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#### Recommended Citation

Reken, Calvin Van; Kelderman, Duane; Tuit, Pieter; and Smith, Kathy, "Calvin Theological Seminary Forum" (2003). *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum (2002- )*. 6.  
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CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

# FORUM



FALL 2003

# Leadership

# FORUM

Providing Theological Leadership  
for the Church

Volume 10, Number 3

Fall 2003

## REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP

3

Christian Leadership  
*by Calvin Van Reken*

5

Who Has the Vision?  
*by Duane Kelderman*

7

Leadership in the Church —  
and in the Church Order  
*by Pieter Tuit*

9

The Changing Face  
of Leadership in Korean  
American Churches  
*by Kathy Smith*

10

Reflections on  
Hispanic Leadership  
*by Mariano Avila*

## DEPARTMENTS

Council Room . . . . .	12
Continuing Education . . . . .	13
News . . . . .	15

Cover: Photo collage portraying  
aspects of church leadership.  
*Photos by Kathy Smith and Paul Stoub*

Scripture texts are from the *New International  
Version*.

The *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum* is published  
in Winter, Spring and Fall editions.  
Calvin Theological Seminary, 3233 Burton St. SE,  
Grand Rapids, MI 49546.  
[www.calvinseminary.edu](http://www.calvinseminary.edu)

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Editorial Consultant: Kathy Smith  
Designer: Paul Stoub, Stoub Graphics  
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Publication Mail Agreement No. 40063614  
Canada address: Calvin Theological Seminary, 3475  
Mainway, LCD STN 1, Burlington ON L7M 1A9



## from the president

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I'm mighty pleased to report that our Commencement exercises in May pushed Calvin Theological Seminary way out onto new ground. For one thing, we barely had enough room to seat everyone. Twelve hundred supporters gathered to rejoice with our graduates. People filled all the seats and most of the stage of Calvin College's Fine Arts Center. The atmosphere was jubilant that Saturday, and people brought it with them to the reception in our beautiful new Student Center.

Beyond the achievements of our grads, people rejoiced at Commencement over the glory of God reflected from the work of three distinguished alumni. For the first time in her 127-year history the Seminary lifted up the names of alums who called attention to God's grace and justice in special ways, and thus brought glory not only to God, but also to their alma mater.

The Reverend Clarence Boomsma, a legendary Christian Reformed minister, preached the gospel with power and beauty, illuminating it from his wide reading. He sought and modeled wisdom in every facet of ministry. Till and beyond his retirement in 1983, he served the Christian Reformed Church as author, ecumenist, secretary, moderator, delegate, and four times as President of Synod. As I can personally attest, Clarence Boomsma was also the ideal mentor of young pastors.

The Reverend Herman Keizer, Jr., served his church and nation for thirty-four years in Vietnam, in Fort Carson, CO; in Bremerhaven and Stuttgart, Germany; in Hawaii; and in Washington, D.C. He served the Department of Defense as Executive Director, Armed Forces Chaplains Board; and as Command Chaplain, United States European Command. He was wounded twice in the line of duty, and his grateful nation has decorated him forty-five times.

The Reverend Dr. Lewis B. Smedes (1921-2002) taught theology and ethics winsomely enough that, decades later, students remember not just Lew's eloquence, but also his habit of converting a student's watery question into a kind of wine the student never had in mind at all. He preached sermons so full of the grace of Jesus Christ that grown men sometimes wept over them on the parking lot after church, and he published one splendid book after another, each one shining with intelligence. He impressed many of us as perhaps the most humane Christian we have ever known.

A church minister, a chaplain, an author-teacher — and each a leader of the church. I invite you in this issue of *Forum* to reflect on the powers and graces of the people the Lord uses for this noble calling.

Grace and peace,

Neal Plantinga

# REFLECTIONS

## Christian Leadership

In October 1997 a Promise Keepers meeting was held in Washington, D.C. Most of the pundits commenting on the speeches were impressed with them. The spokeswoman for the National Organization for Women, however, was not impressed at all. Most of all, she disapproved of the oft-spoken idea that a husband should be the leader in the family. This is threatening to women, she said, and leads to wife abuse. Several Promise Keeper spokesmen tried to address this concern by explaining that they were speaking about a non-abusive kind of leadership. But she was not persuaded. For her there was only one kind of leadership, one way of exercising authority, and it leads to abuse.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus distinguishes two different kinds of leadership, two different ways of exercising authority.

Mr. and Mrs. Zebedee's two sons, James and John, left their father's business to follow rabbi Jesus. No doubt the sons justified their decision to their parents by pointing out that Jesus is not just any rabbi, but the anointed one, the Son of David, the future King of Israel. Accepting this description of Jesus, presumably the whole family thought that Jesus would become the kind of king that David had been — enthroned in a palace in Jerusalem and attend-

ed to by servants. Most likely they weren't too concerned about Jesus' modest station. King David himself did not start out looking like someone who was destined to a position of power and privilege. David's first job was a menial one, a shepherd of his father's flocks — not a very impressive beginning for a future king.

Mrs. Zebedee came to Jesus with James and John in tow to speak to him about her sons' futures. She chose a good time to put in a word for her sons — before Jesus' career really took off. She wanted her sons to

by Calvin P.  
Van Reken, Professor  
of Moral Theology



share in Jesus' exaltation to the throne. When Jesus came into his power and privilege, she wanted to make sure her boys were there too. "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

Surprisingly, Jesus didn't just say no. He didn't say, "You've got it all wrong. I'm not going to be a king like David with a palace and servants." Rather, Jesus said, "You don't know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" The men answered, "We can."

### Matthew 20:20-28

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

"We can," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father." When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

I don't think they remembered what Jesus had just told the twelve disciples — that in Jerusalem he was going to be betrayed, condemned, mocked, flogged, crucified and raised. Or maybe they didn't forget — maybe they didn't really understand what Jesus' words meant in the first place. So they came to Jesus hoping to insure they would have power and privilege, without knowing what that would require. The other disciples hear of James's and John's preemptive bid for power, and are outraged.

Jesus turns the request into a teaching moment. ▶

**Christian Leadership**

▶ He describes two kinds of leadership. One he attributes to Gentiles, those outside the covenant community. The other kind should characterize leaders who are followers of Jesus Christ. So the two different kinds of leadership could be called “worldly leadership” and “Christian leadership.”

**Worldly Leadership**

According to Jesus, worldly leadership means being the boss, giving orders. To be a worldly leader is to be the one whose will is carried out, and who manages to bend others by force or influence to do what he or she wants. When the centurion came to Jesus because his daughter was dying, he told Jesus he knew about having authority. If he told one of his soldiers to go here or there, it was done — no questions asked, as if the soldier had no will of his own. The subordinate is the servant of the worldly leader.

The disciples understood this kind of leadership too. Their jostling for power and authority in what they thought would be Jesus’ earthly kingdom demonstrates it. To be the boss and give the orders requires power to bend someone else to your will. Since leaders need to get people to work together for a common cause, they need the power to keep everyone in line. One problem is, of course, that most worldly leaders use that power to get what they personally want, rather than working for some shared good.

As sinners, each person’s will is swollen, engorged with self-love and self-interest. It is part of fallen nature to pursue what you think is good for you and not worry too much about anyone else. Sinners are continually trying to build kingdoms for themselves, and so the world is chock full of corrupt leaders in the

halls of government and in executive suites. In the home such self-centeredness can lead to all kinds of abuse. This is the kind of leadership that the woman from NOW was concerned about, and rightly so.

**Christian Leadership**

Jesus says that a Christian leader must be a servant or slave. What does this mean? A servant is one whose will is entirely lined up with the will of his master. Jesus himself is a model of this kind of leadership. In obedience to the Father, Jesus entered our skin, lived a life of deprivation, and died a horrible death. He said, “My will is to do the will of my Father.”

But note what Jesus says in Matthew 20 about Christian leadership and authority. He does not say that Christian leaders need to be the servants of God, and do what God wants. He says something far more striking: “whoever wants to become great among you must become *your* servant.” Even regarding his own case, Jesus does *not* emphasize in this passage that his life was in service to the Father, but rather that it was spent *for others*, “a ransom for many.”

Jesus is insisting that Christian leaders must always pursue what is best for the ones being led, and they must do so without any regard for whether it may cost or benefit them personally. This is Christian leadership. It is not only how church leaders should function, it is how Christians should lead in any arena in which they are given leadership responsibilities, such as in government, business, education, medicine, or in the home.

The priorities of a Christian leader are the exact opposite of those of worldly leaders. Worldly leaders use power to insure they

will never experience loss or harm. In fact, whenever possible they will maximize their own profit or pleasure and try to gain what is best for themselves. In contrast, Jesus calls for leaders who will use their power in an effort to secure what is best for all being led, regardless of their own personal gain. This all makes perfect sense, since the chief virtue of a Christian is love, and the essence of love is serving the good of others selflessly. In truth, then, Christian leadership is loving leadership; Christian leaders love those they lead.

Being a loving leader, however, is a complex task. A Christian leader needs wisdom, patience, and self-awareness to love well. Often it is not clear exactly what is best for those being led, so the leader needs wisdom. Sometimes those who are being led may disagree with the leader’s judgment as to what is best for them, so the leader needs wisdom and patience. When a leader is harmed or displaced it may not be good for the ones being led, thus some measures of protection and privilege may sometimes be justified. An army is not better off if its top general is killed. But this concern can easily be used to justify too much privilege. So it must always be rooted in the good of the ones led, and not simply the spoils of power. Staying within appropriate limits takes real self-awareness.

Thus, a variety of virtues are very important for Christian leaders. But first and foremost a Christian leader must be selfless in pursuing what is best for those being led.

**Practicing Christian Leadership**

It is one thing to explain Christian leadership in this way, and quite another to practice it. Our old natures gravitate powerfully toward promoting our self interest first, not the interest of others. There are few leaders in government, business, education, or even in the church who follow this model all the time. How can we practice Christian leadership more consistently?

Remember first that being a Christian is not simply accepting certain claims intellectually. An infant who doesn’t know any-

*Christian leaders must always pursue what is best for the ones being led, and they must do so without any regard for whether it may cost or benefit them personally.*

thing except her mother's face can be a child of God. Satan is not a Christian, and he knows a lot more about God than even the most devout believer. Becoming a Christian has to do with your will. When a man or woman becomes a Christian, his or her will, engorged with self-love, is lanced. Then it begins to return to its proper size and function.

But this is a long, difficult struggle. It took a while for the person's will to get so swollen, and the temptation to keep pumping it up is ever present. All of us still

*As leaders mature in their Christian walk, they become more adept at setting aside the natural inclination to self love in order to advance the good of others.*

suffer from a significant measure of self-love which competes with the love for others that should characterize Christian leaders. As leaders mature in their Christian walk, they become more adept at setting aside the natural inclination to self love in order to advance the good of others.

Praise the Lord that many Christians exemplify the kind of leadership Jesus affirms. Most Christian parents do this consistently. Of particular note are Christian parents who adopt and give loving care to children who

suffer from serious physical challenges. There are parents who year after year live in a small house and drive an old car so that they can afford to send their children to Christian schools. There are Christian business owners who pay their employees a living wage even when competitors do not and they would not have to do so. Many pastors work overtime regularly and don't check their job description before reaching out to someone who needs help. Faithful missionaries live in primitive conditions out of selfless concern for the people to whom they would bring the gospel.

Many Christians in leadership positions are following the Lord's instruction. We thank God for them. We should thank them as well, and keep on praying that the Lord will raise up even more.

## Who Has the Vision?

This question goes to the heart of a vigorous debate in the church today. A popular answer today is, "The pastor has the vision." Those who give this answer point out that, like it or not, congregational vitality almost always turns on the leadership of its pastor. The chapters of many congregational histories can be written along the lines of the various pastors who served that congregation. Chapters of growth and vitality as well as chapters of decline and demoralization often, though certainly not always, turn on who was the pastor in that particular era.

