



CLASSIS NIAGARA OF THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

Website: classisniagara.ca; e-mail: statedclerk@classisniagara.ca

86th session (1st session: September 24, 1986)

Wednesday, February 15, 2012, **9:30 A.M.**

Trinity Christian Reformed Church, St. Catharines, ON



Chairman: Rev. Steven deBoer; **Vice-chairman:** Rev. John Heidinga; **Stated Clerk:** John TeBrake

DELEGATES, PLEASE NOTE:

1. Please bring your Classical Credentials with you to the meeting.
2. If this is your first time as a delegate to a Classis Niagara session, please read and sign the Form of Subscription **prior to the meeting**.

There will be a designated table for both the above

NOTE 1:

During this meeting of Classis Niagara, Minister and Elder Delegates to Synod of 2012 need to be chosen. Synod is planned for June 8 to June 16 at Redeemer University College. Please see Appendix A on page 11 of this agenda with respect to rules and procedures re Delegates to Synod.

The first minister delegate is to be chosen by free-vote election. The second minister delegate is to be chosen in rotation and for 2012 is **Rev. John Heidinga**, Bethel CRC in Dunnville

The following ministers were chosen by election (E) and rotation (R) for Classis Niagara delegates for the years shown:

2011: Revs. Jim Dekker (E) and Steven deBoer (R)
2010: Revs. Rudy Ouwehand (E) and Derek Bouma (R)
2009: Revs. André Basson (E) and Ryan Braam (R)
2008: Revs. Jim Dekker (E) and Greg Fluit (R)
2007: Revs. Derek Bouma (E) and Harold Winter (R)

Please indicate any nominations for ELDER DELEGATES, including why they are being nominated, on the reverse of your classical credential forms.

AGENDA

1. **Welcome and opening devotions**
2. **Constitution of Classis** by the Chairman, Rev. Steven deBoer
 - Credentials/roll call presented by the host church, Trinity CRC
 - Acknowledgment of signing of first-time delegates.
 - Declare Classis constituted
3. **Time schedule:**
 - Gathering, fellowship: 9:00 to 9:30 AM
 - Meeting commences at 9:30 AM.

- Lunch is planned to be from 12:00 noon to approximately 1:15 PM.
- An afternoon break will be scheduled at the call of the Chairman.
- Scheduled speakers during the classis session include:
 - None at time of agenda preparation

4. Committee appointment confirmations:

- 4.1 Credentials: Covenant (to chair) and Jubilee Fellowship
4.2 Advisory re overtures: Riverside (to chair) and Providence. (*Overture re Belhar – pages 12-18*)

5. Classical Administrative Committee Reports

- 5.1 Executive Committee (*page 3*), John TeBrake, Stated Clerk
5.2 Stated Clerk / correspondence (*pages 4-5*), John TeBrake
5.3 Treasurer's report; (*financial report for the year 2011 will be planned to be presented at the May meeting of Classis*), Ms. Emma Winter, Treasurer
5.4 Classis Ministry Leadership Team, Rev. Jim Dekker, Chair
5.5 Classical Nominating Committee, Ms. Ann Kiers, Chair (*page 5*)
5.6 Safe Church Team, Rev. Ryan Braam, Minister member of SCT
5.7 Church Counselor reports: Rev. Ryan Braam, re Jubilee Fellowship
5.8 Regional Pastors' report: Rev. David Tigchelaar and/or Rev. Rudy Ouwehand

6. Classical Ministries Committee Report Pastor Frank Engelage (*page 5*)

7. Brock University Chaplain's Report Rev. André Basson (*pages 6-8*)

8. Shalom Manor Chaplain's Report Rev. Fred VanderBerg (*pages 8-9*)

9. Church visitor reports: (*Emboldened names are changes*)

- Rev. John Heidinga, Elder George Lunshoff– Smithville, Bethany, Fruitland,
Rev. Jim Dekker, Elder Bill Thies – Jubilee Fellowship, Maranatha, Grace
Rev. Richard Loerop, Elder **Dick VanDyke** – Rehoboth, Mountainview, Covenant, **Bethel**
Rev. Rudy Ouwehand, Elder **Rev. Fred VanderBerg** – Providence, Riverside, Trinity

10. Report of Credentials Committee

- The committee is comprised of delegates from Covenant (to chair) and Jubilee Fellowship.

11. Report of Overture Advisory Committee:

- The committee is comprised of delegates from Riverside (to chair) and Providence.

12. Denominational and Other Reports

- 12.1 Denominational reports
12.2 Redeemer University College (*pages 9-10*)

13. Next meeting:

- Date:* May 23, 2012
Agenda Deadline: April 1, 2012
Location: TBA
Chairman: Rev. John Heidinga
Vice-chairman: Rev. EJ deWaard
Credentials: Maranatha (to chair) and Trinity
Overture Advisory: Bethel (to chair) and Bethany

Following meetings: May 23 and October 17, 2012

CHURCH COUNCILS: PLEASE CONSIDER EXTENDING AN INVITATION TO HOST CLASSIS FOR ONE OF THESE DATES!!

14. Closing devotions

AGENDA ITEM 5.1: REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Report of meeting of Executive Committee, January 11, 2012

Present: Rev. Rudy Ouwehand, Rev. Steven deBoer, Pastor Frank Engelage, Ms. Emma Winter, John TeBrake

1. Opening: Rev. Ouwehand read Psalm 62 and led in an opening prayer.
2. Correspondence was dealt with
3. Pulpit Supply: As Riverside’s pastor, Rev. Derek Bouma, has accepted a call to the East Strathroy CRC, the following pulpit supply schedule was approved *(Note: the previously distributed tentative schedule was adjusted to reflect the fact that Mr. Wes Collins will serve Riverside as an interim pastor)*

Classis Niagara of the Christian Reformed Church Pulpit Supply Schedule, February to May, 2012 (prepared with information available as of January 11, 2012)	
Date	Riverside, Wellandport
Feb 19	Couperus
Mar 18	Dekker
April 29	Fluit
May 20	Loerop

