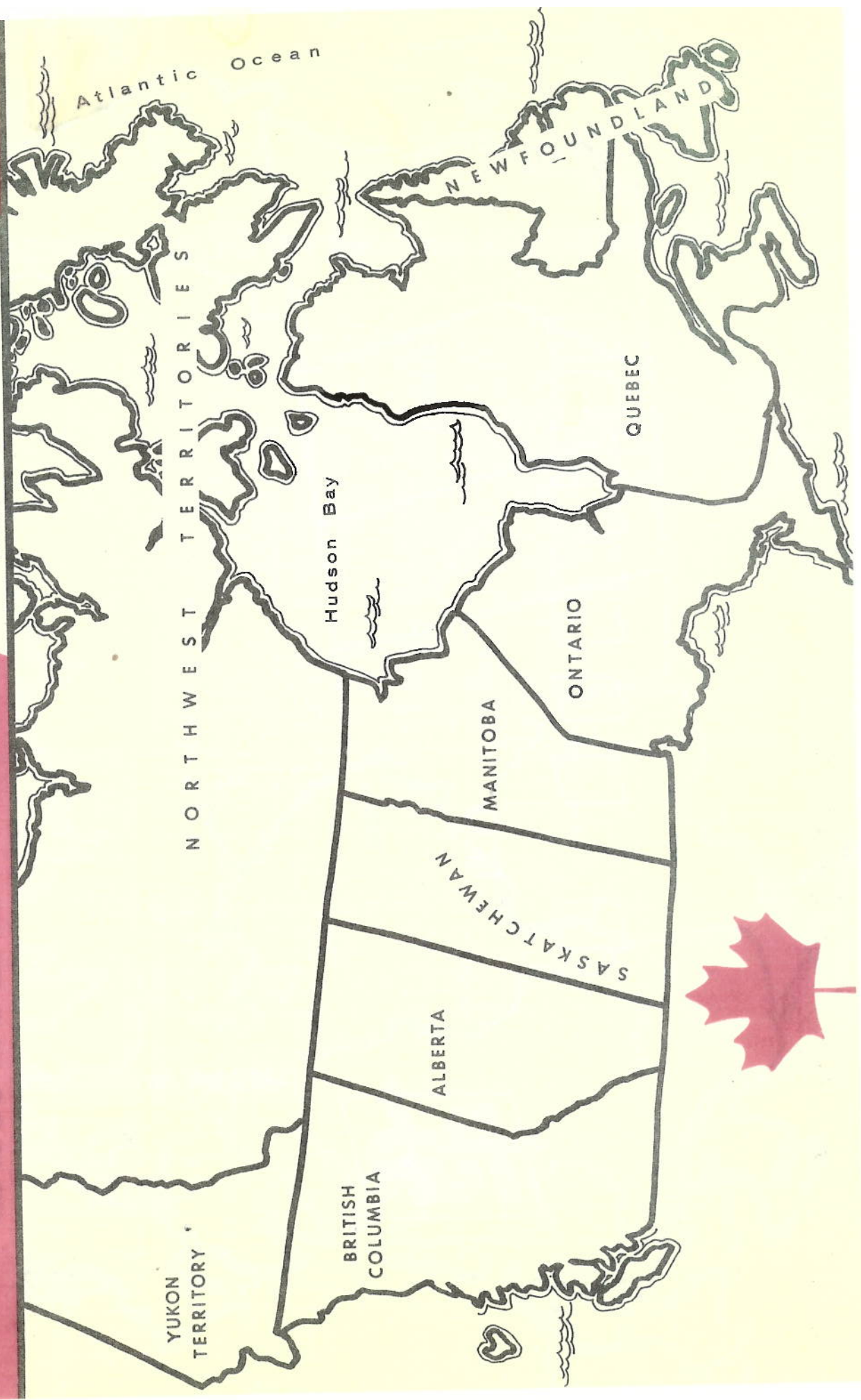


**The RCA in Canada**  
(pages 6-13)

JULY 8, 1977

# The Church Herald





# 25 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN CANADA

By John Moerman

Eighteen of Canada's 27 Reformed Churches are celebrating their 25th anniversary in 1976, 1977 or 1978. The Rev. John Moerman, who was among the immigrants who came from Holland to Canada in the late 1940s and early 1950s, has written this special report for the *Church Herald*.

Dear Sir:

Received your letter Feb. 4 and was pleased to get it, as we were anxious to know something of who was coming to work for us. I will try to answer your questions.

The house has five rooms downstairs and three upstairs. It has natural gas and water in it. There is no electricity. It is situated about 60 rods or five minutes walk from the farm. On our farm we have 180 acres. We grow corn, beans, tobacco, wheat, oats. We milk around 10 cows. We get up at 5 o'clock and are usually finished at 7 in the evening....

You will have about three days traveling on a train before you reach Chatham....

The above letter which I received in 1948 is representative of those sent to thousands of Dutch emigrants about to begin a new life in Canada. Only farmers were able to immigrate to Canada during the late '40s, though a more open policy was adopted in the early '50s.

A cry for help was directed to the editor of the *Church Herald* in 1948 on behalf of families of the *Hervormd* persuasion. Hundreds of families were

The Rev. John Moerman served four years as elder of the First Reformed Church, Chatham, Ontario. After college and seminary he served the First Reformed Church of Galt, Ontario, Emmanuel Community Reformed Church of Edmonton and the Monarch Reformed Church, Alberta. Because of illness the family presently resides at Mayerthorpe, Alberta.

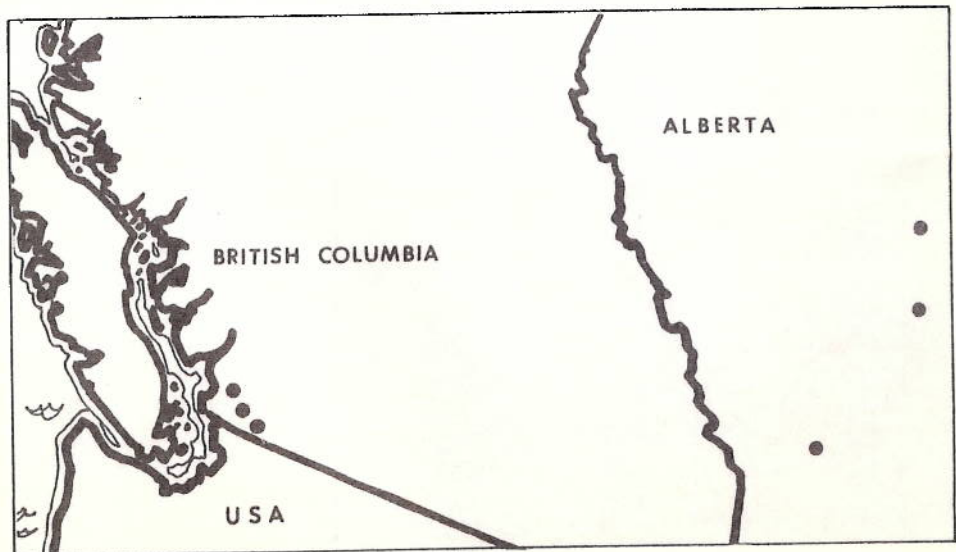
arriving, and it looked like thousands more were to follow in short succession. The urgent request for help was passed on to denominational officials.

In the mean time the Synod of our mother church, the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk*, had established an understanding with the United Church of Canada and was directing her members to join that fellowship. Two ministers from the Netherlands were sent to help the immigrants become a part of that denomination. This direction from Synod was unacceptable to the strongly evangelical immigrants. Many discussions were held and letters were sent to denominational officials in Holland. This probably explains why RCA help was so slow in coming during this crucial year.

Before this large influx of immigrants to Canada, Classis South Dakota had organized two congregations in Alberta: Monarch in 1909 and Alderson in 1912 (later known as Carlstadt, New Holland, Dog Pound, and Bottrel, in that order). Monarch's first minister, the Rev. A. Van Dyke, presented a bill to his consistory that is vastly different from any today:

Horse.....	\$37.00
Buggy Shaft.....	8.50
Coal Oil.....	.30
Halter.....	1.50
Hay.....	3.00
Thread.....	.25

In 1944, Classis Cascades organized a Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, but this congregation was disbanded two years later.





Hundreds of loyal church families arrived in the 1940s and '50s. The majority of them settled in the province of Ontario, while others traveled to the western provinces and the Maritimes. No matter where they settled, they still came together on Sunday for the preaching of the Word of God. The early groups of immigrants worshiped in homes, church basements, town halls, lodge halls, dance halls, real estate offices, YMCA buildings, school rooms and community centers.

### From Organization to Anniversary

Denominational officials of the Reformed Church in America soon worked out a policy statement for the work in Canada, and the Board of Domestic Missions swung into full gear. Pastors were called, full time and part time field men were recruited, a central office was opened in Hamilton, Ontario, homes were obtained, a Canadian Committee was established, a director was appointed and used clothes were gathered in and distributed. The generosity and sacrificial spirit of the RCA was talked about in hundreds of homes throughout Canada.

Very soon large young people's groups came into being. The church was the social and cultural center of the new life, families were large and marriages took place much later in life than they do now. In these young people's groups there was in-depth



Bible study and a challenging cultural hour. Throughout Canada regional rallies were held in churches and campgrounds. Such days and weekends were highlights in the lives of our young people.

During the years of 1949-1963 the RCA organized 32 congregations in five of Canada's 10 provinces. Twenty-one of these were in Ontario, six were in Alberta, four were in British Columbia and one each was in Manitoba and Quebec. It was the policy of the Board to involve as many classes in the Canadian work as possible. The Classes of Minnesota, Lake Erie, Ontario and Montgomery each organized one congregation; the Classes of Kalamazoo, Muskegon,

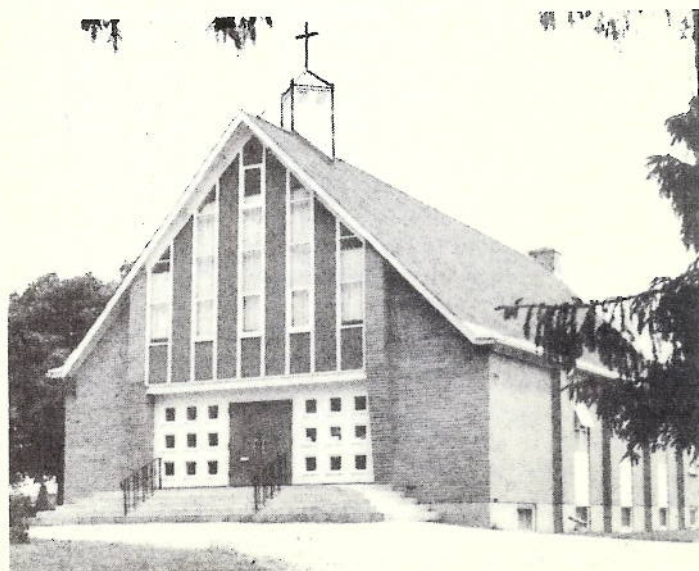
Zeeland and Passaic each organized two congregations; and the Classes of Grand Rapids, Rochester and Cascades organized five, six, and nine congregations respectively.

The new Canadian congregations had to cope with many difficult problems during our growing years: mentality differences; inexperience; ethnic background; theological persuasion; the question of principle versus pragmatism; differing opinions concerning the church's future course; adjustment to language, culture, work and environment; integration and a lack of commitment.

In the late '50s it became apparent that some accepted policies were slowly beginning to accomplish



The Ebenezer Reformed Church, Fruitland, Ontario.



The Immanuel Reformed Church, London, Ontario.

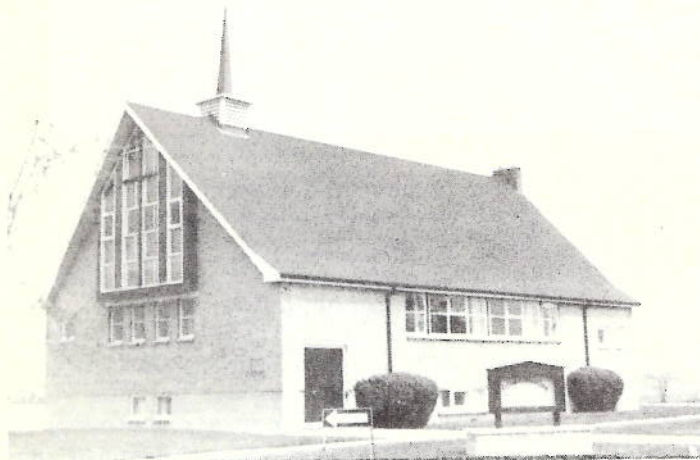




The Calgary Reformed Church, Calgary, Alberta.



The First Reformed Church, St. Catharines, Ontario.



The Bethel Reformed Church, Exeter, Ontario.



Campers frolic near the dining hall at Camp Shalom.

unhappy results. For example, having 21 churches in Ontario belonging to nine different classes in the USA did little to foster unity. Some leaders felt that we should undertake steps leading to the organization of a Classis of Ontario, while others were diametrically opposed.

While these views were being discussed at our consistorial union meetings, something else began to surface concerning which few local leaders had much knowledge; namely, the old policy statement drawn up during the beginning of the RCA's ministry in Canada. One section read: "When these settlers have become established and acclimated to the country and language, they will be given the opportunity to unite with other denominations or continue as Reformed churches." This sparked considerable unrest and debate. Some leaders saw it as an opportunity to join another denomination, while others interpreted this sentence as a letdown to our members.

In order to settle the issue, our churches were given the opportunity

to express their convictions at a 1959 workshop in Hamilton, Ontario. At this workshop there was an overwhelming determination to remain part of the RCA's ministry. A policy change statement was adopted nearly unanimously: "It shall be the policy of the Board to encourage all Dutch immigrants to be loyal to the support of the RCA and assist in the establishment of RCA churches in Canada." Also, it was determined to study the feasibility of organizing a classis of Ontario and to express the immigrants' deep appreciation for the RCA's sacrificial work in their behalf. In the fall of 1962 the Synod of Michigan organized the new Classis of Ontario.

### Important Data

In 1964 the total baptized membership of the Canadian Reformed churches was 7,813, and in 1970 it was 8,113, a four percent increase. In 1976 there were 7,585 members, a six percent decrease. The reasons for this decrease is to be found in a number of factors: disbandment of churches, amalgamation, transfer of charismatic

members and, above all, the ever-decreasing size of families.

In 1964 the annual per family giving was \$177 in our Canadian churches. In 1970 this figure increased to \$264 per family. In 1976 this average jumped to \$493 per year as compared to the overall RCA average of \$428.

The percentage of the total giving to missions in 1964 was 10 percent, or \$18 per family. In 1970 the figure was 12 percent (\$33), and in 1976 it was 13 percent (\$63). In the entire RCA the percentage of giving towards missions was 16 percent (\$67) in 1976.

The number of families in the Canadian churches have been increasing steadily: 1,821 in 1964, 1,956 in 1970 and 2,057 in 1976.

In 1964, \$33,501 was contributed to RCA missions; in 1970, \$64,911; and in 1976, \$130,475.

Presently, our baptized membership is as follows: seven congregations with a membership of 200 or less; seven with 200-300; eight with 300-400; two with 400-500; one with 500-600; and one with 600-700.



## Points of Interest

The ethnic background represented in our churches is as follows: Ukrainian, Indian, Indonesian, American, Scottish, English, Dutch, Irish, French, German, Polish, Finnish, Hungarian and Swiss.

All congregations have lay leaders who in time of emergency are able to take charge of an entire service. A third of these men write their own messages.

Elders do a lion's share of the visitation program. In some congregations they are assisted by deacons, members at large or members of the evangelism committee, thereby freeing the pastor for other much-needed labors and services.

All congregations follow closely the church year. More than half of our churches hold Ascension Day services, some of them in combination with local Christian Reformed churches.

Other special days to which our churches closely adhere are Youth Sunday, Day of Prayer for Crops and Industry and Reformation Day.

Again, some of these services are in conjunction with Christian Reformed congregations.

The preaching is approximately 60 percent textual-expository, 30 percent evangelistic and 10 percent topical.

Our membership is made up of 38 percent tradespeople, 30 percent laborers and 17 percent businessmen, with the remainder being almost equally divided between professional and retired members.

The majority of congregations have had or now have one or more persons of non-Dutch background serving on consistory. The average age of consistory members is 41 years.

Nearly all congregations have a 100 percent subscription to the monthly magazine *Pioneer*, while about 50 percent carry the *Church Herald* family plan. The majority of members believe that there is a definite place for a Canadian Reformed Church magazine, while others believe that the answer lies in a 100 percent subscription to both papers. No doubt the kind of ministry local churches will be



engaged in will become the determining factor as to which paper will serve the purpose best.

During the last five years all but a few churches have been able to meet their inflationary budgets.

With the exception of our newest church and a few congregations engaged in a staff type of ministry, all of our Canadian churches are self-supporting.

## The Reformed Churches in Canada

Year Organized	Church	Pastor	Active Communicants
1909	Monarch Reformed Church, Monarch, Alberta	The Rev. Ernest Doyle	81
1949	First Reformed Church, Chatham, Ontario	The Rev. Jon Van Oostveen	155
1949	First Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario	The Rev. Peter Yff	297
1950	Bethel Reformed Church, Brantford, Ontario	Vacant	121
1950	First Reformed Church, Harriston, Ontario	Vacant	82
1951	First Reformed Church, Brockville, Ontario	Vacant	58
1951	First Reformed Church, St. Catharines, Ontario	The Rev. John Strik	260
1951	Maranatha Reformed Church, Wainfleet, Ontario	The Rev. Wallace Stoepker	185
1951	Emmanuel Reformed Church, Woodstock, Ontario	The Rev. Cornelius Bons	187
1952	Drayton Reformed Church, Drayton, Ontario	The Rev. John Schriel	174
1952	Emmanuel Community Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta	The Rev. Arthur Zielstra	223
1952	Bethel Reformed Church, Exeter, Ontario	The Rev. Hendrick Van Essen	138
1952	Ebenezer Reformed Church, Stoney Creek, Ontario	The Rev. William Kroon	211
1952	Immanuel Reformed Church, London, Ontario	The Rev. Clifford Turkstra	114
1952	Emmanuel Reformed Church, Whitby, Ontario	The Rev. Louis Harvey	178
1953	Calgary Reformed Church, Calgary, Alberta	The Rev. Eric Schulze	148
1953	Elmwood Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba	The Rev. Siebrand Wilts	57
1953	Guelph Reformed Church, Guelph, Ontario	The Rev. Harvey Van Farowe	141
1953	Hope Reformed Church, Vancouver, British, Columbia	The Rev. John Opmeer	146
		The Rev. Murray Moerman	
1955	Faith Reformed Church, Leamington, