our sins. He, faithfully and from His side, remembered His covenant. He worked in the generations. Sinners were converted unto Him, also young people. We would shortchange God if we did not acknowledge all these benefits. As we enter a new century may our expectation be from Him.¹

¹ *Banner of Truth*, September 2007, p. 195.

In explaining the distinction of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, Rev. A. Vergunst commented in a translated article which appeared in the September 2007 *Banner of Truth*:

An old proverb says that times change, and we change along with it. This has also been confirmed in the history of our denomination. Commemoration therefore compels us to reflect upon this distinct identity. This distinct identity is under assault, both as far as the doctrines we confess and the life we advocate. We are under assault from without; consider the tremendous influence exerted by modern theology as well as by the attraction of a modern lifestyle. We are under assault from within when 'the true experience' vanishes and no more than 'natural faith' remains. Such 'natural faith' will, in turn, have an adverse effect upon the consciousness of 'being a stranger upon earth.' It therefore ought to be our prayer that we would give a very careful account as to the distinct identity of our congregations as well as to its great value both in the past and today.

May the Lord, who brought the congregations together and kept them together in spite of all strife and concern, graciously preserve us in the doctrines of Scripture, together with the life which adorns them. Then, in the midst of the sphere of Reformed denominations (in the broadest sense of the word), we shall be exercising the calling to contend for this Reformed heritage. Therefore, may the Lord bring into remembrance the message we find in the words of the Lord recorded in the letter to the congregation of Sardis, 'Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent' (Revelation 3:3).²

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May the almighty King of the church, Who has blessed us with the truth for 150 years, remember His covenant and continue His sovereign work of regeneration in fallen sons and daughters of Adam in this portion of His vineyard for His honor and glory.

Blest be the Lord, our fathers' God.
 Eternal King of kings,
 Who only is omnipotent,
 Performing wondrous things.
 Blest be His great and glorious Name

² *Banner of Truth*, September 2007, p. 213.

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Forevermore, Amen,
And let His glory fill the earth
From shore to shore. Amen. (Psalter 196)

GREETINGS/WELL WISHES

Beloved Congregation,

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It is indeed a milestone worthy to remember that 150 years ago the congregation was organized, and a place was given where the truth was proclaimed. These are 150 years of God's faithfulness and care. Several of God's servants have been sent; they labored for shorter or longer time among you. God has used them to instruct and feed His people but also to give that enemies of God were made His willing servants. Much has changed in this world, and also much in the churches. The Lord had many of His people in Grand Rapids and from some we have heard how powerfully they were drawn out of the service of sin, out of nature's darkness to God's marvelous light. There is still a remnant among you that knows something of the wonder of God's grace. The Lord has preserved that and will take care of it also in our days. May the Lord give a commemoration in the dust, of humiliation because of our many sins and trespasses, and a commemoration of gratitude for Him Who has been and also will be for an undeserving people.

Many memories could be mentioned when we consider also the years that we were given to labor among you. The calling to Beckwith [Avenue] was clear, and the Lord has confirmed that in the years that we were in the midst of you. When we were called by your clerk, brother Jake Van Dyke, to inform us that we were on the duo, much unrest, caused by an unwillingness to leave Franklin Lakes and go without almost all of our children to Michigan, came in our hearts. However, the Lord warned us, before the call came, from Ezekiel 2:8, "Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house." It was about two weeks later that the meeting in which we were chosen to be called was held and the burden of your congregation was laid upon us.

In all the impossibilities which we experienced, the Lord spoke so powerfully from Exodus 3:14, "and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of

Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” There was no doubt, but also no resistance anymore, for the faithful God of the covenant Himself had spoken. It has been our comfort in all which we had to leave behind in the East, and in all the sometimes difficult circumstances, that He Himself had sent us to you.

Unforgettable were the building and the opening of the new church, the meetings after the reflection service in the parsonage, the confession of faith classes we were given to teach, and the sing-alongs in our house with so many of the young people. The congregation grew in numbers, and we may have hope that there were also some new births, some children in grace. The theological students had also moved from New Jersey to Grand Rapids, and this is still the place where the theological school is located. We were given to labor nearly seven-and-one-half years in Grand Rapids before we were called to Kalamazoo. However, also in the vacant years, we were often in Grand Rapids to perform labors in the midst of you, and especially among the youth. The labors that we were given to perform in the midst of you, as your own pastor and also as moderator, were polluted by sin and with many shortcomings. It is only God’s faithfulness and His grace that the seed could be sown upon the field of the church. Did it receive a place in your heart to bear fruit to God’s honor and to your salvation? Then all boasting be far from us. It is only because He has been good for undeserving creatures. It is our hearty wish that the Lord will bless the labors of our dear brother in the ministry and of the consistory to the extension of His church, and to the instruction of His dear children. He will take care of His own work and will keep His promises even in our perilous times. For it is His cause and not ours and may that be the hope and comfort. Zion’s King sits upon the throne. He reigns and will gather His sheep. Those whom He has loved from eternity and for whom Christ has laid down His life. He is worthy to be served and receive all the honor for what He has given also in those 150 years. What a wonder if we then, in commemorating His goodness and faithfulness may receive a place in the dust before Him.

God sent other servants, Rev. Zippro and now Rev. de Leeuw, to work in that portion of His vineyard. We are but tools in His hands, and the church is not our cause but His own cause. If there was anything good in those past years, it has come from Him alone. If there will be any well-founded expectation for the future, it can only be from Him who never forsaketh

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

the work of His own hands. He will take care of His inheritance, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in the hand of the exalted Christ. What is of man will surely come to nothing, but the Lord's work will stand, and all enemies who come against it will not prevail.

Dear congregation, stay with and love the truth in which all that is of man is placed outside. In this truth, God's own work for, but also in His church, is honored. It is: nothing in man, and what a painful way that is against our flesh, but all in Him – that is how the Church goes to Jerusalem. There it will not be the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, or whatever the name of a church may be, but one flock under one Shepherd, gathered and preserved by Him. This Church will be before the throne and sing of Him Who bought them with such a price.

May you so commemorate God's deeds, His faithfulness, and His care in all those years.

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God will then receive the honor, and He alone will be glorified.

Rev. C. Vogelaar

Beloved Congregation,

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy Name give glory...”

These words of Psalm 115 came to my mind when I was asked to write a few lines regarding my stay in Grand Rapids. What shall I say and what shall I mention? The Lord gave me some strength to serve the congregation for seven years. Oh, what is man? Not only in the world, but also in the church, we tend to steal the honor of God and to put ourselves in the center. But there is no reason to boast and to end in man. We are nothing but wretched creatures. It is only a wonder of free and sovereign grace, when the Lord draws a sinner out of darkness and brings to His marvelous light. And it is another wonder, when such a creature, taken from the dust, is called to be a minister of the holy Word of God and is allowed to work in His vineyard.

It is not a small thing to leave everything behind and to cross the ocean and become a minister in a strange country. However, when the Lord calls, we have to go. It was the year 2005. I was invited to preach in Grand Rapids. After I preached, a night followed which I will not easily forget. During that night of wrestling and praying, the words of Christ spoken to Simon Peter came to me with power. "Feed my lambs" and "Feed my sheep." It was as if the Lord said to me, "You have to feed my sheep in Grand Rapids." I said, "Lord, how can that be? Do I have to leave my family and my home country? It is impossible." My wife was afraid that we would have to emigrate, but she was reassured and said to me, "You will never get a call from Grand Rapids, where Rev. Lamain has been a minister before." I had to admit and say, "Yes, I am not worthy."

But God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not ours. After some time, a calling letter from Grand Rapids came. It was no more a question to me: I had to go. And so, I came to Grand Rapids in 2006. I was installed on Wednesday, April 26, 2006. Rev. C. Vogelaar, former minister and moderator of Grand Rapids, conducted the installation service and preached about 2 Timothy 4:1-2, "I charge thee therefore God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." I spoke my inaugural sermon with the words of 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ constraineth us."

Seven years went by. The Lord gave strength and love to do the work. The first years I preached three times every Sunday. Many times the Lord gave opening. I may believe there is still a poor and needy people that are begging for a crumb from the Master's table. And yes, the life in the ministry comes with strife and difficulties. But the Lord helped through, and we may say "Eben Haëzer: hitherto the Lord has helped us."

With my whole heart, I hope and pray that the Lord may remember the church in Grand Rapids in the future. He is the great Shepherd who leadeth his people in love. He continues to gather his church, chosen by the Father, bought by the Son, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. May the Lord be with the brothers of the consistory and their minister. May He give light from above to take the right decisions in difficult matters in church life. May the Lord

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

remember the Beckwith Avenue flock. That many sinners may be drawn with cords of love. We are all travellers to a never-ending eternity. How soon we have to appear before a holy and righteous God! That we may come to know ourselves not only as poor, but also as lost sinners. That we may haste for our life's sake and that we may be brought at the feet of that precious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. That his Name may be lifted up through the preaching of our beloved brother in the ministry. May his Name be glorified now and evermore!

Rev. Johann B. Zippro

150TH ANNIVERSARY GREETING

Dear congregation of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation:

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You can imagine that thousands of sermons have been preached and read in the 150 years of FNRC history. How hard it was for the early immigrants to make that big change; they immigrated to a far country on the other side of the ocean. In that time, there were also those who died during their journey, including children, who were buried in the ocean. Think about that. Many came to become happy and rich, but what frustration and disappointment was awaiting them. Yet, on the other side, there were immigrants with not the least thought of a true and eternal God, and yet, God stopped them on the broad way and placed them on the narrow way. Yes, He gave them a place in His church under the truth. Others served in the offices for many years and were not a stranger of that new life. At the appointed time, the Lord brought them into everlasting glory in heaven. Oh, what an eternal wonder!

A number of immigrants, who, with all the changes that they had to experience, did not change their religion from the old fatherland. They could not join the churches in this city, even though the preaching was in the Dutch language. Why was that so? The immigrants missed hearing the scriptural and experimental ways of the Lord in the preaching. So, what did they do? Oh, what a struggle, what a disappointment. They laid it before the Lord in their prayers because this was more important to them than a good job and

a nice house. And, the Lord took care of them. In His incomprehensible providence, they established a church where they were not deceived for eternity. Although this brought them into much strife, the enmity of the so called “pious people” became their portion. Yet, it was not their case, but the Lord’s. They did not see that every day. It came out that their intention was not to be secluded as “better people.” No, not at all. But it was only for the sake of the sound doctrine. And, in and through that doctrine, they sought the honor of a triune God and the salvation of lost ones in Adam. The Lord took care through remarkable ways. You will read it in this book. Yes, they went through difficult times. They experienced that which was predicted by the Lord Himself: ‘in this world ye shall have tribulation’. But then, what follows? ‘Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’, also the pious world. Oh, that faithful triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Many of God’s faithful servants have been used instrumentally to edify His Church militant here in Grand Rapids. He has used these servants to encourage them in their spiritual warfare against Satan, world, and their own flesh. Elders and deacons have gone through the congregation, attended the meetings, read the sermons, and instructed the youth. Members and baptized members, although brought up under the sound doctrine, departed, with all the sorrow and pain of it among parents and grandparents and further relations. Yet, there comes a day of reckoning.

It is not out of place for congregation and consistory to stammer an Eben Haëzer: hitherto the Lord has helped us. As we face the unknown future, our expectation must be of the same triune God, Who has proved during all these years to be the faithful One for this part of His vineyard in America.

On behalf of the consistory and congregation, a hearty thanks to all who were involved, bringing things together regarding these 150 years. May the reading of this book lead to the sincere acknowledgement of the Lord’s faithfulness and fill our hearts with jealousy upon those who were brought into His Church militant, now having their joy in heaven with the Church triumphant. So be it.

Your minister,

Rev. G.M. de Leeuw

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

September 2020

*Dear consistory and congregation of the
First Netherlands Reformed Congregation:*

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As your moderator I wish to extend my hearty well-wishes on the occasion of your anniversary. What comes to mind first of all is the town where your congregation is located. When I heard of Grand Rapids, Michigan, many years ago, I was told that this was the “Jerusalem of America.” Such a saying leaves much to one’s imagination. That thought comes to mind when writing well-wishes, and I cannot help but ponder the tears of the Lord Jesus Christ over Jerusalem! Those tears showed the Savior’s divine concern over an entire city, exalted unto heaven. Jerusalem was the city chosen by the Lord to be the place where Jehovah would have His habitation. Jerusalem was desired by the Lord to have godly kings reign there. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth was Mount Zion, and God was known in her palaces for a refuge (Psalm 48). Indeed, Grand Rapids, it is quite the thought to be called the Jerusalem of America. My thoughts multiply when thinking of the many dealings of the Lord with a city in Michigan, as a local congregation there commemorates 150 years of existence. Matthew Henry notes that the Lord wept because Jerusalem had not improved the day of her opportunities. Congregation of Beckwith Avenue, if the tears of Jesus which He wept over Jerusalem mean anything to you, I sincerely hope and pray that they will never testify against you in the day of days, because that shall be bitter for those who lived under the truth of Law and Gospel in Grand Rapids, Michigan. One hundred and fifty years of divine dealings with a city and congregation in Michigan ought to make us stop and think of the countless opportunities: “...even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace!” (Luke 19:42c). Ponder with me on the time of your visitation.

When I think of you as a congregation, other memories also come to mind. I remember my late father, who, after the passing away of Rev. Lamain, served you many times. I remember that he did so with trembling, but also with desire and opening from above. We may believe that his labors were not in

vain in the Lord. When we moved to Grand Rapids in 1996 during our time in the theological school, there followed three years when we became more personally acquainted with many of you. I remember that the Lord spoke to me personally during that time, with the words from the history of Elijah, *“I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there”* (1 Kings 17:4b). I may say that I believe the Lord fulfilled that word, and to this day we cherish good memories from dwelling there by the brook. It was a time of many changes: two of our children were born in Grand Rapids, and there we delivered our first trial sermon before fellow students, instructors, and consistory members. When I visited the congregations, Mr. Jake Van Dyke faithfully picked me up on Saturdays to bring me to the airport. And finally our ordination and departure to Bolivia in 1999, now 21 years ago, took place in Grand Rapids. Many years have now gone by, and the Lord’s ways are past finding out. *“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”* (Malachi 3:6). Currently we are neighbors again, and before your present minister arrived, we were even given to serve you again on several occasions.

The Lord has been faithful throughout the history of your congregation. He has not changed, and therefore the remnant according to the election of grace – also in Grand Rapids – is not consumed. May that same God continue to supply in your every need. May He richly anoint your shepherd and teacher, our dear friend and brother Rev. de Leeuw, as he labors in your midst. And remember the many tears that were shed from your pulpits, but above all the tears we reflected upon earlier. If the tears of God’s servants and children are counted and collected in God’s bottle, do you think the tears of Christ are not? Be ye reconciled to God. This is the wish of your friend and moderator, for you as consistory and congregation.

Rev. H. Hofman

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SUBSCRIPTION FORM³

Throughout the history of our church, at least five different Forms of Subscription were used and were signed by elders and deacons upon their installation to their respective offices. The form in use during the longest period of time is as follows:

FORMULA OF SUBSCRIPTION FOR MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL, ELDERS AND DEACONS OF THE NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN, USA.

We, the undersigned, Ministers of the Gospel, Elders and Deacons of the Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan, do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription, that we heartily believe that the entire Holy Scripture, Old and New Testament, is the revealed Word of God.

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We also declare that the 37 Articles of the Confession of Faith, and Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, commonly known as the “Three Forms of Unity,” do fully agree with the Word of God.

We therefore promise and pledge ourselves wholeheartedly, by the grace of God, to promote and defend the aforesaid doctrine as much as possible in all the acts of our ministrations, and to rule and serve the congregation according to God’s Word and the Church Order drawn up by the National Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-19.

We further declare that if we do anything contrary to our calling and promise, and persist in our wrongdoing after being duly warned, we shall be suspended from our office, having, however, the right of appeal.⁴

³ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 22.

⁴ *First Netherlands Reformed 100th Year Anniversary Booklet*, p. 22.



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THE CONSISTORY OF THE FIRST NETHERLANDS
REFORMED CONGREGATION - 2020



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Front row(left to right): Melvin Blom, Richard Ten Elshof, Steven Boluyt, Rev. G. M. de Leeuw,
John Van Zweden, William Greendyk, Jerald Fluit

Second Row(left to right): Daniel DeMeester III, Gerrit Bleeker, Dr. Willard DeBraber, Raymond
Kleyn, Daniel Engelsma, Paul Timmer

VIS VISSER VISSIA VLASTUIN VLIEGER VLIETSTRA



VOGEL VOGELAAR VOSHOL VROEGINDEWEY

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FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF CONSISTORY MEMBERS WHO HAVE SERVED THE CONGREGATION. SINCE SEVERAL HAVE SERVED AT VARIOUS TIMES, THE DATE IS THE TIME OF THEIR FIRST INSTALLATION.

DIVISION AVENUE CHURCH

ELDERS

1870	Klaas Smit	1899	Gysbert Vander Male
1870	Jan Sinke	1900	John Spote
1871	Cornelis Lindhout	1908	Adrian Van Dyke
1872	Jan Proos	1909	John Bodbyl
1874	Willem Spanjer	1912	Jacobus Mol
1876	Wouter Dekker	1914	John Van Zweden
1880	Willem Van Dyke	1915	Maarten Faasse
1881	Dirk De Pree	1918	A. J. Theunisse
1881	Antonie Smaal	1920	Kris Winters
1883	Adrian Aarnoudse	1923	C. Kaashoek
1886	Jan Boot	1931	Adrian Van Krimpen
1888	Hendrik Jan Stokkens	1933	John Kamp
1889	Sarel Timmerman	1935	Chris Van't Hof
1893	L. Spejjer	1939	Abraham De Bruyn
1896	Cornelis Fondse	1940	Cornelius F. Boerkoel
1897	A. Merizon	1944	William Boluyt

DEACONS

1870	Gerrit DeGraaf	1902	Ari Van Eck
1870	Willem H. Freeze	1903	Matheis Demaagd
1871	Jacob Bierens	1903	Gerrit Vander Kooy
1872	Benjamin Oom	1904	Johannes Oom
1875	Hendrik Grebel	1908	John Kwekel
1877	Domis Van't Hof	1910	Abraham Geldhof
1878	Willem Van Dyke	1912	John Mol
1879	Bartel Jonker	1912	Adrian Vanden Bout
1880	Frank Vander Hulle	1913	Dirk Meulenberg
1881	Jacob Kooman	1915	James Westdorp
1881	Abraham Verhaar	1916	John De Meester
1884	Arend Oom	1917	A. Bolle

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1886	Cornelis Jonker	1918	Vincent Faasse
1887	John Oom	1918	Martin Hommel
1888	Marinus Cornelis DeFouw	1919	Harry Langerak
1888	Cornelis Rozel	1921	William Boluyt
1889	Johannes Hyboer	1923	John Kamp
1893	Aart Van Eck	1924	Chris Van't Hof
1895	Abraham Lindhout	1924	John Vander Boon
1897	C. Van Oeveren	1928	Dick Van Oeveren
1898	Jeremias Flipse	1930	Cornelius F. Boerkoel
1900	Leendert Stouten	1936	D. De Pree
1900	Adrian Merizon	1937	Louis Boot
1901	A. J. Theunisse	1938	Willem Van Dyk
		1945	Louis De Maagd

OTTAWA AVENUE CHURCH

ELDERS		DEACONS	
1923	Dick De Bruyn	1923	Peter Penning
1923	Teunis Stehouwer	1923	John DeMeester
1923	John Mol	1923	Peter DeMeester
1924	Cornelius Kalawart	1924	Adrian Vander Male
1926	Jacob Ver Sprille	1925	Thomas DeFouw
1926	James Wielhouwer	1925	Andrew Vander Male
1926	Henry Boogard	1926	Henry F. Baatjes
1926	Peter Penning	1928	Martin Faasse
1930	Andrew Vander Male	1928	Clayton Van Dyke
1930	Kris Winters	1930	John J. VerWys
1931	Henry F. Battjes	1930	John Quist
1933	John DeMeester	1931	Harry Langerak
1933	Harry Langerak	1932	Mathew Stoutjesdyk
1934	Maurice Vander Jagt	1932	James DeMeester
1937	Clayton Van Dyke	1933	John Mieras
1940	Daniel Van Ree	1933	Homer Nordyke
1940	Cornelius DeMaagd	1934	William Schol
1941	Chris Van't Hof	1935	Cornelius Phillips
1943	James Vanden Toorn	1936	Daniel Van Ree
1943	John Quist	1937	William Van Stee
1944	Cornelius Quist	1940	John Goudzwaard

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1940	Peter Sporte
1940	Cornelius Quist
1942	Jay Rademaker
1943	Abe Karelse
1944	Marinus Westrate
1944	John Mol, Jr.

FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED CONGREGATION (COMBINED)

ELDERS		DEACONS	
1954	Peter Vander Stel	1948	Peter Bazen Sr.
1965	Dr. Gordon Deur	1952	James Van Stee
1968	Jacob DeBruine	1954	James DeMeester
1968	Marinus Westrate	1954	Martin Poulisse
1969	Peter Kamp	1955	Cornelius Van Zweden
1969	Clarence Bleeker	1955	Marvin Vanden Toorn
1974	Carl Vander Male	1956	Philip Huisjen
1975	Marvin Vanden Toorn	1957	James Wielhouwer, Jr.
1976	Dick Spaans	1959	Carl Vander Male
1977	Peter Van Kempen	1960	Orie Vander Boon
1977	John VanDyke	1960	Dr. Gordon Deur
1978	Henry Langerak	1961	Fred Van Dyke
1985	Henry Kamp	1966	Clarence Bleeker
1986	Gary Kwekel	1967	Jacob DeBruine
1986	Dr. Robert Johnson	1968	Henry Langerak
1989	Jacob Van Dyke	1968	Raymon Stoutjesdyk
1991	Jerald Fluit	1970	John Vander Boon
1991	James Bazen	1970	Robert Verhey
1993	Delwyn Deur	1970	Peter Bazen, Jr.
1993	Walter Rozeboom	1970	William Vander Male
1993	David G. Engelsma	1972	Daniel Breuker
1995	Melvin Blom	1972	Dirk VandenToorn Sr.
2000	Thomas VandenToorn	1973	Dick Spaans
2003	William Greendyk	1975	James Bazen
2004	Thomas Engelsma	1976	Richard Kamp
2009	Steven Boluyt	1976	Robert Sporte
2011	John Spaans	1978	C. F. Boerkoel Jr.

