

the presbyterian banner

September 2017

*Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea — the LORD on high is mighty.*

Psalm 93:4

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Editorial

One of the folk hosting us for a trip to Niagara Falls told us of the time when his daughter was travelling in New Zealand. On the first Monday she was in communication with her father. He was keen to know if she had managed to make it to church the previous day.

She replied to him, "I went to the Reformed Church, Dad."

To this he responded, "Which Reformed Church was it – Free Reformed, United Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Heritage Reformed?"

She said, "Dad, there's only one Reformed Church in each town!"

This shows a notable difference between conservative Reformed church life in the area where the ICRC met in Canada compared with down under. On the Niagara peninsula there is at least one congregation of the various fellow members of the ICRC, literally within five to ten minutes of each other. And as well as the various Reformed Churches mentioned above, there is also the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and a number of other Reformed Churches – the Christian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church of America.

It was a blessing to touch on this while amongst them. While each church is distinct in some way from the others in the confessional faith we profess, there is also much more that we share. And what a surprise they had to know the size of the congregation I ministered to! Their congregations average three to four hundred members. How did we get by with only fifty to sixty in a congregation? And yet, they could also appreciate the intimacy of such a fellowship. I found an example of this when I worshipped in two congregations and was not approached by anyone there apart from my host family. Apparently they all assumed I was there with someone else. This is something that would not happen amongst us – I trust.

And yet, with the blessed number of members they have and the bountiful blessings they have there, they have built up and sustained Christian Schools without any State Aid, together with Senior Citizen's Homes and a number of other charitable works. Once you have become a part of them, you are very much at home with them.

And isn't that what you find throughout the world? Wherever God's people meet together in obedience to his Word and by his Spirit, they are at home.

*For where two or three come together in my name,
there am I with them.
Matthew 18:20*

Photo Credit: Cover: Niagara Falls

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Wisdom of the World—Jews

1 Corinthians 1:18—25

The apostle Paul grew up and was educated as a Jew. He had a Jewish world view. That view was based on the Bible, but was not exactly biblical. Paul believed in one God, Yahweh. He believed God created the world, that God delivered his ancestors out of slavery in Egypt and gave them laws to obey in their God-given land. As a Pharisee he believed in resurrection, resurrection on the last day. He also believed that salvation was by works of righteousness, or righteousness which is in the law (Phil. 3:6). In his zeal for the law he attacked followers of Jesus Christ. His world view did not include the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

When Paul was confronted by the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, he believed and was baptised. He was converted. He received the Holy Spirit and started preaching that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He preached Jesus as the fulfilment of the Scriptures of the OT. His teaching confounded the Jews (Acts 9:22). Although they had the same Scriptures, they had a very different world view. The Jews violently opposed the gospel that Paul was preaching. For them, Jesus of Nazareth was a blasphemer who was crucified. For them, his resurrection was a story made up by his disciples.

While on his second mission Paul went with Silas and Timothy to the greatest city of Greece, namely Corinth. He preached – or reasoned – in the synagogue that Jesus is the Christ. Some Jews believed, but others became abusive. He stayed in Corinth for more than 18 months. Some five years later he wrote a letter to the church at Corinth. He heard about various problems in this church, one being division. He heard that

various factions centred upon personalities had arisen in the place. It was becoming a case of ‘who you know’ rather than ‘what you know’. Paul rebuked them for being so worldly.

Jews, as well as Gentiles, prided themselves in the teacher

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”

²⁰ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks ^[b] foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

they followed. We will look at Gentiles next time; as for the Jews, they had their various rabbis. And now converted Jews were taking pride in who baptised them. In rejecting this attitude, Paul explains how the message of the cross, and the consequent world view, is fundamentally different from the Jewish world view. The Jews accused Paul of turning the world upside down with his teaching (Acts 17:6). Paul saw

Dennis Muldoon

the gospel as turning the world right way up. He saw God as choosing the foolish and weak things of the world to shame the wise and mighty (1:27).

1. Wisdom

‘The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but the power of God to us who are being saved’ (1:18). People outside of Christ look to worldly wisdom or human wisdom. Wisdom that is not from above is earthly, sensual and demonic (James 3:15). The Jews had the Bible with its wisdom books. God gave King Solomon wisdom from above, but he did not live according to this wisdom. He ended up following the wisdom of this world in loving many foreign women (1 Kings 11:1). Subsequent kings adopted the same world view, a view rejecting or ignoring the wisdom of God. They took pride in the wisdom and power of man.

Isaiah spoke prophetically of such wisdom saying, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent’ (1:19, from LXX Isa 29:14). The wisdom of this world, the wisdom of man, will fail. God will see that it fails. God will bring confusion (James 3:16, Deut. 28:28). The wise man of today will be the fool of tomorrow. We do not have to look far to find such people. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? (1:20).

The king of Egypt had his wise men, but where did they end up? They were no match for the wisdom and power of God displayed by Moses. King Nebuchadnezzar learned the power of God to bring confusion and mad-

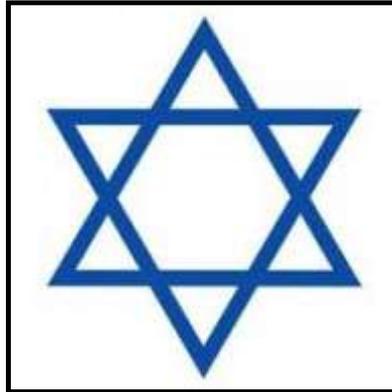
ness (Dan 4:31-33). 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men' (1:25). Too often Israel turned away from the Lord to seek counsel of other nations, and even of idols. As believers, we have God's word and God's counsellor in the Holy Spirit. Remember this and teach it the flock of God.

Paul is warning the church in Corinth not to be taken in by the worldly wisdom or the world views that dominated the city of Corinth. The wisdom from above that came with Jesus was a world view focused on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. We must try to understand the pain, and the shame, associated with the cross. "According to Cicero it was so unspeakably ugly as to be 'off limits' in polite conversation. 'The very word cross' he wrote, 'should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears' (Barnett).

