

AGENDA MATERIALS

The 46th Meeting of Classis Central US of the URCNA

Convened by **Wellsburg URC** in Wellsburg, Iowa

Convening **Monday, January 21, AD 2019 at 1:00 pm**

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AGENDA

The 46th Meeting of Classis Central US of the URCNA

Convened by **Wellsburg URC** in Wellsburg, IA

Convening **Monday, January 21, AD 2019 at 1:00 pm**

1. Opening Devotions – By a member of convening consistory serving as chairman *pro-tem*
2. Presentation of the Credentials and Roll Call of the Delegates
3. Reading of the *Form of Subscription* and Delegates' Declaration of Assent
4. Declaration that Classis is Duly Constituted. Rev. Jacques Roets (Redeemer, Dyer, IN) assumes the chair. Rev. Alan Camarigg (Hills, MN) serves as vice-chairman.
5. Adoption of a Time Schedule for Monday: Begin at 1:00 pm, 15-minute break at 3:15 pm, a one-hour break at 6:00 pm. Evening session to end at 9:00 pm. Morning session to begin at 8:30 am with a 15-minute break at 10:00 am and a one-hour break at noon.
6. Appointment of Committees to Examine the Credentials
 - a. Credentials of the delegates
 - b. Credentials of the examinees
7. Classis Reports:
 - a. Interim Committee – the Wellsburg consistory – see attached
 - b. Stated Clerk – see attached
8. *Colloquium Doctum* for Rev. Roberto W. Rossi (see *Church Order Appendix 5*)
The consistory of the Immanuel URC in De Motte, Indiana has requested a *colloquium doctum* for Rev. Roberto W. Rossi.
 - a. Chairman explains the procedure for the exam as well as for voting
 - b. Approval of credentials
 - c. Sermon – Report by the Immanuel Consistory, De Motte -attached
 - d. *Practica* – Rev. John Vermeer (30 minutes)
 - e. Church Polity –Rev. Harold Miller (20 minutes)
 - f. Confessional Knowledge – Rev. Todd De Rooy (20 minutes)
 - g. Reformed Doctrine – Rev. Joel Vander Kooi (25 minutes)
 - h. Ethics – Rev. Spencer Aalsburg (20 minutes)
9. Ordination Exam for Candidate Paul Freswick (see *Church Order Appendix 4*)
 - a. Approval of credential
 - b. Sermon – Report by the Waupun Consistory - attached
 - c. *Practica* – Rev. John Vermeer (30 minutes)
 - d. Church Polity –Rev. Rev. Harold Miller (15 minutes)
 - e. Confessional Knowledge – Rev. Todd De Rooy (20 minutes)
 - f. Reformed Doctrine – Rev. Joel Vander Kooi (35 minutes)
 - g. Ethics – Rev. Spencer Aalsburg (20 minutes)
10. Credentials Committee Report
11. Next Meeting:

Date for Next Meeting – The next *regular* meeting has already been scheduled for Monday, April 8 at 6:30 p.m. (with supper at 5:15 pm) and continuing on Tuesday, April 9, with the Wellsburg consistory as the convening consistory. Place to be determined.
12. Closing Matters:
 - a. Thanks to Host Church
 - b. Concept Minutes
 - c. Prayer and Adjournment

DEVOTIONS SCHEDULE: (GOES BEYOND OUR HOPED FOR TIME OF ADJOURNMENT BUT JUST IN CASE. . .)

The chairmen, or a delegate from the designated church, should be prepared to lead a brief devotional as described below.

- Opening of Classis Thursday afternoon (*Scripture, Prayer, Song*) Chairman Pro-Tem
- Closing of Session #1 prior to Evening Meal (*Prayer*) Orange City
- Opening of Session #2 after Evening Meal (*Scripture, Prayer, Song*) Pella
- Closing of Session #2 (*Scripture, Prayer, Song*)..... Rock Valley
- Opening of Session #3 at 8:30 a.m. (*Scripture, Prayer, Song*) Sanborn
- Closing of Session #3 prior to Noon Meal (*Prayer*) Schererville
- Opening of Session #4 after Noon Meal (*Scripture, Prayer, Song*) Sioux Center
- Closing of Classis (*Scripture, Prayer, Doxology*)..... Chairman

NOTES FROM THE CONVENING CONSISTORY

LOCATION:

- **CHURCH:** Our January 21st, 2019 Special Classis Meeting will take place at 608 South Adams St, Wellsburg, IA 50680 and will begin at 1:00 p.m.
- We are anticipating that our meeting will conclude somewhere around 7:30-8:00 p.m., perhaps even earlier; however, that may change due to the nature of the two exams as well as credential matters.
- Please also note that the weather conditions in central Iowa in the middle of January can make travel conditions risky if there is snow, so please keep that in mind when deciding whether you plan to spend the night in a hotel.
- Given that hotel options are limited near us in Wellsburg, we have elected to provide lodging options that would best suit the needs of the brothers from both parts of Classis as they return home the night of the 21st.
- No meal will be provided at noon on Monday before classis other than snacks and drinks.

LODGING:

For the brothers East of Wellsburg: (*Block of Rooms ARE RESERVED*)

Hampton Inn Waterloo Cedar Valley
2034 La Porte Rd.
Waterloo, IA 50702
Tel: 319-233-2044
Price: \$109.00 + tax

A block of Kings and Doubles reserved. Free breakfast included in the morning. Check in time is 4:00 p.m.

This hotel is located approximately 30 minutes East of Wellsburg and is close to Highway 20. When reserving, use the group code "URC". **Cut off date for reservations is December 30th, 2018.**

For the brothers West of Wellsburg: (*Block of Rooms ARE RESERVED*)

AmericInn
810 S. Oak St.
Iowa Falls, IA 50126
Tel: 641-648-4600
Price: \$80.00 for King/\$85.00 for Queens

A block of Kings and Queens is reserved. Free breakfast included in the morning. Check in time is 3:00 p.m. Note: This hotel does not have an elevator.

This hotel is located approximately 25 minutes West of Wellsburg and a few miles north of Highway 20. When reserving, use the group code "URC". **Cut off date for reservations is December 24th, 2018.**

For the brothers South of Wellsburg (Block of Rooms ARE NOT RESERVED)

AmericInn

2101 Commerce Dr.

Grundy Center, IA 50638

Tel: 319-824-5272

Price: Approx. \$80.00

This hotel is located approximately 15 minutes southeast of Wellsburg.

***If you should have any questions about reservations or other options available,
please contact Rev. Joel Worries at 641-869-3633.***

Print this page separately, fill it out and bring the hard copy to classis.
Please e-mail the correct spelling of the delegates' and alternates' names to the clerk ASAP at ClassisCentralUS@gmail.com

CLASSICAL CREDENTIAL

To Classis Central US of the United Reformed Churches in North America, to convene on

_____ (date), at _____ (place).

The Consistory of _____,

member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in North America, has appointed brothers

_____ and _____

as delegates to represent said church at the meeting of the classis. The alternate delegates are:

_____ and _____.

We hereby instruct and authorize them to take part in all the deliberations and transactions of the classis meeting regarding all matters legally coming before the meeting and transacted in agreement with the Word of God, as interpreted by the Three Forms of Unity, and applied in the Church Order.

By the order of the Consistory,

Done in Consistory on _____ (date)

_____, Chairman

_____, Clerk

Church Order Article 26 Questions

1. Are Consistory and diaconal meetings held regularly? _____
2. Is the Word of God faithfully preached? _____
3. Are the sacraments faithfully administered? _____
4. Is church discipline exercised? _____
5. Are the poor cared for? _____
6. Is God-centered schooling promoted? _____
7. Does the Consistory need the advice or help of the classis for the proper government of the church? _____ If yes, use the reverse side.

Done in Consistory on _____ (date)

_____, Chairman

_____, Clerk

United Reformed Church of Wellsburg



608 South Adams St.
Wellsburg, IA 50680

November 28th, 2018

Brothers and Fathers,

The consistory of the United Reformed Church of Wellsburg has served as the convening consistory for the Spring 2019 meeting of classis. It has been a privilege for us to serve in this capacity, and we look forward to hosting our upcoming meeting.

Below is a summary of the work we have completed thus far:

- We received and approved the request from Immanuel URC of De Motte's consistory, along with the concurring request from another classis consistory (Oak Glen URC), to hold a special classis meeting on January 21st, 2019 for the purpose of a Colloquium Doctum for Rev. Roberto Rossi.
- We also received and approved the request of Grace URC of Waupun's consistory to conduct an Ordination Exam for Mr. Paul Freswick, who accepted a call to be their next minister. This exam will also take place at our special January meeting.
- We have contacted and secured examiners for each section of the exams, along with appropriate time schedules.
- We have made arrangements for the meeting, including meals and motel accommodations.

We are grateful for the opportunity to serve our congregations, classis, and most of all our Heavenly Father in this manner.

Elder Spencer Slifer
Clerk of Consistory

CLASSIS CENTRAL U.S.
of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

Rev. Ralph A. Pontier
Stated Clerk of Classis
ClassisCentralUS@gmail.com
641-230-3880 (cell)

118 Holland Drive
Pella, IA 50219

REPORT OF THE STATED CLERK
December 10, AD 2018

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

Due to a previous commitment to serve a church in Florida during the month of January, I am unable to be with you. I have arranged for the alternate stated clerk, Rev. Barnes to take the minutes for this meeting and forward them to me for distribution. I will remunerate him a portion of the fee classis pays me.

Since the September 2018 meeting, I have attempted to faithfully carry out the duties of the stated clerk as defined in our *Church Order* and the *Classis Rules of Procedure*. I report the following specific matters:

1. I prepared the agenda for this meeting in consultation with, and assistance from, Rev. Worries of the convening consistory.
2. I prepared a draft of the anticipated minutes and classis report to assist the alternate stated clerk.
3. I conducted other miscellaneous correspondence and communication.

It is a privilege to serve the churches of Classis Central US as clerk. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

Please note that the cell phone number listed in the heading is my only phone number. I have terminated my land line. Please delete the number ending in -5174 from your contact list.

Respectfully submitted, your servant,
Ralph A. Pontier

**IMMANUEL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
9991 W. 1200 N.
DE MOTTE, INDIANA 46310**

October 10, 2018

Dear Consistory of Wellsburg United Reformed Church,

As you know, Immanuel URC's pulpit has been vacant for some time, beginning with our pastor's leave of absence in August 2017, followed by his emeritation in March 2018. Since then we have conducted a pastoral search and have now separately requested a Colloquium Doctum of Rev. Roberto Rossi.

The next regular scheduled meeting of Classis Central is not until April of 2019. Given the length of our vacancy, the consistory of Immanuel United Reformed Church is requesting that an additional earlier classis meeting be held sometime in January, 2019 solely for purposes of conducting the Colloquium Doctum of Rev. Rossi. The consistory of Oak Glen United Reformed church has joined in this request and we enclose it for your review. This is made according to our Classis Rule I (C) which allows the convening consistory to convene an additional meeting of classis upon the request of 2 consistories.

