



# Mission News

*Mission Activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches*

**Volume 5 – November 19, 2010**

## Mission Aid Conference 2010

The Fraser Valley in British Columbia and the Mission Aid Brazil Committee, originating in the Canadian Reformed Church of Cloverdale, hosted the Fifth International Mission Aid Conference August 12, 13, 14, 2010.

The conference was held in the facilities of the Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church and was ably moderated by Rev. A. Souman, pastor of this church. Attendees came from far and wide to represent their missions focused organizations and to tell of their work: from Canada, United States, Brazil, and West Timor to share of work in these places as well as in China and parts of Africa. It was a blessing to be able to hear how actively the work of spreading the gospel is being done, and how the Lord is using ordinary people in his church gathering work.

### Theme

The theme of the conference was “Empowered by God to Empower Others” based on the text in Ephesians 6: 10, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” This would be broken down in to presentations on:

1. Empowering Christian teachers to transform lives in their classroom,
2. Empowering Christian citizens to transform lives in their communities,
3. Empowering Christian leaders to transform lives in their congregations.

### Christian schools and mission work

The conference was opened with a public address to the conference participants and to an invited audience by the keynote speaker, Dr. A. J. deVisser. He chose as his topic “Christian Schools and Mission Work: A Powerful Combination.” He led the audience through the historical

background of mission work and the place that the establishment of schools had in this activity. He recounted how Christian education as a mission tool was seen as vital even back in the seventeenth century and the need



to educate children as well as adults in the Christian faith was recognized and addressed. Dr. deVisser stressed that the most important part of mission work was and should always be the preaching of the gospel, but that aid and education have always been seen to be an important auxiliary goal. He encouraged the conference participants to work in their areas of mission activities with a heart that is brave, yet open and understanding to the needs of the local people and to

work in a way that is fitting and upbuilding to the places and times in which we live, work and do outreach.

### Make nations to be his disciples

The next morning, Rev. A. Souman spoke an opening address to the conference participants, again based on the conference theme text. In Christ’s work we are bringing not our own project, but the Word of Christ. It is not our own skills, words, strength and not to our own glory. God empowers us through the Holy Spirit to work out his plan, to win converts, his not ours. We know the truth and the truth sets free. Satan does not want that glorious message to go out, but we must bring it and win not only individuals, but nations and leaders. Christ tells us in his Word to make disciples of nations. We must put on his armor and fight boldly with the sword of the Spirit. Then we will stand strong in his almighty power. It is God, working through us. In Christian schools children must be taught so that they can be protected from the forces of the evil one, but even how to attack. Leaders, Christian citizens, and ministers must transform lives in the places they live and work.

Rev. Souman closed his address with the reminder that the Word of God offers the only way to eternal blessedness and extended the call to all to encourage each other to stand firm in the Lord and in his mighty power.

The conference then continued with the following presentations:

### 1) Empowering Christian teachers to transform lives in their classroom

The next speakers were educators from North America that had led Teachers Symposiums at the Aldeia Training Center in Recife. These Symposiums are organized and sponsored by Mission Aid Brazil.

Ron deHaan, vice-principal of Credo Christian High School in Langley, BC, recapped his 2009 presentations made to Reformed teachers at the inaugural symposium. His theme was:

*“Reaching Up and Reaching Out”:*

- I. Perspectives on Evangelism and Covenant Schools.
- II. Teaching Christianly is about who I am and what I do.
- III. Reach your Students: Passion, Perseverance, Practice.

Ron deHaan described the enthusiasm that the Brazilian teachers (about sixty) showed in their discussions and the evidence of the love of the Lord in their work as well as the dedication to their students and schools.



Otto Bouwman, principal of Cornerstone Christian School in Lynden, WA, then spoke about his experiences in the second symposium, which took place in July 2010 with some fifty-five educators attending.

His topic was:

*“Educating to the glory of our Trinitarian God.”*

- I. Live deliberate lives that image God.
- II. What lessons can we display in the classroom from God as Father?
- III. What lessons can we display in the classroom from God as Son?
- IV. What lessons can we display in the classroom from God as Holy Spirit?

Bouwman echoed deHaan’s observations that the Brazilian teachers have special challenges in their classrooms that need special gifts, especially when the students come out of weak family structures. But the love for their students and work was evident.