### *Beware of the "heroic leader"*

But saying the pastor has the vision is too simple. The countryside is strewn with congregational casualties where pastors rolled into town with a vision that was never owned by the congregation. Beyond normal resistance to change, the congregation never trusted the pastor because it had the sense that the vision was the pastor's vision alone. The pastor did not take seriously that particular congregational setting with its unique history and culture.

The pastor did not listen carefully enough, love long enough, pace change carefully enough.

To state this in biblical terms, the pastor did not come to terms with the intricate connection between pastoral leadership and the work of God. Scripture makes clear that pastoral leadership is embedded in a larger drama in which God is gathering the church, Christ is the head of the body, and the Spirit gives gifts to every member of the body. The pastor has a crucial role in congregational leadership, but it is far too simple to say that the pastor has the vision.

Secular leadership literature today reinforces a healthy skepticism about locating the responsibility for vision too narrowly in the person and office of any one "heroic leader." Harvard Business School professor Ronald A. Heifetz, in his authoritative work on leadership entitled *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Belknap Press, 1994), speaks of the myth of leadership as "the solitary individual whose heroism and

*by Duane Kelderman  
Vice President for  
Administration  
and Professor  
of Preaching*



brilliance enable him to lead the way." Heifetz points out that over-emphasis upon the person and personality of the leader usually proves counterproductive. When the successes and failures of an organization are too closely tied to its leader, the organization itself avoids work that inescapably belongs to the organization, not the leader.

In his latest book entitled *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* (Harper Business, 2001), Jim Collins, picking up where he left off in his previous book *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, (Harper Business, 1994), also de-emphasizes the role of a single visionary leader. Collins points out that, contrary to what the media might suggest, America's best-run companies are led by CEOs nobody knows. "Myth" is the name that Collins gives to the notion that visionary companies require great and charismatic visionary leaders, and

Who Has  
the Vision? ▶

the notion that companies become visionary primarily through “vision statements” carefully orchestrated from the top down.

### Three places to look for vision

OK. If it's too simple to say the pastor has the vision, then who does have the vision? Who or what guides a congregation in ministry? Let me offer three answers to the question, “Who has the vision?”

First, **Christ has the vision.** What a relief it should be to every pastor and congregation that they are not starting from scratch when they try to be a faithful church. The church is not an ad hoc organization dreamed up by a group of disconnected people. The church is the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the church and the source of the body's life (Eph. 1:22-23, Eph. 4:15-16, Col. 1:18). Any congregation's vision is of one piece with the mission of God that spans centuries and continents. Any spiritually vital congregation is one that God has called into being, that Christ has given life as a vine gives life to a branch, and that the Spirit is equipping for ministry by his work in the lives of each member and the body as a whole.

A key mistake that many churches and leaders make today is overlooking how much of the church's mission and vision is already clearly spelled out in Scripture. Imagine a church that said, “We'll start worrying about what *our* vision is after we've accomplished everything that Scripture clearly sets forth as the church's vision. After we have realized in our life together worship that is God-glorifying, education that makes life-long disciples of Jesus Christ, fellowship that embodies the unconditional acceptance of Christ, and witness to the world that leads people to Christ and brings shalom and justice to our community and world — after we've done all these things that are obviously Christ's vision for the church, then we'll worry about our own particular vision.” Such a congregation might never get around to articulating its own vision! Of

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faithful church.*

course it's true that this biblical vision has to be clearly stated, and carefully applied to each particular church's situation. And that involves planning, priority setting, etc. But the point here is that we don't start from scratch when we think about the church's vision and who has it. It is not first of all *our* vision; it is Christ's.

A second answer to the question of who has the vision is, **The church has the vision.** In the case of the CRC, every Christian Reformed congregation has committed itself to Scripture and the Reformed confessions that give a comprehensive vision of what the church is called to be and do. The Contemporary Testimony is a treasure of biblical and theological vision finely tuned to contemporary cultural challenges the church faces. Officebearers who have been called by God and the congregation commit themselves to be ordained guardians and promoters of the church's sacred vision. Many congregations embody in their life and history most of the fundamental practices that constitute the church's ministry: worship, nurture, fellowship, diaconal outreach, evangelism.

Last year I heard a sermon by Rev. Tim Brown, a leading pastor in the Reformed Church of America and professor of preaching at Western Seminary. With appropriate fatherly pride, Tim told the congregation about a phone call he had received from his son Jon who was doing a seminary summer assignment in a church in rural Minnesota. Jon had told his father story after story of the faithful ways of the congregation he was serving — the story of the man who had lost his

leg in a baler accident decades ago but lived with gratitude and joy, the family whose daughter had died in a farming accident but who radiated the love of Christ, the story of generations of children who left that farming community with a firm foundation of faith and were vital kingdom citizens throughout the world, the story of a congregation that was salt and light in its community in unspectacular but significant ways.

Jon could have come to this church with a different attitude. He could have come with his briefcase full of things this church should be doing. Instead, he listened, he loved, and he lifted up what this congregation was doing. He saw how Christ was active in this congregation long before he pulled into town, and how Christ would be active long after he left. He sought to affirm, encourage and challenge the church in *its* enduring vision of ministry. I predict that Jon will be a very effective pastor because he will lift up the congregation's own vision and build upon it.

True enough, you say. But. The fact is that, while Christ has the vision and the church has the vision, scores of churches are languishing today. They are struggling and they know it. Their worship lacks genuine spiritual vitality, their nurture is weak, their fellowship is uninviting, and their witness falls short. They need help. And they need it now.

And this is where it is imperative that **the pastor also has the vision.** Pastors must have deep convictions about what God has called the church to be and must proclaim that message clearly. Pastors must be passionate in articulating what God's church and kingdom ought to look like. Pastors must be bold and courageous. They must be self-sacrificial and give their lives to turning the Pentecost dream into reality. They must be risk takers.