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2013	John Van Zweden	1980	Gary Kwekel
2013	Richard Ten Elshof	1981	Henry Kamp
		1982	Joe Verwys
		1986	Paul Blaak
		1986	Thomas Engelsma
		1986	Jacob VanDyke
		1987	Thomas VandenToorn
		1988	Henry Rosendall
		1988	Ronald Klaasen
		1990	Delwyn Deur
		1990	Theodore Engelsma
		1991	Russell VandenToorn
		1991	Peter Vander Jagt
		1992	Brian Zevenbergen
		1995	Dirk VandenToorn Jr.
		1996	Adrian Neele
		2000	Gilbert DeBruine
		2000	Thomas Kamp
		2004	Dr. Willard DeBraber
		2005	Paul Timmer
		2007	Gerrit Bleeker
		2008	Michael Klaasen
		2008	Daniel DeMeester III
		2012	Daniel Engelsma
		2012	Larry Roelofs
		2016	Raymond Kleyn
		2016	Dr. John Schelling

(List of Elders and deacons as taken from *125 Anniversary Booklet* with corrections)

CURRENT LIST OF ELDERS AND DEACONS 2020

Elders

Melvin Blom
 Steven Boluyt
 Jerald Fluit
 William Greendyk
 Richard Ten Elshof
 John Van Zweden

Deacons

Gerrit Bleeker
 Dr. Willard DeBraber
 Daniel DeMeester III
 Daniel Engelsma
 Raymond Kleyn
 Paul Timmer



WILLEKES WILLEMS WILLIAMS WINTERS WOLBERS

APPENDIX A

STEPS OF GRACE

Throughout the history of the FNRC, ministers have explained and referenced the steps of grace. For example, Rev. Lamain wrote in his 1956 New Year's letter to the congregation regarding those whom the Lord has quickened: "Death follows hard on their heels; their debt is unpaid; God's justice has not been satisfied; fierce fightings rage within; Satan, the accuser is so active; the law condemns; the gospel is silent; Christ is hidden and with a condemning conscience they stumble on their way...they still believe that the end of the man that trusts in the Name of the Lord shall be peace; that God shall never forsake the work of His hands. But to believe is for them a question that looms larger and larger as time goes on. And they can never be jealous of the persons who talk blithely about their religion and who are so content and happy in their salvation. If they were to choose, no matter how miserable their state and how often Satan the murderer tells them: 'There is no help for you in God;' they would prefer to lie with Mordecai the Jew at the King's gate than to ever appropriate one thing that was not applied to them by the Holy Spirit. It is their longing and desire to have the blood applied to their soul. That in the way of justice and equity they may be saved by the redemption that is in Christ alone." Here we have a description of one who has experienced Christmas, is experiencing Good Friday, and longs for experiencing Easter, namely, having Christ applied to their soul, and the pronouncement of the divine acquittal. In explaining these steps in the preaching, the Lord's people receive instruction and guidance, and those who aspire to a superficial way of salvation are warned.

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Below are the steps of grace delineated according to the church calendar.

1. **CHRISTMAS:** The sinner is quickened and convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit. The Lord dwells in the heart of the quickened sinner by His Spirit. The Spirit discovers unto the soul its great misery. Because the love of God is shed abroad in the heart, there is a sorrow over sin because it displeases the God whom he has come to love sincerely and supremely. In due time, the way of salvation in a Divine Savior is revealed to the awakened soul. See Eph. 2:1, John 14:17&23, Rom.5:5, Jer. 31:9a, Matt. 16:16-17 and John 1:47-51.
2. **GOOD FRIDAY:** The sinner convicted of sin dies with Christ losing all foundations that are outside of Him, that is, experiences that all hope and expectation outside of Christ for salvation are cut off. This includes losing all his religious experiences as a foundation. Such a one expects to be justly condemned to hell by God the Judge, for God will have His justice satisfied. See Jeremiah 45:4, Luke 22:46, Matt. 26:56b, Luke 24:21, Gen. 32:25&27, Ps. 116:3, and Zech. 3:1&3.
3. **EASTER:** The sinner, after being cut off from all of his experiences and other creature foundations, is justified before God in the court of his conscience by experiencing the giving and receiving of a Divine acquittal from the Father based only on the finished and complete work of Christ; in this the Savior is applied to the soul and arms of faith are given to receive Him and His benefits. A soul that experiences this is lost in holy wonder and admiration: amazing grace, wonderful Savior, a great wretch like me given peace with God! See Rom. 4:25, Luke 24:36, Job 33:24, Rom. 5:1&2, Eph. 2:8, Gen. 32:28&30, Ps. 116:6-8, Zech. 3:2,4,5.
4. **ASCENSION:** The saved sinner experiences a homecoming by being received into the Father heart of God. To this end the Spirit witnesses with the spirit of the elect that they are the children of God. This benefit is referred to as “adoption” whereby

APPENDIX A

the justified sinner can cry, “Abba, Father.” See John 14:2&3, and Rom. 8:15-16.

5. **PENTECOST:** A Triune God is applied and His saving work sealed to the soul by the powerful operations of the Holy Ghost, whereby the heart is filled with the glory and salvation of a Triune God. This causes the soul to swim in the ocean of the love of God, and in the extolling of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as the disciples did on the day of Pentecost. Such souls lose themselves in a Triune God. See Eph. 1:13, 4:30, John 14:26, 16:13, Acts 2:4, 17, 18, 38c, and Gen. 35:9&10.



APPENDIX B

IMPORTANT EXPERIENTIAL DOCTRINES AND COMMON THREATS TO THESE DOCTRINES

SOUND DOCTRINES AND THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Throughout the history of the Church there have been attempts to erode sound doctrine. Our times are no exception. The attacks often seem to be quite different, but fundamentally they are all similar. They all make the way of salvation a way in which man can begin in his own strength and wisdom. Thus man thinks he can be saved without the miracle of regeneration being wrought in his heart by the Holy Spirit. He goes on in this self-made way, without experiencing the depth of his misery before a holy and righteous God and the justice of God's sentence of condemnation. Such ones never have a godly sorrow and a supreme love for God since His love has never been shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit.

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Serious doctrinal errors are usually not introduced blatantly, for then it could be hard to get general acceptance. Instead they are advocated subtly and thus are often mingled with some truth. When opposition to the errors arises, there is a momentary retreating until the time seems ripe to advocate the errors again. This continues until there is broad acceptance of the errors.

Often, the advocates of error do not think their views are in conflict with the truth. They will even reference biblical texts to justify their erroneous beliefs. Nevertheless, the carnal enmity to the only way in which God will

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save a sinner will be apparent. Paul best summarizes the situation of natural man in Romans 8:5: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

It is by the mixture of error with true religion not discerned and distinguished, that the devil has had much success against the cause and kingdom of Christ. In this way he has hurt the cause of Christianity during and after the apostolic age to a greater extent than by all the persecutions of both Jews and heathens.

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There is a danger today that when the Spirit withholds His saving work from a congregation for a time, man will try to invent ways by which natural man can bring salvation to himself. In this way, multitudes are deceived for eternity, but those that wait on the Lord will not make haste (Is.28:16) and shall not be put to shame (Ps.25:3, Ps. 69:6, Is.49:23). Thus there is abundant reason for us to ever labor to maintain the sound doctrines of our forefathers and to be on guard for anything that undermines or dilutes these doctrines.

Rev. G. H. Kersten (1882-1948) saw how the church had degenerated during the 1800s. Thus he was very clear as to what are the unadulterated doctrines of salvation. With him there was no gray area: it was either black or white. This clarity can be seen in his Catechism sermons and in his book entitled *Reformed Dogmatics*. Rev. Kersten gives the following warning in the foreword to his *Reformed Dogmatics*: “Under the pretense of returning to the doctrine of Calvin, there is more and more an endeavor to neglect the writers that followed him, as if they were too scholastic. This has great dangers, and seeks to keep out of the hands of the people those books which confirm the precious work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, that is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, *in which the special and general ministry of the Spirit are distinguished. Consequently, historical faith is looked upon as saving faith, and the experience of the saints to be misguided piety.*”

It was in this context that the NRC of Grand Rapids was founded in 1870.

APPENDIX B

We must still be on guard against the same errors that were of concern at that time. Thus it is necessary that we be aware of how these errors differ from the doctrinal principles on which our church was founded.

IMPORTANT EXPERIENTIAL DOCTRINES AND COMMON ERRORS CONCERNING THESE DOCTRINES

The following is a summary of several important doctrines and of errors concerning these doctrines that were, and still are, of concern.

1. Both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility must be emphasized. Many churches that once professed and practiced this truth have moved towards placing a greater emphasis on man's responsibility, even though it is clear throughout Scripture that God's sovereignty is over all His works. Indeed, man is responsible by virtue of the fact that he was created good and upright. But man is now spiritually dead. Thus no appeal, suggesting man is capable of generating saving faith, may be made to this responsibility. Meanwhile our state of death must become, by grace, our guilt rather than our excuse or fate.¹
2. Both the necessity of regeneration and the offer of grace must be emphasized without putting so much focus on the duty to believe as to imply that man can do this in his own strength. Indeed, the call to repent and believe is scriptural, but it must be remembered that this is what we ought to do, not what we are able to do in our natural state. When the preaching of the duty to believe outweighs the necessity of being born again, hearers will end up helping themselves rather than waiting upon the Lord for deliverance.² It must be stressed that true saving faith is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8) planted in the heart at regeneration. By the Spirit's continuing work after regeneration this faith is increased, while the child

¹ Rev. A. Vergunst, "The Distinctive Theological Identity of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations," pg 8.

² Revs. Sonneveld, Kersten, Vergunst, den Hollander et al: "Every Tongue Should Confess..." Lethbridge 2012, pg 37.

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of God learns more and more that he cannot believe of himself. As the Spirit leads further, unbelief becomes his crowning sin. Such ones find that a divine command is needed: "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24). What a wonder! Christ died for all of the sins of His people, even for their sins of unbelief. They are saved in spite of their unbelief. Such ones learn, of a truth, that faith is a divine gift, for they find continually that they cannot believe of themselves. When God gives them His Son and His benefits, he gives them arms of faith to receive Him. As impossible as it was to believe before, it then becomes impossible to not believe. Thus they cannot but believe.

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3. A biblical distinction must be maintained between an outward and an inward call. A lack of this distinction promotes a salvation that man begins, continues, and finishes by himself and/or with the help of other mortals. Thus a salvation is promoted that begins without a miraculous regeneration whereby the prevailing enmity against God is broken and He is put on the throne of our hearts. The external call must go forth, looking unto God to work the rebirth in the hearts of the hearers. If this rebirth takes place, the individual will become a great sinner before God and will learn that he cannot find the way. With all the rhetoric of those around him who might try to help, and with all of his scholarship, his case becomes more and more hopeless. He sinks deeper with all his seeking, praying, trying to believe, etc., until he becomes totally bankrupt with all his efforts. When the Lord empties a sinner to make room for the Savior, the sinner cannot stop that emptying process.

4. A clear distinction must be made between common grace and saving grace. Without this distinction, one could be inclined to assume that temporal blessings, as well as remarkable providences of support during and deliverance from natural afflictions in his life, are indications of being in favor with God. Also, a turning unto God for merely selfish ends could be taken as true conversion. One can seek the Lord from time to time for selfish ends, without having the conviction that He is worthy in and of Himself to be served and glorified. Satan also can be transformed into an angel of light and can attempt to convince one that these outward blessings are evidence that one has peace with God and thus it is well for time and eternity.

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5. The biblical order of salvation must be maintained. Many are willing to speak about the marks of grace, but they hardly focus on the different steps in the life of grace.³ Maintaining the order of salvation stresses the need for the miraculous, almighty, and irresistible work and leading of the Holy Spirit for each of God's people, beginning with the inward knowledge of our misery. Maintaining the order of salvation as emphasized in our Heidelberg Catechism leaves less room for error.

6. Both Christ and the way in which a sinner is led to Him must be preached. Otherwise there is a speaking about a Christ for Whom no room has ever been made in the heart. Instead of being "undressed" and uncovered, man is rather "dressed up" and built up. The result is a happy Christendom and possessing people who never lose what they presume to have. True religion is experiential. So when we talk of the experiences of the saints, we are speaking of how and what the Holy Spirit works in the heart by His special ministry. We are told in Acts 24:24 that Felix "heard him [Paul] concerning the faith in Christ." This indicates that Paul spoke not only about Christ but also about how the Spirit works true saving faith in the heart of a sinner. Christ taught that the Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He spoke of the Father's hiding these things from the wise and prudent and revealing them unto babes (Matt. 11:25), and of the Father's drawing a sinner unto the Son (John 6:44).

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If we consider the Scriptures, we see repeatedly that true religion is experiential and not merely an intellectual exercise. For example, consider God's meeting Moses in the inn to slay him, Jacob at Bethel and Peniel, Ps. 40, Ps. 116, Ps. 130, Is. 6 & 12, Jer. 45:4, Lam. 3:22-33, Hos. 5:15, Zech. 3, Luke 24:36, John 20:19, Acts 2, and Acts 9:3-9, etc.

We also see this experiential leading of the Holy Spirit in the life of the disciples. After they were quickened, convicted of sin, and the way of salvation in a divine Savior was revealed unto them (John 3:3, Eph. 2:1, Matt. 5:4, Matt. 16:16-17), they experienced that all hope and expectation outside of Christ had to be cut off: that Christ arose for their justification, that Christ ascended to the Father so that they could be

³ Revs. Sonneveld, Kersten, Vergunst, den Hollander et al: "Every Tongue Should Confess..." Lethbridge 2012, pg 38.

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brought into the Father-heart of God, and that the Spirit was poured out in their hearts to seal the work of and apply a Triune God to them.

The saving work of the Holy Spirit in the heart does give marks of grace by which one can see if it is His saving work, but we are not to rest in them. Christ is the only ark of safety, the only Mediator. We, as fallen creatures, are enemies of salvation exclusively by Jesus Christ. The hypocrite does not experience much of this enmity, but the saints do and thus unbelief becomes their greatest sin. The hypocrite can solve this by working up the faith he needs to take the Savior, but a saint becomes so poor and hopelessly lost that he needs it all to be given from above. For the hypocrite, salvation is merely a humanly actuated process; his faith is historical faith and, at most, temporary faith. If we do not believe that the saving work in the heart of a sinner includes the Holy Spirit's leading experientially, then it is something that natural man can make happen, as opposed to waiting on the Lord to work it in our hearts. We must be effectually and experientially taught by the Holy Spirit that there can be no way prescribed whereby a natural man can, of his own strength, obtain that which is supernatural, since that can only be given by an Almighty God. God is a jealous God and will have all the honor and glory for the salvation of a sinner. Thus, "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

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7. There must be a biblical view of the way in which spiritual life is experienced. When a sinner is not discovered to his spiritual state of death and his hell-worthiness, he may be urged to go to Jesus and to believe in Jesus, but he will do so in the way of a broken covenant of works. This danger is very subtle, and one against which we need to be on guard. An urging to go to the Savior without an experiential discovery of one's deep fall promotes a presumptuous seeking and finding that is within the reach of natural man. In this manner, a humanly actuated process is advocated whereby one can come unto God with Christ (a mere helping Savior), as opposed to coming unto Him through Christ as a complete Savior for a completely bankrupt sinner, which is only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner.

APPENDIX B

CONCLUSION

We pray God will give us the grace and wisdom to maintain the doctrines which are consistent with His Word, and that His Word may be a lamp unto our feet and a light upon our path, directing us in the way that we must go. The experiential way in which God leads His people can be summarized by observing the ongoing trials of a saint in Romans 7, his strength in Romans 8, and his joy in Romans 9.

The future of our church will be impacted and the rich heritage that has been given us can be lost if we do not faithfully and prayerfully strive to preserve the old paths. It is a way in which God is exalted to the highest and man is abased to the lowest in the salvation of a sinner. All praise, honor and thanksgiving be unto His holy Name, forever and forever.



APPENDIX C

WHY A SECEDER?

BY REV. CORNELIUS VORST



Rev. Cornelius Vorst, the second pastor of the independent Division Avenue congregation, returned to the Christian Reformed Churches (CRC) in 1891 when he accepted a call to the CRC congregation of Lodi, New Jersey. While serving in New Jersey, he began to write a series of articles for “The Banner of Truth”⁴ titled “Why a Seceder?” He

recalled from his younger years, the experiences he had as a new immigrant, first in New York and later in West Michigan as he searched for the “tried truth” he had known, loved, and experienced for himself in the Netherlands. Finally, he described the circumstances which ultimately led to another secession in West Michigan, forming the Christian Reformed Churches in 1857. Although no direct references are made to the Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids, this “window” into his thoughts and opinions regarding biblical Reformed doctrine and practice in the church, perhaps, reveals what led him to affiliate himself with the young Division Avenue congregation and to subsequently become its pastor.

⁴ At that time, “The Banner of Truth” was a periodical for English-speaking Christian Reformed Church (CRC) members, which eventually became known as “The Banner” and still exists as a periodical in the CRC denomination today.

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These articles have been edited in order to combine them for readability.

I was a member of a church which bore the name of Seceder Church of the Netherlands. With this name she was known by the Government.

In the year 1834, many members left the Reformed Church because the formulas of unity were not binding any more.

The synod of the national Reformed Church did not hold itself to the doctrine nor government of the true Reformed Church. Did they not make this statement, and have they not since the year 1816 left the paths of the Reformed fathers? For instance: that Jesus Christ is the true Son of God was a doctrine denied by many.

The Arminian doctrine, that a person can repent and have saving faith if he only wills, was preached quite universally. The doctrine of sovereign election was discarded, and those who preached it were held to be fanatics or obstinate persons, etc. A hymnal, approved by the synod, containing about 200 hymns, was introduced in the churches, so that hereby the 150 psalms might be removed.

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The greater part of the ministers were also dissatisfied with the old, orthodox, “dry”, Heidelberg Catechism, because it was too dogmatical and the doctrine of misery and the glory of King Jesus would have to be taught too much.

There were also many ministers who did not hesitate to permit, yea, even invite to the Lord’s Supper, those who did not belong to the Reformed Church. Thus far the doors were opened. And since that the largest number of the ministers were destitute of true grace, the apostasy became more firm, and the conservative doctrine was looked upon as a dreadful monster. It was secretly depressed and set aside, until the liberal flag did wave above most of the churches in the Netherlands.

This was painful to the heart of the pious. At first they opposed and spoke against it, but liberalism became predominant. As the children of Israel in Egypt, so the orthodox cried to God for deliverance according

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to His good pleasure, and, behold, the Lord called forth one of His humblest servants, Rev. H. de Cock, to begin the work of reformation, or to be a hand and foot to the sighing people of God. With him, God also called others, of whom some are yet living, but most of them have left the church militant. In this way the Seceder Church arose. The Lord worked powerfully and divinely in those days. Deliverance came. Those who loved the doctrine of free grace according to the word of God and the institution of the fathers awoke. The spirit of the Lord God hovered as it were over the dead bones, and they came together bone to bone; the hearts did melt as it were in one. The spiritual life of God's children began to breathe; the old became new, love began to flame within the hearts. The old Reformed doctrine did not only receive its honor but it became, above all, precious unto them. Under the preaching of the true Gospel, those who loved the truth were brought in communion with God in Christ and were added to His people.

They all became seceders, and left either immediately or in time, the so-called Reformed Church of the Netherlands and united themselves under the name of Seceder Church of the Netherlands. Since that time the first Seceder congregation existed by this name. To belong to this people and church became also my blessed privilege. The Lord was pleased to bless this doctrine to my heart, whereby the people of God naturally became precious unto me. In proportion, as the power of the Spirit was experienced in His work, the acts of God in the way of secession could be observed and approved through faith, even though the heart otherwise naturally feels for the old church walls. When God works, it is easy to follow, even if the flesh must be crucified.

When this separation continued, there frequently arose not a small perplexity amongst the people, so that hatred, enmity and oppression from the mighty church lords, of whom many were rich (whereas the Seceders generally belonged to the common class), almost would have destroyed the poor people. But it was God's work, once begun by Him, and when He says, "Now shall I arise and hear thee, O Israel," then those people have a mighty King.

Wonderfully the Lord provided for the Seceder Church, and kept her

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in the truth until this day.

Of this church I have said I was a member when I arrived in New York, almost forty years ago. Being I was not acquainted with America, and thought it was very uncivilized, since most immigrants belonged to the laboring class, it did not appear attractive to me, nor did I have any desire for it [immigrating to America]. It is true, I did hear that many of God's people went, and especially those of the Seceders. This almost pained me, but that I should go myself I could never have thought. It nevertheless happened. O, how unsearchable are God's ways.

To act carefully, I had sought correspondence with the late Dr. A. C. van Raalte, of Holland, Michigan. With the greatest discretion, the honorable man answered me, and advised me to come directly to Michigan after I arrived in New York.

Being a member of the Seceder Church, I also asked if this church was in America. Of course he could not inform me regarding everything in particular, but wrote to me that this needed not to hinder me from coming through directly to Michigan. I was, however, not inclined to this, but desired to remain some time in New York, since I had others coming with me and could not journey so hastily. I therefore requested him to send me the address of two of his friends, where we could feel our goods were safe, and who could be trusted to assist us in exchanging our money.

Upon this I received the address of Dr. Thomas De Witt and Dr. Marselus, of New York. After I had arrived with friends [who had emigrated with us], and they had left for the west, I, with my wife, went to Dr. De Witt. Mrs. Zwaan brought us to the door but did not go in. I, ignorant as I was, began to speak with the doctor, first about my journey, and, after he had read the letter of Rev. van Raalte, we got somewhat more in a conversation. The church with me, naturally, was number one. I, a full-blooded Seceder, who had been on the water with my friends thirty-five days without being able to have regular service, panted as a hart for the water brooks, so we [did] for an opportunity to go to church. For this reason I went to Dr. De Witt to learn when

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he would preach Holland, which was done then once every month by him and Dr. Marselus. I was astonished when I saw his nice church; also his friendliness as long as we spoke about outward things, but I desired to hear something of this minister about the spiritual welfare of the soul, because our feet were now on the safe shore, and that desired most by us, was that we now might breathe freely (i.e. express ourselves without fear of harassment). The doctor asked me from whence I came. He also told me he was well acquainted in Amsterdam. I asked him if he knew Rev. S. van Velzen. Upon this the doctor answered no. I asked more and more, but by questioning found myself more in darkness. The doctor was acquainted with the classis of Amsterdam, but it was of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, from which I had seceded. It was at this occasion that I for the first time was called a “seceder”. A “seceder”, I thought; wonder what that word means? But by the very action of Dr. De Witt I could notice that he did not think much of my church. He gave me a card with which I could go to Dr. Marselus.

With the hand of Providence and the card of Dr. De Witt, I arrived safe at Dr. Marselus. The Doctor received me very courteously; I narrated our birth, also our intention to go west soon, where Rev. van Raalte lived. The Doctor knew Rev. van Raalte and spoke very highly of him; especially because he was the preparer of the way through which the following generations coming from the Netherlands to America should be led and the benefit that was to come through this into the church.

The Doctor was also much pleased with the love I had for the church, and that I spoke more about this than other emigrants whom he had met.

It was natural that I was immediately marked by him as a good Christian. I asked him on what Sunday he was going to preach in the Dutch language. His reply was, “Next Sunday afternoon.” Then my heart began to sing:

O God, our shield, with face benign
Look on Thy servant, wholly Thine,
And keep him, Lord, Thou great Defender!
One day, passed in Thy house of praise,

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Is better than a thousand days
Spent in the realm of earthly splendor.
Though only at Thy door I wait,
No tents of sin give joy so great.

— Psalm 84

As Dr. De Witt had done, so also Dr. Marselus asked about my church affiliation. I, as a seceder, spoke freely, not knowing that he was not acquainted with our church in the Netherlands. But, to my great surprise, I learned that the Doctor and his church were one with, or corresponded with the church which Rev. van Raalte and I had left, as a sister church.

Indeed America appeared to me now as a new world, but not so desirable. What to do? We were here now, and everything was arranged for us to go to Holland, Michigan, in the near future. The best thing to do was to see how to get there, then we would be in the Holland colony, and that would undoubtedly be more pleasing to me. Many who had belonged with me to the same church denomination were there.

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To my delight, the Sunday came that we could go to church. The previous Sunday we had met at the house of Mr. Zwaan, where a sermon was read from Smytegelt or some other old writer. The family could not understand the English, but I learned that this was not the only reason why they did thus [stayed home from the church services]. It was also strange to me that they had not the same desire to go to hear the gospel in our own language as I had.

Not all of them went to Dr. Marselus' church. I, nevertheless, expected to have a feast.

In the church it was difficult for me to collect my thoughts. Such a large church and so few people to listen to the sermon? This grieved me. There were many more Hollanders in New York, of whom I had met some, and they were not in the church now? The thought rose in my mind, I wonder if they are home to listen to the reading of some

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old sermon? It was mysterious to me, but afterwards I understood. The Hollanders who remained at home and took care of the tools received more than we in the temple. Here the proverb was confirmed, "All that glitters is not gold." I heard Dr. Marselus deliver a Holland sermon, but instead of preaching, it was read; besides, it was more Remonstrant than Reformed, neither did it have sound practice in it; on the contrary the sermon was very superficial. Now it was not so surprising to me why the Hollanders did not come and listen to the sermon.

It would have been a silent Sabbath to me had I not heard an edifying sermon read from Rev. Hellenbroek in the morning.

That Dr. Marselus read a printed Holland sermon, I could excuse, but that it was a water-and-milk⁵ sermon, this pained me, because then God's precious day was spent so in vain. Never had I heard such an unreformed sermon either read or preached in the Seceder Church in the Netherlands. It was also strange to me that the minister read his sermon, instead of preaching it without manuscript, as all the ministers were accustomed to do in those days. Oh what a difference between the Holland and American churches! I was very much displeased.

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Civility required me to see Dr. Marselus before leaving for Michigan, and I did so the following Monday. As usual, he was very friendly, and I did not doubt his sincerity; on the contrary, I believed he was honest, yes, even so conscientious that it sometimes brought the tears. The doctor was much pleased with the arrival of Hollanders. This, of course, gave liberty and freedom of speech to me. After a short conversation, the doctor asked me if that sermon of yesterday was a good one? I thought, "O dear, please be silent on that subject, for if I must speak my thoughts in truth, my answer is No." As the doctor used broken Holland in speaking, I was hoping he would notice my ignorance to make this clear when I gave a dodging answer. The reader must know that the doctor was friendly, having gray hairs, respectable, different in clothing from the business men, both in word and deed he appeared to be a minister, which made him more honorable in my estimation. I

⁵ In other words, the sermon was deficient in (or completely missing) spiritual nourishment and instruction for those souls hungering for the word of God.

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thought then, and now even more so, that a minister in the Reformed Church was to be distinctly separated or known from others, because the rank of prince, king or emperor cannot be compared to that of a minister in the Reformed Church, for they are as our fathers used to say: Ambassadors of the King of kings, servants of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, who must deliver His Word as they have received it. For this reason they are called His servants, also angels (Rev. ii, 3). They are to keep themselves separated from those that belong to this world.

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Upon earnest request, as if the doctor thought I might pass a good judgment upon the sermon, I began, with due respect, to make my complaint, and told him wherein it did consist: neither my Holland friends nor I were edified. This was a great surprise to the doctor; he thought it was a very good sermon, because it had been written by a minister that stood in Amsterdam, and also died there. I knew in that large city, of twenty-eight Reformed ministers, only two that were sound. I asked the doctor who had published that sermon? His reply was, "The Classis of Amsterdam, or a committee, for the benefit of widow J. W. van Staveren." When I heard this I knew enough, but asked, "How could you read such a sermon in your congregation? This half-Jewish and half-Ashdodish is something in which nothing can be found for the edifying of the souls of the people of God." The doctor replied that those books had been sent by the Classis of Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. It seemed therefore that the doctor did not understand what he read.

After I had explained to the doctor the condition of this [Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands] church, as I had also done to Dr. De Witt, he also was dissatisfied with me. He told me that Dr. De Witt had attended an ecclesiastical assembly at Amsterdam not long ago, and that his church also kept up correspondence with the Amsterdam Classis; he could therefore not think so badly of this church. When I asked him whether he knew Rev. van Velzen, of Amsterdam, or Rev. Brummelkamp, from Arnhem, he declared that they were unknown to him; yes, he did not even know that there was a Seceder Church in the Netherlands, and if it was so, then they were likely Separatists, as there were such persons in Jersey.

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“What!” I asked. “Are there also Seceders in this country?” The doctor answered me, “In Jersey.” Where Jersey was or where the State of New Jersey lay was to me as unknown as California; but that there were such people in America I understood thoroughly. But they were not much respected by Dr. Marselus.

I asked the reason for their separation, but could not understand this. Then I asked the Hollanders that lived in New York—some of them had also belonged to the Seceder Church in the Netherlands. The persons of whom I received the most information was the Zwaan family and Mr. and Mrs. Van Der Wall; the last named have been our neighbors in Holland, Michigan. I learned that the doctrine of the Rev. van Staveren, of whom I heard a sermon read, was in general the doctrine of the Reformed Church; also that they permitted members of different denominations to attend the Lord’s Table, and that the baptism of children was casual and informal, as if a midwife performed it.

They also told me that the [Heidelberg] Catechism was preached once every four years, though not according to the Church Order of Dordt. Also, that the Formula of Unity was not binding; otherwise no freemason could belong to the Church where discipline was exercised, because if it was, the Church would be cleansed of them.

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There was still another item, namely, that the Dutch Reformed Church had almost 800 hymns, instead of psalms, which they sang. However, at that time they did not yet have the hymns of Moody and Sankey.

I thought, by myself, I am glad I belong to the Seceder Church, and expected to find its continuation in Holland, Michigan.

It cannot be surprising to any one who has his church near at heart, that I had been very much discouraged by Dr. Marselus as well as by Dr. De Witt, to go to the west. Rev. van Raalte was known to both of them and regarded as very trustworthy. They also mentioned names of respectable persons in the Dutch Reformed Church, who were constant helpers to Rev. van Raalte. Two of the names of those honorable persons I remember distinctly yet, as I had a conversation with them myself.

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They were Mr. Schieffelin, a wholesale druggist, and Mr. Campbell, a broker. They were extremely friendly and serviceable, also clever in giving, so that I could have received many favors of them had I sought it; but of seceders they would not hear. To them, also, I pointed out as clear as possible the sin of freemasonry and that it could have no right of existence in the Reformed Church. But when I learned afterwards what kind of persons were members of the freemason lodge, then I understood why they were so opposed to the seceders in Jersey. Before I left New York I knew I was to pass with the train through New Jersey to Michigan. O, how I would like to have inquired who those seceders were, as I had heard of the Hollanders in New York, that they were still of the old stamp, tender before God and man, but despised by many. Never had I thought then that I would so soon hear of the seceders of New Jersey in Michigan. Especially in a new world, a person will frequently lose for some time the subject of former meditation, whereas land and sand and the cares of life will prevail for a season. Nevertheless circumstances worked together without it being noticed. God was working this. Who would not rejoice when, after a long journey, he finally has a home for himself? At least so it was with me. Never could I acknowledge the Lord sufficiently for his keeping and parental care. I felt myself perfectly at home in those foreign parts because there were many people at that time that feared God and served him out of love, so that the Holland colony, however much despised by some town people, became to me as a Zoar to Lot. But as to the manner of religious worship, I soon detected a difference from that in the Netherlands. On the one side there was an exaggerated piety, as for instance to pray and sing psalms at a political caucus, and with reference to the exercise of Godliness, it moderated with the spirit of the time. What was regarded in the Netherlands churches as evil, yes, as sin, was church custom here. In the Netherlands the 150 Psalms with the spiritual songs of Mary, Simeon and Zacharias were used in the services, but here, the Reformed Church had 788 hymns which have replaced the Psalms in the congregations. Besides, liberty was given to preach the entire catechism only once every four years. This robbed the congregations of the necessary instruction by which they would be strengthened against the superior power of Anti-Reformed churches and errors in doctrine, as it was left us for true comfort and the advancement in Godliness. O,

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how strange to me, and had it only been in the form of church worship in which I saw such changes, it could easily have been overlooked; but the changes touched the very substance of holy things. This grieved me most, because in this way the tried truth lost much of her strength and beauty. The preciousness of the service of Jesus Christ, who for His people is the life of their soul, is much darkened. The doctrine of sovereign grace in Christ and a free salvation through grace in Christ, cannot be believed, tasted and experienced, if He is not the only Name and Person given by the Father for wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption. In this way the truth loses its power in the midst of the congregation, and the labor of the ministers, in course of time, will become unfruitful. Living under these impressions, I frequently thought of what I had experienced at New York; nevertheless I was in Holland and would have to stay there.

We were received and waited upon most cordially by Rev. van Raalte and his pious wife. Much, very much, now and then has been said wrongly, yea, even slanderously against him, having its origin in the advice and help offered to coming emigrants; nevertheless, I say much, yea, very much, was malicious slander. The circumstances with me were so that I frequently came in contact with Rev. van Raalte, more so, because my spirit was not in unity with his church. This he knew, but should I now view every advice given by Rev. van Raalte, whose result was not in conformity with my spirit, as deceit or faithlessness? From this the Lord preserved me, for the reason that Rev. van Raalte never gave me any cause; on the contrary, even when I had left his church and was again in the seceder church⁶ in this country, he nevertheless showed his great and manly character.

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To whomsoever it might appear, in the future, out of my writing in the BANNER, that there was not the least unity between Rev. van Raalte and myself as to the church governmental sphere, I nevertheless want it absolutely understood that Dr. A. C. van Raalte, who some time ago passed away, was a noble person. He was gifted with a quick judgment

⁶ Rev. Vorst refers to the formation of the Christian Reformed Churches in 1857, which was due, in part, to the concerns with the Reformed Churches in America (RCA) as described in this article.

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and understanding; he had excellent and great spiritual gifts; he had a beautiful talent and ability to draw the people. He had to bear heavy burdens, but had faith enough to sail through all troubles, since he was so supported by his will power that he would rather hide himself than stand ashamed. To me he has always been a true helper and adviser; no wonder that I honored and esteemed him highly and had full confidence in his honesty. It always pains me when I hear evil spoken of Rev. van Raalte. As a father of the colony, he spent many sleepless nights. The insults cast upon him were very unjust. Rev. van Raalte was also a man and dependent on the advice of others, as for instance, of Mr. Kellogg and others at Allegan, so that he had a double burden, that of public person, land owner, and minister of his congregation and surrounding places. His birth and education were really above the central class in which he was to move. Therefore his self-denial was much greater than that of the emigrants, driven here by poverty or oppression, could realize. As there are yet many, who in the Netherlands, belonging to the Seceder (Chr. Ref.) Church, when coming here easily join the Dutch Reformed [RCA churches], no one should consider that Rev. van Raalte did so. He has showed me himself the many benefits prominent members of said church of the State of New York afforded him and the poor emigrants.

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Truly their [the RCA churches] help was noble, for the colony was in need. Neither may we as a people that fear God fail to see God's hand in this; on the contrary, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" should stand in the foreground. Rev. van Raalte, being a sensitive man, could with tears in his eyes, not repress his feelings when he freely spoke of the eastern friends.

Although I was an emigrant, the prospect of coming poverty had not caused me to leave the Netherlands, as it had with many, nor a better future for my children, for I had none. This Rev. van Raalte knew. On the contrary, the panic of 1857 made the Dutch money as attractive as the charitable gifts of the church friends. That what he did not consider with others, he did with me, sometimes out of urgent necessity of the time. For this reason I have read with an entire different impression

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the article of Rev. H. E. Dosker in the Hope⁷ than others who are not acquainted with the separation,⁸ as Rev. Dosker calls it. However, more about this later. In the Netherlands, as a young man, I began to study, viz., private instruction. There was no theological school in Kampen then. This instruction I received of Rev. S. van Velzen, then minister at Amsterdam, now a professor at Kampen, since I did not have the assurance in my heart that the Lord had called me to the ministry, which was necessary for me to know.

I wondered how so many young men went to study for the ministry at that time in Holland, Michigan. From some families two sons became students, while I personally felt it must be nearly impossible for any person to commence such a holy work. The difference of opinion between Rev. van Raalte and myself was so wide that I now more than ever loved my Dutch Seceder Church, being a citizen of America and a member of the Dutch Reformed Church.⁹

Through the courteous treatment and counsel which I received of Rev. van Raalte and my ignorance with the English language made me feel very much obliged to him.

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Through his powerful language and speech he frequently conquered my heart. This, with the excellence of his sermons, and the earnest desire of my soul for the Lord's Day and the preaching, did quiet for a time all my superstition against his church. Those with whom I presented my certificate of membership to Rev. van Raalte, were Henry Rot and Peter van Leenwen. Since those certificates were given by the Seceder Church in the Netherlands, and we desired to remain members of that church, we inquired especially into this; upon which we received the answer that "the Dutch Reformed Church was a continuation of the

⁷ A church periodical of the Reformed Church in America published in the 1800s.

⁸ The "separation" referred to here is that which formed the Christian Reformed Churches in 1857.

⁹ By "Dutch Reformed Church", Rev. Vorst is disappointedly referring to the "Reformed Protestant Dutch Church" (now known as the Reformed Churches in America), to which Rev. van Raalte and the churches in the Holland Classis joined themselves in 1850.

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Seceder Church in the Netherlands.” Considering we did not have a thorough understanding of the union¹⁰ existing between the churches in the West and East we received this testimony for what it was, because we were displeased with the church life which we detected was much different from what we had left in our [Seceder] Church in the Netherlands. Soon I detected that we were not the only ones who wished we could find a church here such as we had left. But that was past. The preaching of Rev. van Raalte was as good as could be expected.

We, however, detected new things, but where to go? There was only one church [in the area]; this was Rev. Van Raalte’s. Therefore no other church could be found in which we knew from the preaching, worship, and discipline that the Formula of Unity was binding.

While in the Netherlands, not only the ministers who served our congregation spoke according to our heart; but also our elders, who regularly led the meeting on Sabbath days, read such sermons. Because I was young when I joined the church, the preaching and the reading had a powerful effect upon me. I was, therefore, a great lover of sound doctrine, as it was heard there according to the word of God. There were some who did not tenderly love the elder of our congregation; but I did. I was glad when he would speak to me, because his prayer, speech, and the reading of sermons were all precious to me. This was also the same with the friends who came with me to America, with the exception of one family, whom I did not know before, but took along with me upon request of Rev. van Raalte. The husband of this family (W. Stark) worked for Rev. van Raalte, and he (Rev. van Raalte) acted as security for the repayment of the money. Beside these, we took another lady along who spoke the English language, upon condition of repaying [her] expenses.

In the beginning of this year, Rev. H. E. Dosker began to write in the Hope about the life and labor of Rev. van Raalte. I thought Rev.

¹⁰ The union between the liberal “Reformed Protestant Dutch” (RCA) churches in the East and the churches organized as the “Holland Classis” in the “west” (i.e. West Michigan) formed by more conservative “seceders” who had immigrated from the Netherlands.

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Dosker would give a faithful account of what he knew; but he had hardly begun when it appeared that he only repeated what his father, Rev. N. H. Dosker, had written about his church [Dutch Reformed]. The contents were, as Rev. H. E. Dosker was pleased to call it, to bring forth anew before the public the subject of Separation and the writing of his father. This book, written at Grand Rapids, Michigan, was unknown to me, although residing there at that time. The book was procured by me, and when read, I felt indignant because the history was presented entirely unjust. To call those who had joined the old body upon condition, as myself and others, by such a disgraceful name as Separatists; thus to stigmatize the Seceders in the West! The young Rev. Dosker gave us the name of Separatists, and schismatics, instead of true adherents of the Reformed doctrine, discipline and worship according to God's word. This inconsiderate language pressed me to give the history and the reasons why I with others became Seceders in America. I will try and prevent as much as possible to mention the name of my old honorable friend Rev. van Raalte, because I know that his relatives desire this when we publicly write about the Separation. Had not Rev. Dosker taken it up in the Hope for several successive weeks, placing our church and congregation in a false light, through which the readers were led away from the truth and inculcated with falsehood, I had not begun to describe the subject more accurately. When Rev. Dosker (and also myself) speaks of the East, then we are to understand by it the Reformed church in the states of New York and New Jersey; or, better expressed, the English speaking element of the Dutch Reformed Church.¹¹ But because they had their existence as well as origin in the Eastern States, therefore they were named "The East." The East was not to be rejected, because she did much for the Holland colony in Michigan.

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As a church body she had her name in the row of Protestant churches. As an American church she sought to keep step with others, and grew in outward appearance and strength. There was no lack of desire to spread or enlarge her coast, and where the opportunity was lacking at a previous time, now a door was opened by the Holland emigrants.

¹¹ These congregations now known as the Reformed Churches in America (RCA).

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Such an opportunity is worth a financial sacrifice for the American and also for the Hollander. That money was the cause which inclined the first ministers of the colony to unite with the Dutch Reformed Church instead of the United Presbyterian, which had much more similarity with the Seceder Church in the Netherlands, is without any certain ground. It was not the money, but the denominational name (i.e. "Reformed Protestant Dutch Church") that attracted the immigrants to the Reformed churches in the East. In addition to this, their ignorance of the eastern Reformed churches led to the union as not one of the immigrant ministers was sufficiently acquainted with the eastern churches nor with the other denominations. They could have known, as they afterwards did, that the eastern Dutch Reformed churches recognized the Netherland Reformed Church (the Dutch "Hervormde Kerk", i.e. the national Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands) as a sister church. All the ministers in the colony came from the Seceder Church of the Netherlands and were separated, as well as myself, from the Netherlands Reformed Church (the national Dutch Reformed Churches of the Netherlands). What the Seceder ministers condemned in the Netherlands, they embraced in America. This mostly arose out of ignorance of the true condition; had most of them known the truth, that the Dutch Reformed Church in America has thousands of freemasons—to mention only this—it would have been impossible for them to yield with their congregations to rest easily in the arms of freemasons.

This was to them absolutely a secret. Who was the cause of it I now pass by silently.

In addition to this was the money question. Most of the first ministers, would have regarded it to be a great sin to have sold themselves and their congregations for money. Such talk would have been considered nonsense. How could Rev. van der Meulen do such, and may we think it of others? Let no one do it. But money was scarce, even if it was not hard cash. The commonly called "wild-cat money"¹² was also

¹² During the pre-Civil War era, wildcat banks, although technically legal, abused the bank note-issuing authority of state banks by issuing bank notes or paper money, known as "wild-cat money", under circumstances that discouraged or rendered

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very acceptable [and available]. The colony was poor financially, but the Lord dwelt richly with His spirit in the log huts of His children; it was precious to be an inhabitant there.

In this great moneyless time the eastern churches could help, and so the Dutch Reformed Church (the eastern RCA congregations) offered this assistance. The question was asked if no other churches were willing to do this? The answer was, yes. Other denominations offered assistance. But the name (“Dutch Reformed Church”) so familiar to the Holland people sounded precious, and this church received the preference, and ministers and congregations, though small and weak, were led to this union without a true knowledge of her existence as a Reformed church in America. The die was cast as to the commencement of affiliation with this church; it was enacted by the leading persons. Among them were those who did not understand much about church affairs. Again, others, also among those who came, were members from the national Reformed Church of the Netherlands who desired not to hear of a Seceder Church.

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They were perfectly at home in the old body, because they were not so much attached to the doctrine of the fathers of 1618-19. At first they were not so well pleased; but gradually they began to work more harmoniously, and the first Hollanders consented, upon the advice of their leaders, to join the Dutch Reformed Church.

That this step was too hasty and wrong we desire to show in the following article.

Obviously, Rev. Vorst intended to write an additional article (or more) relating the history of the Reformed churches in Michigan. However, no additional articles were written and in the “Church News” section of the August 1893 issue of the Banner of Truth the announcement was made: “We regret to learn that Rev. C. Vorst of Lodi, NJ has suffered a shock of paralysis, and is unable to continue his labors. If it be the Lord’s will, may he be restored

impossible conversion into physical gold and silver (<http://encyclopedia-of-money.blogspot.com/2015/09/wildcat-banks-united-states.html>).

The UNFAILING FAITHFULNESS of GOD

to the church and his family.” In 1895, Rev. Vorst left the CRC congregation of Lodi, New Jersey and returned to live in Holland, MI where he passed away on May 20, 1898 at the age of seventy-two years.