Do you think someone at the ABC has been reading Cicero! Do you find it difficult to speak of the cross of Christ in polite conversation today? We live in a society that prides itself on worldly wisdom, a society that regards the cross of Christ as foolishness of the highest order. We are expected to apologise for our foolish beliefs. We need to watch and pray; we need to be constantly realigning our world view to that of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The population of Corinth was divided between Jew and Gentile. They had different world views but neither included the cross of Christ. Jews believed in one God; Gentiles believed in many, or none. The message of the cross impacted Jew and Gentile in different ways. Both regarded it as foolish, but for the Jews it was a stumbling block (1:23). How was it a stumbling block or offence – '*skandalon*' in Greek? For the Jew, death by hanging on

a tree or a cross signalled the curse of God (Deut. 21:23, Gal 3:13). Worshipping a man who had died such a shameful death was unthinkable for a Jew – as well as for a Greek. The cross was a symbol of defeat, not victory. The Jews could look back to the powerful King David, even if they did not listen to his wisdom in the Psalms. They looked forward to another David, a politically powerful Messiah.



2. Sign

In this context they looked for a sign – 'Jews request a sign' (1:22). It is one of the ironies of Jesus ministry that even as he was healing sick people and raising people from the dead the Pharisees came and disputed with him, and sought from him a sign from heaven (Mark 8:11). No wonder Jesus spoke of them as blind guides! Herod wanted to see Jesus so he could get him to perform a miracle. They wanted miracles, often of a grotesque and freakish kind (e.g. a cow giving birth to a lamb in the Temple) which they saw as pointers to the coming messianic age (Barnett). They wanted a sign for its own sake, but Jesus was not into pointless miracles or signs. Jesus did not perform miracles on demand. With a sigh of sadness Jesus assured the Jews that no sign would be given them, sinful and adulterous generation that they were.

A generation that is blind to truth, blind to the wisdom and

power of God, is a generation that prides itself in falsehood and lies. Is this not the generation we live in? We still hear people saying that if God is all powerful then let him perform a miracle right here and now; 'Let him send fire from heaven right here.' They do not believe what is written in the Bible, although they believe everything else they read and hear. They cannot accept the miracles of the Bible, but say they will not believe unless they see a miracle or sign. This is just what the Jews said. Jesus told the Jews that the only sign they would be given was the sign of Jonah (Mat 12:39).

In answer to the Jews requesting a sign Paul wrote, 'we preach Christ crucified' (1:23). An offence or stumbling block Christ crucified may be to the worldly wise, but to those given to see beyond this world it is the wisdom and power of God. No human being could ever have thought of such a way of salvation; no human being could ever put such a plan in place. Only God in his wisdom and in his power could plan and prosecute this perfect way of salvation for sinners in this world. It is the way of salvation not only for Jews but for Gentiles. It is the way of salvation for people from all nations, for Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, animist and the secular humanist.

The gospel, the message of the cross, will be foolishness to the world but we cannot change it. What we must do is preach the cross and the resurrection, and pray that the Lord will open the heart of the listener to believe it. The gospel will continue to be the wisdom and power of God to those whom God calls.

The World in the Banner

High Cost Of Defending Religious Liberty In Vietnam

Arrested in April 2011, Lutheran Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh has suffered heavily for his public defence of religious liberty, as has his wife, Tran Thi Hong. On 28 July Pastor Chinh, his wife and their five children arrived in Los Angeles, USA, having accepted a deal from Vietnam's Communist regime that saw Chinh freed on the condition that he leave the country. On 30 July authorities charged Protestant human rights lawyer and religious liberty advocate, Nguyen Van Dai, and five associates with 'carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the People's administration'. As the 'alleged instigator', Dai could face from 12 to 20 years in prison, a life sentence or a death sentence. As his 'accomplices', his co-accused could face 5 to 15 year terms. Please pray for Vietnam and its Christians.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 417 | Wed 02 Aug 2017

Vic Govt maintains 'safeguard' claims as Dutch proposal gives all citizens over 75 access to assisted suicide

Any person over age 75 will be able to receive euthanasia – even when perfectly healthy – under proposed law in the Netherlands, as Dutch doctors warn that euthanasia is 'getting out of hand'.

"When euthanasia was first introduced in the Netherlands in 2002, no one would have imagined a time when legislators would permit euthanasia simply because a person had reached a certain age," Australian Christian Lobby Victorian director Dan Flynn said.

"Disturbingly, this new push comes as new data from The Netherlands shows more than 400 patients were put to death by their doctor in 2015, without having given explicit consent. One such case was a woman who on resist-

ing, was held down by her family as her doctor killed her with a lethal substance.

"As Notre Dame University Bioethics Professor Margaret Somerville expressed today in the Herald Sun, 'once euthanasia is normalised slippery slopes are unavoidable'," Mr Flynn said.

"With the Dutch Parliament now considering euthanasia for anyone simply based on their age, and examples of similar abuse in other countries, it is becoming increasingly problematical for the Victorian Government to point to examples of where so-called safeguards have worked," Flynn said.

"Thankfully, Victorians have the benefit of drawing on the experiences in countries such as Canada, Belgium and the Netherlands to know that it does not take long for so-called safeguards to be eroded under constant pressure from euthanasia activists," Mr Flynn said.

The latest move in the Netherlands has led a group of 220 doctors to warn that things are 'getting out of hand' while Oregon doctor, William Toffler, is currently on tour in Australia warning Australia 'not to make the same mistake' of opening the door to euthanasia.

"We know that in other countries held up as examples of good public policy by advocates like Andrew Denton and Dr Philip Nitschke, euthanasia has slipped from being available only to the terminally ill to euthanising the mentally ill and even children," Mr Flynn said.

"Having not taken this significant policy to an election, the Victorian Government needs to reassure voters that this will not be Victoria's future, and cease current euthanasia plans."

+ *ACL*, 5 July 2017

Bondi synagogue ban over terrorism risk leaves Jewish community shocked and furious

A local council has banned the

construction of a synagogue in Bondi because it could be a terrorist target, in a shock move that religious leaders say has caved in to Islamic extremism and created a dangerous precedent. The decision, which has rocked the longstanding Jewish community in the iconic suburb, was upheld in court this week as the nation reeled from the alleged airline terror threat and debate raged over increased security measures at airports and other public places.

The Land and Environment Court backed the decision by Waverley Council to prohibit the construction of the synagogue in Wellington St, Bondi — just a few hundred metres from Australia's most famous beach — because it was too much of a security risk for users and local residents. Jewish leaders are shocked the decision appears to suggest they cannot freely practice their religion because they are the target of hate by Islamist extremists — and that the council has used their own risk assessment of the threat posed by IS against it. The head of the local Jewish community said the council and the court had effectively stifled freedom of religion and rewarded terrorism.

"The decision is unprecedented," Rabbi Yehoram Ulman told news.com.au. "Its implications are enormous. It basically implies that no Jewish organisation should be allowed to exist in residential areas. It stands to stifle Jewish existence and activity in Sydney and indeed, by creating a precedent, the whole of Australia, and by extension rewarding terrorism."

NSW Jewish Board of Deputies chief executive Vic Alhadeff told news.com.au he had never heard of any other religious group being denied a place of worship just because they were

targeted by outside extremists and that the move was a dangerous precedent.

"It's a very sad day for Australia if an established community, which needs a house of worship, is refused permission to build it because of fear that others may pose a threat," he said. "This simply shows how we're all losing our freedoms. Those who want us to be afraid are winning, and this ill-conceived judgment represents a dangerous precedent." ...

Rabbi Ulman said the decision "came as a surprise and shock to the entire Jewish community" but was even more scathing about the council, warning it had threatened the future of Jewish life in Australia. "By pulling the terror threat argument they have shown that they are completely out of touch both with the reality and with needs of their constituency," he told news.com.au. "They have effectively placed in jeopardy the future of Jewish life in Australia."

+ *Joe Hildebrand,*
www.news.com.au

India: No Freedom of Religion in Madhya Pradesh

On 21 May police detained 72 tribal children and the eight adults supervising them as they travelled to Nagpur for a church-run Vocational Summer School (VSS). Next day, police detained 11 tribal children and the two adults accompanying them as they travelled to the same VSS. The adults were charged with kidnapping and forcible conversions. However, the case collapsed when parents of the children produced documents to show that they were already Christians.

Despite this, six of the Christian leaders remain in detention. On 13 June police detained Sister Beena Joseph of the Carmelite Sisters of St Teresa congregation, along with the four young tribal women travelling with her to a church-run education centre in Bhopal. The women were interrogated and held for some 12 hours

before being released at midnight. Emboldened by the rise of PM Modi (nationally and internationally) Hindu nationalist groups are stepping up efforts to ensure nobody violates the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, which makes conversion from Hinduism a punishable offence unless done with the permission of local government (Hindu nationalist) officials. Pray for the Church in India.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin*
| RLPB 412 | Wed 28 Jun 2017

No, Christians And Muslims Don't Worship The Same God; It's Not Even Close

Contrary to former President George W. Bush, texts held sacred by Muslims and even some notable Catholic and Protestant church leaders, Muslims and Christians do **not** worship the same god and that's why their societies are so radically different.

The idea that the world's two largest monotheistic religions pray to the same god became a commonplace myth in the aftermath of 9/11, likely due in great part to Bush, who sought to unify secular Western liberals and Christians with moderate Muslims in the war on terror.

"I believe we worship the same god," Bush said on many occasions, both during his two terms in the Oval Office and in the years since. He's also frequently repeated a related myth, telling ABC's Charles Gibson in a 2011 interview, for example, that "we all have different routes of getting to the Almighty."

Similarly, here's what the Surah (29:46) tells Muslims to do when talking with Christians and Jews about Allah: "Do not dispute other than in a good way with the people of Scripture, except for those of them who do evil; and say 'We have faith in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. Our God and your God are One, and to Him we submit [ourselves].'"

Pope John II would undoubtedly agree, and there are mainline Protestant voices who would as well. That's the way of myths; they sound so reasonable and right and may even be logical on the surface, but a closer examination of the fundamental beliefs of Christians and Muslims about the divine exposes the claim's utter emptiness.

Begin with how the two faiths view Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus' claims about Himself. At John 8:58, He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." At John 14:6, He put it this way: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me." And at John 8:58: "I and the Father are one."

As Josh McDowell famously said, to make such claims, one has to be either the Lord or a lunatic, there is no middle ground.

There definitely is no middle ground in Islam concerning Jesus. Faith in Jesus is the worst kind of blasphemy. "Islam" means "submission" or "surrender." Muhammad described Allah at Surah 112 as: "Say: he is God, the One and Only God, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten. And there is none like unto Him."

That is why the Christian Trinity — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit — is the ultimate heresy for Muslims. To be absolute, Allah must be one and utterly other than man. To believe otherwise is to commit the idolatry Muslims call "shirk," worshipping multiple gods, or polytheism.

Muslims do affirm that Jesus was a prophet, but they utterly reject the Christian understanding that He died on the cross to solve man's sin problem and that His resurrection three days after His death verified His claim

to be God. For the Muslim, it is simply inconceivable that Allah would become a mere man or die a mortal death for any reason whatsoever.

That's why Islam focuses on externals. Sharia law is the means by which every aspect of daily life is brought under submission to Allah's demands, including politics and civil society, economics, the social realm, sports, the military and international relations.

The worth of every individual person and every element of Muslim society is judged by the degree to which it is submitted to Allah. The only "change" or "salvation" in Muslim society is progress toward total surrender to the will of Allah. As is said at Surah 33:36: "It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any choice in their decision."

It could hardly be more different with Christianity. The separation of church and state, for example, that secular and religious Westerners alike have taken for granted for four centuries is rooted in Jesus' saying at Mark 12:17 "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's."

That separation derives from the fact that "change" in society for the Christian begins with the heart of each individual person, what Jesus called being "born again" in His conversation at John 3:3 with Nicodemus.

Some might even call it the "come to Jesus meeting."

