

## Classis Niagara - Press Release of Classis Blue Bell June 20, 2012

On behalf of the convening church of Blue Bell, PA, br. Dennis Bratcher called the meeting to order, and led in opening devotions. He read Titus 2, requested that the delegates sing Psalm 100, and led in prayer. A review of the credentials revealed that delegates from all seven congregations in the classis were present, and that their credentials were all in good order. Once the the classis was declared constituted, the officers suggested by the previous classis took their places: Rev. Peter Holtvluwer, chairman; Rev. Clarence Bouwman, clerk; and Rev. Dick Wynia, vice-chairman. Rev. Holtvluwer thanked the church of Blue Bell for their work in convening the classis and the church of Tintern for hosting it. He also drew classis' attention to the vacancies in Blue Bell and Dunnville, and the impending departure of Rev. Carl VanDam from Grassie, to serve the church in Houston, B.C. He also made us aware of the health concerns of Rev. J. Geertsema, whose recovery from surgery for colon cancer has been slow.

After the chairman asked the questions under Article 44 of the Church Order, the assembly dealt in closed session with a request from Attercliffe for advice in a matter of church discipline. The church of Grassie requested honourable release from service in the classis on behalf of their minister, Rev. VanDam, who has accepted a call to serve the congregation in Houston, B.C. After the necessary documents according to Article 5, C.O. were presented and reviewed, classis granted Grassie's request. Classis also appointed Rev. Bouwman to serve as counsellor for Grassie. On behalf of classis, the chairman expressed gratitude to Rev. VanDam for his faithful and diligent work during his time in Grassie, and wished him the Lord's blessing in his service in Houston.

Classis agreed to delete from the Regulations for Classis Niagara a section dealing with a classical committee for a Fund for Needy Theological Students, since Synod 2010 had appointed a committee to serve the whole federation in this capacity, and since Classis Niagara September 2010 had decided to discharge its committee.

We received a report from Rev. Bouwman on a visit he had made on classis' behalf to the March classis Southern Ontario of the URCNA, at which an overture requesting the adoption of a new Form for the Baptism of Infants was on the agenda. His report prompted some discussion among the delegates about covenant theology in Reformed circles.

According to the schedule, Dunnville is the convening church for the next classis, scheduled for September 12, 2012, or alternatively, December 12, 2012; the suggested officers are Rev. Jan Huijgen, chairman; Rev. Clarence Bouwman, vice chairman; and Rev. Peter Holtvluwer, clerk.

Rev. Pieter VanderMeyden, minister of the Vineland Free Reformed Church was welcomed in our midst as a fraternal observer from the Free Reformed Churches in North America. He brought us greetings, and also presented a personal request that we reflect on the possibility of coming to some formal agreement and procedure dealing with members who move among the Reformed churches in the Niagara area. Such movement between Canadian Reformed and Free Reformed churches is complicated by the fact that while these federations recognize each other as true churches, they do not have a formal ecclesiastical relationship with each other. Rev.

Wynia responded to Rev. VanderMeyden, thanking him for his attendance and his greetings, and expressing the desire of the Canadian Reformed Churches to take up once again the challenge of working toward unity between the two federations.

During question period, classis discussed some concerns relating to pulpit supply for vacant churches. We were also polled, with respect to decisions our consistories may have made about what Bible translation they would be adopting for use in worship, once the 1984 NIV is no longer available. The English Standard Version seems to be the version of choice. Rev. VanDam expressed his appreciation for the positive experience he had during his time in the classis, and his prayer that the Lord would continue to bless the congregations of Classis Niagara. The chairman concluded, with thanks, that censure according to Article 34 CO was unnecessary. The Acts were read and approved, and after we sang Psalm 122:1,3, the chairman led the body in prayer, giving thanks for the meeting, and bringing before the Lord the needs of the churches, particularly those which are vacant. The meeting was closed.