We appreciate your consideration of this request.

In His service,



Russ Vander Molen, Clerk of Consistory
Immanuel URC, DeMotte



October 10, 2018

To: The Consistory of Wellsburg United Reformed Church

Esteemed Brothers,

The Consistory of Oak Glen URC of Lansing, Illinois joins with the Consistory of Immanuel URC of De Motte, Indiana in requesting a special meeting of Classis Central U.S. in January 2019 for the purpose of conducting a Colloquium Doctum with Rev. Roberto Rossi.

In His service,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter C. Smith".

Peter C. Smith
Clerk of Council
Oak Glen URC, Lansing, Illinois

October 10, 2018

Classis Central U.S.
United Reformed Churches in North America

Dear Brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ,

With gratitude and praise to God, I am writing to you. My name is Roberto Rossi, and I am a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). My wife, Carrie, and I have been married for 19 years, and we have two children, Matteo (age 15) and Lydia (age 13). We currently reside in Lansing, IL and have been worshipping at Oak Glen URC.

Since the Lord called me to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ, I desired to serve the Lord in the Gospel ministry. In 2003, I graduated from Moody Bible Institute; and in 2013, I graduated from Mid America Reformed Seminary. In the spring of 2013, I was called to Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church (URCNA) in New Jersey, pending the sustaining of the candidacy exam. That summer, I began serving the Lord in Pompton and was ordained in the fall. I ministered there as the Associate Pastor until the summer of 2015. At that time, I was called to serve Crete Church (PCA) as the Assistant Pastor. Consequently, my ministerial credentials were transferred to the PCA. After a year, the Senior Pastor was diagnosed with a terminal illness, and the elders asked me to serve as the Interim Pastor. I completed the interim position a year later and am currently without a call.

Meanwhile, I have been preaching occasionally at Oak Glen URC and Immanuel URC in De Motte, IN. My wife and I have been praying for the Lord's leading, asking Him to clearly lead us to the Church of His choosing. In His goodness, He opened the door to Immanuel. While there, I inquired about the pastoral vacancy, and the consistory considered my inquiry. They asked me to fill out the pastor questionnaire; and in a matter of weeks, I interviewed with the elders, led worship services, and enjoyed good fellowship and conversations with the congregation. I am excited to serve a congregation that worships the Lord according to His Word, commits to the discipling of God's people and desires to grow in their outreach and evangelistic efforts.

Furthermore, I was very encouraged and impressed with the consistory's diligent "vetting" of my past ministry callings. We discussed my previous callings at length, and the consistory graciously spent a considerable amount of time talking with my wife as well. Our discussions were very open and honest, proving to be very encouraging and helpful to Carrie and me.

In God's providence and sovereignty, He has led the congregation of Immanuel to give the consistory permission to sponsor me for a *Colloquium Doctum*. I am truly honored by the congregation's vote of confidence and affirmation to have me serve, Lord willing, as their pastor. Thus, I join in asking that Classis Central conduct this *Colloquium Doctum*.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all!

Warmly in Christ,

Rev. Roberto Rossi

Scripture Reading: **1 John 1:1—2:2**
Sermon Text: **1 John 2:1-2**
Sermon Title: **“Our Advocate with the Father”**

2:1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Dear Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Many years ago, I remember seeing a beautiful painting of an elderly, African-American man sitting on a rocking chair on the porch. A young boy is sitting on his lap (presumably his grandson), and the elderly man is reading his well-used Bible to the boy. It's a picture of an elderly, wise man imparting wisdom to a young child. Many of you have committed a considerable amount of time to sit down with your children or grandchildren to read the Bible to them.

Why do we commit such time to our children? Well, we hope and pray that the Lord will open their hearts and minds to the truth of God's Word and *walk* in the truth. Like the writer of Proverbs 1:8, we say, “*My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck.*”

John's letter is like a picture of a wise, elderly man who is speaking to his children. In this case, he's a spiritual father to these believers, and he's very pastoral and affectionate toward them. He addresses them by saying, “My little children” (or, “My dear children”). This phrase is used six times in this letter. He's not only imparting the truth regarding the light and life in Jesus Christ, he's also an eyewitness to the Light and Eternal Life—Jesus Christ. See chapter 1.

His message is this: “*...that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*”

Sin is very serious because it is an affront against God, and it reveals that we're not walking with God or “in the light”. Sin blinds us from seeing the truth of God and deceives us from the existence of the light of the Gospel. [Illustrate] John, like a faithful, spiritual father, reminds us of our need of an Advocate—someone who *continuously* and *always* intercedes and pleads for us before the God of light.

This very encouraging word by John should strengthen you, friend, if you're struggling with the assurance of God's forgiveness and love for you. Or, please listen carefully if you're struggling with the assurance of salvation. As we'll learn in our sermon passage, our Father is able and willing to forgive *because* His Son is “**Our Righteous Advocate**” and “**Our Sacrificial Advocate.**” Let's consider these two points.

First, Jesus is...