+ *Mark Tapscott (Executive editor of the Daily Caller News Foundation and chief of its Investigative Group)*

PCUSA Speaks Out on U.S. President Trump's Proposed Ban

The Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) stands with transgender community members, affirms their sacredness – as they are created in the image of God – and asserts their deservedness of a dignified

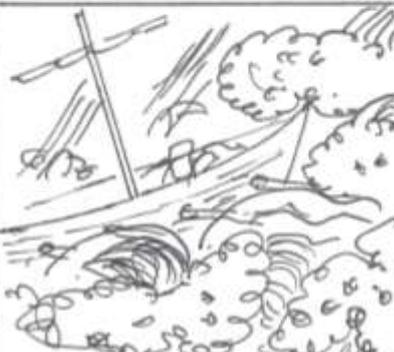
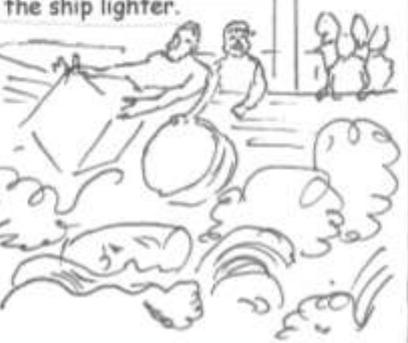
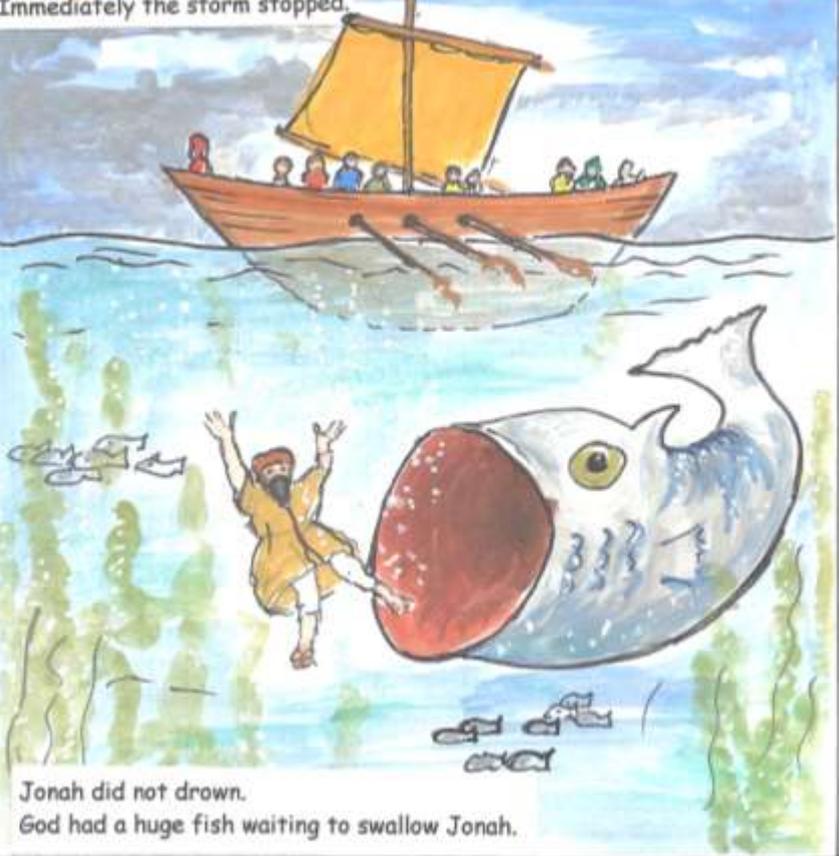
and respectful work environment. On Wednesday, [U.S.] President Trump issued a series of tweets that abruptly announced a ban on transgender people serving in the U.S. military. It is particularly disappointing given that this proclamation falls on the anniversary of President Truman's Executive Order 9981 that abolished racial discrimination in the U.S. Armed Forces in 1948. This decision by President Trump reversed a gradual transformation under the Obama administration, which welcomed transgender people to serve openly. President Trump said, "Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail." Naming transgender people and their life-saving medical needs a "burden" is cruel, inaccurate, discriminatory, and serves to further push to the margins a population that experiences job discrimination, homelessness, suicide, and hate-motivated violence at devastating rates. As Micah stands firmly within the prophetic tradition that calls us to honor God's image in one another, so should Presbyterians in this moment. God requires us "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and its predecessor churches have explicitly affirmed the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people for almost forty years. A resolution passed by the 221st General Assembly (2014) entitled, On the Global Crisis for People Who Are LGBT and Their Families: A Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Response, "[encouraged] each Presbyterian to hold in prayer our LGBT sisters and brothers in the countries where they are vulnerable around the world" (Minutes, Part I, p.737). It is a painful reality

that, indeed, our own country remains one of those where LGBT people, particularly transgender people, are vulnerable and explicitly targeted by our most powerful politician and the systems he influences. According to the Williams Institute, there are an estimated 15,500 actively serving transgender members of the U.S. military. Thousands of transgender people have risked their lives in service to this country including the more than 134,000 transgender veterans who are alive today. Although the President alluded to exorbitant medical costs associated with transgender service members, the reality is that these costs amount to less than a thousandth of one percent of the Defense Department's annual budget.

Historically, [the PCUSA] understand[s] inclusion in military service to be a bell tolling the advance of justice and an affirmation of citizenship and humanity for marginalized groups. This week we also saw the Department of Justice file court papers asserting that the law does not protect employees from discrimination based on sexual orientation. These actions combined represent a clear effort to undermine the rights of LGBT people and to dampen the knell of freedom. We hold close our LGBT neighbors, even as the law of the land tries to push them away, and commit to stand with and defend them against bigotry, exclusion, and demonization.
+ *Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202, 888-728-7228, Fax: 502-569-8005*

Children under the Banner — Jonah 1

<h2>The Runaway Prophet!</h2>	<p>God told the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh to preach. He didn't want to go.</p> 	 <p>So he got on a ship going to Tarshish,</p>
 <p>Soon a fierce storm blew up.</p>	<p>The sailors threw the cargo overboard to make the ship lighter.</p> 	<p>They were terrified and wakened Jonah up.</p> 
<p>Jonah told them it was his fault and to throw him overboard.</p> 	<p>Immediately the storm stopped.</p>  <p>Jonah did not drown. God had a huge fish waiting to swallow Jonah.</p>	
 <p>They rowed harder. They prayed. Then they threw Jonah into the sea.</p>		