4. Ministerial credentials for Rev. Derek Bouma to be transferred to East Strathroy CRC and Classis Chatham were processed.
5. Financial update from Treasurer: Ms. Winter reported that she is still receiving shares for the year 2011 from churches; she expects to be able to present a full report for the May meeting of Classis.
6. Liability Insurance and charitable organization status: the charitable organization designation is expected to be completed this year. The liability insurance is dependent on this, so it will come into effect after Classis Niagara receives its charitable designation from the Canada Revenue Agency.
7. Role of Ministry Coordinator: Work has begun on defining the position in its current context and its contribution to our Classis. We expect to receive a preliminary position description at our next meeting.
8. Review agenda for February 15 meeting of Classis: this was completed.
9. Review of Article 41 items from October credentials: there were no CO Article 41 items on the credentials from October. However, there was an item from one of our churches on the back of the credentials (“additional comments”) of the October 2011 meeting that came under this category, and that was a request to provide more equipping sessions besides the necessary administrative work we do as a classis. It was noted that there were no specific issues or topics identified in this request. As a committee, we felt it would be helpful if churches identified issues or topics that they would like to be considered. That led to the consideration that perhaps we should have each of our February meetings as an **equipping session** to deal with identified issues or topics, with an appropriate speaker/facilitator to lead us through the issue/concern/topic. It would be appropriate to obtain input from Classis about this consideration, and it was agreed that we would begin to seek that input at the February 2012 meeting.
10. Closing: Rev. deBoer led in a closing prayer. Our next meeting is planned for February 8 at 10:00 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 5.2: WORK OF THE STATED CLERK/CORRESPONDENCE

Summary of correspondence from October 2011 meeting of Classis to January 5, 2012

	Date	Item	Action
1	Oct 12	From Ms. Dee Recker, Director of Synodical Services, Highlights of the September BOT meeting	RFI; distributed to clerks of councils
2	Oct 20	To Mr. Wayne Knight, confirming Classis Niagara's approval of the renewal of his license to exhort to October 2012	RFI
3	Oct 20	To Rev. Joan DeVries, forms to be completed with respect to her nomination to the Board of Faith Alive	RFI
4	Oct 20	From Ms. Dee Recker, Director of Synodical Services, "that Rev. Byung Nam Moon and Rev. Simon Kim, having entered vocations that are judged to be non-ministerial, are honorably released from the office of minister of the Word in the CRCNA."	RFI; forwarded to clerks of councils
5	Oct 22	To CRCNA Yearbook, updated information for 2012 edition	RFI
6	Oct 24	From Rev John de Vries, thanking us for hearing him in October. "The Restorative Justice report made to your classis meeting highlighted the Restorative Congregation Pilot Project, implemented by Shalem - Mark VanderVennen and Stan Baker"	RFI
7	Oct 25	From Young Adult Leadership Taskforce (a ministry of the CRCNA Leadership Exchange), information about initiatives to engage with young adults from within and outside of CRC congregations, especially with reference to raising up a new generation of church leaders	RFI; see website for more info: www.leadershipcrc.org/ya
8	Oct 27	From Mr. Chris Pullenayegem, Director, Leadership Exchange, details of a new leadership formation program	RFI; see www.leadershipcrc.org for more information
9	Nov 19	From Mr. Marc Hoogstad, secretary of Ontario Youth Ministry Leadership Team, minutes of its meeting Nov 19	Forwarded to Pastor Frank Engelage, Classis Ministries Coordinator
10	Dec 7	From Mr. Larry Lutgendorff, Director, Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, requesting to address our classis	Mr. Lutgendorff has been invited to set up his display, and to join the delegates for lunch
11	Dec 1	From a Ms. Judy De Wit, asking to promote her book about abuse in a church setting to pastors, church leaders, etc.	RFI; the denominational safe church ministry finds the book inadequate; the e-mail was not distributed to churches
12	Dec 1	From Rev. Al Gelder, Director of Mentored Ministries, Calvin Seminary, seeking churches that are interested in applying for a summer intern	RFI

13	Dec 21	From Rev. David Koll, Director of Ministerial Candidacy, information about a workshop held on the use and development of the office of Ministry Associate	RFI; forwarded to the CMLT and to MAs in Classis Niagara
14	Dec 22	From Dee Recker, Director of Synodical Services, credential documents for Synod 2012	RFI; to be provided to delegates

AGENDA ITEM 5.5: REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Although there is not much to report, a few changes have taken place on the committee. At our meeting held on December 19, 2011, we welcomed a new member, Mrs. Joyce Koornneef, she comes from Smithville CRC. Cor VanSoelen, our chairman has ended his term and Ann Kiers will be taking over that position. Frank Engelage and Bill VandenBrink are also members of this committee. No other business to report at this time.

Submitted by Ann Kiers, Nominating Committee (chair)

AGENDA ITEM 6: REPORT OF THE CLASSIS MINISTRIES COMMITTEE

2011 has come and gone, 2012 is alive and well and ministry continues in a variety of ways. My work on the classis level has had me engaged from the congregational to the classical to the regional to the denominational levels.

Networking: I continue to receive ongoing reports from Amanda and Ryan Van Geest who serve with Mission Aviation Fellowship in Mongolia. There is a discussion with the a number of church based ministry coordinators, from Smithville, Grimsby and Fenwick regarding Young Adults in the region and was there any specific group focusing on this age group. This discussion was also carried forward by a number of the pastors at a recent gathering in St. Catharines. On a regional and denominational level, I participate in the Canadian Collaboration Task Force in Burlington which includes reps from the various agencies and other classis staff people. As the name suggests its intent is increase the amount of collaboration that takes place and reduce duplication. At each of our meetings there is a rep from the US based group called the Congregational Services Committee which has much the same function but in a more formal way than our Canadian group. At a recent meeting of the CSC I attended via telephone on behalf of the CCTF.

I have also connected with the Ontario Youth Ministry Team via their minutes and a conversation with the secretary Marc Hoogstad. I have added to the website the document on hosting a classis meeting for your information.

I am working to complete the charitable status for Classis Niagara and hope to complete that process in the next couple of months.