### 2) Empowering Christian citizens to transform lives in their communities

After lunch, Moises Lins, principal of Escola Biblica Crista in Sao Jose/Maragogi then took the floor to talk about being a salt and a light in our communities. Lins had, in his own words, been a Roman Catholic persecutor of the Reformed Church in Brazil, but by the grace of God had come to hear the truth of the gospel of grace and joined the Reformed church. He spoke of the reality of broken families, the lack of good role models for children and youth, and the weakness of the preaching of the Word in other churches. God’s Word transforms preaching, families, Christian schools, marriages, and communities. We must be living members of a body, whose head is Christ. We are images of God, broken down by sin but remade in Christ. We must reflect this so the world will see it. Moises Lins expressed the blessing of the work of mission in Brazil and encouraged all the attendees to continue to do the work that God has prepared for them, “to be doers of the Word, not hearers only” and that God would bless that.



### 3) Empowering Christian leaders to transform lives in their congregations

Thyago Lins, the son of Moises, is an ordained pastor in the Igreja Reformada do Brasil and he spoke with enthusiasm of the gift of the Reformed treasure that must be shared with his country. It can transform lives, but transforming lives needs leadership and there is a leadership crisis in Brazil. There is need for active, motivated, faithful leaders, who do not do it for self glory but Soli Deo Gloria. Just as Isaiah said, “Listen and your soul will revive,” so can it happen: new life promised by God. Thyago proclaimed that it was wonderful to be used in Christ’s church gathering work to transform lives in churches in Brazil.

#### Streetlight Ministries

Hilco deHaan of Streetlight Ministries also gave a small presentation on the work that is being done by that organization in inner city Hamilton and how the Lord is blessing their efforts to reach the hurting and the lost in that community.

## Mission News

An additional discussion took place on how to increase the readership of Mission News and how to reconnect with the church members on the home front. This is a challenge for every organization as they seek to raise funds as well as awareness.

## Theological training in foreign lands

The evening presentation on the topic of “Theological Training in Foreign Lands: How Can We Help?” and moderated by Rev. C. Bouwman was attended by many observers. The need to develop indigenous leaders in Brazil, China, and Timor was expressed by all the groups working in these countries.

Missionaries from Brazil, Rev. B. deGraaf, K. Wieske, and J. VanSpronsen explained how the Reformed church is growing at a tremendous rate in that country and they cannot keep up with the preaching requests. The

federation of Brazilian Reformed Churches has urgently requested help to set up theological training in their country as soon as possible, January 2011 if the proper arrangements can be made.

Dr. J. Visscher and Rev. F. Dong then gave light on the work that is being done in the Far East, through the Urban Mission Board of Cloverdale/

Langley. Trips have been made since 2005 and up to 1000 house church leaders have received instruction as well as thousands of church members. The instructors have been a number of ministers and professors from Canada. But the demand is too much and a new strategy is being formulated, that being an on-line Bible college. Courses are being developed by various instructors and the hope is to begin with twelve students in January 2011.

Rev. E. Dethan, working in West Timor, told of the establishment and operation of a Theological Training Centre in that country, Indonesia being the second largest Muslim country in the world. There are some fifty-five students enrolled, and teaching and training is on-going, also with the help of guest lecturers from Canada. He also emphasized that the demand for training and instruction cannot be met.

This was an eye-opening discussion, hearing how much work is being done in foreign countries, how much could be done and needs to be done, but how time, money, and manpower are real limitations. The discussion that ensued centred on how can we help each other so

that the work that one geographical group develops can be used by another and how resources should be shared and courses developed to the benefit of all. Perhaps a “Mobile Theological Training Team” could be set aside to teach around the world. An exciting thought; God be praised that the Spirit is touching so many hearts in so many places, peoples, and countries.

## Child sponsorship

The first topic on Saturday was on “Child Sponsorship – the Pros, Cons, and Logistics.” Konnie Peet of CRWRF gave an interesting power point presentation on this topic, this organization having been active in Africa for some thirty years already. While they started with operating orphanages with schools attached, the work is shifting away from that setting. More time and effort is now spent on the parents and care givers, recognizing that families and community leaders need to be strengthened in order

for the quality of life to improve in Africa. Konnie Peet recommended the book *When Helping Hurts* as a guide to relief work in poor areas of the world.

## Mission Association

Following this Dr. J. Visscher and Dr. A.J. deVisser led a discussion on the proposal to develop a Mission Association,

aimed at bringing all the groups involved in mission and outreach work in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches to assist, inform, promote, and strategize together (see Dr. J. Visscher’s article on this subject). They explained the historical framework, the pitfalls that have been encountered over the years, and the goal for such an organization. The work is so decentralized now and the benefits of working together were discussed. We’ll see where this proposal goes.

## Special thanks

The conference ended with the usual round of “Beefs and Bouquets.” Special thanks were extended to Maritha Dykstra and her wonderful kitchen crew’s edible creations, as well as to Evan VanVeen, the sound technician who made sure that all the delegates around the table could be heard by one and all. The next conference will be held, D.V., in three years, hosted by one of the mission boards in Ontario. Everyone expressed thanks for the conference, “encouraged and empowered by all, for all, with all” and to the glory of God.

Ginny VanderHorst



# A Canadian Reformed Missions Association?

## New proposal

At the Fifth International Mission Aid Conference held from August 12 - 14, 2010 in Langley, BC, there was a topic on the agenda that raised more than a few eyebrows. Apparently many of the participants were not aware that earlier the Urban Mission Board of the Cloverdale and Langley churches had sent out a proposal for the churches to consider establishing a Canadian Reformed Missions Association (CRMA).

No doubt the quick and common reaction on hearing this is: "Who needs yet another organization? Don't we have enough already?" Understandable, so an explanation is necessary.

## Many projects

The first fact that we need to consider is that our churches are very decentralized when it comes to mission and mission aid work. We have no synodical committee dealing with foreign or home mission efforts. We have no board somewhere overseeing everything. We have no bureaucracy in Ontario or BC keeping an eye on what is being done. Rather what we have is a whole bunch of local and regional efforts.

Now all of these efforts are to be applauded and most of them are no doubt very worthy of consideration and support; however, a few problems are emerging. In some cases churches are pulling out and no longer supporting older, more established mission efforts in such places as Brazil and PNG. In other instances local churches, either alone or in concert with neighbouring churches, are supporting new work in Indonesia or in addition are also supporting projects in China. Added to this, there are appeals to begin work in other countries such as Mexico, Argentina, the Ukraine, and South Africa.

Moving from foreign missions to home missions, we see outreach work being done in the inner city of Hamilton, among the natives around Smithers and Prince George, and other efforts being contemplated among both the native and Metis populations of Manitoba. We also see the rise and expansion of youth camps in BC and Ontario. More attention is also being paid to radio broadcasting and the internet as evangelism vehicles.

Then too there are an ever-increasing number of mission aid organizations that are either directly or indirectly connected to our churches: Children of Light (Indonesia), Faithworks (North America), Children of Hope (Mexico), Word and Deed (Haiti), CRWRF (International), MERF (The Middle East), Worldwide Christian Schools.

In short, there is a lot going on in our Canadian Reformed circles. And we can be very thankful for that;

however, there are dangers too. They include undermining traditional support, starting up new projects without proper research, unhealthy competition for donation dollars, a shortage of trained manpower, lack of representation at mission conferences, non-existent or poor consultation, etc.

## Purpose

After surveying this burgeoning field, the Urban Mission Board, with the backing of the local churches of Cloverdale and Langley, deemed this to be a good time to consider establishing a missions association. Such an association would invite all the churches and organizations in our churches that are involved in mission, mission aid, youth camps, and disaster relief to join together in an entirely voluntary association.

The purpose of such an association has been outlined as follows in the UMB letter:

1. *to assist the members in the fulfillment of their respective roles and tasks;*
2. *to keep one another informed of mission work being done by member churches, either nationally or internationally;*
3. *to consult with one another about matters and issues of mutual concern;*
4. *to promote missionary training, research, and development;*
5. *to facilitate co-operation where there is geographical overlap or possibilities of mutual assistance;*
6. *to sponsor conferences and seminars that will better equip members churches, boards, missionaries, mission workers, and other personnel;*
7. *to have Canadian Reformed mission efforts represented at international mission gatherings sponsored by organizations, such as The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) or the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).*

## Next step

Getting back to the Mission Aid Conference, it should be mentioned that this proposal was discussed near the close of the meeting, received a lot of feedback, and won general support from the participants.

The next step is to determine whether or not sending churches, mission aid, and other organizations also see some merit in the proposal. If they do, then in due time a founding meeting can be called and hopefully an association can be established.

*J. Visscher*