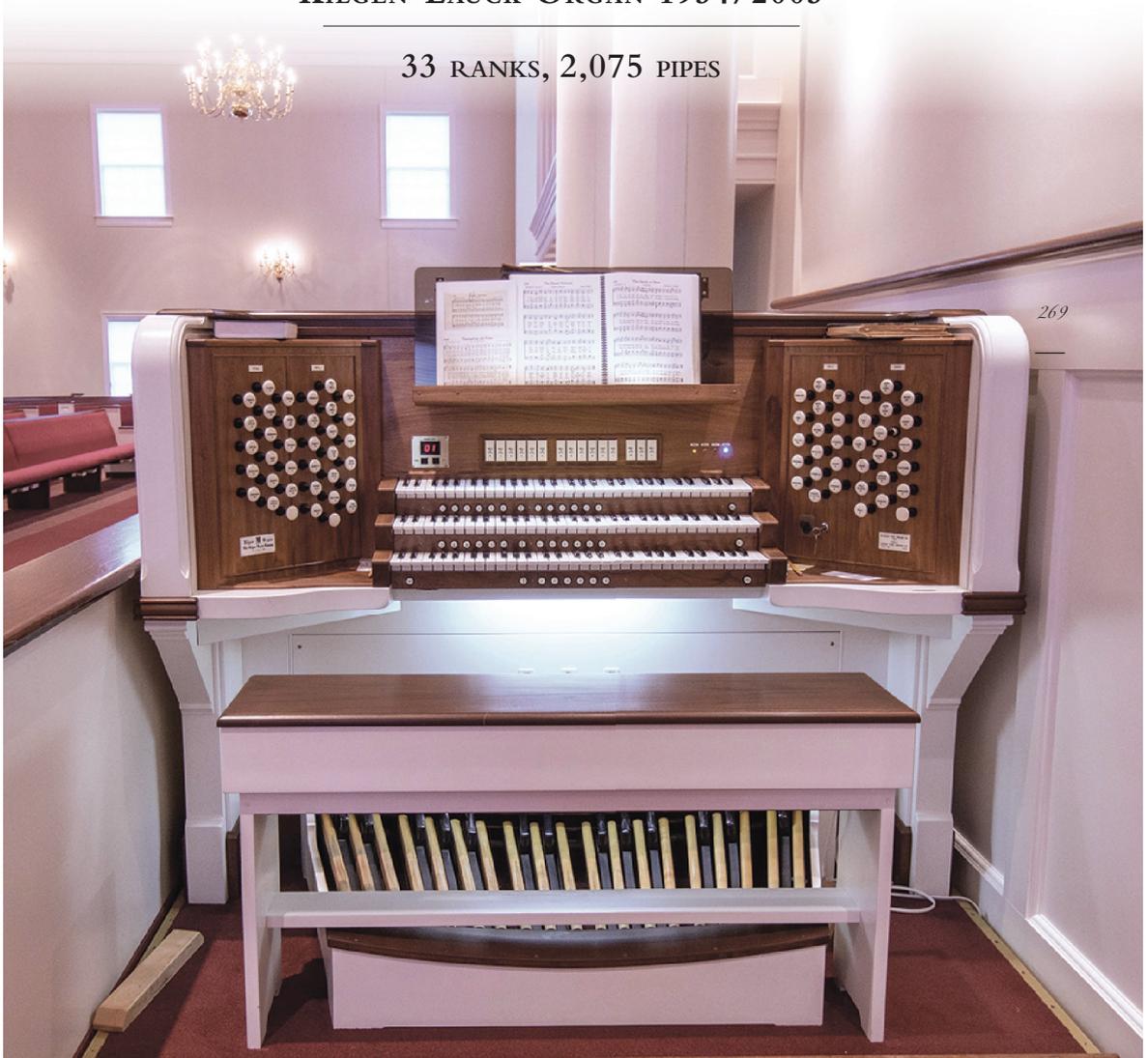


APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

THE SPECIFICATION FOR THE ORGAN
INSTALLED AT THE FIRST NETHERLANDS REFORMED
CONGREGATION ON BECKWITH AVENUE (AS OF JANUARY 2020)
KILGEN-LAUCK ORGAN 1954/2003

33 RANKS, 2,075 PIPES



GREAT

Unenclosed, 4" wind, except for
Tuba on 8" wind

STOP	PIPES
16' Gemshorn (ext. from 8')	12
8' Diapason	61
8' Clarabella	61
8' Gemshorn	61
8' Erzähler II	(Choir)
4' Octave	61
4' Waldflute (ext. from 8' Clarabella)	12
2 2/3' Twelfth	61
1 1/2' Mixture IV	244
8' Tuba (ext. from Pedal Trombone)	17
Chimes (25 tubes)	
Tremulant	
Great to Great 16'	
Great to Great 4'	
Unison Off	

SWELL

Enclosed, Flues on 4" wind,
Reeds on 5" wind

STOP	PIPES
16' Gedeckt (ext. from 8')	12
8' Geigen	61
8' Chimney Flute	61
8' Salicional	61
8' Voix Celeste	49
4' Geigen Octave	61
4' Rohrflute (ext. from 8')	12
2' Octavin (ext. from 4' G. O.)	12
2' Plein Jeu III	183

16' Fagotto (ext. from 8')	12
8' Trumpet	61
8' Fagotto	61
8' Vox Humana	61
4' Clarion (ext. from 8' Trpt.)	12
Tremulant	
Swell to Swell 16'	
Swell to Swell 4'	
Unison Off	
Blank	

CHOIR

Enclosed, 4" wind

STOP	PIPES
8' Koppelflute	61
8' Viola	61
8' Viola Celeste	49
8' Erzähler	61
8' Erzähler Celeste	49
4' Fugara (ext. from 8' Viola)	12
4' Nachthorn	61
2 2/3' Nazard	61
2' Blockflute	61
1 3/5' Tierce	61
1 1/2' Larigot (ext. from 2 2/3 to c''')	
8' Clarinet	61
8' Tuba	(Great/Pedal)
Tremulant	
Choir to Choir 16'	
Choir to Choir 4'	
Unison Off	
Blank	

PEDAL

Unenclosed, 4" wind, Trombone/
Tromba/Clarion on 8" wind

STOP

PIPES

32' Contra Bourdon	(Electronic)
32' Lieblich Gedeckt	(Electronic)
16' Diapason	32
16' Bourdon	32
16' Gedeckt	(Swell)
16' Gemshorn	(Great)
10 $\frac{2}{3}$ Quint (from 16' Brdn.)	
8' Principal (ext. from 16' Diap.)	12
8' Bourdon (ext. from 16' Brdn.)	12
4' Octave (ext. from 8' Principal)	12
32' Cornet IV	(Derived)
16' Trombone	32
16' Fagotto	(Swell)
8' Tromba (ext. from 16' Trom.)	12
4' Clarion (ext. from 8' Trom.)	12
Blank	

CONTROLS

- 12 general pistons
- 6 divisional pistons each for Great, Swell, Choir, and Pedal divisions.
- 6 toe studs for activating pedal pistons
- 7 toe studs duplicating General pistons 1-7
- Great to Pedal reversible toe stud
- Swell to Pedal reversible toe stud
- Choir to Pedal reversible toe stud
- SFZ reversible toe stud
- 64 memory levels

COUPLERS

Great to Pedal	8'
Great to Pedal	4'
Swell to Pedal	8'
Swell to Pedal	4'
Choir to Pedal	8'
Choir to Pedal	4'
Swell to Great	16'
Swell to Great	8'
Swell to Great	4'
Choir to Great	16'
Choir to Great	8'
Choir to Great	4'
Swell to Choir	16'
Swell to Choir	8'
Swell to Choir	4'



APPENDIX E

THE AFFLICTED AND POOR PEOPLE THAT TRUST IN THE LORD

Throughout the history of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation, there have been remarkable evidences of those favored ones of heaven among its membership. A common characteristic of these people was their spiritual poverty and dependence on the Lord to lead them in the way everlasting. They often had to pray with the Psalmist in Psalm 139:23 and 24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Such ones have learned by the quickening work of the Holy Spirit of the corruption and deceitfulness of their own hearts, and of the holiness, righteousness, and justice of the Lord.

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ALBERT VISSIA - JUSTIFIED BY THE LORD

Albert was born in Indiana on June 9, 1901. Sometime after that, his family moved to the area of Corsica, South Dakota. They attended the services of a group that later became the Corsica Netherlands Reformed Congregation. The Lord was pleased to regenerate Albert when he was a young man. Some years later, while living in Grand Rapids, he wrote in a letter to a friend (Dick Spaans, Sr.) how he experienced the forgiveness of his sins and justification. The letter was dated December 28, 1939. He and his wife, Gertrude, were members of



Albert Vissia

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the Netherlands Reformed Congregation on Division Avenue at that time.

After the Lord regenerated him, the Holy Spirit showed him that he was not able to make amends for his sins and guilt. He found that the law strictly demands satisfaction. He wrote,

We were created in a covenant of works, and when we receive a new life our work-holy nature is so busy, but God lets us work ourselves to death. By these means I was given to see more and more the impossibility to ever be saved by the works of the law, and that Christ was the end of the law for everyone that believeth. There was no way anymore to escape that well deserved punishment. My soul began to love the justice of God and I was not willing that He would step off from His justice. I could undersign with my own hand that God was just to condemn me forever.

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Finding that he had not one penny to pay for his guilt, he was given to look prayerfully to Him for a way of deliverance. One night the Lord was pleased to lead him to Golgotha. There he saw that his sins had pierced the hands and feet of Jesus, and he expected that He would look at him in wrath and revenge. But to his surprise, He looked upon him with compassion. He wept bitterly because his sins had nailed Him to the cross.

Albert then sought refuge in the Savior. He desired him to be his Prophet to teach him, his Priest to intercede for him and to atone for his sins, and his King to rule and govern his heart. At this time the burden of sin did not weigh so heavily upon him anymore, but nevertheless, his guilt was still open. About this he wrote the following:

His sweet and encouraging promise continually re-echoed in my soul, "Seek and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you," Matthew 7:7b, and again, "Though your sins ... be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," Isaiah 1:18c.

While in the field picking corn one day, he suddenly was desperate and at his wits end. His sins were like mountains reaching to heaven. He wanted to flee, but did not know where to go. It then came with power in his heart: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome

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the world,” John 16:33b. This was confirmed for him the next Sunday when Rev. VandeHoef spoke from the same text. A week later he discovered that he was still missing something from the words of I Cor. 13:1, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” Then it pleased the Lord to shed His love abroad in his heart and he was able to behold the Lord Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father. He then cried out, “Give me Jesus else I die, because without Him is an eternal destruction.” From then on his soul sought Him that he might find Him. He was daily praying in the Spirit and longing for Him. After this continued for some time, he heard his mother speaking about that dear Lord Jesus. This was accompanied with so much love and his soul went out to Him so that he cried out, “Lord Jesus, how long must I wait for Thee yet.” It then came into his heart that he would soon be with Him. Then he saw heaven open for him in the Spirit, and he beheld the Lord Jesus. Then these words came to him with power, “no man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him,” John 6:44a, and, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, John 14:6b.” These words continued to resound in his ears and heart.

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That same Sunday a sermon by Philpot on the death of a hypocrite was read resulting in Albert becoming more distressed inwardly. He saw himself a hypocrite who was trying in his own strength to fulfill the law and doomed to go lost not having a true saving faith. He left the church greatly distressed and after doing the farm chores that evening, terrible blasphemous thoughts came into his heart. He saw himself as eternally lost and saw the deep abyss open for him. Then it came to him that in the cross there is eternal salvation, and he was given to look up and behold Jesus and an open heaven. Then those words came back, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man can come unto me except the Father draw him.” He had comfort for a moment, and then it was gone again. His father noticed that he was distressed and asked what was wrong with him. But his distress was so great that he did not respond to the inquiry but fled to his bed. The pangs of hell got hold upon him. He saw hell open for him to swallow him up. Everything was cut off for his soul. When hope for deliverance was cut off, then it resounded in his soul, “Be merciful unto me, Oh God, be merciful unto me,” Psalm 57:1a. The next day he saw that he was like Demas having loved this present world again. Then it came to him with power, “thou art delivered from the law, or rather

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you are no more under the law but under grace.” He could then believe that Jesus took for him the revenge of the law subduing its demands. This resulted in the burden of sin falling off his back. Then his soul entered in a sweet betrothal with the Lord Jesus, and His presence was sweet for his soul.

Albert’s soul then longed for the divine acquittal. Soon after this he did public confession of faith, and at the same service the Lord’s Supper was administered. He wrote the following about this communion service:

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A long white robe was put on me, yes, I was carried from my bench as with the hands of angels to the table of the Lord. When the cup of blessing was given to me, I drank out of it because the Lord Jesus said, ‘this blood have I shed for the forgiveness of sin.’...then these words came with power in my soul, ‘be of good courage your sins are forgiven.’ Then my conscience was sprinkled with His cleansing blood and heaven was opened for me in the Spirit like for John on Patmos. I saw Jesus sit[ting] at the right hand of God the Father, and then it came with power in me, ‘died for our sins, but has risen again for our justification.’ The entire form for the Lord’s Supper was sanctified to my soul in Spirit and in truth. Yes, triune God, Thou shalt receive all the praise, reverence, and thankfulness to all eternity. Yes, my soul shall praise God eternally... Now dear brother, ask the Lord for deeper discovering light and grace, that your missingness may drive you out more and more to the Lord... Well brother, so we must die to all self-righteousness, frames and tears to find Jesus.

Thus Albert experienced receiving the divine acquittal from the Father based only on the finished and complete work of Christ. He could not but end in holy awe, wonder, and adoration in a triune God. Albert died in Grand Rapids on September 9, 1961.

APPENDIX E

A MOTHER IN THE CONGREGATION

Another one of these afflicted and poor people who was dependent on the Lord grew up in the Turner NRC church. During her married life she was a member of the First Netherlands Reformed Congregation. Rev. W.C. Lamain was the minister of this congregation during part of this time (1947–1984). She left behind a record of some of her religious exercises. The following are taken from her diary in which she gives evidence of being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, having experienced Christ being revealed to her soul as the way back to God, and longing for Him to be applied to her soul and being justified by her Judge. At various times when faith was in exercise, she could believe that she was washed of her sins and guilt. This can be seen from several of her diary entries. For example, she wrote the following about her exercises during a preparatory week in January 1974 regarding missing the knowledge of her sins being pardoned, and being given to believe that she was “washed”:

The Lord's Supper was celebrated. At the preparatory sermon, I felt myself included but much strife because I lack the knowledge of sin pardoned. It was good to sit with God's people but the week after I was one night much troubled about my sin. So many thoughts arose in my mind about how unfit I was. After some time these words came to my mind out of I Corinthians 6:11, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed." I was lying in bed in wonder and humility. Washed by the water of regeneration.

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In a June 1981 entry in her diary regarding a communion service she indicated that Jesus Christ was her only hope as it was with the disciples before Easter. She, like them, had no other hope for peace with God even though she had not yet experienced Christ being applied to her soul and receiving the divine acquittal.

Very much strife and fear but, could not stay away. The week after, still much strife but, I felt, "to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68), and then came so clear to my soul, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto you, but my father which is in heaven" (Matthew 16:17).

She wrote on July 18, 1972 about her dependence on, and joy in being instructed from above:

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First Sunday the minister is back from the Netherlands. Spoke in the evening from Isaiah 63:14, "As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name." It was precious, good to be there, confirmed to my soul; Psalm 32:8, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." Rev. Verhoef preached in the afternoon from Psalm 86:11, "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name." It was wonderful.

In May of 1974, she wrote the following about her desire to know that the Lord loved her, and about how good it was to again experience the exercises of a God-given faith:

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May 1974: It was again the Lord's Supper. Dominee Lamain preached for me at the preparatory sermon. Just what I had begged the Lord to hear about, and to know if the Lord loved me. The week was calm but on Saturday night much strife. On Sunday morning it was, "Wait on the Lord nor faint nor fear" (always such fear to get out of my seat), "yea, wait and see the Lord is near." I felt at the table the Lord was near and the Dominee said, "Kind (Child)" when he gave me the bread, and I would believe I was a child. Oh, that I could always believe, but those times are short.

In January 1975, she recorded the following about being directed to Christ as the way unto the Father for her soul:

I begged the Lord that the minister would preach something out of my experience so I could believe it was true in my heart. At all three services, he spoke about what I had experienced and each time mentioned a word the Lord (I believe) had spoken to me.

On Monday at the funeral of N. Westrate, they sang, "What God has promised" and brought back to mind what I had experienced some years before. Sunday morning during communion he [the minister] said, "and then the Lord says, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life...'" (John 14:6). He explained each word so wonderful. It was good to be there. What a mercy.

She was also given much encouragement for the New Year for she recorded

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the following during the same month:

After pleading for encouragement for the year we have entered, after much begging it came in my heart, “Thy protector is the Lord” (Psalter 345:2).

Regarding a communion service during January 1977, she recorded only one sentence; a sentence that contains much instruction. It was:

Never felt so entirely empty and could come and sit at His feet.

During February 1981, she was given to see that for a sinner like her, there was only hope in a sovereign-doing God, who saves His people in spite of there being no good in them. Thus she recorded the following:

Very troubled until these words came to my soul with much encouragement “Milde handen, vriendelijke oogen zijn by u van eeuwigheid” (loosely translated: Gentle hands, friendly eyes are by Thee from eternity). I saw so clearly, if it had not been from eternity that the Lord chose His own, then there was no hope.

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Her last diary entry was made in October 1981 and was as follows:

After a week of trouble and distress regarding the sacrament, while reading a sermon, these words touched my heart, “...Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus...” (Matthew 28:5). A few days later listening to a [sermon] tape [in which] the minister read the chapter with those words, I was given hope to believe that was my whole desire.

From the above we can conclude that this woman longed for God and to have peace with Him through Jesus Christ, and to live to His honor and glory, ever dependent on Him for every step of the way. Her best times were when she could experience communion with Him through His Son.

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CORNELIUS BOERKOEL, SR.

At the age of eighty-two, Cornelius Boerkoel, Sr. wrote Rev. Willam C. Lamain a letter describing how, as a teenager, the Lord had convicted him of sin; showing him that he was lost for eternity. After some time, he also experienced, that there was grace and mercy for “such a wretch as I was.” A portion of this letter was referenced earlier in this book; the full letter is given below:

Dear Rev. Lamain,

March 21, 1983

Enclosed please find an article for the purpose of a tract, providing it may receive your approval.

I have tried to make it as short as possible, realizing much of what is contained in this text had to be omitted, which should have been included. I understand you so well, as you often say that there is such a depth in the Word of God, both as to the wages of sin, and to the blessings of FREE grace to the exaltation of the triune God. In the early days of my life I was deeply impressed with the reality of the Majesty of God. These impressions increased much at the age of twelve and with heavy convictions which particularly took place until the age of eighteen, and not finding a refuge for my soul. The sin in my heart had constantly increased without a sign of relief. Satan, the tempter, encouraged me to make an end of my life, for he said there would be no forgiveness for such a creature as I was. Every occasion I had I would spend in the upstairs bedroom at my parents home, pleading for mercy for such a wretch as I was. One time, being tempted to make an end of my misery, I took a razor blade with me, but God who is rich in His mercies spoke these words with power, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Ezekiel 33:11. This prevented me from this awful sin. O marvel of His love and mercy!

Being afraid to speak to my parents about my condition, fearing I would shew them my hypocritical heart, I made use of the opportunity to seclude myself with God’s Holy Word, and the forefathers, such as Rev. Comrie and others. I recall hearing my parents say to one another, “What is Cor

APPENDIX E

doing upstairs all the time?” so they had surmisings. As our custom was at home to sing after reading God’s Word after meals, my father often asked me, “Cor, why are you not singing along with us?” Sorrow consumed me, as I was without God in the world; I replied, “Father, what shall I sing in a strange land?” Tears would burst from my eyes, being worthy of nothing but His just condemnation.

Upon an occasion I ventured myself to an old preacher in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), having lost my righteousness, I asked him, “Is there a way whereby I can be saved?” “Overburdened?” the Pastor asked me. “Yes, Reverend, indeed; the burden is so great and I can find no refuge.” He quoted the words of Romans 5:20b, “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” This is the text I used for the enclosed tract. We talked for a while, but though the words can be of comfort, I was still burdened, thinking to perish forever, and that without God in the world, who is just in His judgments, and Holy in His tribunal.



Cornelius Boerkoel

In this state of perplexity on leaving home in the morning for work, my thoughts dwelt upon the suffering of Christ in Gethsemane, how that He had left His father’s dwelling place and came upon this wicked world to dwell among men. My heart was fixed and I was aware of where I was going, but in my heart I saw Christ sweating great drops of blood, pleading the Father, if the cup which He had taken upon Him, and which was given Him from the Father, might be taken from Him, but submitting Himself in love to His Father’s will, to restore His Holy attributes, which Adam and I in Adam had broken. There He lay as a worm and no man. I sank in deep despair, lost forever, forever lost, justly lost; here I thought to sink, deeper and deeper, having to sign my own death penalty, and thinking to sink into a desperate destruction.

There I might experience that the Lord spoke with power to my soul with the words we find in Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool,” and also Isaiah

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54:10, "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." From there I was led to Gabbatha, Christ being condemned to death, He the lamb of God, bearing the curse of the children of men, and a guilty sinner set at liberty. How indescribable, the JUST for the unjust. And following the crossbearer, being nailed on the accursed tree, pangs of sorrow filled my heart and when He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" God forsaken of God, to redeem sinners! "Lord," was my question, "has Thou spoken Thy promising words unto me?" So unworthy was I of the least.

God was satisfied with His full redemption for hell worthy sinners, like me! Here my burdened heart received a blessing, justly lost, and justly saved, with His atoning sacrifice. Could my tears forever flow for such condescending mercy! Oh, the height and the depth of salvation can never be extolled here upon the earth.

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My father, having heard of a Rev. Minderman at Division Avenue church, thought it wise to visit and listen. Mother also, myself, and my younger sister attended for several months. Father mentioned, "Never have we heard such gospel preaching in the CRC." What my father said was the truth. A few years later my father passed away at the age of sixty-two years. My heart was rejoiced when I heard this preaching, all according to God's word, and agreeable with the Puritan writers which I read. I told my parents that I no longer desired to attend the CRC, and whereas I had not made public confession in that church, I would ask to have the baptismal papers mailed to the NRC [on] Division Avenue. At this time Rev. Minderman had already left for the Netherlands.

My desire had become to live with the children of God, and to dwell where they dwelt. I thus ventured one evening to go to the consistory of the NRC on Division Avenue. Upon entering the consistory room, the chairman, my beloved friend Sporte, asked me, "Well, young man, tell us what brought you here." I related my hearts desire. Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God. My question was, "Would you be willing to accept my baptismal papers, so that in due time I might become a member of this church?" His answer was, "Boy, if you have first given your heart unto the Lord, then we

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welcome you to become a member of His church.” My heart broke with joy and love to these dear children of God. The office bearers, if I recall, were Mr. John Sporte, chairman, Mr. Merizon, J. Van Zweden, K. Winters, etc. along with some deacons. This was about the year 1922.

Never, or rather little, dared I to talk about these things—to my shame. Satan deceived Eve in her state of innocency, and he surely has not overlooked me. My daily battles with my corrupt heart, inclined to evil and not to good, and my burdens are well known to God, whom I have promised the love of my heart for His great love to me, a sinner. Thus the Lord has also at times given me the desires of my heart. One thing have I desired of the Lord and that I will seek after, that I may dwell in His house and extol His great mercy to an unworthy creature. These times, when permitted, I also have not forgotten.