Prescribed Search Work

SEPTEMBER 2017

Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 6 and 7)

1 SAMUEL chapter 21

1. Who else was present when Ahimelech the priest gave David the holy bread [shewbread]?
2. What did David do because he was afraid of Achish the king of Gath? (2 verses only)

Chapter 22

3. Who came to David when he was in the cave of Adullam? (2 verses)
4. What did Doeg the Edomite tell Saul about David and Ahimelech? (2 verses)
5. What did David say to Abiathar when he was told that Saul had killed the Lord's priests? (2 verses)

Chapter 23

6. What was the Lord's answer when David asked if the men of Keilah would deliver him up to Saul? What did David do then? (2 verses)
7. With what words did Jonathan comfort David in the woods?
8. What caused Saul to stop pursuing David in the wilderness of Maon? (2 verses)

JUNIOR

MARK chapter 11:1--19

1. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, what was the saying of the people who went before, and those who followed? (2 verses)
2. What did Jesus do to those who bought and sold in the temple? (2 verses only)

Chapter 12:1—12

3. In the parable, how did the vinedressers treat the beloved son of the owner of the vineyard? (2 verses)

Chapter 12:38—44

4. Why had the poor widow cast more into the treasury than the rich? (2 verses)

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
The questions for the whole year
are available from the above postal
address or by email at:
[**iesteel@gmail.com**](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)

Churches in the Banner

The International Conference of Reformed Churches — 2017

Sjirk Bajema

The ninth International Conference of Reformed Churches began on Wednesday evening, the twelfth of July 2017, with a Prayer Service at the hosting church, Immanuel United Reformed Church, in Jordan, Ontario, Canada. This was opened by the minister of this congregation, the Rev. John A. Bouwers, on behalf of his congregation and their federation of churches – the United Reformed Churches in North America. The preaching of the Word was done by the Rev. Raymond Sikkema, a retired minister of the URCA, and prayer was made by the Rev. Heon Soo Kim (Korea) for the churches, the Rev. Rowland Ward (Australia) for preaching and mission, and the Rev. Douw Breed (South Africa) for the Lord's blessing on the conference. Following the service there was a time of fellowship over refreshments.

The next morning the meeting began. Following an opening devotion by the Rev. Richard Holst (Wales), the previous Moderator, and prayer, the roll was read out. This gave expression to the worldwide breadth of the ICRC and identified the delegates personally as they stood upon their names being read out.

The new moderamen were approved – the Rev. Dick Moes (URCA) as the Chairman, the Rev. Matthew Ebenezer (India) as the vice-chairman, and the Rev. Peter Naylor (Wales) as the recording secretary.

The Rev. James Visscher (Canadian Reformed Churches), the corresponding secretary, gave his report next. He has had a busy four years since the last meeting, particularly preparing for this meeting. He has had thousands of emails to deal with in this time.

The new Constitution which was approved by the last meeting at Cardiff had been approved by the major assemblies of more than two

-thirds of the member churches and was declared in force.

The Website report was next presented. The approval of this report was held over until after the *Lux Mundi* proposal regarding the ICRC taking over this magazine. Following this several amendments to regulations were dealt with.

The meeting then approved a number of Advisory Committees in the areas of Credentials, Finance, Press Release, ICRC 2021, Application New Members, and Membership Reports. At this time there were also Panel Discussion Moderators and Members appointed in



The 2017 ICRC in session

the areas of Theological Education and Growing Future Leaders for the Reformed Faith, the Ministry of Mercy and the Reformed Faith, Bringing the Reformed Faith to Asia, and the Future Direction of the ICRC.

In the afternoon the Report of the Regional Conference Committee was dealt with. This consisted of reports of the regional conferences. The Asia-Pacific regional conference in Seoul, South Korea, was held in October, 2015, with the subject being Regarding the Sacraments. The European regional conference was held at De Glind, near Amersfoort in the Netherlands in May, 2016, and looked at Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The African regional conference was

held in August 2016 and had the subject, *Effective Approaches to Sharing the Gospel with Muslims*. No North American regional conference was held, largely due to the high number of other conferences being held.

The proposal to work closer with the World Reformed Fellowship in connection with regional conferences was passed.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) spoke to the decision their last Synod made to open all the offices to women. The key decision at the heart of their decisions in relation to this is Decision 3: "To declare that there are Scriptural grounds to provide ample room for the deployment of the gifts of women in task areas such as preaching, instruction, pastorate and diaconate." There was opportunity to ask questions seeking clarification in regards to this.

The last part of the afternoon was used up with various Inter-Church Relation committees meeting with each other.

The evening session was conducted in the church with a large contingent of the local congregations present. There were two church presentations by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central Europe. It was very helpful and very encouraging to see the Lord's work in church growth in these areas. Then the Rev. Hiralal Solanki gave an address on "A Brief Overview of Christian Mission in India."

Friday 14th July

The Chairman, Rev. Dick Moes, began a series on four Solas of the Reformation with a devotion on Sola Christus in the light of Acts 4:12. Today there is much opposition to this, just as there

was at the time of the Reformation. Now it is because there are said to be many ways to be saved, while at the Reformation it was because you had to go through the church to be saved. And personally too it is being challenged, because how well do we know what Christ has done for us and how do we live it out?

Acts is the continuation of the ministry of Jesus by the apostles. They continued Christ's healing ministry, as we see earlier in chapter 3 with the healing of the crippled beggar. The crisis developed because the authorities did not believe. They thought 'the Jesus case' had finished but it was quite the opposite. They were being challenged again, especially with what Peter said here. There are 3 aspects to this: 1) Accepting the totality of the name of Jesus; 2) Only in the name of Jesus can we enter the coming Kingdom through being saved; and 3) There is a divine necessity to being saved by the name of Jesus. This divine necessity involves a plan of salvation, the requirement of obedience (which is alone in Christ), and the problem of sin and forgiveness. Because God cannot tolerate sin and yet we are sinful, there must be the way through his Son. This is what the Lord Jesus does, satisfying God's justice with his obedient life and death. There simply is salvation by no other name. Peter had to maintain this in his time and we must do it again in our time. The 'Jesus case' is continually before us.

The morning session was taken up with the Report on Theological Education. Part of their work involved the publication of a 'Theological Education Directory', which deals with Ministerial Training Institutions, Instructors and Information.

Following Morning Tea a Panel Discussion was held regarding "Theological Education and Growing Future Leaders for the Reformed Faith." Using 2 Timothy 2:1-2 the members of the panel brought out the vital need of being educated in the faith, of that education being spiritual, of it being done by able and faithful men, and of committing

what we have heard to young men. Being addressed to Timothy, a local pastor, does the responsibility for this education lie with the local minister, church, denomination, or a theological college?

Then the question was asked and considered regarding cross-cultural training: Is the best way to prepare students for ministry to be trained where they are, or to go to



One of the panel discussion sessions

western seminaries?

This was followed up by discussing whether an ecumenical body like the ICRC could become involved in the provision of theological education for its member churches. The general consensus here was that at best the ICRC could supply information sharing. It is neither appropriate nor practical to move beyond that.

The next question concerned the growing area of distance learning and how the ICRC could help member churches through guidance in making this available, or by recommending certain institutions. There is tremendous potential in this area, as some attested to. Especially when joined with tutoring through a local Reformed/Presbyterian minister, it can have a positive interaction.

Scientific articles were next discussed, in relation to what is being published by reformed academics. The dilemma is how does one judge what is good material in this instance and how can the ICRC play a role in this?

After commencing the afternoon session as usual with singing and prayer, the meeting agreed to place

on the agenda the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Proposal on the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, which relates to the suspension of the RCN from the ICRC because of their recent decision to open all the church offices to women according to Article IV.4 of the ICRC Constitution. This Article says: *Suspension or termination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes that the Member Church, in its doctrine and/or practice (which includes the ordination of persons to the offices of minister or ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture, cf., Belgic Confession, Article 30), is no longer in agreement with the Basis; removal of suspension shall also be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote. A proposal to suspend, terminate, or remove the suspension of the membership of a Member Church may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church. A suspended Member Church may send Delegates to meetings of the Conference but shall not vote).*

This was not to be a time to make a decision on this, that would come on Monday, but it was an opportunity to hear the OPC's reasoning behind their proposal.

Elder Mark Bube presented the case for the OPC. He explained how the last General Assembly of the OPC appointed a Commission of the Assembly to specifically deal with this matter at the ICRC, if the decision was made to open up the office to women.

Then there was a round of contributions from other delegates. Rev. K. Janssen for the Canadian Reformed Churches spoke of their deep disappointment regarding the RCN decision, also in the light of his ordination examination in 1999 within the RCN, when he was strongly warned against hold-

ing a view that in any way was open to women in office. Prof. C. Van Dam (emeritus) also raised his concern in the light of the clear word of scripture and the influence of secular humanism. The Rev's R. Ward (PCEA) and L.A. den Butter (Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) supported three of the four parts to the OPC Proposal, but not to suspend at this stage. This was followed by the Rev. P. Boon (Free Reformed Churches in South Africa), who spoke quite strongly about the many sister denominations who had raised their biblical concerns over a number of years with the RCN and yet seen no sign of their coming back to the truth of scripture. Then the Rev. M. H. Oosterhuis (RCN) spoke acknowledging their going against the ICRC Constitution and asked not to be suspended, and gave a commitment that they would recommend to their Synod withdrawing membership.

Rev. J. Sawyer (OPC) spoke regarding the history of the OPC and their struggles with ecumenical bodies and denominations who had left the way of the Word. Rev. B. Hoyt (RCNZ) raised their concern regarding the integrity of the ICRC and the weak message that would be sent if the matter were not dealt with firmly by suspension. Rev. R. Holst (EPCEW) spoke of being encouraged by the RCN early on in their federation's formulation to be based on Scripture and to stay true to it, and so now they were deeply disappointed at their decision regarding women in all the offices.

Following this the application of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia was dealt with. The confessional documents and educational material used was looked at by the Membership Committee and outlined for us. They were founded in 1952 and consist of some 9000 communicant and baptised members. The recommendation came to accept them into membership. This was passed unanimously.

Following fellowship over dinner, we gathered in the church to hear a presentation from the Associate Re-

formed Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Churches of Indonesia.

Then the Rev. Dr. Derek Thomas spoke on Calvin's preaching on the book of Job. Following this, the vice-chairman invited questions from the congregation.

Monday 17th July

Following singing the Chairman, the Rev. Dick Moes, spoke on 'Sola Gratia' from Ephesians 2:1-10. He used the illustration of gift giving. He said gift giving could be, firstly, because the recipient is worthy of it. Then, secondly, gifts are given in terms of reciprocal relationships. These are given on the expectation of a return – 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.' The word for grace in



An evening session audience, looking towards the back of the church

Ephesians 2 is about a gift. It is a word Paul uses over 100 times. But Paul departs from the dominant view of grace in his community. It is not about those who are worthy of it, but those who are completely unworthy of it. We were spiritually dead and under the control of Satan. Just as corpses cannot respond to stimuli, so we were completely dead in our sin. Thus this grace is completely unmerited favour rooted in the love of God himself. God created the world for sons and daughters, and yet they refused to be sons and daughters. But still God moved to save a number through his Son, and so bring many sons to glory. He includes his people in what Christ does. And so we are spiritually re-

sponsive in Christ. We are no longer ruled by Satan, but we rule over Satan with Christ. And thus we have Ephesians 2:10 – where you have reciprocal grace coming through. But it is all of God and his Spirit through and through – in Christ. Thus the Christian life is about putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. Good news is all about grace – the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ – our unmerited favour and the goodness of God. God chose the foolish to shame the wise – 1 Corinthians 1:27. We are all one in Christ. Grace creates a counter-cultural community where all are one in Christ. We have it all in Christ – and what he has done for you he wants to put in you.

The first business of the morning was receiving the Report of the Diaconal Aid Committee. Members of the committee explained their mandate and were particularly careful to note their status as not a super missions organisation, but a help to advise and network with the member denominations. Disaster response is very much an ongoing concern and requests are often received for these. They evaluate the type and extent of the need, the presence of local churches, and so on. Also there is the careful oversight that needs to be there. The Committee asked to be relieved of this part of the Mandate as it involves much more than one might think. They believed it best to refer to more suitable reformed-presbyterian agencies in this area.