Pastors must proclaim the vision by letting their lives carry the message and only use words when necessary. They must embody in their personal lives and relationships the love and discipleship to which they call their congregation. They must earn the right to proclaim the vision

by showing their congregation that they are walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

A pastor-colleague of mine has led a Grand Rapids inner city congregation with strong conviction for over twenty years. He has articulated a vision of ministry that has led that congregation through painful chapters of change and renewal. But this pastor and his wife have been effective leaders because they have never asked the congregation to do something they themselves haven't done. A pastor who adopts two Down's Syndrome children, opens his home to strangers, weeps with the weak, and calls into judgment himself along with the strong — that pastor has the credibility to call the congregation to dream dreams and see visions beyond the status quo. The point is not that every pastor has to do these things, but that pastors must model the love and commitment to which they call their congregations.

#### *Being a pastor is difficult*

Even when the pastor's vision is properly embedded in the broader vision of Christ and the church, pastoral leadership

*Pastors must proclaim the vision by letting their lives carry the message and only use words when necessary.*

is not easy. Faithful pastoral leadership involves delivering disturbing news and raising difficult questions. Congregations that honestly face the gap between the biblical vision and their current reality face change. No one likes to change, and all change naturally generates resistance. Pastors must take the heat and absorb congregational resistance without giving up on the vision. Pastors must constantly remind themselves that when they lead, people don't love or hate *them* as much as they love or hate the positions they represent. Pastors must differentiate themselves, that is, not take congregational anxiety personally. Indeed, pastors who can receive people's anger without becoming personally defensive generate trust.

Pastors who can hold steady in times of congregational adaptation usually find that in the ensuing calm, relationships become stronger.

In other words, being an effective pastor is painful and difficult. It requires reservoirs of poise, faith, and self-sacrifice that are a gift of God's grace; and the love and support of many people in the congregation.

#### *A Sacred Journey*

Who has the vision? It's best to see the ministry of the church as a sacred journey in which pastor and congregation together seek to walk in step with the Spirit of Christ. Together they seek to live out the purpose and vision of God. A ministry vision that glorifies God will come from a congregation where the pastor-congregation relationship as a whole is marked by mutual love, patience, honesty, confession, humility, commitment, sacrifice, and prayer, all of which are gifts of God's grace. Pastors and congregations that have such a relationship with one another as they respond to God's call to ministry can be assured that they have caught *the* vision.

## Leadership in the Church — and in the Church Order

In 1977 I was examined as a candidate for ministry in Classis Tasmania of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. I still recall the response of the examiner to one of my answers: "But that is not according to church order!" Since then, through twenty-six years of ministry in congregations and mission settings in Australia, Indonesia and the Philippines, I have developed a deep appreciation for Reformed church order and its usefulness for the life, work, and ministry of the church. I also recognize that doing things according to the church order of the Christian Reformed Church does not always resonate with the individualistic spirit of the age.

In fact, many pastors and congregations find themselves caught between powerful cultural forces that affect the way people think about traditions and human constructions like the church order.

Before this era, most people saw traditions as having binding authority. That just isn't true anymore. Post-traditional people aren't bound by such ideas, and in their passion for spreading the gospel through the church of Christ, they often view the church order as irrelevant at best, and at worst, a barrier to min-

*By Pieter Tuit,  
Professor of Missions  
and Church  
Administration*



istry. Church planters may feel the tension more than others since they are called to reach people who are saturated in North American culture and have little or no exposure to the benefits of church traditions and may even be predisposed against such structures.

The church order was never intended to be a barrier to ministry; it was meant to help establish and sustain congregations. How can church leaders today show their congregations — both emerging and



**Church Order**

established — that there is much to be gained by paying attention to the church order of the Christian Reformed Church? They can show how it articulates the mission of the church, defines biblical leadership for servants in the church and provides accountability and protection for those leaders and their congregations.

**The Mission of the Church**

Many local congregations today are thinking about their mission and vision, and the church order is a helpful tool in this process. It promotes the task and ministry of the church and gives each congregation and the Christian Reformed Church as a whole a very clear mission statement based upon Scripture and the confessions. For example, in its section on the “The Task and Activities of the Church,” (worship, faith nurture, pastoral care and missions), it spells out the church’s mandate to missions in the congregation, the classis, denominational ministries in North America, and denominational ministries abroad. This order reminds me of Reformed missiologist Johan H. Bavinck’s writing that the church exists first of all for God, expressed through worship; secondly for those who belong to it, and thirdly for the needs of the world. All congregations must reflect each of these areas as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Church Leadership**

Church leaders today who deal with cultural forces and organizational issues are not so different from the leaders who developed the church order in the time of the Reformation. They faced the double challenge of the spiritual reformation of the church to preach the gospel of salvation in all its fullness and the institutional reformation of the church from the excesses of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. They articulated the following principles about exercising leadership in the church.

**Christ Leads the Church**

Over the course of the middle ages the

church had developed a form of government that emphasized the power of human leaders. The Reformers placed the leadership of the church back into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, emphasizing this basic truth: It is not first of all about how we lead but how Christ leads. As Duane Kelderman writes in the previous article (p. 6), Christ provides the vision for the church and its leaders.

**Officebearers Lead under Christ’s Leadership**

This does not mean that there is no place for human leaders. Christ rules his church by his Word and his Holy Spirit, but he does so through people who are his representatives in the congregation. Officebearers come from the congregation, yet they do not so much represent the congregation as they represent Christ’s rule in his church.

There are two important implications of this view: the principle of shared leadership and the place of Christ’s authority within the church. Here the Reformers found a middle way between those who preferred a hierarchical form of church government and those who supported congregational independence. They believed no one in a congregation may lord it over another because Christ is the only Lord of the church, and this view is reflected in church order. Every church member has the office of prophet, priest and king and is called to express this in the ministry of the church. Christ’s leadership — the

only leadership the church needs — is expressed through the service of officebearers who guide the life and ministry of the priesthood of all believers.

Officebearers do this as servants of Christ — servant leaders who follow the example of the one who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. They do not serve out of the authority of tradition, but the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is binding for all congregations.