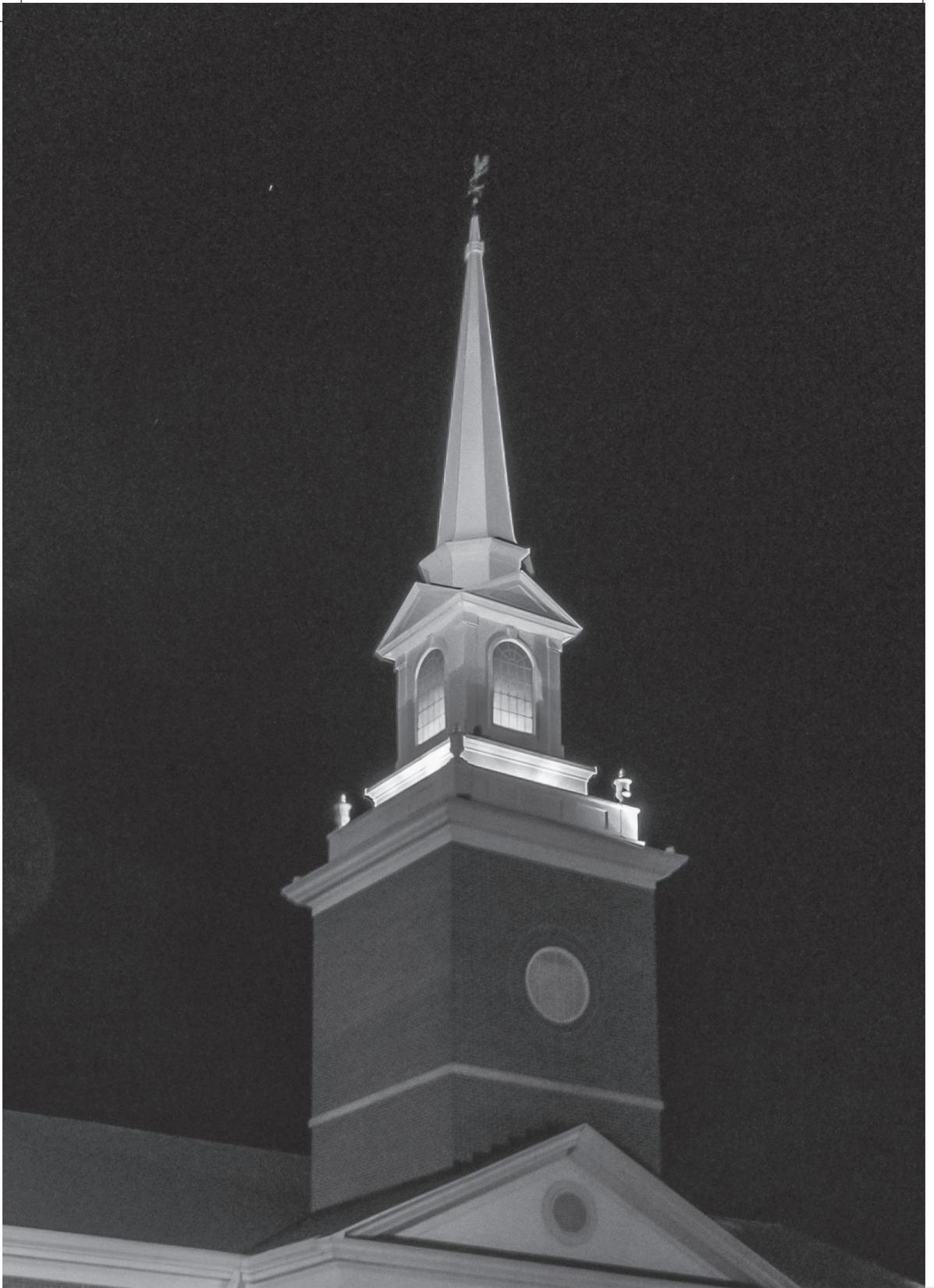
Rev. Lamain, we love you because you exalt Christ to the heart of God’s children.

*Sincerely,
an unworthy friend,*

C. F. Boerkoel, Sr.

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P.S. I hope I have not overtired you with this message. Also much has been omitted, which could be related.



APPENDIX F

SERMONS

BLUE BOOK 140 – REV. LAMAIN – “THE SOUL’S CONCERN REMAINS”

UNPUBLISHED – REV. LAMAIN – “REMEMBER LOT’S WIFE”

BLUE BOOK 240 – REV. MINDERMAN – “THE REMNANT OF THE LORD”

BLUE BOOK 105 – REV. PIENEMAN – “THE BRINGING OF GOOD TIDINGS
OF GREAT JOY”

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THE SOUL’S CONCERN REMAINS

A Sermon on Psalm 60:9

BY REV. W. C. LAMAIN

*“Who will bring me into the strong city?
who will lead me into Edom?” -
(Psalm 60:9)*

David was a man after God’s own heart. He was known, elected, and loved by God from eternity. His name was written in the book of life of the Lamb, because from

Psalter 191: 1,5,6,7
Read Psalm 60
Psalter 158: 4,5,6,7,8
Psalter 428: 5
Psalter 299: 6,7

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eternity he was in the thoughts and heart of God. The Son of God was, from eternity, the Surety to make satisfaction for him, and to deliver him from the power of hell. God the Holy Spirit took it upon Him to regenerate him in time and to grant him the life that can never die.

As a result, David in Psalm 71:17 could sing: “O God, thou hast taught me from my youth.” God had glorified His grace in the son of Jesse, and given him faith, hope, and love. He said in Psalm 116:10, “I believed, therefore have I spoken;” and in Psalm 39:7, “And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee.” That God’s love had been shed abroad in his heart is evident from Psalm 18:1, where he cried out: “I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength!”

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In spite of all this, his life had been, from his early youth on, full of trials and troubles. His father left him in the field when Samuel came to anoint one of his sons to be king. His brothers did not esteem him very highly, for they could not bow under the sovereignty of God. For many years he was persecuted by Saul who was resolved to take away his life from the earth. And after God had placed him on the throne, his life was one of continuous grief and sorrow, although time and again it became manifest[ed] that he shared in God’s favor.

The one thing is connected with the other. God in His wisdom leads His people through dark ways, and the more they have to go through such deep ways, the more it becomes clear that He does not withhold all good things from those who walk uprightly before Him. These ways were profitable for David’s soul, and such ways have been profitable for the Church in all ages. What a rich legacy we have received from Him!

It is indeed true that God gives His people strength according to their crosses, but He also gives crosses according to their strength. Such ways are appointed unto us by God’s eternal wisdom, but also by His inexpressible love, so that we may stay humble and need God at all times, and so that we may be exercised in bearing our cross after Christ in order that we may become more like unto Him.

Crosses are grievous, but they are no less profitable, and at times God’s children experience in their lives that a cross may even be sweet. God’s

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objective is at all times the glorification of His Name, but also the benefit of His people.

God's people are exercised by their struggle and sanctified by their sufferings; and let us not pray God to remove all our crosses, for God appoints them also to keep us watchful and to prevent us from losing our concern.

This is also very evident from our text. According to the historical information contained in the superscription, David wrote this psalm after he had obtained a glorious victory. David had gone to the north at the head of nearly his entire army and had fought against the Syrians. The result was a glorious victory. Again, the Lord had fought David's battle, blessed his armor, and subdued the enemies. But while David and his army were in the north, the Edomites invaded the country in the south and afflicted great destruction. The enemies took vengeance on defenseless old people, women, and children. So David had been delivered from one calamity but now he faced a new ordeal.

At such times, the enemy of the soul does not grant us any relief either. What fiery darts he shoots at the soul, with the purpose to make it doubt God and to rebel against God and draw it away from God! The devil employs every means at his disposal to draw us away from God. Faith is a mercy that is tested and tried, but it is a blessing that God never allows His people to be tested beyond their ability to endure. His eyes ever look down in love upon them.

It never stops for a child of the Lord. Edom is the usual name for the country and the people called Edomites. They were descendants from Esau, and they lived in the mountain region of Seir. Generally speaking, this region was not very fertile, so that the inhabitants lived mainly by trade. Some made their living by hunting or robbing. They had great riches and Edom was known for its wise men (Obadiah 8). Yet most Edomites were like their progenitor, Esau. They were wild and reckless, and they were continually in conflict with Israel. We remember how Edom refused passage at Kadesh, in Numbers 20:14, which forced the Israelites to make a detour. The enmities took on the form of warfare under King Saul (I Samuel 14:47). The capital city of Edom was Petra, built in the rocks and well-nigh impenetrable. Later, David sent Joab with an army of thousands to punish Edom and to humiliate it for

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the evil it had done to Israel. Joab did manage to kill about twelve thousand of the enemy in the Valley of Salt, but Edom was not defeated.

By faith, David had already sung a song of victory over Edom, but it had to materialize yet. And this now was his concern. David knew the Edomites; he knew their country, and he knew how difficult and troublesome it would be to take this city built upon a rock. David himself was an experienced warrior, and at his side were men who knew how to fight battles. They were courageous warriors. But self-reliance and reliance on his men fell away. He was fully convinced that he was dealing with an enemy that could not be underestimated. The difficulties connected with entering the city and with subjecting the country were not imaginary. How small and powerless David felt himself! He had to be brought into this city and he had to be led into Edom. It was God Himself who must do it, otherwise it would be a hopeless matter. David fully realized this, and this caused him to ask: "Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom?"

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God often confronts His people with impossible situations. Thus, it was in the life of Abraham, the father of all believers. First, [it was] in connection with the birth of the son of promise, and afterwards again in connection with the divine command to sacrifice his son on the mountains of Moriah. We see the same thing in the lives of the children of Israel. The deliverance from the land of Egypt was a superhuman miracle. Hardly were they gone out of there, when they stood before the Red Sea. God had to make a pathway where there had never been one. And after the covenant-making at Sinai, they [the Israelites] again and again confronted impossibilities.

God's people are placed before walls and mountains; that is to say, they face impossible situations time and again. Yet that is not harshness on the part of God, but a sign of His love for them. It is inherent in our nature to trust in our own strength, to take care of ourselves, to rely on our own wisdom, our own weapons, our own warriors, and on everything that is not of God. Hence it is a token of God's love when we come into straits, when He causes the wisdom of the wise to fail. We do not always realize this at once – far from it.

We are inclined to entertain hard thoughts of the Lord, to become discouraged, to give up, and to say that the ways of the Lord are not right. How we

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feel enmity flare up against His dealings, indeed, against Himself! In such ways it becomes manifest what we are and remain in ourselves. The flesh does not subject itself to the law of God. It does not want what He wants. It is wholly contrary to our nature to deny ourselves and to abandon all other support on which we lean and in which we trust. But God is so kind and good to His people as to confront them constantly with dilemmas.

Indeed, beloved, our own nature is so independent from God and so filled with enmity against Him that we can very well do without Him. But now it pleases God time and again to place us in such circumstances that we must seek His face. And only when we can not get help anywhere else will we turn to God. He does this so that we may acknowledge that only He is our Savior and Redeemer.

It is the same with the spiritual life of God's children. God leads them from one perplexity to another, so that they will turn to Him for help. This is true with respect to our condition for eternity as well as our spiritual state in life. Think of Jacob and Esau. Jacob was the elect of the Lord. Already before his birth the Lord had revealed this to Rebekah. Jacob had been made to see what he lacked in his soul and how he looked forward to the day when the Lord would fill this need! He needed and wanted God. No one can doubt that, for it is clearly evident from Scripture.

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Jacob thought that the problem was solved when Esau sold him the birth-right, but instead of it being solved, he had to flee, otherwise his brother would have killed him. And there, in the land of Luz, where he was privileged to see that ladder and hear the promise from the mouth of God, the place became as a house of God and a gate of heaven for him that dark night. But still he had no final solution!

Indeed, Jacob reached Bethel relatively soon, but it took twenty years before he reached Peniel. And as a rule, it is the same way with God's children. Often there lies a long time between the revelation and the resolution. The Lord is free, and we may not impose limits on Him or His dealings, for the Lord's goodness knows no boundaries.

Nevertheless, Bethel was a memorable place. Was Jacob happy there? Most

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certainly! The wonder of God's revelation there was so great to him that he could travel on with great courage. But his journey took him further and further away from Canaan. And after twenty years, things had reached such a low ebb that Jacob's mind could no longer fasten upon what God had promised him long ago. One night God appeared unto him and spoke clearly to him: "I am the God of Bethel." But even this did not mean a solution. After that he saw a host of angels at Mahanaim, as a renewed token that God would protect and keep him, but that, too, could not remove his guilt and pardon his iniquity. How terrified he became when he heard that Esau came to meet him with four hundred men!

God came to seek justice, and Jacob did not have even one penny to pay his huge debt. And all he had experienced fell short of the mark. True, those things had come from God, but they had not been applied. If there was ever a time when Jacob felt that he lacked everything, it was that night at the Jabbok. God's justice had not been satisfied; the law kept on demanding; Satan opposed him, and his conscience condemned him!

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He had no foot to stand on. God could justly condemn him forever. He was nothing but a hell-worthy creature. But there the Lord concluded matters in Jacob's heart. Jacob was cut off there, but he was also incorporated and accepted. On the basis of the righteousness of the Messiah, he was acquitted. He was brought into an indestructible city; he was placed on that solid foundation of which the psalmist sang:

*No earthly strength or power
Can make it move or cover.*

There, he consciously experienced in his own soul that God's anger was silenced, and God's wrath was quenched. There, the curse of the law was removed, and Satan lost the battle. There, he became, with Christ and in Christ, one of God's conquerors, which is evident from the name he received there. There he was indeed led into Edom. Satan was forced to let go of him and Jacob was now the charge of his King. Now he was allowed by faith to step on the necks of his enemies and to cry out with holy courage and freedom: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth, Who is he that condemneth?"

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This affliction would not rise up against him a second time. The peace of God now filled his heart – the peace that exceeds all comprehension and that keeps the heart and mind in Christ Jesus. Now there was a level plain between God and his soul. Sin would no longer reign over him. People who may experience this are no longer under the law but under grace. Their eternal foundation is the eternal good pleasure of the Father, the free grace that moved Him from eternity. Such people no longer boast of horses and chariots, but in the Name of the Lord their God! From henceforth they magnify the righteousness of Christ which lifted them from the gates of death so that they might spread abroad His praise in Jerusalem. They may sing: “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in” (Isaiah 26:1,2)!

Of Christ we read in Isaiah 63 that He came from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah. He trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him. He trod them in His anger and trampled them in His fury. For the day of vengeance was in His heart, and the year of His redeemed had come. He trod down the people in His anger, and made them drunk in His fury, and brought down their strength to the earth. And through the application hereof, God’s people rejoice in the one-sided work of God. On the part of them, there could never be any hope or expectation, as they, by the illumination of God’s Spirit, have learned:

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*No trust will I place in my strength to defend,
Nor yet on my sword as a safeguard depend; In thee,
Who hath saved us and put them to shame,
We boast all the day, ever praising Thy Name.*

Man is placed completely outside of everything and hence all boasting on his part is excluded. Rather, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord! It is God, and He alone, who redeems His people. Before the presence of this great Zerubbabel the great mountain becomes a level plain. But also, by faith, the walls of Jericho fell!

That is how it was with David at that time. When he was still very young, he killed a lion and a bear and saved his sheep from certain death. In the

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strength of the eternal and living God, he had been privileged to slay the giant Goliath. And before he ascended the throne, the Lord had taught his hands to war and his fingers to fight, so that the women had danced and sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands!" The people sensed that the Lord was with him.

He had been privileged to gain many victories. God had often fought for him. He had shown His favor many times, both outwardly and inwardly. But now, once more, he faced a great problem in his life as king of Israel. However, the question he asked, the repeated question, was not the result of doubt and fear. The difficulties were many, but we can sense that he was not discouraged on their account. His only hope and expectation was from the Lord. He boldly expressed that. Faith is not blind to problems, but it looks through and over them. God's people have a Refuge in distress and death. They know to whom they can go with their problems and difficulties.

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Prior to these days, the Lord had rejected His people on account of their sins. He had torn them asunder and had been angry with them. He had shaken their land. He had split it. He had caused it to see a hard time. He had made it to drink the wine of confusion. He had used the enemies as a rod to chastise the people, but He had not allowed them to destroy His people. The God of the covenant faithfully keeps His word. He had given His people a banner in the word of His promise. And the content of that promise was salvation in the Messiah.

This Messiah would one day be lifted up on Golgotha. He had been given as a covenant of the people, and in this Christ, they would conquer. They had indeed felt God's anger, but this did not remove their boldness to look up unto God and to expect deliverance from Him. For it is God Himself who by His Spirit encourages His people to look up to Him. That which is impossible with men is possible with God.

Indeed, that which we by our deep fall in Adam made impossible, Christ made possible again by His everlasting sacrifice. By His blood, a new and living way has been opened by which we have access to, entrance in, and passage through to the throne of grace in all vicissitudes of life. And when,

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by the operation of the Holy Spirit, these people may exercise their faith, they entrust themselves wholly to the Lord. In these exercises they receive strength to take hold of the living God in full confidence that He can, and will, and shall deliver them, and never will forsake His own. "My God will hear me!"

It is always God's object amidst all strife and trouble to glorify His own Name and to make His people realize and see what He is and remains to them. At times God's people must go through deep waters and through roaring fires, but it is also true that this faithful Jehovah accompanies them and will never allow them to drown or burn.

Also, in our spiritual life there are vicissitudes to be endured. There will be strife and struggles until the end, for this is not the land of rest. Light and darkness, battle and victory alternate. David experienced this and it is also the experience of all those who have been delivered from Satan's dominion and now march under the banner of King Jesus. Christ foretold us: "In the world ye shall have tribulation." When God is good to His people, Satan is angry. He is filled with a consuming hatred of them who are the inheritance of the Lord.

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In the North, David had beaten the Syrians, and now, in the south, the Edomites invaded the country. So, there is always something to be concerned about. Concern remains. And it proves to be necessary in the lives of God's favored ones. Our flesh does not want such ways, but God deems them necessary in order to keep us close to Him. Our nature craves after rest, and we are enemies of bonds and prisons, of affliction and crosses. Whoever has learned to know himself a little will agree that we should be afraid of nothing quite as much as of ourselves. Our nature is always inclined to run away from God, to leave Him at His own place, to run off with His honor, and to rest in and live on what took place in the past. We ourselves close the door to further exercises and more revelations. But how blessed it is that God reigns! He leads His people always in such ways that He draws them to Him, so that He may reveal Himself further and better to them in His redeeming love and victorious grace. Oh, it is so beneficial for them to be driven into straits, for that is the way for them to learn to despise their own strength and to learn the meaning of:

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*Blest is the man whose strength Thou art,
Thy ways are hidden in his heart,
He treads the highway to Thy dwelling...*

And now, in the way of sanctification, God's people learn to know Edom inwardly as well as outwardly. The old man of sin collaborates continuously with the prince of darkness. Ever and ever they are on the lookout to invade the country and wreak havoc there. Sometimes these people say, "O enemy, will you never give up?" They discover more and more that in them there is no strength over against such a great multitude. In themselves, they are so weak that, even after all that has taken place in their lives, they nevertheless have no strength to conquer even one enemy.

We keep on trying, but the Lord is so good for us that we never succeed. The desire to help ourselves is rooted deeply in our hearts, but we find out more and more that God does not give His honor to another, nor His praise to graven images. The guards at Jesus' grave did not run away on account of the women and the disciples, but, when the Father raised His holy Child Jesus, and when the Mediator arose in His own strength from the grave, they all fled.

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God's people can fight the enemy only in the power of Christ. Only by His strength can they conquer and triumph. It is a great grace of the Lord if they may give things over into the hands of Christ. "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me... Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation" (Psalm 35). "Let the angel of the Lord chase them."

They must lose the battle in order to gain the victory with Christ. Only He can bring Edom under control. In this life, this will be only done in part. One day, Christ will cast all His and their enemies into eternal damnation. Then all enemies will become like dust under their feet. This day will dawn for those people whose life has become Christ. Here they must often sigh and sow their seed with tears, crying out: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And how often does Satan block the road for God's children, so that they cannot go on! But that, too, is beneficial for their soul, so that Christ may reveal Himself in His glorious

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ministry unto them and they may experience that He is the chiefest among ten thousand; that He always makes intercession for them with the Father, and gives them courage and strength to walk the course laid out for them.

He is ever willing to manifest His strength in their weakness, and He stirs them up to long for the end of the battle, although always submitting themselves to the will of God. It is through death that they will be led to victory. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death itself. At times, the thought of death can vex and terrify them. This is so that they may learn they need grace not only to live but also to die.

The Lord knows which ways to open in order to keep His own low to the ground, and to teach them to place all their trust in Him. They must constantly learn to forget that which lies behind and to reach for that which lies ahead, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13,14). Without this concern, we would become such high-minded Christians, Christians, however, with barren, unfruitful lives devoid of spiritual exercises. It is better for them to be under the apple tree (Song of Solomon 2:3) than on the heights of Gilboa; it is better for them to be in the fiery oven than on a bed of carelessness; it is better for them to be at the battlefield than on the rooftop.

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Concern keeps our needs before us; it is the way in which we gain more knowledge of self, of our deep fall, and of the riches of God's unfathomable grace in Christ Jesus. In order to be exercised by strife, we must first be engaged in strife. And thus, we not only realize our need of the operation of the Holy Spirit but also the knowledge of the Person of the Holy Spirit and His effective fellowship. "Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." The more knowledge we have of the one as well as the other, the greater will be the realization of what we lack, but also the better we shall feel the necessity for our empty and naked souls to be completely filled with a Triune God.

For that reason, the Lord brings His people into the battle and causes them concern, so that He may reveal Himself all the more gloriously to their souls. And then is also learned that we cannot glorify God in the ways in which we do not know Him. Hence all these ways are very beneficial for us, but we

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can see that only afterwards. Then we stammer: "Holy are Thy ways, O Lord!"

If we may experience something of it here below, we shall in principle know something of the meaning of:

With endless thanks, O Lord, to Thee, Thy wondrous works will I proclaim...

Already here upon earth, but soon, especially in heaven, when Edom will no longer be, and when His people shall have entered into their eternal rest in the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, the Triune God shall receive all honor and thanksgiving, because He has done it all.

APPLICATION

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Oh, how many urgent reasons there are to examine, between God and our own soul, whether we know something of this concern. The world is full of people without any concern whatsoever. And I am not referring to the poor heathen or the hardened Jews, but to those who were brought up in the teachings of the Gospel. How many thousands have turned their backs upon their teachings, or who are still within their reach, but who, nevertheless are dead unto death, and upon whom the Word of the Lord makes no longer any impression! More and more consciences are being hardened and multitudes travel toward eternity without any impression of death and eternity whatsoever. With great pity we should look upon our poor fellow human beings and our own poor offspring, which, generally speaking, is so hardened that nothing can move them anymore.

How it should take hold of us that we live under such a severe judgment, for what is more terrible than the judgment of hardening of the hearts? The god of this age has blinded men's eyes and dulled their senses. It is on account of our departure from the Lord and the hardening of our souls under both God's blessings and judgments, as well as of our despising the Gospel, that we have gotten into such a sad condition. What will be the end of it all? The end may be a total return to heathenism if God does not prevent it and a total abandonment to destruction, as these things usually follow upon the judgment of the heart.

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O children, boys and girls, do not harden yourselves against all the callings of God! Many of you no longer have any respect for God and His Word, and you ignore the advice and warnings of your parents, teachers, and ministers. Remember that whoever hardens himself will suddenly be destroyed. God is not mocked, and whatever a man sows he will also reap.

On the other hand, there are those today who have a general spirit of superficial religion and who put themselves at ease by thinking that all is well for eternity. However, they are enemies of genuine conversion and concern; indeed, they actually laugh at it. They are sure that they are going to heaven, but they never learned to know what hell is. Without any fear, they travel toward eternity. They are Christians without knowing Christ, and they are strangers of the true work of God in the heart. What an awakening that will be when Christ will say to them, "I never knew you!"

But let us not go too far afield and too far from home, for what a sad condition is seen in our own circles! How many pretend to be concerned who never experienced true concern! Innumerable are the ways in which men cling to false supports and build their hopes on false grounds, without ever having experienced a cutting off from Adam and an implanting into Christ.

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Then there is also the building up of one another on grounds which shall fall away before the moment of death. Oh, when soon reality dawns upon you, you will curse and damn each other to the bottom of hell, but then it will be too late, forever too late.

Examine yourselves by the simple truth of God's Word. May God give you eyes to see that the end of your ways will be death. For everything that is not according to the Word of God, there is no morning-light.

As long as a person is still living, he can be converted. God looks for truth in the inward parts. Our own work will fall away, but God's work will stand fast and is able to stand the test.

Also, what a sad thing [it is] that God's true concerned people are so little concerned! We see so much false resting on things that cannot afford rest, and that is because there is so little uncovering. How many live on things

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that took place years ago and from which all life has departed, and which can be no ground on which to meet God! In times past, there was some true anguish of soul and some cleaving unto the Lord, but now it looks so often as if everything is gone. The country is and lies quiet. It would be a blessing if the Edomites invaded the country once again!

May God strive in your souls! That we might be wrestling with God, like Jacob did. If God wrestles with us, we shall wrestle with Him. May you realize your need, and may everything outside of Christ fall away, so that the cry will be heard: "Who will bring me into the strong city? who will lead me into Edom?"

There is no rest outside of God. Justice must be fulfilled, and the curse of the law must be removed so that our souls may find refuge in Christ. It is by Him that we must be reconciled with God.

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— Oh, may true concern return to your hearts until God receives all the honor due unto Him! May we perish in ourselves as lost ones so that we may find salvation in God through Christ!

People of God, how little concern do we find, generally speaking, to die unto ourselves in the way of sanctification in order to find life alone in Christ! How little this necessity is understood today! It is more often mentioned than truly experienced. Hence it is not convincing nor exciting and inviting. The souls who may experience something of it and yearn that Christ may be formed in them, are often walking their way in loneliness. There are not many comrades in the battle anymore. Many have gone on home, and Jacob is getting small in this respect. We may have and use the words relating to the matters, but what we need is the matters described by the words!

May God arise once more over His inheritance as in the days of old! There are, to be sure, here and there, still some of those people, hidden as it were in the brushwood and thickets of life, who have the same strife and concern as David had. O people of God, let it not grieve you and cause you to bow low in the dust. David's great Son has conquered Satan and bruised his head, so with Him you will be more than conquerors. You will conquer with Him through the blood of the Lamb, and soon you will be led to complete victory.

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You will be led by Him with joy and gladness and enter the palace of the King – there to rest eternally, but also to sing eternally! Amen.

#2 - REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE

Sermon on Genesis 19:26

BY REV. W. C. LAMAIN

Beloved Congregation,

Our life in this world is a responsibility for each and every one. We are all travelers to that great eternity, and there is but one step between us and death. When the end of our life shall arrive, then at that time, a judgement shall fall for eternity. There will be no changing in the condition of man after he is taken out of this world. For that reason, it is for each and every one a personal matter to search our heart time and again whether we know something that shall stay with us, that will go with us in the hour of death and in the day of judgement. Because straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to eternal life. I hope to explain to you out of my text which you will find in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 19:26: “But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.” Thus far.

Psalter 84
Read: Luke 17
Psalter 31: 4,6,7
Psalter 323
Psalter 202: 1,2,3

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We have, beloved congregation, in the plain of Jordan, a monument of vengeance. We will consider the wife of Lot. In the 1st place, as a privileged woman; in the 2nd place, as an apostate woman; and in the 3rd place, as a punished woman.

There is, of course, in the whole Bible, no history more instructive than that of Lot and his family. His own history shows clearly how the righteous

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scarcely are saved. In the 2nd place, his sons-in-law show clearly the way the gospel is received by the easy, careless world. And, Lot's wife is a type of all those who are convinced but never converted.

In order to have a clear understanding of the position of the wife of Lot, we must first consider that she was a blessed woman. She was a privileged woman. What were the privileges granted to that woman? In the first place, in the way of God's providence, she was married to a God fearing and righteous man. There is no doubt about the grace the Lord had granted unto Lot. We have a clear testimony of that in the word of God. Of course, to be married to a God-fearing person does not mean it is always easy. No, because even when we are converted, we have our nature, we have our character, and we still have our faults. Many times, there are more faults present than in an unconverted person. And even when we are converted, it does not mean that it is always easy to live with the person. But, it is not always the same. The life of God's people is a life of up and down. And God's people have times that their nature is minimized, they have times that they have communion with God and they have times that they have freedom and liberty for their own heart. And also, every time, sitting at the table, then they have a prayer and a supplication. And if faith is living, people, then time and again, even when it is faint, you can hear there is something living inside that is crying to the Lord.

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Every boy and every girl must always be on their knees to ask the Lord for a husband or a wife who fears the Lord. It does not mean that that will convert us. No, but still, it shall prevent us from many sins. It is also possible that the Lord uses him or her to bring us to other thoughts and that the Lord uses the person as an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit to bring us to spiritual life.

Thus, it is a privilege and that privilege was given to the wife of Lot. She had heard so many prayers and supplications of that man, during the time she was married with him and lived with him in this world.

The second privilege that was given to Lot's wife was she was favored with wonderful company. One evening, two men entered into Sodom, and they came into the house of Lot. She had served those angels. What a blessing.

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There are few in this world that shall have the privilege that angels had entered into their house. Those angels were there the whole night; as she had seen with her eyes, they were servants of the Lord. What a great privilege. And not only that, but those holy angels came to the house of Lot with a special message. She had heard out of the mouth of those angels what the Lord was planning to do and what lay in God's counsel. She had heard about the judgment that was coming on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. She was not a stranger of what would happen in a short time.

There was another privilege given to that woman. Namely, she had seen with her eyes the beginning of the judgment of the Lord. Even for her husband, even for Lot, it was not so easy to leave that city. No! He hesitated and hesitated. And finally, the angels of the Lord pushed them out of that city. And as soon as they were outside of that city, then the Lord came down, as you find in verse 24; "then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." Lot's wife was on the way to Zoar, she was on the way to the cave in the mountains. Lot was on the way with her to the mountains.

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It was a different condition than with their sons-in-law. They had also heard the message; they were warned so seriously. But they mocked Lot. Oh, it was nothing else than unbelief that was in their heart. 'Oh, such things would never happen. The angels came in that city only to make the people afraid. Because such things had never happened in the whole world. Never!' But the woman had believed that the Lord would come and bring destruction to those cities.

And now, already outside of that city! As I have told you, she was on the way to Zoar! And then immediately you read in the text "but his wife looked back from behind him and she became a pillar of salt." It is possible that we have received many privileges and many blessings in our life. There is, in respect to that, a great difference between men in this world. There are people living in the visible church, even in the visible church here on earth, and they are never, never concerned one moment about their state and condition. Never! There are people in the church, in whom the Word of God never makes an impression in their heart. And if you ask them, whether their eyes are sometimes wet under the preaching of the Word, if they have

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nights in their life that it is impossible for them to sleep while their hearts are filled with death and eternity, then they say, 'No, it has never happened in my whole life. I come to the church, once, or twice or thrice; but if you ask me if it ever made any impression to my heart or soul, then I have to say no!' Oh, what an awful, an awful condition it must be.

Young and old, I believe that it is awful to make this statement. There are in the visible church people that never and never have any impression under the preaching. And it is already finished before it is eternity. They live in this world and are never concerned about their eternal state. Their conscience is silent. Of course, if we look into the condition of the church in our days, then it is not a few, but many. It is even among our young and coming generation. Oh, it is impossible, people, to explain what sometimes comes up in our heart and in our mind. Really, it is impossible to tell it. When you see before your eyes, you see how unconverted and indifferent that our children are walking on their way to eternity. Because, it shall be something to be lost forever and forever. If it is not at this side of the grave, the time shall come when the conscience shall be opened. When Christ shall appear on the clouds and when He shall appear in the glory of His Father, and with His holy angels, oh, what shall it then be for each and everyone in this world to be without that robe and without that garment of the righteousness of Christ? And then, to be lost forever and forever.

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But there are people who are privileged to have an open conscience from their early days. And when I ask them this evening, 'Did you live so easily in this world for yourself?' Then they answer, 'No, I have always lived with an open conscience. And death and eternity have always been behind me.' There are people that come under conviction. There are people that become serious in their life. And for a certain time, they break with sin. Not inwardly, because that is the work of the Holy Spirit, but outwardly, they can break with sin. Outwardly they can follow with God's children. Outwardly, even as the wife of Lot, they can leave that city which is called Destruction. They can leave that city and it can seem that they walk on the way to heaven. It seems that they are walking on that road. And still, it is nothing.

Oh, the wife of Lot, she was not only a privileged woman, but she became at one time in her life an apostate woman. She was a woman that turned away,

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that went back to her own city and to her own people. Lot's wife looked back from behind him. And what was the reason that she had done that? Humanly speaking, it cost the angels much work to push Lot out of that city. But once he was out of that city, he never looked back to that former city in which he had been living.

And why not? What was the reason that Lot never looked back to that city? Because, that Lot, as soon as he was out of that city, he accepted for his own heart the righteous judgments of the Lord. Oh, that Lot. He was far away from the way of the Lord in his daily condition. But when it came so far that he left that city, then he accepted for 100 percent with his whole heart that the Lord brought the city to nothing. Oh, then he had no more thoughts about his house, he had no more thoughts about his furniture, nor had he any more thoughts about all his treasure and everything that was in the city. No! He surrendered everything into the hands of the Lord. He agreed with the Lord for 100 percent that the city was all burned up through the fire and brimstone that the Lord rained from heaven. Lot was privileged to bow down under the almighty hand of the Lord.

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But it was different with this woman; oh, it was different with the wife of Lot. Because, with her feet she was out of that city, but she was never out of the city with her heart. Never. It seemed that for awhile that she had forgotten everything in the city. You do not read one word of that woman that she had mocked with the words that the angels had spoken to her. She had accepted it. And still, now on the way to Zoar, oh, everything came back to her. She thought 'Oh, that house where I was living for so many years, and the furniture that I had, and all my friends that I had in the city. One day we had a party there, another week we had a party with those people. It was always pleasure, it was always something.' She thought, 'Oh, for one more moment I have to look to that city.'

She was not looking to her husband. No! Why did she not look to her husband? There lay a separation between her and her husband. It was never one. Never. The same life that was in her husband was never glorified in her. If we are strangers of that, and the Holy Spirit never comes into us, then that separation lies there. And that separation shall be forever and forever.

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Without grace, we never, we never can understand the work of God. We never can have a love for the true work of God in our heart. And now, her house, her furniture, her friends, her treasures, and all that she had in that city weighed more for Lot's wife than to walk on the way to Zoar and to escape from the wrath of God. Oh congregation! If the true work of God was never in our heart, we can become religious, we can be an example to other people, but finally, we go back to Hell, we go back to sin, and we go back to our own ways. We never shall continue and be steadfast in the ways of the Lord, people. Never. She looked back to that city. There was a fleshly compassion in her heart with the city, with the inhabitants of that city, with all her possessions, and with all that burned up there. Oh, it was awful, congregation, the thoughts that were in her heart. But now, one look to that Sodom and the Lord made His decision. She became a pillar of salt, a pillar of salt, immediately.

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There are some examples where the Lord immediately punishes our sins and that He comes with his righteous judgements. It does not happen so many times. No, it does not happen so many times, the heart of the children of man is filled with evil. If it would take place every day and every week, then it would be different. It is in accordance with the word of God. But now, immediately, the Lord punished this woman. A blessed woman, an apostate woman and finally a woman punished by the Lord.

But before we speak about that, we will sing Psalter 323.

“But his wife looked back from behind him and she became a pillar of salt.” She was struck dead in that place. Yet her body did not fall down. But it stood there fixed and erect like a pillar or monument, not liable to waste or decay as human bodies exposed to the air. She changed there immediately into a pillar of salt.

That was only her body. That was not her soul, no. Her soul was immediately in eternity. Because for her also, that body is waiting for the day of resurrection. But that woman who became a pillar of salt is an awful example for each and every one. One of our explainers of the Bible made a statement about what had happened with that woman: Consider that monument of vengeance on the plain of Jordan: speak to her, she does not hear, cry, she

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does not regard you; urge her to flee again from wrath, she does not move. She is dead. There was no changing at all in the condition of that woman. We see out of this history that it is possible, that it comes so far with man that he is on the way to Zoar, but he never enters in to that city. He is lost forever and forever.

Oh, it is a reason, congregation, for each and every one to be serious. Even Christ had admonished the Jewish people in Luke 17:32 when he said, "Remember Lot's wife." Erskine said in one of his sermons, "One look upon Christ that shall save us from wrath to come. One look." Those people in whose heart it is true, say that a thousand times and more than a thousand times. They are praying the Lord to open their eyes for the glory of Christ and that they see the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world. But here in our text, people, one look and it was done forever and forever. One look! And then so far gone already. It is a reason to examine our heart. What shall bid us before the hour of death shall come? The older we are, it is not the easier. No, but it becomes more and more difficult. The Bible teaches us so seriously that there are few that shall find the way of life, eternal life. Few! And thousands and thousands and millions and millions shall deceive their poor soul for that never ending eternity. And what shall that be to be lost forever and ever, especially when we have a mind filled with religion and with thoughts that we are on the way to heaven?

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But, if the beginning of God's work was never and never in our heart, we must always observe and must realize that it will not be there at the end of our life. No, so often we hear from people that say, "They were talking about this text or that text or a Psalter. So now we have ground to put them in heaven." No, that is no ground. But what is necessary is to be cut off from the world, from sin and from our self. What is necessary for our eternal welfare? It is that the Lord enters our hearts with His love and that He binds us unto Him with such bands which never shall be broken. It will be shown in the fruits. To follow after man, that never shall continue forever. No, that is all too short for eternity.

It is necessary that the beginning of the work of God is in our heart. We must hate sin with all that is in us, and not just some kind of sin but every sin. We must commend our whole heart entirely unto the Lord. We must be able to

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say in our life with Hezekiah, in Isaiah 38:16: "Oh Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit;" Namely, that the Lord may be glorified, that Christ may be exalted, and that our soul may be restored in the fellowship with God, reconciled with Him through the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the beginning of the work of God, the principle of the work of God, is that we are cut off from Adam and ingrafted in the Lord Jesus Christ. We never can find rest for the sole of our feet before that we find rest in God through Christ Jesus. We can not look back, because if we look back on that way, that is a clear proof that our home is in Sodom, that our heart is in Sodom, and our life is in Sodom.

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Lot never looked back. Why not? At that time, he was so tired of that sin in Sodom and in his own heart. He was so tired. If the Lord had taken away Lot on the way to Zoar, he could say, 'Lord it is good, it is good. Now I am delivered from all my corruption; now I am delivered from all my wretchedness.' God's people have times in their life that they are so tired of themselves, so tired of sin, so tired of this world. They could say, 'Lord thou art able to take me away rather than staying on this earth, because I am always afraid of myself.' I always have to pray, by day and by night, that the Lord be with me and round about me as a fiery wall at all times. If the Lord leaves us over to ourselves for one moment, it is done. We lay as one dead on the street. And those people come to the acknowledgement in their own heart as long as they are living here on this earth that they are a grief to the Lord. A grief to the Lord as long as they are living. Really! Because the root of every sin is in our heart as long as we are living here. Even when the Lord has taken away the guilt of our sin, the pollution of sin stays with us as long as we are living here on earth. I say it in other words: these people can not live as they want to live. And that is a heavy burden, a heavy burden. We started tonight with Psalter 84: "Be ye not unruly, or slow to understand. Be glad in God ye righteous and heed his wise command."

Now, there was a time in the life of God's people that they thought this was about their neighbor. It was their neighbor. But there comes a time when we become so before the Lord. We are as an unwilling horse, as such an unwilling horse; as an animal that is always striving against the Lord. There was in one of our congregations a man that had 5 sons. Four were unreligious and the other was without a mind. He had no mind. One time the man said

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to me, 'That boy is now 21 years old. There never was one day that I could accept this. That must be a blessed day for me when I can accept what lays in my family.' Oh, yes. And you must say, 'O Lord dost Thou love your people so much that Thou givest them so many crosses, so many struggles and so many hardships in their life?' Is that now love? Is that now love? Yes people, that is love. Because if we do not have those crosses and if we do not have those struggles, what then?

I know, people, I know for myself that the Lord is sitting on His throne. I know that. I shall never take that place. I know that. And still, I am fighting with the Lord to come to that place. For God's people, the day of death shall be better than the day that they were born. When they bury us on a piece of ground, not in a cemetery but on a piece of ground anywhere, because we are not worthy to be buried in a cemetery. They can well say that the day of death is better than the day they were born. And from that day on, the Lord shall have no more grief from that person.

Of course, another thing, we never know, people, what can happen in our life. Remember, remember the wife of Lot. Oh, I hope young and old, great and small, that you will go with me to the plain of Jordan to look to that monument. I hope you will go with me and we can look to the wife of Lot as a serious example for each and every one. The time is short, people, the time is short. It is possible that this Sabbath Day is the last Sabbath Day of our life. For many weeks, there has been no one taken away. Perhaps the Lord is now on His way to take away this one or that one unexpectedly. Then the whole congregation would be upset. 'Have you heard that that boy, that girl, that man or that woman was taken away by the hand of death?'

Remember, remember the wife of Lot. What shall be the end for us? A convinced sinner is not a converted sinner. A convinced sinner is not an awakened sinner. No. There is a difference. We are travelers to eternity. It is a personal matter for each and every one. Oh, take it with you this day. I am standing here in your midst, people, with that consciousness that I have no power to bring it in your heart. I can not even bring it to the heart of my children. Oh, I want to do it, I want to do it. But I cannot do it. I am so incapable. But for the salvation and for the welfare of your immortal and never dying soul, remember Lot's wife.

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Is this the last message that I shall bring to you? Shall this be the last message that you will hear from this pulpit? I hope, I hope that the Lord will appear in our midst, in our hearts; I hope that the Lord does something so that we can see that He is still alive, and He has not forsaken us. There is such a deep sleep in which the people are lying in our days, such a deep sleep. They are sleeping in the top mast of the ship, they are sleeping so soundly. And from Sabbath to Sabbath they come. May we take it with us, take the message with you. May we lay on our beds tonight and say, "Lord, I have heard it again. Shall it testify against me? Shall it testify against me?" When I was a boy, 12-13 years old and living under that impression, so many times while I was walking, I passed by the water. And there was a voice inside so many times that said, "Cast yourself in the water and it is done. There is no hope, there is never hope for you." And then, that eternity. I wish I could tell you what was in my heart then. But now it is so far gone, so far gone. But I considered the seriousness of life in those times. There were sometimes that I was so convinced of eternity and that righteous judge. Then I said, "O Lord, turn my eyes, Oh, turn my eyes from the water." Really! Because it means something to be lost and that forever and forever. Oh, children, do not reject and refuse the warnings and the admonitions. Refuse it not, but that you would bow down before the Lord. It shall be awful and awful to fall into the hands of the living God. And boys and girls, children, if we refuse to bow our knees, Christ shall break our legs in the day of judgment. And then, too late, then too late forever and forever. May the Lord look down in mercy and in grace.

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Examine your heart people, that think you are on the way to heaven. Examine your heart. Is your life the same as the wife of Lot? Then the time shall come when you look back. Then the Lord shall change you into a pillar of salt. Then He will make an end of your life and you will fall into eternity. There the worm shall never die, the fire never shall never be quenched. I beseech you, young and old, great and small, that the word of God brought in your midst shall never testify against you. I want that it were in the days of McCheyne in 1836. When he passed through the city in the evening, then in every house there was a cry of the people. He said, "Two or three children were convinced and crying about their guilt and sin."

Oh, I pray you, I pray you, ask in this coming night, ask in this coming night on your knees, that the Lord will come. Oh, what shall it be if He never

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comes? We live on through life and then to be cut off forever and forever. May this serious warning be sanctified to young and old, great and small, and that our talk and our subject when we come out of the church would not be about the world, but that this would be our subject and that it would stay with us, stay with us until it bears fruit for our immortal and never dying soul. “Oh Lord, O Lord, come in Thy love and in Thy favor and visit our souls, and the hearts of our children. Amen”

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THE REMNANT OF THE LORD

A sermon on Zephaniah 3:12

REV. H. A. MINDERMAN

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Text: Zephaniah 3:12 - I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the Lord.

The prophetic book of Zephaniah, my hearers, is a short book because it contains only a few chapters. Zephaniah was a contemporary with Jeremiah. However, even if we must therefore call it small in size, we do not think that we are saying too much if we immediately add to it with freedom: this small book is notable because of its rich contents; a contents full of humbling as well as comforting significance, both for the Israel of the old as

well as for the church of the new covenant. Zephaniah lived and prophesied during the reign of the godly king Josiah, King of Judah, who broke down

Psalter 182: 1

Zephaniah 3

Text: Zephaniah 3:12

Psalter 439: 3,4

Psalter 416: 5

Psalter 161: 1-5

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the altars of Baal in the fear and strength of the Lord to restore the service of Israel's Jehovah in the midst of idolatrous and backsliding Judah.

