

Northern Lights

Reflections on General Synod 2011

By Pete Burrill

Congratulations to general secretary Wes Granberg-Michaelson on the occasion of his retirement, one that celebrates 17-plus years of service to the Reformed Church in America. I personally do not know Wes as well as others but have come

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to see more of his work in the past few years and of his dedication and faith in that work as well. So thank you, and may God richly bless you in your retirement.

I enjoyed Wes's report to the General Synod and I agree with him on many points. I was struck by one statement especially: "And by staying on our present path, we will not allow our-

selves to be divided in the future by differences in pastoral practice over issues like homosexuality. Our mission will maintain the unity of the Spirit that we treasure as God's gift." I wrestled with that statement over the course of General Synod. How do we do that?

The issues are many and varied, emotional and traditional, and, yes, even biblical and theological. Wes

posited in his report that the big question will be, "What do we do about Jesus?" It's an awesomely big question that is filled with many implications. Jesus is the living Word of God, truth incarnate, God's heart delivered into our world. He did the unthinkable, worked the miraculous, turned things upside down in order to right them. He transformed people, and one of them was me. But being truth incarnate, Jesus is also love incarnate—and therein lies the tension. I came to the conclusion



that to hold these two in balance is not humanly possible, it is a work of the Divine.

The course of the week was filled with little “nudges” that kept the questions alive in my mind: Vicky Menning in her workshop on transformational leadership and the good news that should prompt us to shout; conversations about the church being a “safe place” to be and to find healing; Marijke Strong’s article in *RCA Today* about the restoration of shalom found in inviting everyone into the community of Jesus. I have not always been very good at these things, though I want them for myself and others.

A Franciscan blessing reads:

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart. May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,



so that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace...May God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

There are no easy answers, but there is Jesus and the ongoing work of his transforming power in all his people’s lives. I pray this prayer for Wes and for us all because Jesus called us all into this “foolish” work to change the world. ■

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More than 50 Years of Ministry



John Drost has been officially retired from ministry since 1989, but that doesn’t mean he’s been sitting on the sidelines. Drost attends Westdale Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, where he is still very involved with evangelism, Christian education and discipleship, and leadership. “As long as I have lived, every Sunday as God’s people gather for worship and praise have been special moments in my life and continue to convince me that this is

what God’s people are meant to do,” says Drost.

For the past 10 years, he and his wife, Joan, helped manage the archives of the Regional Synod of Canada, cataloguing and preserving records and mementos from Canadian churches. Drost says he has a special passion for archival work; in addition to his work on the synod’s archives, he keeps a family archive at his house.

In 1952, at the age of 24, Drost immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands. “The trend of the time was for many people to seek their opportunities elsewhere. I had served in the military in Indonesia for three years, came back, and was a little restless, I suppose,” he says. “Going to Canada was a popular thing to do at the time, and it appealed to me.” He intended to work in agriculture or forestry—his field of study—but instead found himself called to ministry.

He met and fell in love with Joan

while serving as a student assistant at Second Reformed Church in Hackensack, New Jersey, during his time at New Brunswick Theological Seminary. They were married in 1959.

He and Joan served at four RCA churches during their years of active ministry: Hope Reformed in Lethbridge, Alberta; Maranatha Reformed in Montreal, Quebec; Maranatha Reformed in Wainfleet, Ontario; and Ebenezer Reformed in Stoney Creek, Ontario. John also served as the first executive director of Camp Shalom, a

summer camp ministry owned by the Classis of Ontario.

John and Joan have two daughters. Their younger daughter, Judith Storey, works in the advancement department at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario. She and her husband, Craig, have a son and a daughter. John and Joan’s older daughter, Nancy Kamara, has worked in Africa for many years. She and her husband, Siapha, live in Ghana, where they work in community development. ■

2012 All-Canada

Leadership Conference

By John Kapteyn

Mark April 27-30, 2012, on your calendars.

That’s when the Regional Synod of Canada (RSC) will host a leadership conference for pastors, elders, deacons, and other leaders in our churches and classes.

The conference will include a two-day workshop with Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor, authors, with R. Robert Creech, of *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal*

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and Congregational Transformation. Herrington is also a pastor, and Taylor is a pastoral counsellor. Their writings have inspired many churches in the RCA to participate in the Ridder Leadership Initiative.

In the workshop, Herrington and Taylor will address the church’s decreasing ability to impact culture with the good news of Jesus Christ. What can we do about it? They propose a radical transformation in how we do church, starting with the church leadership and including systems transformation.



Leadership transformation is focused on deepening our walk with God by committing to radically obey God, especially in fulfilling the Great Commission. Leaders must also strive to live with integrity and to be authentic.

The second essential transformation relates to our systems: our synod, our classes, and our congregations.

In churches, for instance, we spend a lot of time planning events—worship services, children’s worship time, choir, etc. We then track the trends, such as worship attendance, to see if we are succeeding. If we aren’t, we try to come up with even better events. If this still does not work we may change our structures. So if worship attendance is not increasing we may start a Saturday night worship service, or if children’s worship attendance is down we may cancel this and move to a Wednesday family night.

The problem with this approach to

church revitalization is that it is based on some unspoken “mental models” of church. One common mental model is that church happens at church. Events are planned at the church building, and we invite our friends and neighbours, and we’re disappointed when they don’t come.

Herrington and Taylor suggest that for deep transformation, we need to examine these mental models, and perhaps change them. An alternative mental model they suggested is that church happens wherever two or more believers live, work, or play.

They do not suggest that we need to abandon our traditional way of doing church, but rather that we should not constrain the Spirit by assuming that church can only function in a specific way (usually the way we grew up with church).

Attend the workshop to learn more and begin to think about your church, classis, or the synod in a new way. The leadership conference will be held at Westdale Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario. More information—including registration—will be coming soon at

www.reformed-church.com. ■

Get news from other regions at www.rca.org/synods. Here’s a glimpse of what’s happening:

- Albany: Delmar Reformed Church finds true community in new small groups, called Berea groups.
- Far West: Pastors prepare to launch a Hispanic Ministry Training Center to better equip Spanish-speaking pastors in Phoenix.
- Great Lakes: Grace Church in Allen Park, Michigan, finds revitalization through prayer and reconciliation.
- Heartland: Nearly 3,000 youth attended Rocky Mountain High in Estes Park, Colorado.
- Mid-America: Christian Park Reformed Church is navigating challenges on the road to revitalization.
- Mid-Atlantic: Second Reformed in New Brunswick found new life by providing college students with access to its under-utilized facilities.
- New York: Five people from a small, turn-around congregation have attended seminary in the last five years.