I. Our Righteous Advocate (v. 1)

2:1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

He says, “*I write this to you so that you will not sin.*” Earlier, in chapter 1, John says, “*If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*” Like a father, he desires that his children walk with Christ and put to death the evil deeds of the flesh (worldliness, lusts, greed, pride). These evil deeds destroy fellowship with God; and consequently, it destroys peace with God and our neighbor. [Illustrate]

On the one hand, he urges us to stay clear of sin—to flee from it—to not sin! On the other hand, he knows that sin is a reality in our lives. So then, what's our hope? And, what are we going to do about it? John doesn't point to Himself nor does he tell us to look to ourselves and make peace with ourselves. Rather, he says, “*But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous one.*” Literally, “*We have an Advocate before the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One.*”

We have an Advocate. An “Advocate” (παράκλητος) is “one who pleads another's cause before a judge; a counsel for defense.” He comes alongside to help another in need. One commentator says, “The proper office and business of an advocate is with the judge; with him the advocate pleads the client's cause” (M. Henry).

It is the same word in John 14:15-17, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper (παράκλητος), that He may abide with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*”

[Illustration] In the legal system, there are lawyers who are called “public defenders.” These Public defenders or advocates are “employed at the public’s expense in a criminal trial to represent a defendant who is unable to afford legal assistance.” God, by His grace, sends us the “Heavenly Helper and Defender,” and He does so at His expense.

In no way, dear friends, can we advocate for or defend ourselves in God’s holy presence. In no way, can we have any other person advocate for us in His courtroom. Our sins deserve God’s just judgment. The Bible says, “*The consequences of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23; 5:12; 7:5, 13; Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4). Sin deserves a verdict of death. Who’s your advocate in God’s courtroom?

Now, any defendant can have an advocate who pleads a person’s cause before a judge, even an advocate who is not law abiding or unrighteous himself. However, before God, the advocate must be righteous or just because it’s the righteousness of the advocate that is acceptable and pleasing before the Judge of all. There’s “no darkness in Him” [God]. Therefore, our Advocate must be righteous. See Psalms 15, 24.

When the Apostle says that we “*an Advocate with (or, before) the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous (One)*,” we are reminded of the fact that Jesus, our Righteous Advocate, is seated in glory at the right hand of the Father and is heard by the Father because of His righteousness. He’s, therefore, approved and accepted by God. Indeed, He fulfilled God’s Law and its demands. He was obedient to His Father’s will even to the point of death on a cross. He was in a state of humiliation, dwelling among sinners like us. After His resurrection and ascension, He sits in exultation and glory, pleading for you and me, dear Christian.

[Illustrate]

Romans 8:31ff says, “*What, then, shall we say...is at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us.*” Hebrews 7:23-25 says, “*Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.*” How long? FOREVER—ALWAYS! There’s no need for an earthly priest to mediate or intercede for you and me. There’s only one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

In the Catechism, Lord’s Day 18 says, “How does Christ’s *ascension* into heaven benefit us? First, He pleads our cause in heaven in the presence of His Father...”

^{2:1}“*My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*” Only the Righteous Advocate gained access to the Father’s throne of mercy so that He can present you faultless and blameless before God. Look to the Righteous Advocate when you sin and not to yourself!

Second, Jesus is

II. Our Sacrificial Advocate (v. 2)

²²“*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*”

John illustrates or explains the previous assertion or truth. Jesus “*is the propitiation for our sins...*” This is a big word and a difficult word to pronounce; and perhaps, a foreign word to you. It’s a term that we frequently discuss in theology, but it’s a *biblical* word (see 1 John 4:10). Therefore, it’s a very important word. It’s a crucial part of what Jesus accomplished and experienced on the cross in His human nature.

Propitiation means that God’s wrath and judgement was satisfied (or appeased) when Jesus was crucified. That is, God’s justice upon sin was satisfied when Jesus Himself (and nobody else) bore our sins in His body on the cross. Because of this, God’s attitude towards us changes. As one commentator says, “He moves from being at enmity with us to being for us.” Christians are no longer enemies of God but children of God (c.f. John 1:12; Ephesians 2:13).

[Illustration of pagan cultures and western culture]

But notice, Jesus “²*And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.*”

There are differing interpretations of this verse. First, some churches believe that this verse teaches and promotes *universalism*. Universalism teaches that Jesus Christ died for everyone; and therefore, everyone is saved (even those who do not repent and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior). However, the Bible clearly teaches that we must repent and believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved. They cannot account for the Bible’s clear teaching on hell.

Second, many churches believe that Jesus died for everyone’s sin, but it’s up to the individual, *of his own will*, to repent and believe in Jesus Christ so that Jesus’ death can be applied to them. So then, Jesus died only to make salvation available for everyone, and a person’s salvation is dependent upon man’s will to choose Christ. If this is the case, then Jesus’ sacrifice on the altar of the cross didn’t *accomplish* salvation, and salvation ultimately rests in man’s decision.

We believe, however, that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ really and truly *accomplished* salvation on the cross once and for all. That is, He really and truly saved His people two thousand years ago on the cross. He had you in mind! Your sins were nailed to the cross so that He really and truly paid the penalty for your sins and atoned for them. It's not up to man's will. Rather, it's God's will and electing love that causes men and women to turn to Christ in faith and repentance (c.f. John 1:11-13; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

John 10:14-16 says, "*I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also (i.e. Gentiles in the world). They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one Shepherd.*" Revelation 5:9-10 says, "*And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (i.e. the world). You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.*"

John is saying that our Sacrificial Advocate is *not only* for the Jews and to his audience; but He's for God's elect throughout the whole world. One commentator says, "Under the word 'all' or 'whole', God does not include the reprobate, but designates those who should believe as well as those who were then scattered through various parts of the world" (Calvin).

In response to this, many people will say, "God's not fair! He doesn't give man an opportunity to exercise his free will." These are loaded comments. I'll only say this: The Bible teaches us that our wills are in bondage to sin. In our sinful nature, we freely choose to deny and hate God and His Word. God is completely just to condemn all to death and hell. But, because of His great mercy, He saves many and freely provides for them a Sacrificial Advocate (recall the idea of a public defender).

The English Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, was preaching a sermon on God's electing love and predestination. At the end of the service, a man came up to him and asked: "Pastor Spurgeon, how can I know if I'm elect? How can I know if Jesus died for me?" Spurgeon said, "Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved!" The Holy Spirit works repents and faith in the hearts of God's elect.

III. Points of Application

I want to leave you with a few points of application. What does it mean to have an advocate with the Father? What does it look like?

First, it means the assurance of forgiveness and a clear conscience before God. You are no longer an enemy of God but a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 10:19-25).

Christians typically don't have a problem saying, "Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins." We have difficulty *appropriating* the truth to our own lives and *living* in freedom.

Second, it means the assurance of salvation. Please turn with me to 1 John 2:28-29; 4:16-18. Because of the objective reality of Christ's sacrifice, we live in confidence before the face of God in His courtroom. Do you fear the judgment of God? Do you constantly live with a guilty conscience? Then, the love of God is not made complete in your life. Our focus is on ourselves and our sin when it should be on Christ.

Lastly, in light of God's grace and forgiveness in Christ, let us walk in the light. That is, walk in a manner worthy of the Christian calling by taking sin seriously and actively desiring to live a life that pleasing to the Lord. Walk in the light as He is in the light.

AMEN!

IMMANUEL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
9991 W. 1200 N.
DE MOTTE, INDIANA 46310

November 5, 2018

To: Rev. Ralph Pontier, Clerk of Classis Central, U.S.
Rev. Joel Worries, Pastor of convening consistory, Wellsburg URC, Iowa

Consistory Report on *Colloquim* Sermon of Rev. Roberto Rossi
Preached on October 21, 2018 at
Immanuel United Reformed Church, DeMotte, Indiana

Dear Brothers of Classis Central U.S.:

Rev. Roberto Rossi preached his *Colloquium* Sermon on 1 John 2:1-2. Our review of the sermon follows the format of Immanuel URC's Sermon Evaluation Form as follows:

Sermon Theme: We can be assured of the forgiveness of sins and our salvation because Christ is our Righteous Advocate and Righteous Sacrifice.

Sermon Introduction: The sermon's introduction succinctly and clearly summarized the text, the context, and the general theme of the sermon.

Exposition: The sermon followed the text in a clear and logical fashion. The context was John providing a pastoral answer to doubts of our salvation when we confront the reality of sin in our life. The two main points of the sermon were 1. *Jesus, Our Righteous Advocate* and 2. *Jesus, Our Righteous Sacrifice*

1. *Our Righteous Advocate*: The sermon properly laid the foundation of the opening exhortation of verse 1 which says "*my little children, I write these things so that you may not sin*". Rev. Rossi explained that God cannot have us minimize sin, that we are to flee from it, and that we must recognize the reality that sin breaks fellowship with God. Yet, here we were reminded that the text is addressed to us as "*little children*", similar to the picture of a father exhorting and teaching his beloved son.

So where is our hope, given the reality of sin? The good news is that we have Jesus Christ as our advocate. While we can understand an earthly advocate/lawyer who pleads our case, such human advocates themselves are sinners who need another's righteousness to stand before a perfectly holy God. Christ himself is perfectly righteous and thus His intercession for us is heard and approved by the Father because of Christ's righteousness. This is a true comfort for Christians in our daily walk knowing Christ continues to intercede our case before the Father continually. Because Christ is our perfect advocate, we know that our prayers are heard in heaven!

2. *Our Righteous Sacrifice*. Rev. Rossi gave a very understandable explanation of the concept of propitiation (the satisfaction of God's wrath) and explained the differing views of the meaning "of the whole world". The sermon provided a clear defense of the doctrine of election and that Christ's sacrifice was a propitiation for the elect throughout the whole world.

The points of application were well done, explaining that because of Christ, we truly have the forgiveness of sin, the assurance of salvation, and that we are now called to walk in the light of God's grace to us.

Illustrations: Rev. Rossi used illustrations that clarified the meaning of the sermon and yet did not take the listener off on a tangent.

Gospel Message: Christ was the main focus of this passage and sermon. The work of Christ and how it applies to our daily life was beautifully displayed throughout.

Organization and Delivery: The sermon flowed logically and clearly, each point was developed sufficiently, and understandable, plain language was used throughout.

Additional note of commendation: Before the service, the elders had made an announcement regarding an impending exclusion of a baptized member. The elders had notified Rev. Rossi in advance this was going to occur. In both his congregational prayer and in parts of the sermon application, Rev. Rossi was very pastoral in providing comfort to the congregation.

Consistory's conclusion: The consistory of Immanuel United Reformed Church approved of and appreciated Rev. Rossi's sermon and we wholeheartedly commend him to be admitted as a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the URCNA.

In Christ,

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Sermon Audio: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/saplayer/playpopup.asp?SID=111418238120>.

You can also find this sermon on our web site at <https://www.waupungraceurc.org/> under the recent sermon tab, sermon titled 'God's Good Law'.

Paul Freswick **Text:** Psalm 119:41-56 **Title:** God's Good Law

Theme: Stand in and stand up for the law of God

As pages turn to Psalm 119 mention that there are eight sections/strophes of 8 verses each (22x8=176). Mention that the Psalm is acrostic, and that there are 8 words repeated often throughout the Psalm (law, testimonies, precepts, statutes, commandments, etc.)

Introduction

Dear congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have before a Psalm with beautiful structures and themes. A Psalm which should make us think and speak and live with joy in light of the law which God has given to us. But what is the Law? The law and the commandments so often referenced in this Psalm? The law here in Psalm 119 can be referring to specific commandments, even the ten commandments at times we might say, but the Law is also a way to refer to the whole of the first five books of the Bible and beyond that, it can stand in place for the whole Word of God. So in this Psalm which uses the word law "*TORAH*" in the first verse and then repeatedly throughout all 176 verses we have a Psalm which talks about the Law of God, including the ten commandments of God, but also about the beauty of the word of God more generally.

And so we ask this morning, what is the Law of God and what does it mean to love the law of God, as our inspired Psalmist so clearly does? And what does it mean not only to love the law in a general way but also to take joy in living by that Law? These are the kinds of questions we will consider together, looking at how Psalm 119 directs us to both **stand in and stand up for the law of God.**

We will do this by considering three of the currents which are weaved throughout our text: First about Hoping in the Word, second Speaking of the Law, and third Living by the Precepts.

I. Hoping in the Word

First what does it mean to be Hoping in the Word, or promises, of God? For we clearly see a hope and a trust in the first verses of our text (v. 41-42) and then the word “hope” is used as the second “section” of our Psalm begins.

So in verse 41 this section, or *strophe* to use the technical term, begins with “Let your steadfast love come to me, O LORD, your salvation according to your promise.” This then runs directly into the “trust” language at the end of verse 42. Then the next sections begins in verse 49 with the words “Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope.” This then runs directly into the language of “comfort” in light of the promise which gives “life” in verse 50.

So, not content with a single word repeated over and over the Psalmist gives variety and color to his expression. Speaking not only of “hope” but also of “trust” and “comfort.” These things are in light of the “promises of God” and the “word of God.” Are these the kinds of words we think of when we think of the Word of God? They indeed ought to be and I trust that they are. We trust God because of what is revealed in His Word. And notice that the Psalmist does not look anywhere for comfort except to God and what God will do! That is the language of 119:41, it is language which anticipates the fulfillment of promise and ties the **fulfillment of promise to salvation**. This is the clear testimony of an Old Testament saint waiting for Jesus Christ, because it is Christ who has fulfilled the promise given long ago in the garden of Eden; after the fall but before Adam and Eve were even expelled from the garden.

The Psalmist makes this testimony in light of the covenant faithfulness of God. For “steadfast love” is *hesed* in the Hebrew so intimately tied to the Covenant faithfulness of God and LORD in all caps is the name of God which emphasizes that God is our Covenant God. In other words, *it is as if the Psalmist is saying in verse 41*, “in light of your covenant faithfulness and in light of your covenant name I have hope in salvation.” Salvation which we now know came through the work of Christ on the cross to save sinners.

This is why the word “promises” is a good translation in verse 41... The Hebrew word there is rarely translated “promises” it is usually the less specifically translated “word(s)” but because of the context of covenant faithfulness (so closely tied to covenant promises otherwise there is

nothing to be faithful too) and because they were trying to keep some of the variety of the Hebrew vocabulary (this is one of the 8 repeated words) in Psalm 119 the word “promises” is used appropriately.

Notice, that it is not only the “word” of God and “promises” of God which give hope but also in verse 43 the “rules” or “rulings” of God are tied to hope. This may seem a little odd to our ears. This is probably an example within Psalm 119 where we do not want to press the use of the word “rules” too far, we can say that the “rules” or “rulings” of God include his promises which are the foundation of our hope and we do not need to say much more than that. We do know however, that Christ kept the law for our sake, and *in that sense* some hope can be found in the rules or laws themselves.

Perhaps another way to think about this is that the law *itself* does not give death, but rather the rules of God when followed lead to life. And especially this is clear in the life of Jesus because he perfectly followed the law and that was a life giving obedience. The apostle Peter ties the obedience of the law-keeping of Christ to life in this way..... **(1 Peter 2:22-24)** “*He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth..... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness....*” Do you hear how the perfection of Christ is then tied to his taking the curse for us which is then tied both to our need to live for righteousness!? And what does it mean to live for righteousness? Certainly that means to keep the law of God, to live in service to God because of what God has done, and a similar move is made in Psalm 119, which each strophe/section begins with our hope in the promise of salvation each section also moves to speaking about living by the law and speaking about the law. In other words, the Psalm not only teaches about how the promises and the words of God give us light and hope but Psalm 119 also teaches about how to stand up for the law it or to speak up for it.

And that brings us to our second point, *Speaking of the Law*.

II. Speaking of the Law

Certainly having a hope and a trust in the law is something which leads to a desire to speak of the law. So we have verse 42 that to “trust” the Lord includes (we can usually think of each

Psalm verse as being tied together, which in Hebrew poetry is broadly called parallelism) v. 42a having an “*answer for him who taunts me.*” To put this in 2018 terms we might say, some people of the world and many church going people today might ask questions like “why wait for marriage to do what you desire to do” and the response is “if that desire is against God’s design and God’s law then that desire is a sinful desire.” There are many more examples we can give, perhaps you are thinking of a conversation you have had with someone in the last month that followed those lines on one point or another. The point is that we are not appealing to our own authority; our answer for why we do what we do (or at least for what we seek to do) is that we are seeking to live in accordance with the word of God.