Nevertheless, in spite of this reformation, Zephaniah, enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord, saw how the larger part of the people of Judah had turned to God only outwardly, so that their entire religion, at its very core, was actually nothing but a religion of dead forms.

Thus, Zephaniah used sharp and hard language against the princes and judges and against the unfaithful prophets and priests. We are told this in verses three and four of the chapter of our text, in which Zephaniah announces God's judgments upon land and people.

Surely, Zephaniah knows that God's awful sentence upon Judah has been pronounced. Indeed, it has been made known to him that Judah will shortly sigh in Babylon under God's judgments, and that the Lord will give them into the hands of a tyrant who will rule over them.

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But, although he knows all this, still the hope of the future lives in the heart of this prophet. Moreover, his eye, enlightened by the Spirit of the Lord, already surveys the future ages. And whereas he was just now still proclaiming the day of God's vengeance, then yet again, as we read in the 9th verse and what follows, he presently reveals himself as the prophet of salvation who is preaching Judah's deliverance, and the salvation of the new dispensation in strong and deeply moving language.

It would be a joyful time, when Judah, delivered from their captivity, would return again to the country of their fathers, and God would take away His judgments from above the head of Israel's remnant. That time when the Lord, in the Christ Who would come, would deliver His Church out of the Babylon of sin and death, and the remnant according to the election of God's grace would rejoice again in the gracious and blessed presence of their God and King – that time Zephaniah may behold here in a prophetic perspective as having already come. For that reason the prophet, upon Divine instruction, is calling unto that remnant, whom God has left unto Himself in the midst of the deeply sunk Judah as a poor and afflicted people, but loved and elected by Him, because for them, there was still reason and cause to

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rejoice in the Lord as the God of their salvation.

Thus, for that remnant according to the election of God's grace, there was at that time, as there still is at present, cause and reason for rejoicing. Thus, God remains for His afflicted people the unchangeable and faithful one, Who will never leave nor forsake them. Therefore, there the message sounds forth for them in the 14th verse of our chapter: "Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!" And God, in His Christ, has taken away their judgments and has reconciled their guilt as verse 15 tells us, since He Himself wants to dwell in their midst as their God and King. Then there is for those people – though poor and afflicted in themselves – no cause to fear, but to rejoice most blessedly in the God of their salvation, since they will never be cut off nor forsaken by the Lord.

The assurance of this we find written, so rich with comfort, in the words of our text which can be found in the 12th verse of the chapter read to you out of Zephaniah 3: "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the LORD."

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In pursuance of these words, we wish to speak to you at the present time about: The remnant of the Lord:

1. Of whom the smallness is so strikingly portrayed;
2. Of whom the activity is so emphatically declared; and
3. Of whom the preservation is so safely guaranteed.

I. We will now consider the first point – Of whom the smallness is so strikingly portrayed. It may, beloved hearers, truly be called a touching and striking portrayal by which the remnant of the Lord is presented to the eyes in the words of our text. The God of heaven and earth, He, Who is the trier of the hearts and reins, is calling that remnant: "an afflicted and poor people."

"Are God's people an afflicted and poor people?" Thus we hear you exclaim, asking in surprise. And we agree with you, that viewed superficially, this picture seems really puzzling and like a riddle. For if we inquire into who

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they are to whom we are pointed here, who the people actually are who are here presented as afflicted and poor, then we see that they are not the mouth-and-name-confessors, nor the temporary believers, nor the almost Christian. Those people indeed seem to be close to the Kingdom of God; but with all their religion, they still stand infinitely far outside of it. We see that they are not the lukewarm people like those at Laodicea, of whom the glorified Christ says: "I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of My mouth."

We see that they are not those of whom there are also found so many in our days, who show a form of godliness but have denied the power thereof.

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No, beloved, none of these, none of these who are rich in themselves and increased with goods, having need of nothing, are the people meant by that afflicted and poor remnant in our text. However, this is what rightly might stir up our amazement and surprise if viewed superficially. Here we have portrayed before us a people as being afflicted and poor who are most highly blessed, people whom God has set His heart upon from eternity; those that He already has elected in Christ Jesus unto life eternal from before the beginning of time, people whom He loves with an eternal and wholly voluntary love and whose names He has written in the Lamb's book of life.

Yes, that remnant of whom is spoken here are those people redeemed by God through the blood of His Holy Child Jesus, sought by Him in time and regenerated and quickened by His Spirit. Hence, they are those whom He has stopped in the paths of sin, and whom He has translated from death into life, and from darkness into His marvelous light.

Yes, the people called afflicted and poor in our text are that holy congregation of true Christian believers, expecting all their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost. The people here portrayed as afflicted and poor are thus in fact people most highly blessed and privileged above thousands. They are people whose blessedness cannot be described; whose privilege can never be valued according to its worth. They will need eternity and an eternal language and tongue to render the honor, the worship, and the blessing unto that God Who elected them, unto that Jesus Who redeemed them, and unto that Spirit Who sanctified

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them, for the grace shown unto them, while passing by thousands and for the blessing granted unto them wholly undeserved.

And still, in spite of how this all may be and how most highly blessed and privileged above thousands these people meant here may be, still they are called, and that according to truth, “afflicted and poor.”

In order to find a confirmation of this truth, we need not even bring to memory the persecution by the enemy or call to mind the scaffolds of murder which were erected for those people in the centuries that lie behind us. Nor do we need to point to the ways of crosses and afflictions upon which God, according to His sovereign power, is leading His people; for God’s people are afflicted and poor at all times and under all circumstances – that is, in themselves.

God’s people are and remain in themselves “afflicted and poor” every day. So, that means not only in days of adversity, but just as well in days of prosperity; in times of rest and peace. Also, at the time when they may sit down under their vine and fig tree, also at that time, yes always, the remnant of the Lord is and remains an afflicted and poor people.

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Yes, truly afflicted and poor is that remnant as it lives in the midst of a world that lieth in wickedness, as it dwells in the outward church, indeed, whether they are weeping tears under the cross and the hiding of God’s countenance, or whether they are singing psalms under the blessed enjoyment of God’s presence and favor.

God’s remnant is called afflicted. Do you ask, “Why?” For this reason, beloved, because they feel they possess in themselves no power nor ability to overcome the bitter plague of sin in their heart. To their own grief, they have to learn that instead of getting better, they are steadily becoming more afflicted and more guilty, whereas, in themselves, they find the ability to only increase their guilt daily. God’s children feel themselves to be afflicted, because they are made sensible of their total inability to overcome the abomination of their heart. Yes, even during their best times, they often experience their complete inability to suppress and conquer a single sin, so that with Paul, they lamentingly cry out: “O, wretched man that I am! Who shall

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deliver me from the body of this death?” So then, God’s people are afflicted, needing help to the highest degree. They are continually assailed by a host of enemies, bearing about a heart constantly inclined to going astray and wandering about. Chained fast to the old man of sin, they are of themselves so weak, needing so much help that they cannot stand or remain standing on their own feet for one moment. Indeed, every hour they are in danger; continually they are the target of the fiery darts of Satan, while mocked or accused by the world, vexed by a host of cares and needs, they often have to lament with the poet:

*Myriad woes beset my heart, myriad doubts and bitternesses;
Thou Who my Deliverer art, bring me out of my distresses.*

Truly, with the eye upon all that which we mentioned to you, you will have to agree with us when we testify that the name “afflicted” is truly fitting for that remnant of the Lord. However, in addition to being afflicted, they are also called poor as well. Then, wherein does the poverty of that so richly privileged people consist?

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Listen then with attention, and it will become clear to you. That remnant is poor, and truly not only in the sense in which Paul speaks to them when he says: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen.” But above all, God’s people are poor in that they possess nothing in themselves and are nothing in themselves. For that reason, they have to confess and learn, as well as acknowledge it in humility, that they are poor, and have to live from those things which are given, yes, they must live by grace.

Also, the most advanced person on the way of grace is still nothing more, and neither should be anything more but a poor beggar at the throne of grace. If we are more than that, we are too much; whereas God, not only at the beginning in the way of discovery, but also at the continuance, yes, even to the very end, shall continue to fulfill His Word: “He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.”

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God's people are also poor in their knowledge of God and their knowledge of Christ. They feel themselves to be so poor in their understanding, that with Bildad [in Job], they exclaim, "For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing."

God's people are poor in righteousness since they possess nothing which could possibly exist before God. All their righteousnesses are as filthy rags, are they not? Therefore, they do not even possess a small garment to cover their nakedness before God, and not a penny to pay to God for the ransom of their debt.

God's people are poor in faith, so that they can neither embrace by faith, as being theirs, a simple benefit of salvation nor Christ's Surety righteousness. Even in their best moments, they are sometimes not even entirely free of unbelief, for which reason they then, indeed, have to lament with David: "For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me."

God's people are also poor in love. Indeed, when they presently declare to be willing to go with Jesus into prison and into death, then, a short time later, they immediately are ready to deny Him for a single word of mockery or upon some threat of the enemies.

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God's people are also poor in courage and strength, so that many times they already tremble for the rustling of a leaf and flee when there is no pursuer. It is true, there come times that they think to be able with Samson to take away even the gates of Gaza, of the city of the enemies, or, with Peter, even to go with Jesus into prison and death. But, ah, beloved, when it comes to the test, where then does their courage and strength stay? And, then sighing, they have to exclaim while their hearts are ashamed, "Lord, we have no might against this great company!"

God's people are also poor in prayer; many times, they do not know how to pray as they ought. Most of the time, with all their sighing and crying, they cannot bring it any further than "Ah, Lord, mercy!" Or, "Alas, Lord, what has to become of me, an afflicted and poor one? I shall yet perish in my misery!"

Thus, that remnant has to live by grace, both bodily as well as spiritually. Daily they have to come to God's throne of grace with empty hands, to ac-

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knowledge there that everything for which they are supplicating the Lord, and that which they may receive from Him has been forfeited by them a thousand times.

Yes, indeed, God's people are poor, and they are called poor in spirit, because of the poverty which weighs them down and wounds their heart and conscience, is a spiritual poverty. However, with all the poverty of this remnant, with all the affliction of which we heard in this hour, they possess one great privilege: that is that they know and are willing to acknowledge that they are so afflicted and poor, and that, without God's grace of showing mercy, and without the benefits of salvation merited by Christ, they would have to perish forever.

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God's people's great privilege consists in this: that God graciously discovered their affliction and poverty to them by His Spirit; and, by His discovering grace, God caused them to know that they are worthy of the curse and damnation, so that, unto their bitter grief and sorrow of heart, they learned to understand something of what it means to stand outside of God and Christ for their own account. Indeed, their benefit and privilege is that their affliction and poverty has become guilt unto them and grief before God, and that they have become concerned about this before the Lord.

Oh, to be sure, we agree that other times were also occasionally experienced by those people; God's people have experienced a time in which they imagined themselves to be rich and thought to have need of nothing. That was the time when they had been privileged to share in God's favor for the first time and had been privileged to experience and taste in a convincing manner to their heart, something of God's sweet and tender mercy. Then a time came, did it not, in which they thought to have gained everything and to have entirely surmounted their need and poverty? That was the time in which the way of deliverance was opened unto them by commencement, and they also were privileged to experience something of Jesus' manifested love in their heart. Then they thought that they could live from the provision of the basket without care. Indeed, they certainly expected that tomorrow shall be as this day and much more abundant.

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But, there it pleased the Lord to discover their affliction and poverty to them as to the corruption of their heart and existence; there they began to see that they came short of so much, yes, came short of everything. They began to see that their garment was so soiled, their debt so much. Then they acknowledged, did they not, to be mortally poor; however, their acknowledgement was of such a nature that they, considering that a poor man has to work in order to exist, began to work with all the might of their hand in order, if possible, to make good what had been spoiled. This lasted until the time when it pleased God to make known unto them that all their work is a debt and all they did and left undone is unrighteousness. Yes, they were so discovered to themselves that the garment of their virtue and duty and of all their righteousness became unto them a shame and burden. Indeed, they were so discovered that they were even ashamed on account of their faith, because they could do nothing with it but condemn themselves. They detested their prayers because they realized how full they were of self-interest and foolishness.

Truly, to be discovered in such a way, you will have to agree with us, is a benefit and a great privilege which God's remnant possesses despite all their affliction and poverty. And, moreover, in this they have been granted a benefit and privilege above thousands that they at times are privileged to receive so much out of the fulness of Jesus' sufficiency and Mediatorial merit. They may then exclaim:

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*O, world and, O treasure Be gone far away,
You can never measure My riches for aye.
I lost all possession, But Jesus I chose;
That is my profession His own I repose.*

Meanwhile, another, in the midst of want and grief, sorrow and loss, is exclaiming:

*But the Lord will send salvation, And by day His love provide,
He shall be my exultation, And my song at eventide.*

So, it is certainly true if we call this afflicted and poor people also a highly privileged and happy people. This will become evident even more clearly

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when we together will contemplate upon the continuation of our text in our second point.

II. The activity of that remnant is so emphatically declared with the words: “They shall trust in the Name of the LORD.”

“They,” thus speaks the Spirit of the Lord by the mouth of Zephaniah. They, whom I shall leave in the midst of thee, “they shall trust in the Name of the Lord.”

“They” – do you still want a further explanation of who they are? They are those who have been translated out of death into life by regenerating grace, who know that vain is the help of man. They are those who learned to know the Lord aright, for without this knowing of Him, no trusting in His Name would be possible. Who would put his trust in a stranger, in someone completely unknown to him?

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Surely, none! Therefore, those who are signified in our text with that word, they are such who have learned to know Him and thereby shall put their trust in Him. They learned to know Him in His goodness, in His power, in His immovable faithfulness, and in His all-surpassing love and grace. “They” – it is a blessed privilege to be granted to belong to them! Those people are distinguished greatly from those who cannot be numbered with them, namely those persons who are still of the world as well as the mouth-and name-confessors. Surely, all these have not learned to trust upon the Name of the LORD, but [trust only] upon their understanding, upon their strength, or upon their piety and their freewill religion.

The person, therefore, who does not know God, who is not savingly discovered to his own impotence and to the strength which God has opened in Christ for afflicted and poor people, understands and knows nothing of trusting in the Name of the LORD. Only people, afflicted and poor in themselves, that in vain have sought for support and help with others or in themselves, only those, who, driven by need, have learned to go to the God of all grace and mercy, through Christ, for mercy, as poor supplicants – that is, God’s living people, hungering after God and His communion – these only are the ones who learn to trust in the Name of the LORD.

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It is true, this trusting is not always equally strong with God's children, nor is it always equally lively. No, on the contrary, that trusting, which is a work of faith, has its seasons and steps. There are sometimes seasons that the trusting in the heart of God's children seems to perish forever with a sense of distrust. However this may be, God is always able to keep His own work alive, so that it sometimes happens that God's people, when they have come as if to the borders of despair, or are plunged into bitter grief and mourning that they seem to perish, sometimes, all of a sudden, they can be visited by the Lord and wrought upon by His Spirit in such a way that they can again lift up their head out of all their deficiencies. Then it can happen that such a soul, leaning upon the Lord Who is faithful, exclaims: "The LORD is my portion, therefore will I hope in Him," while another, though weeping bitterly, nevertheless learns to sing with the poet:

*My soul in silence waits for God, My Savior He has proved;
He only is my Rock and Tow'r; I never shall be moved.*

To trust in the Name of the LORD, therefore, actually means to lean and to rest upon all His blessed virtues and attributes, which all together lie wound up in His Name, that also makes up His Essence. Hence it means that God's afflicted and poor people learn to trust in that God, Who reveals Himself to their soul in His omnipotence, wisdom, grace, unchangeable faithfulness, and inflexible righteousness. For it is in this way that they learn to know God especially in that He reveals unto them His Christ, in Whom His Name and virtues are revealed and glorified. They, in the countenance of Christ, learn to know God in His Name and virtues, and there they begin also to plead upon God's Name and virtues.

At one time, with their eye cast upon the Christ of God, God's people plead upon the grace and mercy of God, Who, for His Son's sake, can be gracious upon them without offending His virtues or justice. Then again, being in poverty and distress, bent down under loss and grief, they plead upon the wisdom and faithfulness of God, Who, as the only Wise One in His Christ, showed that He is able to find a way and a means to deliver the afflicted and the poor, and Who, as that Faithful one, has delivered out of six troubles and in the seventh will not cause them to perish.

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This taking refuge in the Name of the Lord, people, this pleading upon God's virtues, is already a trusting in the LORD; even though we are not always immediately conscious of this. For this reason, it is then said in our text concerning God's remnant: They may indeed be afflicted and poor in themselves, yet, "They" shall trust in the Name of the LORD.

"Shall" is a word that is used in our society when people want to indicate the certainty, the sureness of the coming to pass of matters or events. So, it means a sure certainty. And now, if this is already the case, when it is used by changeable, fallible people, of how much more certainty, of how much more infinite sureness does it contain when the Lord says: "These events or matters shall come to pass." This word is used by Him, Who cannot lie, with Whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning, of Whom it is written: "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" Therefore, the "shall" in our text makes the trusting in the Name of the LORD for God's remnant, certain and sure.

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Moreover, they are wrought upon by the Lord Himself unto this trusting. Surely, He, Who, by His Spirit, worked faith in the hearts of His people, He it is also, Who, after having made them truly afflicted and poor, and after having taken away from them all their props and supports, works upon them by that same Spirit unto this trusting by faith.

Unto some of His people the Lord gives to exercise this trusting in His Name in the standing of their life, so that sometimes they put to shame the farthest advanced [person] on the way of grace by the strength of their trusting in faith. At times the Lord glorifies an abundant measure of faith to His small and weak people. They are as lifted up above all objections for a time, and do agree with God and His leading, and with the cross laid upon them by the Lord, so that they, surrendering their lot and condition into God's hands, trust with their whole soul in the Lord, believing that He shall surely make it well.

Unto others of His people, the Lord gives not only in the standing of their life, but also in the state of their life to trust in His Name as the Name of a Triune and Most blessed Covenant-God. So that they, sinking away blessedly in God, may by faith embrace Him as their God. By this they, knowing

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themselves secure in the God of their salvation, secure for soul and body, for time and eternity, do exclaim with the poet:

*We lift our head aloft, for God, our Shield is o'er us;
Through Him, through Him alone, Whose presence goes before us;
We'll wear the victor's crown, no more by foes assaulted,
We'll triumph through our King, by Israel's God exalted.*

Indeed, by this they do testify at times with Habakkuk that although the fig tree would not blossom, neither would fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive would fail, and the fields would yield no meat, although the flock would be cut off from the fold, and there would be no herd in the stalls, yet they would rejoice in the LORD, and joy in the God of their salvation.

Still, we may not forget with all this, that this trusting in the Name of the LORD constitutes the daily and continual warfare for God's people.

As long as a child of God is here on earth, he has to fight continually. Many times, there is strife within and strife without. For if God's people are to trust in the LORD, then they will have to fight continually against that which attempts to draw them away from the Lord. In order to be able to trust solely in the LORD, it is necessary, therefore, to be continually drawn away from trusting upon everything which lies outside of God and Christ; from all flesh and blood; from all religion, practice and experience. For indeed, experience worketh hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, but then that hope does not rest upon our experience, but upon that God, Whom we learned to know by experience as the eternally Faithful and Gracious One in Christ Jesus.

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To trust in the Lord in this way while letting go of all that is ours – this now constitutes the continual warfare of God's people and causes them to see more and more how distrustful they are in themselves and how it is necessary continually to come supplicating to the Lord with the prayer:

*O God, confirm and strengthen still,
Thy purposes in us fulfill.*

This trusting in the Name of the LORD by God's people is also their

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unspeakable privilege. Surely those people who have learned to know and accuse themselves as afflicted and poor before God, are given and granted to trust in the Name of the LORD. This, indeed, is for them such a blessed and deeply forfeited benefit, that they do exclaim of it, as sunk away in adoration: “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth’s sake.” A more blessed privilege and a more unspeakable benefit is not conceivable for God’s poor and afflicted people, but to trust in the Name of the LORD with their whole heart, to transfer to Him their need and wants, in other words, to cast them upon Him, so as to be privileged to then rest in God’s bosom so that they are as a newly weaned child, who finds contentment near his mother. Then, oh then, it is a holy response to sing along with the song of trust:

*My soul in silence waits for God, My Saviour He has proved;
He only is my rock and Tow’r: I never shall be moved.*

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Before we consider our third point, we will sing something of what God is for this trusting remnant from Psalter 416:5.

The remnant of the Lord of whom God Himself testifies in the words of our text that they, though afflicted and poor, shall nevertheless trust in the Name of the LORD, we still must consider in our third point:

III. Their preservation is so safely guaranteed.

The preservation of God’s Church, as God’s remnant – in whatever way it may go – is safely guaranteed in God’s immovable promise.

In our text the Lord says so emphatically, does He not, “I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people.” What a safe certainty! What a comfort this emphatic promise contains for this people that many times are become like “a lodge in a garden of cucumbers” (Isaiah 1:8b), whose number, as it appears, can often easily be written by a child.

According to this promise of God, there always has been that remnant in the times which have already passed and in the ages that lie behind. It did not matter how weak and defenseless in themselves; it did not matter how

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often it seemed as if the enemy had succeeded in destroying God's Church from off the earth, so that this enemy already shouted for joy: "Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession" (Ez. 36:2).

That remnant was there in Zephaniah's days. It was there in the midst of Israel sighing in Babylon. It was there in the fullness of time, when darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people. Even at that time, that remnant was found, was it not, in the Simeons and Annas. That remnant was there when God's only Son, in the midst of darkness, hung dying on the cursed tree of the cross. Indeed, because there on Golgotha, the blood of God's only Son flowed; therefore, throughout the ages which have past or will yet come, God's immovable promise remains full of truth and strength: "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people." That remnant was there, although the enemy thought to be able to cause that remnant to disappear from the earth with his erected stakes, with his scaffolds of murder which caused the blood of God's saints to flow down in streams. And even at that time, that remnant, according to God's testimony, was found, though in the most secret hiding places, also in our own country, was it not?

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It was also still found in the holes and on the mountains of the Waldenses, and in the valleys of Piedmont, even against the bloodiest persecutions, over against the most terrible raging of the enemies. Indeed, that remnant was there, and their cry out of the depths of misery has resounded against the green mountains of Scotland unto the God of deliverances.

And not only in the past, but also until the present hour we see confirmed God's immovable promise which so safely guarantees the preservation of His remnant. Surely, even now, there is still that remnant, though it may be small in number. It may have become as the gleaning in the uppermost bough. The world causes us to see the evidence of this, that it is still there. That God still bears and spares this world steeped in sin, is indeed only because there are still Josephs found in Potiphar's house. For that reason, God bears, for that reason God still spares this world, continually sinking deeper into wickedness.