I met with the Classis Nominating committee to bid farewell to our out-going chair Cor Van Soelen and to welcome a new member Joyce Koornneef from Smithville. Ann Kiers (Fenwick) is our new Chair.

The CMC Executive has continued to discuss the role of the Ministry Coordinator and I met with Pastor Steve to begin that discussion and see what the needs of Classis are as it continues to grow and evolve.

Thanks for the ways in which you have allowed me to serve Christ and his body over the last decade.

Blessings

Pastor Frank Engelage
Ministry Coordinator Classis Niagara

AGENDA ITEM 7: REPORT OF THE BROCK UNIVERSITY CHAPLAIN

Dear Members of Classis Niagara,

One of the most exciting and gratifying developments in the ministry the past few years has to do with focusing our attention on reaching students who are not Christian, or who have become alienated from the Christian faith, or who, for whatever reason, choose not to be involved in the activities of any of the existing Christian clubs on campus. In fact, we are convinced that this is the only way we can be faithful to the Great Command on the Brock campus. Consequently, we believe the role of the campus minister should be primarily to help students who are already Christian grow in their faith for the purpose of equipping them to reach out to any of their fellow-students who are not Christian, especially the ones who feel isolated and experience difficulty coping with the pressures (both academic and social) of being at university. According to the university's counseling services, the feeling of not fitting in currently tops the list of problems of students who come to them for professional help.

For this reason, the CRC Campus Ministry in Brock's Faith and Life Centre is constantly seeking to develop new opportunities for Christian students to connect with students who do not share their faith. These include:

1. **The bi-weekly toonie-suppers.** These are now entering their second year. After a slow start in the first year, the number of students attending picked up dramatically since August 2011 (the beginning of the second year). On average between 25 and 35 students now enjoy a hearty meal and fellowship every second Wednesday of the academic term. So popular has this program become that on one occasion when more than 40 students showed up, we even ran out of food! According to an informal agreement between the CRC Campus Ministry and the Ecumenical chaplaincy, the former is responsible for providing the meals in the first term and the latter in the second term, to a total of only 6 per term.

Particularly rewarding has been the fact that an increasing number of non-Christian students as well as international students have been coming out to these suppers. Just through this one initiative alone Classis Niagara through its Brock Campus Ministry now has a truly awesome opportunity to impact many students who in all likelihood will one day play an important role not only in Canadian society, but also in various countries abroad. We are therefore also very thankful to the many congregations of Classis Niagara who have stepped up to the plate and provided the meals. All of them found this to be a very convenient outreach opportunity to connect personally with the students. In fact, it's becoming so popular among churches wishing to do something for Brock students that for the second term the Ecumenical Chaplaincy already has more offers to provide a meal than there are opportunities!

2. **Bible-study for atheists.** This initiative was launched by the CRC Campus Minister (and after consultation with all the Christian clubs on campus) toward the end of the first term when students were already elbow-deep in preparing for midterms or in writing term papers. However, the atheist students who did show up were very enthusiastic about an opportunity for atheists and Christians to dialogue on faith issues. Already at the second meeting, two atheist students (one the son of a pastor and the other a lapsed Catholic) were eager to know more about - of all things - Calvin's doctrine of predestination! The ensuing discussion left no doubt that atheist students are indeed more interested in Christian doctrine than many of their Christian counterparts on campus, some of whom admit openly that they consider Bible study sufficient for their faith to grow and that theology really doesn't interest them (as if the two can be separated!).

3. **Connected Life at Brock.** This initiative was launched in the second term of the 2010-2011 academic year as a means for the CRC Campus Minister to connect with even more (especially non-Christian) students on campus. There have been challenges, but the enthusiasm with which this initiative has been received by the Brock Student Council President and other important student leaders is just one of many positive signs that it has great potential to involve even more students in the future. A comprehensive advertising campaign targeting next year's first year students is already underway.

4. **Christian-Muslim dialogue.** Given the very positive relations between Brock's Faith and Life Centre and the Muslim Students Association (MSA), the CRC Campus Ministry is hoping to initiate a

regular Christian-Muslim dialogue in the next term. The aim will be to provide a forum for Christian students to learn more about Islam and for Muslim students to learn more about Christianity.

However, at the same time Brock's CRC Campus Ministry will continue to take serious its mandate to care for the spiritual life of all Christian students on campus, especially the ones who identify with a Reformed worldview. The ministry to these students is focused mainly on faith-based discussion groups and retreats.

1. In the past term, the CRC Campus Minister has organized a whole variety of discussions for different groups of students on leadership (to train the student leaders involved in the ministry) and on life after graduation (for students who were about to graduate and felt the need for guidelines on sustaining their faith in the challenging environment of the workplace).

2. A number of brand new discussion groups will also be launched in the new term. One will be exclusively for female students and will be led by one of the ministry's female student leaders. *The Devil Wears Nada. Satan Exposed* by Tripp York (Cascade Books: 2011) will be the point of departure for another series of discussions on topics such as heaven and hell, and the afterlife.

3. Every term there are students who prefer to meet with the CRC Campus Minister individually and on a regular basis. The past term was no exception. For various reasons, these students do not want to be part of a particular group. Some of them also have issues that can only be discussed one-on-one. Although very time consuming (especially in terms of preparation), these discussions give the Campus Minister and the student the opportunity to explore personal faith issues in a context of mutual trust and respect.

4. In March 2012, the CRC Campus Minister will again be taking a group of students on a retreat. This retreat at the Mount Alverno Franciscan Retreat Centre on the outskirts of Orangeville has become an annual CRC Campus Ministry tradition. Every year, for a whole weekend and just before the start of the exams, a small group of Christian students have the opportunity to study in a stress-free environment with certain times of each day set aside for *lectio divina*, Bible discussion, spiritual walks, and prayer.

5. Unfortunately, efforts to connect students with church families from Classis Niagara have had to take a back seat because of other ministry commitments this year. However we do hope to give it more serious attention in the 2012-2013 academic year.

6. The CRC Campus Ministry team is once again considering a monthly worship service with a Reformed flavor for Brock and Niagara College students in St. Catharines. Very few CRC Campus Ministries still have a regular worship service. However, we believe there is a need for one that will particularly address issues these students experience in their daily life as young Christians. Our team is currently researching a number of possible formats and will be visiting churches that have been successful in applying some of them.

