



Northern Lights

New Regional Coordinator for Women's Ministries



Welcome and congratulations to Christina Labbé, the new regional coordinator for Women's Ministries for the Regional Synod of Canada! Christina brings to this position her passion for Christ, her commitment to women's ministries, and her love for the church. Join us in welcoming Christina as she begins this new endeavor.

Connecting

By Christina Labbé

Connecting is about sitting down in a comfy, overstuffed chair with a cup of coffee and a friend for a nice chat; it's a time to be yourself, to share. Connecting generally comes pretty easily for me; I love people, I certainly have the gift of the gab, and I love hearing people's stories. As I begin my time as the Regional Synod of Canada's Women's Ministries coordinator, I think that connecting might be the best place to begin, so feel free to find a comfy chair and grab a cup of coffee, and I'll share with you a little about who I am.

I was raised in southwestern Ontario on a dairy farm by wonderful parents who were faithful witnesses to the gospel. By third grade I knew that I couldn't save myself from my sin, and I also couldn't heal my own hurt at the rejection from my peers. That summer at Camp Shalom I met Jesus, who is both my Saviour and my Great Physician. Since then I have been learning what it means to be an instrument of healing in the Physician's hands, bringing hope, life, and wholeness to those who are far from Jesus. I worship and minister with and to the congregation of Faith Reformed Church in Kingsville, where my husband is the pastor. I love scrapbooking, taking long walks, experimenting in the kitchen, and golfing. I enjoy stormy days because they're an excuse to curl up with a good book.

My desire is to help you encounter Jesus, to assist you in connecting with your sisters in the church across Canada, and to help you engage more fully as we together follow Christ in mission.

So, my sisters, I look forward to getting to know you, connecting with you, and hearing your stories. Feel free to contact me; I can be reached by email at clabbe@reformed-church.com. The coffee and chairs are ready, and my ears and heart are open.

Portuguese-Language Ministry Builds Community

"I see myself as a missionary in North America," says Humberto Lopes, pastor of New Alliance Christian Church near Toronto, Ontario. "I would like to see more growth, but it isn't our gifts or our wisdom that make the difference. It's God's power and mercy."

After seminary training in Brazil, Lopes came to Canada to work on a Portuguese-language ministry opportunity with a friend. New Alliance started in an apartment on a Friday night in 2003 as an outreach to new immigrants. "My mission is still mainly outreach," Lopes says. "It isn't easy to start a church in Canada, especially one that is intended to attract Portuguese and Brazilian immigrants. The Canadian reality is that the church is not growing. Since many people are not open to the gospel we must reach them through friendships."

New Alliance has a worship team and children's worship programs,

Northern Lights will be part of *rcatoday* three times a year. We plan to send another issue separately but with this same format and size. Please send us your upcoming events and news items, as well as any suggestions for improving our content, at blaidlaw@reformed-church.com.



and between 80 and 90 people attend the contemporary worship service. “We sponsor activities aimed at building community, like family picnics and paintball parties,” says Lopes. “We are also considering expanding our ministry to include an English-speaking service, but there isn’t enough space in our current building to have both Portuguese and English services.



The Lopes family

“We have some members who have accepted Christ for the first time. These new Christians see that something real is happening at New Alliance. It isn’t just religion. The devotion of the whole church community contributes to conversions. Christ’s presence changes lives!”

New Alliance will officially organize as an RCA congregation in November. “I think this will be good for our leadership and my hope is that it will lead to an increased sense of ownership in the church,” Lopes says.

Lopes envisions New Alliance as a ministry that will continue to be a blessing to the classis and to the immigrant families it serves. “We must work closely with God in this postmodern society,” he says. “The Brazilian community is not that big, but we are striving to make a difference.” ●

God Moments

By John Kapteyn, synod executive

I was tired and wanted to be home. Thanks to a two-hour delay, I wouldn’t land in Toronto until after midnight. I wasn’t in the mood for conversation, but the middle-aged man with the “Apocalypse Now” T-shirt wanted to talk. I mostly listened. His hair was long and he looked like he was still living as a hippie in the ’70s.

He shared how his wife and children had left him a few years ago. He worked a few months in the oil patches in Alberta so he could save money to fulfill a lifelong dream to visit Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand; he was now on his way home after three months there.

He hoped that either his girlfriend or a close friend would wait the extra two hours at the Toronto airport. His girlfriend’s two-year-old son had leukemia, which was in remission. Since the friend lived near me, I offered to drive him to his friend’s home if necessary. I hesitated with my offer, as I longed to be home as soon as I could. When we finally landed in Toronto, I told him I would wait for him until he made it through customs, which might take a while, considering his appearance and journey.

About 40 people were waiting for arriving passengers. My eye caught a woman with a teenage daughter, and I’m not sure why, but I walked up to her and asked if she was waiting for a man who was coming home from Vietnam. She got excited and, in somewhat rough language, she asked me how he was doing, as if I had been a long-time friend who had shared his journey. She told me she had a big surprise in store for him—she was going to shave his head and sew the hair into a wig for her son.

After a few minutes, I told her I had to go but she told me to wait so she could give me a warm hug.

For me, this was a God moment. I believe God had orchestrated both meetings and that he was present in them. Total strangers had shared their stories with me and had invited me to be part of their lives. They had a welcoming attitude and openness that we as God’s people often lack. I felt as if I was accepted and special.

In Matthew 25, Jesus says, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” I am a minister of the Word, a representative of God, who is to invite strangers in. In doing so, I invite Jesus in. But somehow, I felt like I had been the stranger and that I had been ministered to, and that I had been in the presence of God.





Mobilizing for Mission Update

By John Kapteyn

The purpose of Mobilizing for Mission (MFM) is to get people moving to do the work God has called them to. In other words, MFM's purpose is to enable us to keep up with God. It has exciting possibilities as a catalyst or resource for mission.

The Good News

"God is on the move," as speaker and author Reggie McNeal likes to say. This is true in the Regional Synod of Canada:

- Two churches will implement the VantagePoint3 discipleship/leadership process this year, and another church plans to do so next year. We have approved grant applications for Forestview Community Church and Open Arms Fellowship.
- Woodgrove Christian Community Church has submitted a preliminary application for a grant to help hire a full-time pastor to equip their congregation to implement their new vision—a vision that came about through a process subsidized by an MFM grant. Cedar Grove Reformed Church in Port Alberni plans to start the visioning process soon.
- Welland has initiated a new outreach program and has received an MFM grant.
- The Calling Lake initiative will be starting soon.
- Eight church planters attended Thrive!, a week-long training event.
- We have 40 organized churches in the Regional Synod of Canada. We also have 15 new churches and ministries, some that may soon be organized and some still in the planning stages.

The Concern

God is raising dreams, and we need to raise the funds to help those dreams become reality. To date, we have received \$32,000. Approximately \$10,000 of this was through Canadian Church Growth Fund askings. I am thankful for this, but we need to intensify our efforts as the opportunities for mission stand before us.

We also need to have good cash flow management and a focus in place. A cash forecast has been prepared based on current contributions and on actual and potential grant requests. I believe we will and can raise more than projected, but I also believe the demand for funds will be greater as more dreams arise.

The Response

We plan to intensify fundraising efforts in three ways:

- Encouraging synod churches to hold a special offering this fall and suggesting fundraising ideas to them. This will allow all people to be involved in MFM.
- Asking churches to include MFM in their budgets or to increase the amount budgeted. One main focus will be on Calling Lake and getting churches to support this mission with an annual pledge over five years.
- Visiting individuals within our churches who may be able to make direct donations, and presenting long-term giving options to them.

God is on the move! May we not be left behind. ●

News

On June 21, at the age of 75, Corrie Moerman passed from death to life. Corrie worked alongside her husband, the late pastor John Moerman, for many years and leaves behind eight children, 28 grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren. Two of her children, Jim and Murray, are Regional Synod of Canada ministers. As her obituary read, "We rejoice in her loving life, godly example, and faithful devotion to her family, many friends, and Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The synod has several new pastors.

- David Wilkens is the new pastor at Christ Community Church in St. Albert, Alberta.
- Stan Seagren is the new pastor at Westdale Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario.
- Scott Nyp was ordained at Drayton Reformed Church in Ontario on August 22, and was installed at Reformed Church of the Thousand Isles in Alexandria Bay, New York.