It is tempting though, not to say what the Law of God teaches. This is true for all ages especially in a culture where any mention of sin is called judgmental. Is there someone younger who has to stand up to his friends and say “we can’t steal that candy that would be breaking God’s commandments” is there someone older who has to say to college friends? “I can’t skip Sunday worship just because I live on my own now, God want His people in His house of worship” are there those of many ages who have to interact with (family members, co-workers, neighbors) and not to be afraid to say that; “yes the law of God really does condemn homosexuality, cohabitation before marriage, and dishonest business practices.” Peer pressure may sometimes be the strongest on the younger generation but all of God’s people can feel it, especially as we get peer pressure from our culture and even some church-goers not to speak about the laws of God in the public square.

So may we not bend the knee to peer pressure but instead may we even be willing to speak the of the testimonies of God before kings (as it says in verse 46) without fearing the shame that may come. May we boldly speak the law even when we are taunted or mocked by others as it says in verse 42. And may we speak even when we don’t necessarily want to, may God then not take the word of truth totally from our lips (see verse 43). With the themes that run throughout Psalm 119 verse 43 could be a prayer of the Psalmist to have boldness when under pressure to speak the law of God to those who mock, those who “taunt” from verse 42.

We know from elsewhere in Psalm 119 that this requirement to boldly stand for the Word of God may include not only the world and the enemies of the church but at times even our teachers and our elders. *Psalm 119:98-100.*

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is ever with me.

99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for your testimonies are my meditation.

100 I understand more than the aged,⁸
for I keep your precepts.

I have been called here, waiting still for a final ordination exam.... To be a teacher, but if I ever teach something contrary to the Word of God at that point I have failed to be a faithful teacher and I hope there would be, not only the overseeing elders, but also Aquilas and Priscillas who would be willing to take me aside and show my error to me. In other words, I hope all here would be like the Bereans who examined the scriptures daily to see if the teachings of Paul and Silas were true. In (*Acts 17*) Luke does not report that the Apostle Paul, appointed an Apostle directly by Christ and one of the most well trained men on the planet (having trained under the respected Rabbi Gamaliel) was upset. Rather, Luke reports that to check the teachings of Paul and Silas was a good and “noble” thing. Why is this so? The principle of Psalm 119 and elsewhere in Scripture is this; the teacher is only to be heard in so far as his teaching is faithful to the Word of God.

This goes for any pastor, any college professor (Christian college or not), and even for an elderly grandparent if they speak not the truth in accordance with the Word of God.

We should also be zealous, even to the point of hot indignation when there is no repentance but instead there is rebellion (*see verse 53*). When we can clearly see that instead of turning away from sin and turning to Christ in humility there are those who run after the pleasures of sin which last for a season. For do to such is to run away from Christ and into the service of Satan which loves sin. When this is seen we should be indignant, we should be zealous. Elsewhere in the Psalm we are told that displays of sin should make us sorrowful. *Psalm 119:136* “*My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.*” This is because we are to love God, which is tied

to loving the Word of God, including the law. *Psalm 119:163* “*I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law.*”

And the taunting and the derision/mockery which comes from those who do not love the Word of God can have a different kind of peer pressure also. The taunting of others can make us not want to stand up for the law and speak boldly about what the law is. But the mocking of others can also tempt us to stray away from the law completely. In other words we can be tempted not only to keep our mouth shut but to even walk along in the ways of the world. So the Psalmist not only prays that God would make him quick and bold to speak up for the law of but also that God would keep him from turning away from the law of God. As it says in *verse 51*, “*The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law.*” So we come to our third point, Living by the Precepts.

III. Living by the Precepts

First, let us note that when we follow the law of God it should not be considered some kind of chain that keeps us from doing what we want. Rather, the law of God should be thought of as the light to our path which keeps us in the way of freedom. Notice the positive way in which the law is described in *verse 45*, “*and I shall walk in a wide place, for I have sought your precepts.*” In other words, to seek to follow the Law of God is the best way to walk; other places in Scripture call it the narrow way (because it is difficult to stay on in our own human weakness) but here the Psalmist describes the way of God as a wide place, or as the place of true freedom we might say; a freedom which is found by seeking the laws/ “precepts” of God.

And what is included when we speak of living by the law of God? Certainly there is not only communal worship, as the Psalms emphasize in many places (think of many of the calls to worship which come from the Psalms), but also the personal devotion that is emphasized in Psalm 1 and throughout the Psalms as it is here. This is done in the night in *verse 55*, “*I remember your name in the night.*” In other words, we think on the name of the LORD and we seek to do his will at the night and at all times.

In the introduction for his commentary on Psalm 119 Charles Bridges talks about two different Pastors who would turn to Psalm 119 in times of spiritual lows. The one said that when he found it difficult to pray he would often turn to Psalm 119 and read through it slowly until the motivation to pray had been kindled again. The other said that when he was lacking in motivation for personal devotions he would often turn to Psalm 119 and start there. Indeed this Psalm is useful for turning our hearts back to God and bringing us out of those “ordinary valleys” (the Christian life can have great valleys, like the valley of the shadow of death, but it can also have day-to-day valleys of a more “ordinary” nature).

So are there times when you have no motivation for prayer or devotions? Psalm 119 is a good place to turn. It addresses many issues with individual pearls of wisdom, one does not need to be able to follow a great chain of reasoning to follow Psalm 119 and to benefit from it. In other words, as wonderful as the book of Romans and Hebrews are, there are some difficult passages within those books, there are some unbroken chains of logic which are wonderful but perhaps not the best for times of “ordinary” spiritual valleys. In times like this take a break from whatever devotions you are working through and spend some time working through Psalm 119; appreciate and meditate on a particular section or even a particular verse. Allow the language of the Psalmist to direct your thoughts in times like this.

