

**Report on the 2017 Reformed Baptist Network General Assembly held at Grace
Immanuel Reformed Baptist Church in Grand Rapids,
Michigan, on November 6th-9th.**

Our 1689 Confession, Chapter 26, Paragraph 14 – “As each church, and all the members of it, are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places, and upon all occasions to further every one within the bounds of their places and callings, in the exercise of their gifts and graces, so the churches, when planted by the providence of God, so as they may enjoy opportunity and advantage for it, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.”

Paragraph 15 – “In cases of difficulties or differences, either in point of doctrine or administration, wherein either the churches in general are concerned, or any one church, in their peace, union, and edification; or any member or members of any church are injured, in or by any proceedings in censures not agreeable to truth and order: it is according to the mind of Christ, that many churches holding communion together, do, by their messengers, meet to consider, and give their advice in or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the churches concerned; howbeit these messengers assembled, are not entrusted with any church-power properly so called; or with any jurisdiction over the churches themselves, to exercise any censures either over any churches or persons; or to impose their determination on the churches or officers.”

As many of you might be aware, we as a church are involved in a local (or what might be better termed – a regional) Association of churches, the Mid-West Reformed Baptist Association of Churches, and have been since 2005. However, it has been my desire as your pastor to be a part of a National Association of churches all down through the time that I have been your pastor, but for various reasons we never have joined either ARBCA or the Reformed Baptist Network thus far. Having understood, as well as I can, the issue of Divine Impassibility, the doctrinal issue which caused the division in ARBCA, and believing in my heart that the split over the disagreements on this doctrinal issue could have been avoided, and should have been avoided, I have now turned my attention to the Reformed Baptist Network of Churches to see whether we as a church might be able to join with them sometime in the future. In saying this, I want to assure all of you of my love in Christ for the dear pastors and churches that are still in ARBCA, and that I am fully intending to do what I can to promote unity with them by continuing to pray for them in our Sunday Prayer Meeting times, and attempting to go the General Assemblies of ARBCA when I am in a position to do so. This has been my position for many years now, and it will continue as God permits and directs me.

In pursuing my investigation of the Reformed Baptist Network, I asked Deacon Lyle Pakala to go with me to the first meeting of those pastors and missionaries who gathered to attempt to form another Association in November of 2015. This 1st meeting of those interested took place in Boulder Colorado, and was a great encouragement to Lyle and myself and many other pastors and people. The reason for the formation of another national Association of churches should be apparent to all; that even though all the churches which became members of ARBCA had subscribed to the 1689 Confession of Faith in order to join the Association, a number of those pastors and churches, those who left the Association in 2104, could not subscribe to the more narrow definition of the phrase – “God is without Passions”; that definition which is the classic scholastic view of the doctrine. Others, although they could subscribe to the classic definition of Divine Impassibility, they could not agree with the way that the whole matter was handled; that

a theological committee would put forth a paper which would define the classical view and then make recommendation that all the pastors and member churches in ARBCA would comply with that view, when some could not be convinced of the classic view and held to a nuanced view of the doctrine which they believe is compatible with God's Immutability.

The Reformed Baptist Network has become the answer for such pastors and churches, who desire to "hold communion together" in an Association of Churches. These brethren do believe that they are bound to pray continually for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ, in all places. They believe that ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification." They believe especially in the promotion of missions around the world for the establishment of Reformed Baptist churches in those places where the gospel is taken. The General Assembly which Jenni and I attended 2 weeks ago was something which was a fulfillment of those desires which I have just spoken of. The theme of the Conference at the General Assembly was – "Local Evangelism: The Foundation for World Missions".

The General Assembly registration took place on Monday, November the 6th at 1 in the afternoon which left much time to acclimate oneself to the surroundings of being in the building of Grace Immanuel Reformed Baptist Church. David Woolin, who has come down to preach here once at church, about two years ago now, set up a large book display in the smaller dining room off the main hall of the church. He brought over many good books from the Reformation Heritage Bookstore which is housed in the Puritan Reformed Seminary there in Grand Rapids, not far from the church. David is a member of GIRBC but he also works closely with Dr. Joel Beeke as his Sales & Marketing Manager. I was able to purchase a set of the Dutch Puritan, Wilhemus A'Brackel's great 4 Volume work entitled – "The Christian's Reasonable Service" with money I had been given from Jenni's Mom for my birthday; a great find at such a reasonable price.

After an afternoon of meeting people as they came in to register, and having spoken with a number of them, we had a fine dinner prepared for us by the church there. The ladies of the church prepared lunch and dinner for us on Tuesday-Thursday as well, and it was all very good food. At 7 o'clock that evening, Professor David Murray, a professor at the Puritan Reformed Seminary, spoke to us on how to foster a burden and a Vision for Missions in the Local Church. He said that "most of our attention as Christian people is upon the vision of mission, but the vision often fades and evaporates too quickly." "This is because the "why" question has not been considered. He went on to show us how to foster a burden for missions. It comes from the example of God Himself, and he used the Scriptures to show us the missionary heart of God. After speaking about Israel's being called by God in her priests and mediators, to be a channel of God's word to the lost, and going on to speak of Christ's giving the Church the Great Commission, he gave us a short overview of church history, many men and ministers carrying the word to the ends of the earth.