The synod office has moved! Our new contact information is 201 Paradise Road N., Hamilton, ON L8S 3T3; (905) 527-8764; (905) 527-8973 (fax). ●

Mobilizing for Mission

Mobilizing for Mission Update

Donations received: \$32,053.15
Grants awarded: \$5,000

Please help us mobilize God's people. For more information or to donate, go to www.reformed-church.com/MobilizingMission.pdf.



Pastor Profile: Siebrand and Maria Wilts

“God’s presence has been confirmed in my ministry again and again,” says Siebrand Wilts, reflecting on a lifetime of pastoral service, “and I know that God was able to use my experience as an immigrant with a foot in two different worlds to reach people.”

Initially, Wilts ministered to Dutch immigrants who were familiar with Christianity. Today Canadian pastors wonder, “How can we reach a community that is basically non-Christian?” Wilts attributes this shift to the decline of the Catholic Church, particularly in Quebec, and to a tolerant Canadian society.

Born in Vlagtwedde, the Netherlands, Wilts immigrated to Canada as a child in 1955. Following studies at Hope College and Western Theological Seminary, Wilts headed to Harriston, Ontario, to serve First Reformed Church, where he had also worked as a seminarian. During his service there the church purchased and remodeled a theater for use as a worship center. In 1976, after six challenging and rewarding years in Harriston, Wilts accepted a call to Elmwood Community Reformed Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. “My family and the church experienced eight years of growth, including the construction of a new sanctuary in 1979,” he says.

Wilts went on to serve as director of Camp Shalom and as pastor of Country-side Reformed Church in Cambridge, Ontario, until 2007, when Wilts and his wife, Maria, chose retirement due to his

struggle with Parkinson’s disease. Wilts has also enjoyed being the clerk for the Synod of Canada and his past experiences as a hospital chaplain. Siebrand and Maria recently celebrated 40 years of marriage. They have four children and six grandchildren.



Siebrand and Maria Wilts

“I would have to say that the ‘inward’ call felt during my high school years has been consistently affirmed during my years of ministry,” he says, “and I recognize that without Maria’s support and encouragement we would not be where we are today. I feel that my experience growing up in an immigrant family was beneficial in serving Reformed churches in the process of transforming from immigrant churches to

community churches. Our ministry has been a positive experience and we were able to finish strong. To God be the glory!” ●

Hope Reformed Reaches Out in Vancouver

“We have our fingers in quite a few ministry pies,” says Randy Opmeer, pastor of Hope Reformed Church in Vancouver, Canada. “God uses us, and we are blessed greatly by him. It’s something to celebrate.”

Opmeer says several thriving ministries have an impact beyond Hope’s walls. “One exciting ministry arising out of our congregation is Servant’s House. It is led by one of our members and overseen by a board of directors from Hope as well. Typically, there are between six and eight men living there who encour-

age one another to abandon addiction and follow Christ. Some of the residents have joined our church.”

In addition to Servant’s House, Hope offers a monthly hot meal to needy people in the community. “This is essentially a ministry of compassion,” says Opmeer. “Its gospel fruitfulness is less apparent, but we trust that some of our guests are growing in faith. Lately, youth from a neighboring RCA church, Fujian Evangelical Church, have been assisting with serving the meals. We also collaborate with a non-RCA Korean church that uses our building. They provide the entire meal once a year.”

Hope Reformed also owns a Christian care facility for seniors, Westminster House, in a Vancouver suburb. The facility houses more than 100 residents and provides several levels of care. “We especially hope that couples never have to be separated,” Opmeer says. “A board of directors drawn mainly from our church diligently oversees the work and ministry there. We rarely have members of Hope living there, but we know that residents are strengthened in their faith, and sometimes residents or employees come to Christ while at Westminster House. It’s a wonderful ministry for an important life stage.

“It’s difficult to reach people in a materialistic and godless city, but I trust that by God’s grace we will continue to be salt and light in and for Christ in our community.”

The congregation stays connected through small groups that meet around Vancouver throughout the week, and once a month church members gather for a soup luncheon after worship to socialize and nurture friendships. Though Hope’s membership is primarily Caucasian, it is beginning to reflect the multicultural flavor of the city, including First Nationals and Chinese people, as well as people from other denominations and non-churched backgrounds. ●