**Accountability**

In recent decades many Christians have been encouraged to find “accountability partners” or form “accountability groups” in which they can share their spiritual journeys and struggles. Reformed church order likewise recognizes the need for leaders of the church to be accountable. It recognizes that we do not live in a perfect world or in a perfect church, and things can go wrong with the leaders of the church as well as the congregation.

In the church order we see a built-in accountability structure between the local congregation, the classis, and the synod. Congregations are not alone as the body of Christ but extend the work of the church through the classis and synod. That is why we have classical examinations of candidates for ministry and why synodical deputies have a voice in the examination process. That is also why church visitors from classis meet with the councils of local congregations. This is an extension of the practice of home visits in which officebearers hold church members accountable regarding their walk with Christ. This is also why the church order calls elders and deacons to regularly spend time evaluating their work as a council.

**Protection**

Along with accountability, the church order also provides protection for officebearers and congregations. That is why there are regulations to follow when an officebearer does not act in the name of the Good Shepherd, but abuses members of the flock. That is also why ministers can-

*Christ rules his church by his Word and his Holy Spirit, but he does so through people who are his representatives in the congregation.*

not be deposed from office without the approval of the classis or a neighboring church council. The church order provides protection from those who fleece the flock or in some way abuse the authority of their office as well as from those who make false accusations or move to summarily dismiss their leaders.

In good times churches and their leaders can also be tempted to make decisions quickly without attending to the collective wisdom of the church as embodied in the church order. In their enthusiasm for ministry — the excitement of seeing God work in ways that go far beyond their expectations and imagination — slowing down to consult the church order may seem like putting the brakes on the work of the

*Consulting the church order may seem like slowing down, but it is actually a way of stopping for good fuel and maintenance that will keep both old and new congregations running well for a long time.*

Spirit. On the contrary, it was designed to serve the church — to answer questions and provide direction for the mission and

ministry of the church. Consulting the church order may seem like slowing down, but it is actually a way of stopping for good fuel and maintenance that will keep both old and new congregations running well for a long time.

No church can exist without some form or structure. This is what the church order is all about — providing time-tested ways to organize the church under the leadership and authority of Christ. Although the church order changes as the church fine tunes it from year to year, the leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ does not change. What a privilege it is for officebearers to join in his work as he gathers his church by his Word and Holy Spirit and brings in his kingdom.

## The Changing Face of Leadership in Korean American Churches

"I was speaking at a college weekend conference for a Korean American church in the Northeast. I met several young adults who loved the church but were getting increasingly frustrated. They respected their elders but at the same time felt they could make significant contributions in leading the church. They weren't being asked." In his book *Invitation to Lead: Guidance for Emerging Asian American Leaders* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), Paul Tokunaga names the frustration that many young Asian Americans face as they aspire to church leadership positions.

In a time of changing leadership styles and models, young people in Korean American churches find the path to leadership complicated by the dynamics of immigrant congregations assimilating into a new culture. Korean churches classify themselves by 1st, 1.5, or 2nd generation, indicating the progression not only from Korean to American

language and culture, but also the progression from traditionalism to new styles of worship and church organization. Leadership styles are changing as well under the influence of American culture. In some cases, the change in leadership models is the result of joining American denominations, such as the Christian Reformed Church.

Calvin Theological Seminary currently has forty-nine Korean students enrolled in six degree programs. Some of them will return to Korea to teach or to pastor congregations;

*By Kathy Smith,  
Director of  
Continuing  
Education*



others will minister in North America and face this changing scene. I talked with three recent Korean American graduates from CTS who are pastoring emerging churches. I wanted to know what these changes are about and how they affect young Korean pastors today.

According to Ken Choe, one of the pastors of the Los Angeles Home Church, a bicultural 1.5 generation congregation in Los Angeles, California, traditional Korean pastors tended to be more dominant and authoritarian, whereas new church leaders tend to be more approachable, more like servants, more like friends. They lead in quiet ways, serving alongside church members. For younger pastors like Ken, the new model is a more comfortable style, but also brings some discomfort. Ken says, "There is fear in taking this new direction — a place I've never been. But I know the



Ken Choe



Matthew Kim



David Sung

## Korean American Churches

change needs to take place.”

Matthew Kim has experienced the changes too. He began his ministry following seminary as a staff pastor at the Korean Christian Reformed Church of Orange County in Westminster, California, and now is partnering in ministry at a new church plant called Jubilee Christian Fellowship in Northridge, California. This new congregation is basically a first generation church, but leans toward being 1.5, and draws younger people, like its two pastors. They have a team ministry model and shared leadership with staff and church members. Matthew says, “In the older mentality the pastor makes the calls. The whole idea of team, shared ministry is more prevalent in these times.”

These new ideas run against the grain of traditional Korean culture. Tokunaga's book explains that Asian Americans, regardless of religion, are shaped by a culture based on Confucianism. Its strong values of family loyalty, respect for elders, social hierarchy, duty, obligation, and education are pervasive in Asia and in Asian American immigrant communities. According to David Sung, pastor of The Lighthouse Community Church in Ann

*“In the older mentality the pastor makes the calls. The whole idea of team, shared ministry is more prevalent in these times.”*

Arbor, Michigan, those values fit well with Presbyterian polity and may explain why the Presbyterian Church flourished in Korea. In America, many Korean congregations joining the Christian Reformed Church come from Presbyterian backgrounds and need to adjust to the differences in CRC polity as well as the differences in American culture.

According to Sung, this is especially true when it comes to leadership. Traditionally, pastors were respected due to their position and title. They were accustomed to a hierarchical model of leadership. The pastor had the most power, followed by the elders, who were given lifetime tenure in office and were even referred to as “Elder” instead of their personal names in all situations, not just in the church.

Today pastors must earn the respect of church members, and especially of the elders. And elders in the CRC must become accustomed to the idea of limited tenure, although some opt for extended tenure of six to ten years in office as a middle way. This is a big issue in emerging churches that must elect elders as part of the process of becoming an organized congregation. Sung has made adjustments as he works in a second generation multiethnic congregation. He teaches his church members that in CRC polity the head of the church is Christ, not the pastor, elders, or deacons. They have different roles, different functions in the church, but are not arranged in a hierarchy. Sung encourages his church members to call him by his given name, or at least as “Pastor David.” And he demonstrates what he teaches by not presiding over the church council, something the pastor of a traditional Korean church would always do.