But then he said that the best way to foster a burden for missions is through evangelistic preaching in the local church. He said that an evangelistic sermon is that which expounds the word, but its primary aim is that of saving souls; the immediate conversion of every single unsaved person in front of the preacher. He then made 4 points of this proposition: 1st – the Rarity of Evangelistic Preaching – Why is it so rare? It may be because of the pastor's personal preference. Most pastors prefer explaining rather than applying; teaching rather than pleading. It may be because of the people in the church. He said – Sometimes mature Christians become selfish Christians. They prefer meat to milk. They don't want to be thought of as anything less than "a sirloin steak". Then too, people are sensitive to hyper-evangelism. They see the problem with emotionalism and decisionalism. Also, some preachers do not want to be criticized by those who are Hyper-Calvinistic. Others do not want to be accused of being pragmatists, who

blunt the edge of gospel preaching. Then there is also the encroachments of Pluralism, those who think that differing views on the doctrines of God, sin, and salvation should be tolerated in the preaching of the word. They believe that unity is more important than truth. Also, the Devil's opposition to the gospel, to any evangelistic preaching is strong in our day. These are some of the reasons that evangelistic preaching is so rare.

2nd – A Sermon should be delivered with passion and energy. He said that Christians can become proud and prayerless and unthankful. We can be experts in doctrine, but we can become inward looking, and not look outside the walls of our own church. 3rd – The roots of a true Burden for evangelistic preaching – Multitudes of texts can have an evangelistic application. Evangelistic sermons are focused on texts which focus on salvation. He then went on to give examples of various kinds of sermons which can be evangelistic. Warm up sermons where removing objections and showing the superiority of Christianity is set forth. Warning sermons where the question – What is sin, is focused on, where the law, the holiness of God, the justice of God, the power of God, death, judgment, and hell are focused upon. Wooing sermons, where there is a focus on the attractive aspects of God's character; love, mercy, compassion, and patience, are focused on, where the gracious mighty work of the Spirit is set forth. And Will sermons – The focus being on the choosing, deciding factor in salvation; God pleading through us that people might be saved.

And 4th – What are the results which we expect to see? Much present tense in them. Evangelistic sermons are those which will be preached in the urgent tense. "Now then". "We are ambassadors for Christ." "We are those who are imploring you to be reconciled to God." He ended his message by asking – "Have we ever adequately conveyed God pleading with those who we are preaching to. People must see that we are passionate for their salvation.

On Tuesday there was a great devotional by Pastor Greg Nichols on the Glorious Concept of the Church as Christ's Saved Society. This was followed by a time of prayer for 15 minutes, and this was followed by the seating of the messengers and the recognition of all the attendees, those who had come, like we had, to witness all that was going on, and who are thinking of joining the Network. This was followed by the first Business Session and the Lady's Tea for the ladies. The Business meeting was called to order and there was the recognition of the messengers from the 26 member churches, and a recognition of guests, including ourselves. There were reports given by the Treasurer, the Coordinator, the GA Planning Committee, the Membership Committee, the Missions Committee and the Personnel and finance Committee. Then there was the report of the Ad Hoc Committee, which presented a Core Values document. (Ad Hoc – a committee formed for a specific purpose to be achieved after which it is disbanded.)

Then there was a presentation of New Business; a vote on applying churches and individuals. I believe that there were 11 of them. They were each given 3-5 minutes for an introduction. Then there was a vote on applying missionaries and indigenous (national) pastors. There followed the election of the Standing Committees, the GA Chairman and GA Secretary, and the Coordinator for the year 2018. Then followed lunch and an afternoon of free time which Jenni and I took the opportunity to go to bookstores. At 4:45 there was a Missionary presentations given by Coordinator Gordon Taylor and Rick Horne. Then followed dinner, and in the evening Pastor Jeff Smith of Emmanuel Baptist Church of Coconut Creek Florida preached to us on Doing Evangelism through the Local Church. He also preached to us on Wednesday evening on Cultivating, Identifying, and preparing Men for Gospel Missions. All very well presented, and you may look at my notes on those messages which are in the binder which I have placed on the Book table in the library room.

I wish that I had time to tell you of all of the wonderful pastors and people that I met at the conference. I wish that I could tell you about all of the missionaries who we heard from during that time. As time goes by, I will be bringing some of these men and their work to your attention

for the purpose of prayer. Some are known to you, others not yet. I would like to say in closing that I believe that it will be a very good and profitable thing for us to join with this Association of Churches. I would like us as a church to be able to hold communion and interact with these churches and brethren in this good formal and informal sense that this Association will provide. It will be a means of broadening our fellowship with like-minded churches, and our being able to expand our efforts at evangelism in very practical ways. Our participation is desired by all those churches who are currently members of RBNet. We will benefit from the Association in our fellowship with them, their ability to help us to better serve our Lord, not only in the cause of missions but in the instruction of men for the ministry through Reformed Baptist Seminary, and through possible interaction with all the pastors and people of the churches represented.

The Reformed Baptist Network is a network of churches, believing in the independence and sufficiency of the local church, and seeking to cooperate together according to the following core values: their theological center, a gracious manner, and an earnest mission. The purpose of RBNet is to glorify God through fellowship and cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission to the ends of the earth. It is a worthy Biblical goal toward which we strive here in this church. I believe that if we join this Association we will be better able to fulfill our greater goals in terms of world missions and working together to build each other up and making each church stronger because of our formal commitment to hold fellowship and communion with them. Please consider these things my brethren, for I will at our Annual Business Meeting in January ask for a vote on whether we should pursue becoming a member church in this Association. It is my belief that we should.