The Committee is in the process of publishing a brochure which draws together information from the churches together with their mandate and other relevant details. The key motivation is Galatians 6:10 where Paul exhorts us to do good to all people, especially those of the family of believers.

After a morning recess where a photo was taken of the delegates and a coffee break was taken, we moved into considering the *Lux Mundi* Report. This involved taking over an English language quarterly

magazine previously published by the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands involving various sister church contributors and turning it into the magazine of the ICRC, where the various aspects of the ICRC would have a voice.

Then there was a Panel discussion on the Ministry of Mercy & the Reformed Faith, involving the members of the Committee. A question was asked concerning what is poverty? Here it was seen that brokenness is at the core and so biblical principles must be brought to the fore. Indeed, it is the Christian faith which is behind the charity ethos in the western world. Added to this is the vital role of the office of the deacon. So while we must be all deacons in spirit, it is our deacons who have the calling to mobilise and direct the people of the church into this caring of their fellow believers and others. Further discussion addressed the need to deal with the whole man, so to avoid a secularisation of giving whereby help is channelled into a non-Christian organisation. So facing an orphan's need you need to address the immediate needs of food and clothing and shelter, but also address the context which brought about that situation. The next question concerned the matter of dependency. Generosity must be balanced so that there is not an unhealthy dependence upon aid. The thought was expressed that if there was a gap, help should be given to fill it but also to get local churches to take on any ongoing need and help them work towards self-sufficiency. An example of how this could work out in practice was given – rather than pay all the fees for a child's education, the policy became to fund it 50% with the rest coming from the student or/and his family. People from the West can come with the best of intentions and build and give all kinds of things, while putting the local people out of business. In this case helping can actually hurt. An illustration was given regarding turning soup kitchens away from

just handing out to genuinely needy people, and get the people receiving help to help themselves by cleaning, serving and cooking.

Following singing and prayer, the meeting moved into the afternoon session and on to the OPC proposal in connection with the membership of the RCN following their recent decision to open all the church offices to women. It was decided to first consider and decide upon B.1, 3, & 4

B. That, with regard to the membership of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) in the ICRC, the Conference:

1. Declare that the RCN—having recently acted to permit the



The Rev. Joel Beeke, one of our evening speakers

ordination of persons to the offices of minister and ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture—is in its doctrine and/or practice no longer in agreement with the Basis of the Conference (cf. Constitution, Article IV.4);

3. Encourage the RCN to reconsider the action of Synod Meppel 2017 in this matter and to restore the doctrine and/or practice of the RCN to be in agreement with the Basis of the Conference; and

4. In the event that, by the time of the 10th (2021) Meeting of the ICRC, the RCN continues to permit the ordination of persons to the offices of minister and ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture, the status of the membership of the RCN in the

ICRC be placed on the Agenda for that Meeting.

Several delegates spoke to this from Korea, Kenya, Scotland, Ireland and the USA, largely raising their disappointment with what the RCN has decided. Several delegates spoke of their own denomination's presence at RCN Synods and the unanimous appeal of fraternal delegates at the last Synod to not go this way.

B:1, 3 & 4 were passed with more than two thirds majority – 28 to 1 with 2 abstentions.

Then the meeting decided separately upon B.2: *Pursuant to Article IV.4 of the Constitution of the ICRC, suspend the membership of the RCN in the ICRC, effective immediately.* This was dealt with firstly by considering an alternate motion from the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (CRCN): *To give the RCN time until the next ICRC meeting to reconsider their membership of the ICRC, as the RCN has promised during the discussion.*

A number spoke regarding this, all apart from the mover bar one being against this motion. This motion failed to receive the plus 50% it needed – 8 in favour, 21 against with 2 abstentions.

Discussion then returned to the original No.2 of the OPC Proposal. This was put to a secret ballot and passed by over 75% – 24 to 4 with 2 abstentions. The Chairman then led in prayer, commending us all to humility before the Lord, especially the RCN delegates and their churches, and also asking a blessing upon our food.

Tuesday 18th July

After singing the Chairman read Romans 3:21-26 & 5:1-2. This speaks to the participation we have in the life of Christ – Sola Fidei. The Bible ends the way it begins – the life we have in God being restored. The most profound delight is the living of God with his people. God dwelling in Eden and God dwelling in the

new Jerusalem. We are pointed to this in the tabernacle with God dwelling amongst his travelling people. The confirmation of this comes in the marriage feast of the Lamb. This is the hope of glory Paul talks about in Romans 5:1-2. Because we all fall short of the glory of God – Romans 3:23 – it was God in Christ who made us righteous. He redeems us from sin in Christ and makes enjoyment in him possible. This faith is a gift of God – in fact, it is the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Through this faith we go from wrath to peace. We daily enter into God's presence as his accepted children and stand in his grace. Guilty people cannot do this.

The Report of the Missions Committee was presented by Mr Mark Bube. This is a facilitating committee which helps connect our various member denominations. He detailed the meetings they had, the challenge of the refugee crisis, the concern to be careful what is published on the internet, and the wider networking that has been done. He presented the Mission's Booklet as an aid to further our mission in different ways.

Then various delegates spoke of the mission work being done by member churches throughout the world. It was a very encouraging list. Due to security concerns, however, we are unable to publish it here.

Next the application of the Presbyterian Church of Uganda was dealt with. The confessional documents and educational material used was looked at by the Membership Committee and outlined for us. This church was founded in 1979 and consists of some 3,500 communicant members. The recommendation came to accept them into membership. This was passed unanimously.

The Mission's Committee led a Panel Discussion on bringing the Reformed faith to Asia. There the question was asked: 'What are the main ideologies and cultural norms that hinder the spread of the gospel in your nation?' This was followed by the question, 'How does perse-

cution and opposition to the Gospel both help and hinder your work?' One example mentioned here was that of the former Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) of Jakarta, in Indonesia. Through his bearing up during persecution and looking to the Lord, there has been a tremendous witness to the gospel.