7. In order to build and strengthen community, the CRC Campus Ministry has hosted a number of social events for students off campus in the past few months, usually at the home of members of a local CRC church. One of these is our annual American Thanksgiving Dinner. Since most Canadian students spend Canadian Thanksgiving with their families, we've started an annual American Thanksgiving Dinner that allows our Christian students to introduce the North American concept of Thanksgiving to international students for whom the idea is completely foreign.

8. During Reading Week (February 17-26, 2012), the CRC Campus Minister will be taking a group of nine students and community members to Costa Rica to explore the possibility of initiating a long-term social justice program, either in that country or in Honduras. Short-term social justice trips undertaken by churches and student groups to developing countries are very much in vogue these days. Although they are for the most part well intentioned, there is reason to believe that in many cases they do more harm than good, as a recent book that should be a must read for anyone contemplating such a trip, has argued very convincingly (R.D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity. How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They*

Help (And How to Reverse It). Harper Collins: 2011). Then there is the enormous financial cost involved in flying halfway across the world and spending a week or two in a community to do what members of the community could have done themselves if they had had the money that's been spent on airfares! The Brock CRC group will therefore visit Costa Rica primarily to listen to and to learn from individuals and agencies that come highly recommended (notably by Christian Reformed World Missions) with the intention of setting up long-term partnerships in social justice projects in a variety of areas such as Fair Trade, for example.

On a more personal level, I have the following to report:

- In December, I attended a two-day workshop on mental health hosted by Brock's Human Rights and Equity Services. The aim of the workshop was to familiarize participants (Brock staff and faculty) with the mental disorders most common on Canadian university campuses and with ways of identifying them.
- Also in December, a colleague from Brock's Department of Modern Languages and Literatures (Spanish) and I read a paper at the university's bi-annual Humanities Conference. The title of the paper was *Fashioning a Hyper-Pious Colonial Subject: Peruvian Mestizos' Appeal to Pope Gregory XIII*. This paper as well as another one, which I wrote in collaboration with colleagues in History, English, and Library Science have been accepted for publication in two international academic journals.
- I have also been asked to review two books for a French online literary journal.
- In October, I attended the annual CRC Campus Ministry Regional Retreat at the Mount St. Mary Retreat Centre in Ancaster.
- Once again, I have been approached to teach courses in the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program in the 2012-2013 academic year.
- As often as my ministry at Brock would allow, I continued to fill in for pulpit-supply in congregations of Classis Niagara.

Finally, I have pleasure in reporting that tentative arrangements have been made with Home Missions to do a one-day, comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of the ministry sometime toward the end of March and the beginning of April, 2012.

Once again, I wish to thank all the congregations of Classis Niagara for their continued and very generous support of this ministry at Brock. Please continue to remember us in your prayers!

In Christ,

André F. Basson
Brock CRC Campus Minister

AGENDA ITEM 8: REPORT OF THE SHALOM MANOR CHAPLAIN

As I am writing, the clock is ticking off the last minutes of the year 2011. I am thinking about the words of Psalm 90, *"Make us glad as many days as you have afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil."* The psalmist is bargaining with God for as many days of gladness/joy as he receives days of affliction. I have often thought that if the elderly in Shalom Manor & Gardens received what the psalmist bargains for; receiving a fifty-fifty split – as many days of gladness/joy as days of trouble – they would be thrilled! Reflecting on this, sometimes I think that this is not true. Sometimes I think that they receive more than the psalmist bargains for, more days of gladness/joy than days of affliction. Whatever the case, there is joy in the lives of the residents of Shalom Manor & Garden.

There is joy in the mundane things. I think of a resident whom I often wheel to her spot at the breakfast table. As I approach her, I bend down and say, "Mrs. Smith, it's good to see you this morning! How are you feeling?" Sometimes she responds, saying, "Good morning, dominee." There is a smile on her face. She says, "I had a bath this morning. It feels so good on my lame body." (I love the way she uses the

word lame. It sounds so appropriately passive as compared to the word paralyzed, which sounds so inappropriately active. She often speaks in Dutch, using the word *lam*, which even sounds more passive.) The mundane activity of bathing brings joy.

There is a resident who responds to my morning greeting, “Hi Mr. Davis, it’s good to see you this morning. How are you doing?” saying, “I woke up.” The first time I heard him say this, it set me back a few thoughts. I woke up. Though said in jest, I think that it discloses that the resident believes that it is a good thing to wake up, it is a good thing to receive the gift of another day! I believe that it is received as a gift because the day includes joys; a phone conversation with a loved daughter, a game of bowling in the auditorium with friends. These are all small things that bring joy.

There are staff members who temporarily leave their positions because they are expecting. After the mother gives birth, while she is on maternity/parental leave, she comes back to her “old work place” and shows her newborn baby to work colleagues and to residents. There is a young mother who regularly comes with her new born infant. She sits with the residents in a lounge area. She shows them her baby. Some residents reach out with their aged hands and gently stroke the baby’s soft cheeks. Some residents hold the little baby on their laps. It’s called baby therapy. The sight, the feel of a baby’s soft skin, holding a little baby brings joy! Baby’s do that. I think that there is more going on. As the aged resident holds a little infant on her lap, she remembers when she held her own little infant on her lap. She remembers the happy moments of mothering an infant, disciplining her toddler and being surprised that the four month old jeans no longer fit her 13 year old son. These happy memories bring her joy. Perhaps, as the aged resident holds the little infant in her lap, she thinks of the infant’s future and hopes that there are many days of gladness, of joy.

The Lord has planted a tree in Shalom Manor & Gardens. It is like a giant cedar in Lebanon. It is called the tree of joy. It is planted in the soil of Jesus Christ, nourished by the Word and Holy Spirit. The aged residents relax in its shade. They eat of the fruit from this tree. There is joy in the lives of the residents of Shalom Manor & Gardens. At the end of one year, and at the beginning of another, like that of the psalmist, it is our prayer that we may experience as many days of gladness/joy as days of affliction.