These young pastors are setting new models of leadership and effective ministry. Calvin Theological Seminary is eager to learn from them in order to better prepare ministers and church leaders for the future — for all generations.

## Reflections on Hispanic Leadership

**H**ispanic pastors, evangelists, and church planters face unique leadership challenges in the North American context. This article summarizes responses to a survey asking them what it means to be a leader in the Christian Reformed Church in the United States. It also reflects my own experience, observations, and informal interviews with several leaders. These reflections are mostly related to first generation leaders working with first generation immigrants, but the situation of most Hispanics is very similar. The effects of immigration last a long time, as the

CRC learned from the days of Dutch immigration.

Most Hispanic pastors in the United States minister to immigrants who lived under harsh and oppressive situations in their own countries. Some came as political exiles. Many Central Americans came due to wars and unstable, dangerous situations in their countries. Most Latin Americans came as economic exiles forced to leave their land and family to travel north for jobs to support their families back

*By Mariano Avila,  
Professor of  
New Testament*



home. In the last three years thousands of people have come from Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. Recent data show that Mexico receives more revenue from Mexican workers in the States sending money back to their families than from the tourism industry or from oil sales.

### **Ministry Challenges**

One of the main challenges for Hispanic congregations and their pastors and leaders is to minister to communities with

very high mobility because people stay during the harvest season but then go to other states or return home. Hispanic pastors also spend many hours helping people to survive in the United States. Most immigrants do not speak English and are looking for jobs but do not understand the way things work. Helping with these issues becomes a regular part of the ministry of a Hispanic pastor. This can mean translating at doctor's appointments, helping resolve immigration issues, providing transportation, helping with economical resources until people are self-sufficient, looking for schools, and, in some cases, providing training in basic skills like learning English. One pastor said that during his twenty-two years of pastoral ministry, he devoted fifty percent of his time to social work.

Some pastors are critical of the strategies of white churches to reach Hispanics. While appreciating the good intentions and generosity, they noticed that when people receive food, furniture, money, and all kinds of diaconal help, they become used to receiving and not giving. Many Hispanics receive all the goods that Anglo churches give them without becoming regular and responsible members of the church.

### **Economic Realities**

Most members of Hispanic churches come from a Roman Catholic background and are not used to supporting the church in a substantial way. People are used to giving *limosnas* to the church, the coins they can spare to help a beggar in the streets. In the common situation of extreme poverty, giving generously is very difficult. This is a permanent challenge for Hispanic pastors who often work at discipling families for five to ten years before they are economically established.

As a result, the majority of Hispanic pastors are underpaid. Some work without benefits, and feel unappreciated because of their low salaries. With families to support and salaries that run between \$20,000 and \$25,000 per year, they face survival issues just like their

*One of the main challenges for Hispanic congregations and their pastors and leaders is to minister to communities with very high mobility because people stay during the harvest season but then go to other states or return home.*

congregations. Some of them can find better pay in other places than in the church and work at part time jobs. One commented: "The salary and benefits in a postal office were much better than in the church. And I was tempted to work full time there and solve my difficult economic situation. But the calling of God was stronger, and I am now working full time in the ministry." Many Hispanic leaders in the CRC are working in very

difficult economic conditions, yet with an exemplary commitment and faithfulness to the church.

### **Benefits of Hispanic Ministry**

On the other hand, the growth and development of Hispanic churches has been significant due to the strong emphasis that each person should be an evangelist. It has been said, "Reformed people taught others about the priesthood of all believers; Pentecostals practiced it." In Hispanic churches to become a Christian means to give testimony to the grace of God to your family, classmates, fellow workers and every one in the neighborhood. Training lay people for the ministry in programs like *Adelante* is a key part of the pastoral work of Hispanic leaders.

Another benefit is that Hispanic churches place a strong emphasis on the role of the family. The pastor's family is always deeply involved in the church's ministry, and evangelism is usually done in the context of families. For the many immigrants who come to this country alone, the church provides the caring environment essential for their survival in a society that in many ways discriminates, rejects, and undervalues Hispanics.

### **Effective Hispanic Leadership**

One of the respondents summarized the challenges for Hispanic leaders in the CRC, especially in terms of their education and preparation for ministry. He wrote:

*A Latino leader should be able to effectively communicate, relate to, understand and empathize with both the recent Latino immigrant as well as the first generation Latino living in the USA. There is a distinct difference between these two groups and yet there are undeniable similarities as well. An effective Latino leader understands these differences and similarities and wisely uses them as teaching tools for both groups.*

*In addition, effective Latino leaders understand and know how to appropriately respond to the surrounding Anglo world without forgetting the essence of being a Latino and the struggles and joys of their people. Latino leaders should effectively communicate these struggles and joys in ways that empower and uplift the congregation.*

*Finally, Latino leaders should be learned in various aspects. Members of congregations look up to church leaders as their most important role models. As such, leaders within the Latino congregations cannot stagnate with their personal development. They must serve as humble role models that empower and bring hope to their congregations and communities.*

**Q** *Our classis has just begun a process of crafting a new vision statement for itself. What's up with that? Haven't we done well without such a statement for more than a century? (elder, west of the Mississippi)*

More and more classes are doing this. Frankly, I don't see how anyone can object to an institution or organization of whatever kind articulating clearly what it's all about. Vision and mission statements can hold our feet to the fire. They can remind us of what should guide us as we do our — sometimes very ordinary — business.

My problem is not that we have them but what some actually say. As you observe and — hopefully — participate in the process, you might want to evaluate carefully what others have done.