Next the question, 'What are the specific ways that your church is involved in evangelism and church planting?' was discussed by the members of the panel.

Wednesday 19th July

Following singing, the Chairman read from 2nd Timothy 3:1-17. The



Looking towards the front of the assembly

focus was on the verses 16-17 and the sola naturally was 'Sola Scriptura'. The primary means that God uses to draw us to himself, into all that we have seen in the previous meditations, is in the verses 16-17. These are the holy Scriptures.

Firstly, they teach us that we must learn to be sanctified. They tell us what we must do. By nature we are like bleary eyed old men and the scripture becomes our glasses so that we see what to do. The 10 Commandments are aspects of this loving God. With the spectacles of scripture, we learn to love as Jesus loves. And so we become Christ's eyes and ears and mouth. He who was the ultimate man of God is in us living out his Word.

Secondly, the scriptures convict us. The Holy Spirit uses the scriptures to expose our old man and so humble us – e.g. Nathan convicting David after his adultery with Bath-

sheba. Peter in Acts 2 proclaims God's Word so that it convicts the Jews. The people Paul wrote to in 2nd Timothy need to undergo the same. People who are lovers of themselves and of money need to be cut to the heart. They aren't living lives to the glory of God.

Thirdly, the scriptures correct us. This is the positive side of admonishment. Psalm 51 contains evidence of this fruit. The repenting and believing in Acts 2 is another proof of it. This is training in righteousness which puts us in the right relationship with God and each other. Our passive righteousness in justification and our active righteousness in sanctification train us to put on this righteousness for participation in the life of God.

Fourthly, the scriptures are able to do this because of God's inspiration. "All Scripture is God breathed" is true of all scripture. As God breathed life into the nostrils of Adam, so he puts his spiritual breath into those who wrote the Scripture. It's the mystery of providence with God working through man. This makes the scriptures sufficient for our salvation and it makes scripture efficient for doing God's will in us.

Since it is five hundred years from 1517, that means it is a good time to reflect on Sola Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fidei and Sola Scriptura. May we have been blessed in this.

Then Rev. Moes led in prayer and we sang a hymn.

The Diaconal Committee Report was then wrapped up after a booklet was handed out which shows the diaconal work being done and where it is being done. The Protocol for dealing with Disasters was set aside and a motion passed emphasising the networking that would help in such situations.

The Treasurer's Report was presented by the treasurer, Mr Kyle Lodder. It's interesting to note that the PCEA is 0.18% of the total membership, so that we pay \$69.61 (US) per year. So we



The Rev's Dirk van Garderen (Reformed Churches of New Zealand) & William Middelhoop (Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands)

Reformed traditions has been a very profitable thing. The recognition and appreciation of each other is growing. The ICRC serves as an ideal means for inter-church relations with individual meetings between federations occurring. Yet we must remember we are a Conference, not an organisation or Synod. There was also discussion relating to encouraging like-minded denominations to observe and join with the ICRC. The place of regional conferences and the website and *Lux Mundi* were highlighted as ongoing forums for information and encouragement.



Looking towards the back of the assembly hall, with the Rev. Melle Oosterhuis (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) in the foreground

don't pay much and yet we receive so much through the ICRC.

Financially the ICRC is very healthy, with an excess from the past four year period. It was felt prudent to retain such a balance and continue to receive membership assessment payments to meet the actual costs for the next four year period.

Following the completion of the Panel on the ministry of mercy and the Reformed faith the fourth panel discussion took place – the Panel on the future direction of the ICRC. The concept of inter-church co-

Following lunch, there was discussion in relation to where the next meeting would be held. It was agreed to hold it in India, hosted by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India, if the relevant government approval could be obtained. Otherwise it would be held in Australia and hosted by the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. The exact time and place and topics will be organised by the Indian churches in conjunction with the Coordinating Committee.

The Press Release was next dealt with and after some adjustments, it was approved.

The meeting then closed with singing and prayer.

Following dinner we met in the church worship area and heard musical contributions from a group of young musicians and singers from the Independent Reformed Church of Korea and the local church. We very much appreciated this and it was concluded with closing comments expressing appropriate thanks to the hosting church and the moderamen. A gift of a clock was made to the local church by the ICRC.

close to the falls on a boat, appreciating God's wonderful creation in this part of his world. On the Sunday we could rejoice in God's special revelation as we worshipped in one or more of the many Reformed congregations in the area.



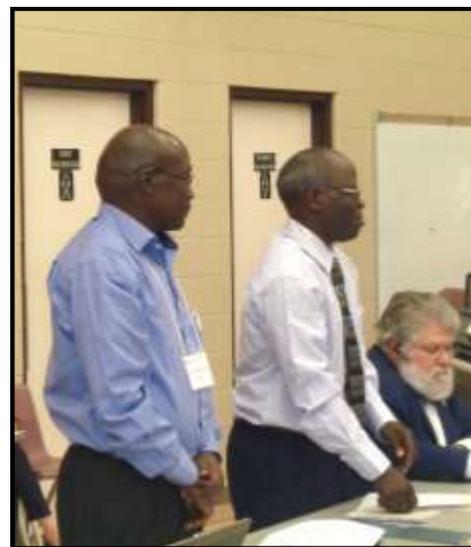
Rev. Daniel Kithongo from the African Evangelical Church

operation was very much a strand in this, with the role of the communion in the ICRC crucial. The connections were also vital in taking away the sense of isolation that some federations could have. The bringing together of the Presbyterian and

As a first time delegate, I found it a most rewarding meeting. The fellowship was very warm and generous. A number of us were taken to the Niagara Falls on the Saturday by local families and even got up



Delegates from the two newest member denominations—the Rev's Andrew Nugteren & Reinier Noppers of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (above), and the Rev Fred Kabenge & Elder James Yiga from the Presbyterian Church of Uganda (below)





Clockwise from top left: Independent Reformed Church of Korea's Young People's Choir and musicians; a scene from an evening session in the church; Dinner time (or was that Supper?); and the Canadian flag which was flying everywhere (it was their 150th Anniversary and normally it is not so ubiquitous, if seen at all)



The delegates and appointed officials of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, Jordan, Ontario, Canada, 2017