

# **Belhar Briefing**

**July, 2009**

( First CRC Seattle, which adopted the Belhar in June, 2007, provides this update of developments pertaining to the Belhar Confession.)

## **Our Reformed Synods Approve Next Steps on Belhar.**

It is with joy and thanksgiving to God that we report the actions of the Synods of the Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed Church. In early June the RCA voted by 72% to approve the Belhar Confession as a fourth standard of unity. This decision requires ratification by 2/3 of their classes, a process that will be essentially completed by March 2010.

On June 18, the CRC with a 76% vote forwarded the Belhar Confession to the churches for continued, in-depth study with a final vote for adoption to take place at the 2012 Synod. The Ecumenical Relations Committee (ERC) has been given the responsibility of leading the denomination to a fuller understanding of the Belhar. Among their other new duties assigned at Synod, they will have a very full plate of responsibilities for the next few years.

We are grateful for the strong positive votes of affirmation that took place in both denominations. It is also noteworthy that Synod elected Rev. Sheila Holmes, pastor of Northside Community CRC in Paterson, N.J., as the first African-American woman to serve as vice president. In a separate action, they instructed the Board of Trustees "to develop a statement of vision and strategy for increasing multiethnic representation within the leadership of the denomination." We are pleased that the denomination is growing in its awareness of racism within the CRC institution.

## **What's Next?**

The next question becomes: how will each denomination carry out the next steps. Maybe more importantly, how will the pastors and churches grow in their knowledge and understanding of the Belhar Confession? In the CRC, the ERC is charged with carrying out this educational process. Pray for them! This is a significant task. The second responsibility will be on the individual churches to educate their congregations. The confession is powerful. Besides helping us understand its content, applying its themes of justice, reconciliation and unity to the Canadian and American experiences will also lead us to confession and repentance of sinful attitudes and behaviors as individuals, as churches, and as a denomination.

## **"Belhar Briefing" to Continue.**

In the coming months, First Seattle CRC will continue to produce the Belhar Briefing to keep readers informed of developments and provide available resources. We will continue to post relevant links to information on our [webpage](#). (And we hope the denomination will develop a similar or even more comprehensive resource site as well). If you are aware of others interested in receiving this brief, please let us know.

## **Quoting Some Reactions to the CRC Synod Vote:**

*I am thrilled Synod approved the Belhar for consideration. The Belhar underscores the obligation of the church to stand where our God stands--with the*

***poor, vulnerable and oppressed. This is the stance the CRC needs to lead it into the future. If Synod had not approved it I would have despaired for the denomination's future. Now I have hope. (Albert Hamstra, CRC Pastor, Director of Special Projects at CRWM; Elder, Coit Community CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan.) D.T. Mile described evangelism as one beggar telling another where there is bread. In sharing the Belhar Confession world wide the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa is sharing with us a reservoir of living water. For all who thirst for unity, reconciliation, and justice, the Belhar says, come and drink of these waters. From the hands of those who have suffered much, could it be that God is inviting us to drink from the reservoir of Belhar. (Dr. Ed Mulder, General Secretary Emeritus of the RCA.)***

***I have both great joy and deep concern in my heart as I read the Belhar Confession and watch intensely to see if the Reformed community of North America will embrace its Biblical teaching. The joy I feel comes from the Lord reassuring me that He is Sovereign and that He cares for us all in a special way. The Belhar reminds us of the responsibility of every believer to reconcile the body to God through Christ by being reconciled to one another. The deep concern I have is that the professing church is great at quoting what Jesus said, but very poor at living out what Jesus did. My challenge to the North American church is that we reconsider filtering the gospel through our traditions, but rather filter our traditions through the gospel. (Clarence Presley, Pastor, CRC Word of Truth International Ministries, Seattle, Washington.)***

***It is with joy that I learned the CRC Synod is moving down the highway of reconciliation with the Belhar Confession as a beacon lighting the Scripture lamp of spiritual independence from our collective 'apart-ness' from God. We will be spiritually whole when we are One in Christ. (Fronse Smith, Elder, Faith Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan.)***

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Belhar Briefing is brought to you by the Belhar Implementation Team of First Christian Reformed Church of Seattle, Shoreline, Washington.