Submitted by Rev. Fred VanderBerg

AGENDA ITEM 12.2: REPORT FROM REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Greetings from Redeemer University College. It is striking to find ourselves already nearly finished the Fall 2011 semester. But we have many reasons to give thanks to God, especially entering into Advent.



Our total enrolment for 2011-12 is 929 students (892 full-time equivalent), and we are deeply grateful for all of our students and the high calling we have to lead them in developing Biblically-directed learning and discipleship. We received another very good report-card in the *Globe & Mail* “University Report,” published on October 25.

We have appointed Mr. Fred Verwoerd as the next Vice President, Administration & Finance for Redeemer University College. Mr. Verwoerd will assume his duties at the beginning of January 2012 as Ineke VanBruinessen transitions to retirement. Our search for a new Vice President, Advancement will commence soon.

We have already enjoyed many events and highlights on campus during this Fall. Our 3rd Annual *reDiscover Redeemer* Open House was held on October 1, on October 21 we celebrated the inaugurations of Professors Ray Louter and Susan Van Weelden, the New Horizons day on October 24 for young-at-heart members of our senior support community, the Zylstra Symposium with Jim Skillen on November 8-9, the Business Partnership Open house on November 10, and “*The Amazing Race – Redeemer Sciences Edition*” for high school students on November 11 brought a lot of students to campus. Our Fall Mainstage Theatre production of Calvin Seerveld’s *The Book of Ecclesiastes* and *The*

Greatest Song was well received during November 22-26, and our choirs will perform *The Messiah* on December 2 and 3. Our annual Cornerstone Partners Dinner on November 25 celebrated student scholarships and recognized scholarship donors. We thank God for blessing Redeemer with such wonderful and enriching events.

We are excited to announce several new programs. This year, we initiated an International Relations minor and a Youth Ministry certificate program. Next year, we will launch a new Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Health Sciences. We are in the midst of filling two openings (Marketing & Accounting) in the Business Department, and we also are advertising positions in Health Sciences, French, and Education.

As part of our Strategic Goal of developing “Whole Life” education, we also are continuing to develop new initiatives for spiritual formation, including appointing and mentoring student chaplains in the residences, developing a long-term strategy for spiritual formation for Redeemer’s athletes, strengthening chapel, and continuing dimensions of last year’s faculty spiritual formation project.

Most of our building projects on campus are completed, although detailed landscape work on our SWM ponds continues, depending on weather. We are grateful that we were able to complete our KIP and RInC building projects before the deadlines for government stimulus grants. We held the grand opening of our Field For All Seasons on October 22, and we expect that the final connection of our solar panel array to the electrical grid should be in operation by the end of the year.

We look forward to having many of you attend the 25th annual Ministers’ Conference on Tuesday, March 6, 2012, with Bruxy Cavey and Tim Day of The Meeting House as our guest speakers. Please check our website at www.redeemer.ca for updates about these and other events, lectures, and concerts.

We continue to receive strong support from the CRC classes in both prayer and giving, for which we are deeply grateful. May the Lord bless you in your ministry, and may you enjoy His joy and peace during this Christmas season as we celebrate the gracious gift of our Saviour and Lord.

Dr Hubert R. Krygsman, President

APPENDIX A: EXCERPT FROM RULES AND PROCEDURES RE DELEGATES TO SYNOD

G. DELEGATES TO SYNOD

1. At its January [now February] meeting, Classis shall appoint one minister delegate and alternate by a rotation schedule, and one minister delegate and alternate by the free vote method. *(Jan 21, 2001)*
At its meeting of Sept. 17, 2003, Classis approved the following process:
 - the first minister delegate is elected by free vote;
 - the minister having the greater than 50% of the votes and the highest number of votes would be the first minister delegate
 - the minister with the next highest number of votes would be the first minister alternate
 - the minister with the third highest number of votes would be the second minister alternate
 - then the second minister delegate is chosen by rotation, in alphabetical order of location of church. If a minister is unable to serve or if the church is vacant, the rotation moves to the next in alphabetical order
 - A minister shall have served the churches of classis Niagara for at least 12 months before being eligible to be delegated to Synod.
2. Councils are encouraged to submit the names of elders willing and able to serve in this capacity on their credentials to the February meeting of Classis.
3. Elder delegates may request reimbursement for lost wages up to the amount determined by Classis.

APPENDIX B: OVERTURE FROM TRINITY AND GRACE CRC'S RE BELHAR CONFESSION

Preamble

The Synod of 2009 proposed ***“to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession).”*** Ground 8 of this proposal ***“allow[s] for a three-year period of reflection (2009-2012) . . . The additional time is given to the churches to adequately study and reflect on the proposal and be better prepared for response.”***

The Councils of Trinity CRC in St. Catharines and Grace CRC in Welland overture Classis to submit the following as an overture to Synod 2012. This overture is a response to Synod's recommendation to study and reflect on the Belhar Confession. We hope that this overture will be a helpful addition to this study period and that this overture will be received as part of Synod's discussion in 2012 and that Synod 2012 will not adopt the Belhar as a fourth Form of Unity.

Introduction

Racism is a terrible sin that has humiliated, belittled and destroyed countless people through the ages. Throughout history racism has taken on many forms. It has appeared as slavery, oppression, Apartheid, and the Holocaust to name a few. Regardless of its form, racism effectively denies that all people are created in the image of God. Scripture makes it clear that in Christ there are no divisions of race. In Christ “there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11, NIV).

Unfortunately the Church has not always proclaimed this truth. Some churches have remained silent about racism while others have manipulated scripture to make racism appear acceptable, even honourable. In both silence and endorsement the sin of racism has been perpetuated in Dutch Reformed churches. The sin of Apartheid isn't something that happened in South Africa; it is the sin of our family. This pains us as a family and causes much regret.

We are thankful to our brothers and sisters in South Africa who have done much hard work in promoting reconciliation and peace where there has been division. We are thankful for the time and efforts that they have poured into the Belhar Confession. We are grateful that they have shared the Belhar Confession with us, as it reminds us how easily racism can hide in our churches.

In North America churches have also struggled with the sin of racism. Historically we recognize our endorsement of slavery and continued mistreatment of people of colour. In fact, this was predated by mistreatment and often outright slaughter of Native Americans. In both situations our treatment of people with different colour skin is disgraceful and offensive to God. We recognize that racism isn't simply a historical problem. It continues today in the way we treat people of Mid-Eastern descent with fear, especially since the 9/11 attacks. We must also note our disrespectful treatment of many legal and illegal immigrants.

History of Racism in the CRC

The CRCNA, while not guiltless, has not remained quiet on the issue of racism and in numerous cases has put words into action. In 2007 Synod recognized that the decision to send missionaries to China instead of Africa “was motivated in part by racist values.” For this reason we took time to pray and to confess our sin as a denomination.

This wasn't the only time our denomination has struggled with racist tendencies. The Timothy Christian School situation in Cicero, Illinois in the 60s is just one example of that. Another would be the white flight mentality as we moved our churches into the suburbs to avoid contact with the increasingly diverse community that moved into the cities.

In all of this we recognize that we can't ignore the reality of racism in our churches and in our denomination. We must fight against this sin as we seek to love and embrace our fellow humans regardless of race or ethnic background.

The Benefits of the Belhar Confession

It's into this context that we receive the Belhar Confession. This document does well in its call to reconciliation and healing. It is a call to unity and a call to love each other regardless of our differences. Given our continent's and our own denomination's history, this is an important document because it forces us to wrestle with racism.

The Belhar is an articulation of our need for unity and respect for the diversity God has created in the world he loves. We also recognize its desire to remain true to God's Word. After reading through this document one would find it very difficult to argue against its basic premise from a Biblical basis. For this reason we see value in this document within our context in the CRCNA. At the same time we also note some significant concerns about this document.

Undefined Presuppositions

The Belhar confession cannot stand alongside of the current Three Forms of Unity because it presumes that which is fundamental to the faith, but does not explicitly state what is fundamental to the faith. It is true that each of the Three Forms is incomplete and deficient, and that they do not fully summarize every doctrine of the Christian faith. However, each can stand on its own as a summary of God's plan of salvation, yet none depends on the others to be understood correctly. This cannot be said of the Belhar, as many terms used in the Belhar can be understood differently depending on the theological leanings of the reader.

The first term which is not clearly defined is the term *Gospel*. This term ought to be clear as it is what we are called to preach teach and defend. However, the Belhar confession simply refers to the Gospel without explicit definition of what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is. The word Gospel first appears in the Belhar confession in article 3 where it states:

We believe ... that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine

This point could easily be understood and applied according to the ideology of the humanist gospel. As this point focuses on the reconciling power of the Gospel, it should begin with the how the Gospel of Jesus reconciles man to God. Yet, since it doesn't, the Gospel can easily be diminished to nothing more than reconciliation between two people, and that the whole purpose of the incarnation of Jesus is to show people how to be reconciled to each other. This ambiguity is profoundly dangerous especially in our context of North America which is saturated with the ideology of humanism.

A second term that begs greater clarification is the term *reconciliation*. As reconciliation is the heartbeat of the document, the Belhar should sing this with clarity – but it doesn't. Point 2 of the Belhar states "*We believe . . . that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another.*" This statement speaks about reconciliation in the past tense, which leaves more questions than answers. Christ's work on the cross is already a full, complete work to reconcile people to God. Yet, this reconciliation is not yet fully realized as we live in a sin stained world. The not yet of this reconciliation is evident any time two believers disagree and they need to be reconciled to each other. Until Christ comes again, we need to be constantly engaged in being reconciled to others as Christ reconciled us to himself. The past tense of this phrase from the

Belhar causes one to wonder if the document presumes the full perfect Kingdom of heaven to be made manifest here on earth without the return of Christ.

Another concern with the lack of clarity in the use of the word reconciliation is that no clear distinction is to be made between Christ reconciling us, and people reconciling with each other. When Christ reconciles us to himself, it is not a reconciliation between equal parties. As fully God, it is only his power, strength and the work that he has done that enables this reconciliation to be complete. On our own, it is impossible to even begin to pursue this process of reconciliation. It is fully by God's grace. On the other hand, reconciliation between people is always between equals. Each party must take equal responsibility in pursuing reconciliation. We cannot assume that perfect reconciliation will ever take place as sin will always stain thoughts and motives, though perfection should be our goal. Yet we cannot equivocate Christ's reconciling us to himself with us being reconciled to each other. We follow Christ's lead by the power of the Holy Spirit, yet still recognize that although the spirit is willing the flesh is weak.

The third term which could use greater clarity is the term *Church*. Article 27 of the Belgic Confession clearly defines the church as the universal gathering of believers. In this definition from the Belgic confession, we repeatedly find the use of the passive voice. This use of the passive voice underscores the theological foundation that it is the Triune God who establishes, gathers sanctifies and sustains the church. The opening statement of point 2 of the Belhar confession appears in brevity to borrow from this definition. Yet, due to its brevity, it is not clear who the active agent is in establishing this church.

Article 28 of the Belgic Confession makes a clear distinction between the active work of the Triune God in establishing the church, and the subsequent obligations of the church. No such distinction is made in the Belhar leaving it prone to a humanistic interpretation, that the church is what we do, and not what God has established.

We could even argue that the Belhar focuses much more on what we do than what God has done. Consider what is written in the rejection portion of point 2:

Therefore, we reject any doctrine . . . which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation

Separate church formations and denominations are what people do, not what God does. Likewise, the Belhar also states:

Therefore, we reject any doctrine . . . which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

Determining membership of the church as phrased here is again about what people do, not what God does. The Belhar fails to make a distinction between the actions of God in establishing the church and the obligations of the members of the church. The Belhar appears to slide back and forth between usages of the word church in its unique points; this requires careful interpretation to prevent misinterpretation. So much emphasis appears to be placed on the obligations of the church that one may begin to question, "Does the Belhar affirm the perseverance of the saints?"

One final word which requires greater clarification is the word *Faith*. The final affirmation of point 2 states "*that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.*" Having failed to clearly define the word Gospel, the phrase "faith in Jesus Christ" becomes dangerously ambiguous. Those who adhere to the prosperity gospel believe that true faith in Jesus will result in health and wealth. Unitarian Universalists could claim true faith in Jesus is one of many ways to salvation. Many other divergent sects that could claim true faith in Jesus while missing the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In addition, if true faith is in the only condition for membership, how would one discern between true faith and false faith if a person would not be required to subscribe to the Creeds, confessions and teachings of the church? The statement in itself is self-defeating. If all that is necessary is true faith, then why have the Belhar? The Belhar isn't necessary then, just true faith. As the book of James notes, faith is evidenced through one's deeds. Yet, by James' letter, it is obvious that while faith necessitates deeds, faith does not imply deeds. The Belhar's plea for people to be reconciled can be helpful litmus test to determine if one's faith is being made manifest in their deeds, but to simply state that true faith is all that is necessary without clearly defining what is meant is dubious.

Theological Concerns

As already noted, the word gospel is not explicitly defined in terms of the propitiatory and satisfactory reality that is accomplished by Christ alone. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that salvation is a matter of proper behaviour, good conduct, and social equality. To suggest, as the Belhar perhaps unwittingly does, that unity and other behavioural matters are the Gospel is to undermine the Gospel of Jesus Christ; in so doing, it provides a false hope. The timeless words of C.S. Lewis are instructive in this manner:

We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up 'nice'; just as we must try to produce a world where all have plenty to eat. But we must not suppose that even if we succeed in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content with their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world – and might even be more difficult to save.¹

Every discussion about the new life of the believer must be fully grounded on the birth, life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as the efficient cause of the new life. If this foundation is not firmly set, the secondary implications of unity and reconciliation as a result of the new life will never come about. Unity is only achieved through the objective reality of the Gospel, which necessitates regeneration. Without the "Gospel as the power of God unto salvation" (cf. Romans 1:16) there can be no interpersonal reconciliation.

According to Thabiti Anyabwile, author and pastor of First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman, it is this confusion that has limited efforts of racial reconciliation in the past:

So many well-intentioned racial reconciliation efforts... seem to major on race and minor on Christ and his work... Some approaches seem to suggest that merely embracing the 'others' ethnicity and culture somehow enhances our embrace of Christ. I think the opposite is the way forward. It's as we tightly cling to Jesus that we find ourselves embracing other people clinging to the Savior. The cross reconciles [humanity] to God and [humanity] to each other.²

Unless our emphases are on the necessity of Christ's life and death on behalf of the believer, our efforts at unity and interpersonal reconciliation are in vain.

The Belhar Confession states humanity's need for unity in such strong terms that it renders unclear humanity's greater need for reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. In John 17:21b Jesus emphasizes that the heart of evangelism is union with God the Father and God the Son when says to the Father "**May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**" Christ's followers are unified not first in how they act, but first as they know a more significant union with God through the blood of Christ. Union with each other

¹ C.S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity" in *The Complete C.S. Lewis: Signature Classics*, (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002), 169-70.

² Thabiti Anyabwile, "Bearing the Image" in *Proclaiming a Cross-Centered Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 74.

serves as evidence of this more significant union with God. We fear that the Belhar is aiming only for the fruit of true conversion not the root of the unity problem – being reconciled to God!

The preceding observation is evidence that the Belhar is theologically unclear. There is a confusion of theological emphasis as it appears to place primary importance on horizontal unity with man, as though this will strengthen our vertical unity with God. This emphasis appears to parallel a humanistic assumption that humanity can better itself through their own hard work - in this case the hard work of race reconciliation. Little emphasis is given to human depravity and our need to first be reconciled to God through Christ by means of Christ's atonement and the Spirit's power. Jesus evidenced this in his summary of the Law in Matthew 22:34-40. Loving God above all must lead to love for his image bearers. The Belhar's human-centered theology will in the end fail to achieve its own stated goals because it is anthropocentric rather than Theo/Christo-centric. Therefore, when the Belhar Confession focuses only on the fruit of conversion – .viz, unity with humanity – it effectively bypasses a much more serious need for the perpetrators of racism to be reconciled to God through the blood of Christ.

The only foundation for unity in the church is recognizing the fundamental need for reconciliation to God through the atoning work of Jesus. In light of this reality, as it pertains to racism, we must acknowledge that the Church has lived more into its old sinful identity than its new self. This acknowledgement leads us to conclude that the Belhar functions better as a confession of sin than it does a confession of our faith. Indeed, we have fallen short of the life to which we are called – the life made possible by the atoning work of Jesus – and so we must turn, time and again, to the very same promises of repentance and forgiveness that adopted us as heirs in the first place. In recognition of this sin, we are driven to the cross of Christ for healing. It is only at the cross that sins are forgiven, life is granted and lives are changed.

Much has been said by the professor's Dr. John Bolt and Dr. John Cooper regarding the claims of *status confessionis* in relation to the content of the Belhar Confession. Such a confession must be made when the very Gospel is at stake in the Church. To say that an improper manifestation of Christian love in the life of the believer caused racism *is not the same* as *saying* the Gospel itself is being denied or its objectivity being challenged.

The Gospel is a declaration of an objective, true, reality. This reality is that in Christ, God has won victory over life and death and made possible our justification and sanctification. Daily, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to make that new reality our personal reality. The good news of the Gospel is that our individual living into the new reality is not what saves us; nor is it not the quality of our faith or our life that saves us; but it is Jesus Christ, the object of our faith that saves us. Granted, the efficacy of the working of the Holy Spirit is indicated by our living; however, it is not determined by it. And so, we must ask, if *status confessionis* requires that the Gospel be jeopardized, do we want to give racism, or any sin for that matter, that kind of authority to redefine or to limit the reality of the Gospel's power? It seems clear that victory over sin and death implies that no amount of sin can overcome the new reality that is offered in Christ Jesus.