That remnant is still found in the midst of the outward church. To our comfort, we may continually see the evidences of this, everywhere in our so richly blessed fatherland where God granted us to be privileged to proclaim

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His Word. And not only here, but also far outside of it, also on the other side of the ocean we were privileged to find some of that remnant who did not bend the knee unto Baal. Also, in our midst, no, we do not deceive ourselves if we testify, also here they are found, those afflicted and poor ones, who, although the one somewhat less than the other, have learned to trust in the Name of the LORD.

Those people, wherever they may be found, are the supports of the city and country, yes, [they are] the corks upon which the world still floats and stands. For the sake also of that remnant, God does not yet withdraw His blessing from His Church and congregation. For the sake of His people, He still continually gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater. Indeed, for the sake of His remnant, God still has His Word preached and His table furnished in the midst of this wilderness.

God's promise in our text, which is so safely guaranteed in all His virtues and in the blood of the covenant, surely contains also comfort for the future.

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Looking at the future of God's Church, while God takes home so many of His children, how the heart of the child of the Lord can be often filled with distress and fear. How then the distressful question can arise in the heart: Oh, when soon God's old people will have passed away, who will occupy those empty places? Who will be "baptized for the dead?" I Cor. 15:29. (That is, who will be admitted to the church militant in place of these old people by whom the church may be edified?)

People of the Lord in our midst, does that fear also take hold of you sometimes, whereas at one time you see this one and then that one of God's old people around you, pass away? Come, let us then, to your and our comfort, be granted the privilege to remind you of God's promise which is not only written, and remains in force for the past and for the present, but also for the future. "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the Lord."

Looking at this, we may be assured that God will take care that those empty places will be occupied again and again by others, by sinners chosen and quickened by God, called and gathered in from the East and West, from the

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North and South, and this will continue until the end of the ages, until the hour has come when God will take home the last one of His remnant, and it will be said of them all: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple."

APPLICATION

Grant us to now ask a question, my fellow-traveler to eternity. Tell us: "Do you already belong to that remnant of whom we were privileged to speak unto you in this hour?" Beloved, so much depends upon your answer to this question. No, everything depends on it, our eternal well or our eternal woe. So it is, indeed, necessary to lay this question upon the heart and conscience of all of you, and to urge you to examine yourself closely, indeed, very closely, if you, in truth, may belong unto that remnant. The infallible characteristics of belonging to it are these: to have learned to know oneself as afflicted and poor before God, but above all, to have learned to know something of that trusting in the Name of the LORD. For the main thing is that trusting by faith, thus, the possession of saving faith, that is what everything depends on. Thereby we not only learn to know ourselves as afflicted and poor, but we also learn to take refuge with confidence in the LORD, to be redeemed and saved by Him for Christ's sake.

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We urgently ask you: Do you know something of this? If not, if you are still an entire stranger of all this, then we must tell you that your condition is dangerous indeed, and that you are travelling towards a terrible future. However, we may also add to this that deliverance is still possible, for you are still here. You still live in the day of grace. Thus, it is still not too late. For the sake of Christ, we call unto you: Make speed, haste for your life's sake, for your life is but a handbreadth, and eternity is approaching with rapid strides from which no return will be possible. Therefore, do not postpone, but today, even today, if you hear God's voice, harden not your heart. Fall down before God even now; who can tell? He may still turn and be gracious unto you for Christ's sake.

The prayer of our heart for you is that He, by grace, might open the blind eyes of your soul, so that you might learn to see and know your state of misery and distress, and that you might learn to flee in time unto that God

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with Whom, through Christ, there is forgiveness for a sinner worthy of death, that He may be feared.

People of the Lord, tell us: Have we mentioned your name, your condition in this hour? Is it not thus that you know yourself as being afflicted and poor, and as such did you not come pleading to the Lord?

Perhaps you fear, because you cannot trust in the LORD with your whole heart, because you learned to know yourself as being full of unbelief and distrust. You fear that with you everything is deceit or just creature work. However, do listen now attentively. In order to accuse yourself before the Lord, faith is needed to do this; in order to learn to supplicate for grace and to flee groaning unto the Lord, faith is needed to do this. The trusting by faith also has its seasons and steps. Refuge-taking faith is also trusting in faith. The pleading upon God's grace, upon His showing mercy and His faithfulness, upon His Omnipotence and upon the blood of Christ – for that, faith and trust are also needed. However, in order to be perfectly comforted, you need a faith and trust by which you lose yourself in God, by which you embrace Christ in His entire Person.

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Let it be your continual prayer, therefore, that the Lord discover you more and increase your faith, so that you, with all God's people, might come to a full embracement by faith, and thus, it might be said of you also: "They that trust in the LORD shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever."

Amen.

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THE BRINGING OF GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY

A Christmas Sermon

BY REV. C. PIENEMAN, BB #105

“Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!” reads the lamentation of David in the fourteenth Psalm. And this was the prayer, the desire and the longing of the Church of God from the time of the first promise until the day of its fulfillment. Hence, this was the desire of Eve, the mother of all living, and also of old Simeon and Anna, the prophetess, who had the privilege of living in the time wherein the Lord God, according to His sovereign good pleasure, would fulfill the desire and longing of so many righteous kings, prophets and children of God and answer their prayers. Yes, my hearers, when the fullness of time had come, then, according to God’s eternal decrees and in His adorable providence, the moment was there wherein the wonder of wonders would be revealed, about which heaven and earth would be amazed and about which they will be astonished to all eternity.

The Song of Zacharias
3,4,6,7
Read Luke 2:1-20
Psalter 109: 1,2,3,4
Psalter 242: 1,2,3,6,15
The Song of Simeon 1-6

God manifest in the flesh!

It was the most joyful tidings which could be brought to poor lost sinners. That tidings which the angel brought in the fields of Bethlehem and upon which we wish to fasten your attention this morning in pursuance of the tenth and eleventh verses of Luke 2.

“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

No, my hearers, never before was such a joyful message proclaimed; never

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was such a welfare, peace and salvation revealed; the shepherds in Ephratah's fields had never felt such an overwhelming and soul's ravishing joy as was now brought to them, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem's manger. And thus there was never such a joy for all God's people, who have been uncovered for their lost state, as when Jesus was born in their hearts as their only Saviour, Who has been anointed of God to be their Prophet, Priest, and King and Who shall reign over them forever.

While we are considering this joyful message with each other, we will notice:

1. The fact of Christ's birth;
2. The joyful message which was brought;
3. The means whereby the hindrances were taken away;
4. The contents of the message itself;
5. The spiritual purpose thereof, to the joy of everyone who receives it.

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I. In considering the fact of Christ's birth, we will briefly observe one thing and another respecting His origin, the place of His birth, His appearance and the remarkableness of His birth.

If we are to say anything respecting the origin of the Lord Jesus, then, in our thoughts, we must go back to God's eternal Counsel of Peace. In the stillness of eternity, the Lord God saw the human race fall away from Him by Adam's breach of the covenant. And, as if in holy confusion, the question of the Father resounded: "How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the host of nations?" (Jeremiah 3:19). Upon this the answer of the Son was heard, according to Psalm 40:7 and 8: "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God: yea, Thy law is within My heart." There the blessed Son of God took upon Himself to satisfy the Divine law for all His people. There He committed Himself to one day take upon Himself the human nature and to therein merit righteousness for all those who are His. And upon the foundation of this covenant of salvation, which was concluded

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in this Covenant of Peace, He would one day grow up out of His place to build the temple of the Lord (Zechariah 6:12). To do this, He had to leave the palace of heaven and take upon Himself the form of a servant, so that it would be exclaimed to those who by discovering light of the Spirit have learned to know themselves as being miserable and naked: "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones" (Isaiah 54:11-12). When the fullness of time would come, that period which the Lord had appointed in His unsearchable wisdom, then the Lord Jesus would be born in the place determined by God thereto. In the fourth verse of the chapter wherein our text is found, we read that Joseph went up out of the city of Nazareth into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled in order to be taxed.

An enrollment was already commanded before this one, which however was not carried out. But now the time has arrived wherein the Messiah would be born. Wonderful guidance of Divine providence! He was born in a stable because there was no room for them in the inn; yea, He is born as a helpless infant, as the poorest among the poor, so that He would one day fill with his riches all the poverty and misery of His people; so that He would one day be the covering of the naked, the bread for the hungry, the rest for the weary and the protector from the enemy.

And Mary wrapped Him in swaddling clothes. Behold, hearers, the action of Mary was a symbol that the Lord Jesus was, as it were, wrapped with the original and actual guilt of His people. God the Father hath made the iniquity of us all to meet on Him Who had descended from the place of glory, and He, Who knew no sin, was made sin for us, so that through Him we would be the righteousness of God and be clothed with His covering righteousness. He would also be the bread for the hungry, which is to say, for those who have been uncovered for their own unrighteousness and having hunger and thirst for His righteousness and thus being able to be satisfied by Him. The Lord Jesus Himself testified: "I am the bread of life which cometh down from heaven." He then, who is satisfied with this bread of life, shall hunger no more forever.

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He is the rest for the weary. He is the informer of rest for all those who can find no rest outside of Christ. Therefore, at one time He said: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

We will also notice His appearance. And then we ask you, hearers, what does a natural person see in the appearance of the Lord Jesus? Nothing exceptional, nothing attractive. It is exactly as the Prophet Isaiah testified: "He hath no form nor comeliness; there is no beauty that we should desire Him." So it was also during the Old Testament with the Israelites concerning the tabernacle. While they remained staring at the skins of badgers and rams with which the tabernacle was covered outwardly, they saw nothing exceptional, nothing attractive therein, but when they, by God's grace, were privileged to view the sanctuary of God with spiritual eyes, then the tabernacle for them was a precious symbol of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. Then they could see in the brazen altar of burnt offerings, which stood in the outer court, a guidepost pointing to the justification by the Surety of the Covenant; in the laver of brass the sanctification and cleansing of the pollution of sin. Then for them the golden candlestick with its seven lamps was a sign of the perfect, eternal light that would one day be kindled by the coming of the Messiah. The ark of the covenant with its mercy seat in the Holy of Holies appointed to them the Divine law and to Him Who testified: "I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is written within My heart" (Psalm 40:8).

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The blossoming rod of Aaron showed them that one day the Kingdom of the great King would flourish over the whole earth. In a word: they saw in that tabernacle everything which is necessary to live comfortably and to die happily.

Likewise, shall God's child, when he may be led into the Divinity of the Lord Jesus, view something uncommon, something fair. Then he shall exclaim with David: "Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into Thy lips" (Psalm 45:2) and with the bride in Songs 5:10 and 16: "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand. He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend." Then they cannot express the beauty, the glory, the suitableness, the sufficiency, the blessedness of that Zion's King. They cannot tell what they then feel, taste and enjoy.

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Lastly, we will also consider the remarkableness of His birth. Who can comprehend that the Creator of heaven and earth, and Who upholds all things by the Word of His power, lay there in the manger as a powerless, helpless, insignificant creature? He Who makes the clouds to be His chariots, Who walks upon the wings of the wind and Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, lies there as a helpless infant. Who can fathom that eternal wonder of God? Oh, if the Church of God is privileged to be led into this, then they must testify: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

II. In the second place, we would notice the joyful message which was brought. Some are of the opinion that the Holy Ghost was the messenger, but we can find no basis for this viewpoint in the Holy Scripture. It was a created angel and perhaps the same angel who had appeared to Mary, thus the angel Gabriel. Be that as it is, the angel, yea, the entire choir of angels were sent by God the Father from the court of heaven, to bring to common shepherds the most glorious tidings which ever was published upon earth. It appears from the eighth verse of this chapter that when this glad tidings was brought to the shepherds, it was night. The glory of the Lord shone round about them and the angel said to them, "Fear not!" And it was not only night in the realm of nature, but we must also say it was night in respect to Israel's spiritual life; that darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people. And is it not also so in the heart of every sinner until the Lord Jesus is born therein?

We can well understand, my hearers, that the shepherds were sore afraid when the angel appeared, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. Frequently, we read in God's Word that people were overcome with fear upon the sight of an angel. So it is also said of Zacharias in Luke 1:12, that when he saw the angel, he was troubled and fear fell upon him. What may be the cause of that, hearers? In the state wherein God had created man, he knew of no fear. Man could then live in the communion with the Lord. And after the fall, nothing of the kind can take place in respect to man as he is by nature. The appearing of the Lord or of His messengers from heaven fills him with awe and causes him to fear and tremble. And this will also be revealed in the conversion of a sinner, when he is thus shone upon by the

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light of the Holy Spirit. When a light from heaven suddenly shone about Saul as he was traveling to Damascus, he fell to the earth while he tremblingly exclaimed: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

And, people of the Lord, when the light of the Spirit shone upon you and caused you to see your guilt and sin, did you remain standing? Or did you fall to the earth with Saul? Oh, if a poor sinner is uncovered by God's Spirit of his wretched state wherein he lives and abides and of the intense enmity wherein he lives against his Creator and Former, then he falls down before God and his heart is filled with all kinds of fears and disturbances. But also, after having received grace, something of this fear remains. This appears to us from the shepherds of Bethlehem, of whom we may suppose were converted people. A constant fear remains in the heart of God's people, whether it is a fear for self-deceit, that their way is not right, and it will still turn out wrong with them; whether it is a fear for adhering depravity, for indwelling sin, etc. But thrice blessed are they who constantly fear thus.

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III. In the third place, we would notice the means whereby the hindrances were taken away. The angel did this by saying to the shepherds, "Fear not!"

We have just pointed out that the cause of fear which fills us with awe and trembling for the High Majesty lies in our fall from God in sin. This fear has its source from the curse of the law. It is a result of the wrath of God against sin and it is constantly enlivened by the knowledge that we are heading for death. Thus, a person, as he lives by nature, has every reason to fear! But those reasons, my hearers, have been removed for God's people. The Lord Jesus has come to bear sin and its consequences and to take away the pollution thereof, so that they, through His righteousness, out of grace, do have forgiveness of all their offenses. By the coming of Christ, Who was born outside of the covenant of works, but having placed Himself under it, the law in its curse has been disarmed. By the crucifixion death of the Son of God and the bloody sacrifice of the Mediator of the Covenant, the fire of the Father's wrath has been extinguished so that He testified: "Fury is not in Me." And in conclusion: Christ has swallowed up death in victory for His people so that, for them, the sting is removed therefrom and they can cry out with Paul: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, (or hell) where is thy victory?" (I Corinthians 15:55).

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Thus, my hearers, all the hindrances for God's poor and needy people are removed by the birth of the blessed Prince of Zion.

IV. And what message did the heavenly messengers bring to the shepherds of Bethlehem? "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

The angel called it "good tidings of great joy." Indeed, the desires, the prayers, and the sighs of four thousand years were now fulfilled and answered. All the promises have here become Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus; all the shadows of the Old Testament have been made clear in the body of Christ.

It was good tidings of great joy, also because of its everlasting power, for it would be proclaimed from generation to generation. This Gospel would be preached unto the ends of the earth, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in and so all Israel shall be saved. This good tidings of great joy shall be to all people, from every kindred, tongue and nations from which the Lord will gather His people. Such joy was never as yet revealed and also shall never again be revealed – that eternal wonder of the mystery of godliness, God, the Father, gave His Son as a gift to enemies!

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How this message must have taken hold of the shepherds! What it was for them when, from the mouth of the angel, it resounded in their ears and penetrated into their hearts: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour." For you, that is what all God's people, who have been made upright, desire: those people who cannot live or die without Jesus and who can find no rest anywhere until they are privileged to hear out of the mouth of God: "Unto you is born this day a Saviour." He who can deliver you from guilt and punishment and give you the right to life, in Whom all the promises for the soul are Yea and Amen.

"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy; for unto you is born this day a Saviour." That this day which the angel caused the shepherds to hear was in agreement with God's decree founded from that everlasting eternity. And at the same moment that this day which the angel caused the shepherds to hear was in agreement with God's decree founded from that everlasting eternity.

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And at the same moment that this day was spoken by the angel, Christ was revealed in His human nature.

V. This was the Saviour, which is Christ the Lord, born as He was promised of the Father and given to His people – the perfect foundation of salvation; the light to lighten the Gentiles; the spiritual house of bread and the manna which descended from heaven. What a glorious, heavenly, blessed work, hearers, to be privileged to worship that Saviour. There is no more blessed work, than to be privileged to worship, praise, and thank God for the giving of His salvation.

How glorious it would be if we could celebrate Christmas as the shepherds in Bethlehem's fields. It would be an inestimable benefit. May God's people be led once again by renewal into that great work of God. May the Lord grant this for His Name's sake.

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“And the angel said unto them, fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

“Fear not!” We would that we could say this to every one of you, but we are convinced that many among us have sound reasons to fear, because King Jesus has never been born in their hearts. So many Christmas celebrations have gone by, unconverted ones among us, without it yielding the least fruit for you. For you it is among us, without it yielding the least fruit for you. For you it is necessary that you begin to fear! For no matter how glorious and blessed the fact of Christ's birth is in itself and how an eternity will be necessary to admire God's love in the giving of His son, all that in itself is not sufficient for you and me, my hearers!

We must learn to know our self, with Asaph, as a beast before God and the Lord Jesus must be born in the beastly stable of our heart, shall it be well with us on our way to eternity.

Shall we ever rightly celebrate Christmas, then, as Christ has taken upon

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Himself our human nature, so must we also have a portion in His Divine nature. Therefore, may you rightly learn to feel how wretched, deeply deplorable and damnable your state for eternity is! The place of prayer would become a place of weeping for you. That the Gospel of grace, which you have heard so often proclaimed to you, might not one day testify against you. For oh, you who remain unconverted of heart and will die in your sin, you shall find it difficult to give an account in the day of eternity, when the born King of Zion in Bethlehem's stable shall stand over against you and with a thunderous voice shall say to you: "Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, I never knew you." In the day of judgment, it shall be more tolerable for Tyrus and Sidon than for you. Therefore, hearers, you have good reasons to fear if you are still living on unconverted. And it will be of no benefit to you though you join yourself among the true people of God if you in practice are found to be a denier in very deed. "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), before it shall be forever too late and it will resound to you from the King's lips; "These Mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before Me." You still live in the possibility of being saved; for you it is still the acceptable time, the day of salvation. Today then, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, but be ye led.

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We must learn to fear and learn to bow our knees before that "Babe lying in the manger." Certainly, my hearers, for a proud creature, as each person is by nature, it is no simple matter to come to this. The high-minded and conceited person thinks this is childish! May God give that we all would learn to fear Him in simplicity, as a child. And let every one of us remember that Jehovah said: "I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth, that every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." It shall be dreadful not to have been willing to do so here, and there to be compelled to. No people, we can never be too childlike before the lofty God. We can never bow too deeply in the dust before Him.

May you be granted the great privilege of learning to bow and bend before Him in uprightness, before the time shall come – and who knows how soon this will be – that there will be no forgiveness for your sins and no longer mercy to be had. May the Lord Himself bind it upon your hearts.

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“Fear not!” so the words resounded to the shepherds of Bethlehem. We just pointed out to you that this fear is understandable. Paul says of natural man in Romans 3:18: “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

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However, when the Lord regenerates a soul, then immediately there comes a profound respect for God, for His Word, for His servants and for His people. Childlike fear is implanted in the soul, with the result that such a one immediately breaks with sin and learns to abhor the same so that he will exclaim with Joseph: “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?” (Gen 39:3). Herein lies the difference between childlike and slavish fear. The first causes the soul to seek refuge with God, the last produces a fleeing away from God. They who are convinced by God’s Spirit, fear sinning against God, but they also fear at times that the work in them shall prove not to be in truth. Then they lack faith and consequently also comfort for their soul. Within themselves they reason that it is not consistent with grace that they can perceive so much depravity in their hearts. They fear the one day they shall again fall back into sin and the world and be revealed as a hypocrite before God and man. But blessed is such a one who thus fears constantly. Indeed, this fear brings you in solitude before God. To you we can cry out: “Fear not!” for the Lord Jesus Christ has to come to take away your guilt and pollution of sin forever. You often fear, concerned ones in our midst, the same as Bunyan, that the entire Mount of Sinai shall fall upon you and crush you, but the Lord Jesus has perfectly fulfilled the law for you. You fear that God’s wrath shall strike you, but if your eyes are opened therefore, you shall see that the blood of the blessed Mediator has extinguished the wrath of God perpetually.

“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.” Notice well, hearers, as soon as the angel had said: “Fear not!” all hindrances were taken away.

And so it shall be when the Lord by His precious Spirit and Word comes to speak to your soul, be it under the proclamation of His Word, or under the reading of the same. Then all fear shall fall away.

It was a good tidings of great joy which the angel proclaimed, and though it is almost 2000 years ago, still it is equally as new and as great for each child of

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God. This joy can ravish the heart so much, that at times and moments they feel as if they will sink away and succumb in the love of God. They cannot express how great this joy is, when they may view and contemplate upon that great wonder of being delivered from so great a need and death by the precious lifeblood of the Lord Jesus. But the greatest joy shall be reserved for eternity, when all sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

What a privilege! Fear not! You entire Church of the Lord – you babes, you children, you young men and daughters, you men and fathers in grace, fear not!

The Lord Jesus has made it well with you and shall make it well with you eternally. Soon you shall see that the cause of fear has been removed. Then it shall make place for eternal joy and you shall be one of that great multitude which no man can number, who shall stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands, to rejoice forever before the throne of the born King of Zion and to render to the Lamb that was slain honor, glory and blessing for ever and ever.

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May all of us be made ready for this blessed state so that we here already might feel the blessed joy in our hearts, and we might proceed further upon our pathway through this Mesech of misery with joy. May the Lord give this for His covenant's sake.

Amen.



Rehoboth
For more information, please contact us at
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	Steamer Grand	Kevin Ash
	Rev. van Raalte	Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albertus_van_Raalte)
	Grand Rapids in 1860s	A. Ruger's Map of Grand Rapids (https://www.loc.gov/item/73693428/)
	Jan Gelok	1891 "Jaarboek" of CRC
	Rev. Seine Bolks	Reformed Church in America, Twitter posting: November 30, 2017
	Spring Street Church	Heritage Hall, Calvin University
	Rev. Roelof Duiker	Heritage Hall, Calvin University
	Rev. Kloppenburg	FNRC
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	View of Grand Rapids 1895	GRPL (66-1-3#76)
	Division Ave. church	Laurie VandenToorn
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	House at 540 Crescent NE	GRPL Archival collection 237, Box 1, Folder 18
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