I'll mention just one thing that strikes me so far: how little some of them are tied in to our Reformed church polity tradition. Here's one example: "Classis X is a group of Christian Reformed congregations in the Y area seeking to fulfill the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ in the twenty-first century." This is a fundamental mistake. **The local council is not the local congregation. Synod is not the bi-national church. Neither is the classis the regional church. Classis is not a group of congregations.** We say that it "consists of a group of neighboring congregations" (Article 39, Church Order), but what we mean by that is that it is a church governmental "assembly" of delegates from that group of congregations sent by their local councils to deliberate and decide on certain matters — on a limited number of matters (Article 34, Church Order).

*Vision and mission statements can hold our feet to the fire. They can remind us of what should guide us as we do our — sometimes very ordinary — business.*

To put it another way, the mission and ministry of our church is a ministry of Christian Reformed people. A classis can solve some problems, do some adjudicating, and even provide resources for that comprehensive ministry of all believers. It may guide that ministry. It may help that ministry flow in well-crafted channels. But in principle it does not, itself, do ministry. It does not worship (though it features some devotional elements), it does not administer sacraments, it is not engaged in educational ministry, and it does not offer pastoral care or exercise church discipline. Neither does it do evangelism or diaconal ministry except when that ministry "is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches" (Article 75, Church Order).

As an assembly of delegates, a classis is not anything like the management of a charitable organization or profit-making business enterprise that does a number of well-defined things in the community like, say, Habitat for Humanity or General Motors. It may guide some programs of a community of churches and help God's people fulfill their calling but it must

never embrace their comprehensive ministry as if it were entirely its own.

My plea, in short, is that we let the regional church be what it is as the Body of Christ in one part of the world and let the classis be what it is: an assembly of delegates called upon to enhance the ministry of that Body in whatever limited tasks it is assigned.

*By Henry De Moor  
Vice President for  
Academic Affairs  
and Professor of  
Church Polity*



**Q** *Commenting on the murder of Father John Geoghan in a Massachusetts prison, one journalist referred to it as "justice served" while another insisted on it being a "travesty of justice." What's your take on it? And, more importantly, on clergy abuse in the Roman Catholic Church in general? (minister, Illinois)*

Well, my take on that murder is exactly what it was for a columnist in our local paper. It was, he said, none of the above but, instead, a "tragic irony."

What bothers me so much about clergy abuse in the Roman Catholic Church, apart from the evil perpetrated upon helpless victims, is that priests were routinely passed on to other parishes so they could continue their abuse in a different setting. It's the cover-up, the "old boys' network," not confronting the sin and dealing with it — in other words, the self-deceptive denial that grieves me. It compromises the integrity of the Christian message to the world more than we shall ever know.

What bothers me even more is that we point fingers and fail to see the same pattern in our own denomination. We need to face the reality that things are no better on the home front. It's time to work as hard as we can to prevent the evil of abuse, in whatever form, and confront it forthrightly when and where we see it. Heeding synod's call to establish Abuse Response Teams that are safe places for victims and that also work hard at education would be a wonderful first step. I don't understand how, after repeated urging, several classes simply do not — or even choose not to — respond. Only one third of our classes currently have trained Abuse Response Teams. I fear that it might take a lawsuit filed against our entire denomination for us to realize how vital to our very existence and mission this issue of abuse prevention is.

## Leadership Challenges in Ministry to Rural and Smaller Churches

*“Seventy-five percent of seminarians come from urban or suburban settings when they enter seminary, but seventy-five percent of them begin ministry in rural churches.”*

This is just one of the things we learned in August 2003 at a Consultation on Rural and Smaller Church Ministry sponsored by Calvin Theological Seminary and the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. Twenty people came together at the Prince Conference Center, including six pastors, four professors, four staff members and three seminary students. Two pastors also serve as consultants and workshop leaders and two others work for Christian Reformed Home Missions as Smaller Church Specialists.

As we listened to discussions about the unique challenges related to ministry in smaller or rural churches, we learned that leadership in these settings is quite different from other settings, and also quite different from stereotypical views about rural ministry.

Seminary continuing education events will be shaped by the learning we acquired in the two-day consultation. Here are a few highlights from our discussion and from a paper entitled “Rural Church Ministry” submitted by participant, Rev. Jerry Buwalda:

- Rural areas are changing due to increased technology in agriculture, increased development of homes and businesses in rural areas, and increased crime.
- Rural people tend to be cautious, traditional, and independent. They also often feel that they have little control of their lives due to difficult economic conditions.
- When rural people move to urban areas, they think “We have a lot to learn.” When urban people move to rural areas, they think “We have a lot to teach.”
- Rural churches come in all sizes, and small churches come in a great variety as well.

- Rural ministry is cross-cultural ministry and pastors need to understand the context to be effective in ministry.
- Rural churches are in some ways better suited to reaching out to and enfolded new members than their larger counterparts.
- Rural churches often have an impact on their entire communities.
- Rural pastors (like most pastors) struggle with feelings of inadequacy. Rural pastors’ sense of inadequacy is fueled by the unquestioned American value that “bigger is better:” bigger churches, bigger cities, bigger staffs, and bigger salaries.



*Rev. Joseph Smith, Bemidji MN (L.) and Rev. Jerry Buwalda, Corsica SD*

Another participant, Rev. Evert Busink, writes in a recent issue of “Thrive!” Christian Reformed Home Missions’ newsletter for smaller churches, that “the tendency to consider small churches as insignificant and unworthy of denominational support is a notion

that fails to recognize that small churches can fulfill the biblical mandate for the church as well as, if not better than, the large church.”

Calvin Theological Seminary hopes to sponsor consultations like this every year in order to listen and learn from other pastor groups in the church, such as urban pastors, chaplains, ethnic pastors, world missionaries, and church planters. We trust that the training seminarians receive will be enriched as a result of these conversations.

## Continuing Education Office Adds Staff

The seminary’s continuing education office is growing! Elizabeth Steele Halstead has joined our staff as Continuing Education Events Manager, and will manage the planning and implementation of our continuing education events, both on campus and in other locations. She will work on scheduling, publicity, registration, and evaluation of events, which will be a great help as we work to expand our continuing education program.