We are concerned with how the Belhar stands in relation to our current three Forms of Unity. Since the Belhar calls for a rejection of all theology that does not encourage unity, this appears to place the Belhar at odds with our other three confessions given that these confessions themselves point to a division within the church itself. They were written to distinguish the beliefs of Reformed churches from other theological traditions of the day. In our current Reformed Confessions we discover language referring to the Mass as “condemnable idolatry” and detesting the “errors of the Anabaptists.” While it is true that, historically, the CRCNA has taken issue with these statements, nevertheless we have opted not to change these confessions due to the historical nature of these documents. Rather, these oppositions have been noted as footnotes in subsequent printings of these documents. Since the CRCNA

has chosen not to alter our existing confessions these divisive words still stand. While the Belhar calls for unity in the church and for the end of all division, the climate in which our current Forms of Unity were drafted was one in which the church was seeking to make just a division for the sake of accurately representing the teachings of scripture. We continue to use these confessions and catechisms as a marker of continental Reformed theology – in distinction from other ways of thinking. What’s more, with humility, we teach that Reformed hermeneutics and theology are the most accurate way to understand and summarize the doctrines of scripture. This is done as a mark of contradistinction to other interpretations. It should be clear that subscribing to the three Forms of Unity is itself a point of division from other elements of the Church. With this in mind, how are we to understand what the Belhar says regarding membership in the church? The Belhar states, **“We reject any doctrine which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.”** Do our theology and hermeneutic constitute a human or social factor? Since we should always admit that our human minds err and our systems cannot grasp the full measure of divinity, we must conclude that our theological systems and hermeneutical principles are “human” and socially formed. However, are we unwilling to require a standard of right belief for membership in the institutional church? In early church history, right theology and orthodoxy were marks of the church. This continues explicitly in the Belgic Confession (Art. 29). As we attempt to grasp the mysteries of scripture, it is evident that this will always be done to the exclusion on some other ideas or doctrines.

There are some who will counterpoint the above by saying that the Belhar is subject to the theology of the other Confessions and therefore must be interpreted and applied in accordance. For instance, Dr. Peter Borgdorff has said,

The Belhar is not a Confession in the historic sense of ‘being like the others.’ Not only because it arose out of a different historic context, but it’s the first confessional statement from a church in the global south, it is influenced by their form of expression and teaching and conviction, and it comes from a people who themselves have suffered the consequences of mal-treatment. In that sense, it has a different flavor than a teaching instrument or an apologetic; it is more the expression of heart of a people who are now responding to a new age, who are speaking to their own history, who want to bear testimony to what their experience is as God’s people and as members in the Reformed community.³

Following that expressed statement, Borgdorff goes on to conclude that the Belhar “functions as a supplement to the other forms of unity.” Even in his own words Borgdorff acknowledges that the Belhar is less of a Confession and more of a Testimony. If, as we have stated, a Confession is intended to clarify the Gospel and summarize the teachings of Scripture, it should be able to stand on its own. What’s more, in the CRCNA the Three Forms of Unity have always been our rule for interpretation. As a rule for interpretation the Three Forms of Unity are express guidelines within which we do the task of theology and through which we can properly understand the whole teaching of scripture. What does it mean that the Belhar, if elevated to a Confession, requires its own interpretive framework? Confessions in the CRCNA have always been the framework. If the Belhar requires a framework it is evidently something other than a Confession.

The Belhar is in an entirely different category than our current three forms of Unity. The current three forms of unity serve mainly as a vertical description of who God is and how God interacts with humanity. The Belhar focuses on the horizontal relationship between people. This horizontal relationship serves as a testimony to who God is. Our current confessions are statements about God, the Belhar is a statement about how people should respond to each

³ Peter Borgdorff, *Adopt the Belhar? Pro & Con: A Discussion Between Peter Borgdorff and John W. Cooper*, November 3, 2011, Lansing, IL. Accessed from http://network.crcna.org/content/synod/belhar-panel?utm_source=CRC+Pastors&utm_campaign=cbf46acfea-For+CRC+Pastors&utm_medium=email On Nov. 17, 2011.

other in response to God. To this end, it seems appropriate for the Belhar to be accepted at testimonial status. A testimony is our response to the gospel. A testimony is a call for our actions to speak to who God is.

It has often been stated that the Belhar is incomplete as a Confession and ambiguous in its definitions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Understanding the Belhar as a testimony, or even a call to reconciliation and action, removes these challenges from the integrity of the Belhar. Understanding the Belhar in this way frees the Church up to answer its questions of action and right doctrine. Submitting the Belhar as a testimony requiring interpretation through the content of the Three Forms allows us to approve of the general thrust towards justice and reconciliation, affirm the hardship and faithfulness of the Church in South Africa, and encourage such efforts in our own contexts; all the while, we can avoid the inherent difficulties and ambiguities in the aforementioned aspects of the Belhar Confession.

Finally we find this document far too open-ended and unclear. It calls us to offer reconciliation to anyone who has experienced injustice. What kind of injustice are we referring to? Is it real injustice or perceived injustice? May we even make a distinction between the two? What if a perceived injustice doesn't resonate with the truths of God's Word? Some would argue that it is unjust to limit a woman's right to abortion. Do we need to fight on behalf of these rights when Scripture recognizes that sometimes being true to God's word means being unjust in some people's eyes? The lack of clarity of the Belhar is a point of concern given that the purpose of our confessions is to bring greater clarity to what we believe.

Conclusion:

Given the above discussion we want to acknowledge the benefits *and* the limitations of the Belhar as a Confession. It certainly has value for our denomination and our context but its limitations make it impossible for us to receive it with confessional status. As a result we move that the Belhar Confession be received in a manner and status similar to that of the Contemporary Testimony. Like the Contemporary Testimony, the Belhar Confession challenges us, as a denomination, to live out our faith in our specific social context.

We, the Councils of Trinity Christian Reformed Church and Grace Christian Reformed Church, recommend that Synod 2012 not adopt the Belhar as a fourth confession. We recommend that Synod 2012 consider adopting the Belhar as a statement with the same status as the Contemporary Testimony.

Grounds

1. It recognizes the limitations of this document as it requires the existing confessions to be interpreted properly.
2. A testimony is properly understood to be our response to the gospel.
3. It honours the importance of this document.
4. It recognizes our need for racial reconciliation.