So we have considered the mediation of verse 55 but let us look back a verse and consider the song of verse 55. We might say, even though the word day is not used in verse 54, that there is this kind of movement from verse 54 of singing the praise of God in the day to now thinking upon the LORD and remembering our God at night. These are not strict rules of course, but mediation is more natural to the quiet hours of the night and making the “statutes” of God our “song” is more naturally a day-time activity (we don’t want to sing or play loud instruments after midnight we might wake up the neighbors, so to speak).

So we can think about verse 54 and the language of making the law of God our song “*in the house.*” House in verse 54 not being the house of God, the Temple, but rather in verse 54 focused upon our own homes. And focused upon our homes on this earth even though our earthly

homes are not permanent homes, because it is called “*the house of my sojourning/pilgrimage.*” The word “**house**” is a reminder that the law of God must impact our whole life, all of our living, it must permeate our worship in God’s house, our walking in the world, and our very home in which we live.

And that word “*sojourning/pilgrimage*” is a reminder that we are not yet in a permanent home. So we are to sing songs not only in our house on this earth but also there will come a time when we sing in our permanent heavenly home (where we will no longer be sojourning).

So we can turn to **Revelation 5** for a picture of this future song in our eternal home (our non-pilgrimage home) with and among the angels. There we will we sing to Him who is not only the great Shepherd but also the sacrificial Lamb who now reigns (which Lord willing we will consider tonight).

Rev. 5:6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. ⁸ And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, **each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.** ⁹ **And they sang a new song, saying,**

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

Rev. 5:11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might
and honor and glory and blessing!”
¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,
“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”
¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Sing a new song indeed. Christ followed the law perfectly, was slain for our sakes, and someday we will sing of his praise along with the angels.

Conclusion

So do we know where our hope comes from. Do we search our own hearts and seek to follow the law of God because we know that the law of God is good and Jesus Christ followed the law perfectly for our sakes!

Are we willing to stand up boldly for that law of God? Do we speak the law of God boldly and wisely but still with conviction when others have disobeyed the law of God?

And are we willing to stand in, even to live in the law of God? To delight in making the law of God part of our everyday life? Do we look forward to not only following the law and singing of the laws and promises of God on this earth but also to singing one day with the angels in our heavenly home?

Indeed, that is the hope of the Christian. How wonderful it is to have a Psalm which shows us the beauty of the Law of God in a variety of ways and points out our hope in the Salvation of God through the perfectly obedient Jesus Christ. AMEN.

Grace United Reformed Church

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November 25, 2018

To: Rev. Ralph Pontier, Clerk of Classis Central U.S.

Rev. Joel Worries, Pastor of convening consistory, Wellsburg URC, Iowa

Consistory Report on the Sermon of Candidate Mr. Paul Freswick Delivered on November 4, 2018 at Grace United Reformed Church, Waupun Wisconsin

Dear Brothers of Classis Central U.S.:

Mr. Paul Freswick delivered this exhortation to the congregation of Jesus Christ on the text of Psalm 119:41-56. Our review of this sermon follows the basic precedent of other sermon reviews done for this Classis. This was the first sermon delivered by Paul Freswick after receiving and accepting a call from our council.

Sermon Theme: Stand in and stand up for the law of God.

Sermon Introduction: The introduction included a concise and clear summary of the context and setting of Psalm 119. The theme and points were also introduced along with a question to grab our attention and to aid in seeing the importance of this passage in our daily lives.

Exposition: The points were logically explained and taken from themes interwoven throughout these verses (41-56) of Psalm 119. There were three points: 1. *Hoping in the Word*, 2. *Speaking of the Law*, and 3. *Living by the Precepts*.

1. Hoping in the Word. Mr. Freswick gave a clear explanation of how our hope is tied to the promises of God. For this reason it was explained how the Psalmist here is looking forward to the promises of salvation fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So today our hope is based on the same reality which is now more clearly revealed.

2. Speaking of the Law. Mr. Freswick explained from the text that we are to be bold in standing up for the Word of God in all spheres: including the public square, before Kings, before teachers, and even with grandmas. A helpful supporting text for this point was taken from later in the Psalm (verses 98-100).

3. Living by the Precepts. Mr. Freswick helpfully explained what it means to not only speak about the law but to even live the law of God in our own homes. This challenge was delivered in a careful way and included comforting reflections on our eternal home which comes after this pilgrimage.

The Gospel Proclaimed: The gospel was clearly preached throughout; this included a reminder of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ (with I Peter 2 read as a support text). There was also a call to repentance and self-examination in light of God's law with an emphasis on the positive call to love God's Word and law.

Application and Conclusion: There were applications made throughout the sermon, in the conclusion this included thought provoking questions to help the congregation apply these words in their own lives. The conclusion was also Gospel driven with a restatement of the theme. We

heard many encouraging comments from the congregation and how blessed they were by this sermon.

Illustrations: Illustrations of various lengths were used throughout. They were helpful without being dominant or distracting. Mr. Freswick brought out the example that in the Psalms there are strings of pearls and that we should look for and examine each pearl.

Delivery: Mr. Freswick was in touch with the people of God and his tone was appropriate to the passage. His sermon was understandable with all our age groups.

Consistory's conclusion: The consistory of Grace United Reformed Church in Waupun Wisconsin was encouraged and grateful for this sermon and gives a wholehearted commendation for Paul Freswick to be admitted for his ordination exam and to become an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament in the URCNA.

In Christ,

Larry Van Den Berg
Clerk of Consistory