Betsy brings a global perspective to her work from having lived in Italy and England, as well as in Rhode Island, Texas, and Washington D.C. She is also a freelance artist and coordinates the visual arts work of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

Betsy graduated from Calvin College



*“I am grateful for the opportunity to work in the Calvin Theological Seminary community. I am looking forward to developing the Continuing Education program and being the Worship Institute’s resource liaison for the visual arts.”*  
— Elizabeth Steele Halstead

with degrees in art and psychology and from Fuller Theological Seminary with a Master of Arts degree in theology. Her areas of interest include encouraging life-long learning for leaders and laypersons in the church and interdisciplinary studies with a particular focus on the integration of theology and the arts.



President Plantinga's "Creative Preaching" Seminar



Schultze and Kelderman's "Communicating" workshop

## Preaching and Communication are Focus of Summer Seminars

Going high-tech and reading a novel seem like opposite ends of a continuum of communication methods. Yet, in the summer of 2003, each of these very different approaches produced a learning opportunity for preachers and church leaders from around the United States and Canada. Two summer seminars co-sponsored by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Calvin College's Seminars in Christian Scholarship office gave church leaders a fresh look at ministry and communication from two very different angles. Each included a diverse group that gathered at the Prince Conference Center for learning and renewal.

A month-long seminar led by President Plantinga focused on "Imaginative Reading for Creative Preaching." Neal reports that "for sixteen mornings we sang and prayed together and then discussed literature that, absorbed and considered, would nourish the mind and heart of preachers and therefore equip them a little better to do the same for their hearers. We read and discussed fiction, biography, memoirs, culture criticism, journalism, children's literature, drama, essays, and theology of the sort that converses with the wide world."

A week-long workshop with Vice President Kelderman and Calvin College Professor Quentin Schultze dealt with "Communicating Well for Ministry in a

Technological Age." The group surveyed an array of new technologies and discussed the fittingness of technology in worship and other means of communication. Participants appreciated the opportunity to reflect on communication as communion, modeled by teachers who are themselves communicators and

friends. One remarked, "You two leaders have modeled for us how to listen and to engage in dialogue from the heart."

Calvin Seminary hopes to continue its involvement in summer seminars like these for the unique educational opportunities they provide and the benefits that reach out to the wider church.

## CTS Receives Two Grants to Sustain Pastors

"Sustaining Pastoral Excellence" is a program of the Christian Reformed Church to support and strengthen pastors — so they can help build vital congregations. One of the ways this program helps pastors and congregations is by providing grants for continuing education events. Calvin Theological Seminary received two of these grants this year and will use them to provide continuing education for pastors around the denomination.

The first grant is for a CRC Leadership Conference to be held on October 24-25, 2003 at the All Nations Christian Reformed Church in Lake View Terrace, California — a large Korean congregation that recently joined the CRC. This two-day conference will provide pastors and church leaders with biblical and theological discussions

of the church as well as practical workshops in different areas of ministry. It is cosponsored by the seminary, Christian Reformed Home Missions and Pastor-Church Relations, the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and the Korean Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Southern California.

The second grant will bring a conference for pastors and elders to four different locations. This conference is entitled "The Messiness of Marriage and the Knottiness of Divorce" and will be led by Professor of Pastoral Care Ronald Nydam. It will be offered in Lynden, Washington in October, and in Bradenton, Florida in November. Plans for two more locations are being developed. The one-day conference has already been held in several areas in the US and Canada.



## Plantinga Speaks to Leadership Development Network

In May 2003 President Plantinga spoke at a Leadership Development Network retreat organized by Mike Johnson in Houston, Texas. The sixty-seven participants focused on the theme of “A New Creation,” based on Colossians 3:1. After the weekend Neal wrote, “As I ponder the retreat, its setting and what I’ve been thinking about a lot in recent years, I wonder if this is the time to renew our sense of what it means to be ‘raised with Christ.’ Dying and rising with Christ is the central dynamic of a Christian life, but do we all understand what it means?



This sounds to me like something that people would get interested in, and I’d try to help them!” His help was delivered in

the form of four presentations that were surrounded by worship, prayer and testimony.

## CTS Hosts Forum on Disabilities

Calvin Theological Seminary hosted the Committee on Disabilities of the National Council of Churches in September, including a morning of presentations sponsored by the Student Senate. They included a lecture by committee member Linda Larson on “How to Minister To and With Persons with Disabilities” in which she cited biblical examples of disabled persons who were used mightily by God and celebrated the gifts that disabled persons bring to the body of Christ. Following her presentation a panel discussion of Kathy Black’s



Linda Larson




book, “A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability” was moderated by Jim Vander Laan, Director of Disability Concerns for the CRC. It included com-

mittee members Karen Blasford and Jim Swanson, Karen Broekstra from Calvin College, and Professor of Pastoral Care Ronald Nydam.



September 26, 2003 was a day for looking at the institutional priorities of Calvin Theological Seminary as part of a comprehensive evaluation process. The entire afternoon was dedicated to this important meeting and involved all board, faculty and staff members in small and large group discussions.



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### ALUMNI AWARDS

Each year Calvin Theological Seminary is pleased to honor two alumni who have made significant ministry contributions in the Kingdom of God and have reflected positively upon the values and mission of CTS.

You are invited to submit nominations  
 (with brief statement of rationale) by December 31, 2003 to:

Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., President, Calvin Theological Seminary  
 3233 Burton Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546  
 or via email: [sempres@calvin.edu](mailto:sempres@calvin.edu)

The recipients will be honored during the week of the Seminary’s Commencement (May 2004).





# How is God calling you?

**Ben Meyer**, M.Div. 2003

*Calvin Theological Seminary*

"It started with a short-term missionary assignment to Nicaragua. Amy taught high school and I worked with the CRC there. Soon we knew God was calling us to missionary service. Four years later, with three beautiful children, a thorough preparation for ministry from Calvin Seminary, and God's call to cross-cultural missions, we're ready to serve. We can't wait!"

*Ben and Amy Meyer and their children Grace, John and Luke will begin their work with Christian Reformed World Missions in Mexico or Spain later this year.*

**Calvin Theological Seminary will give you the tools to respond.**

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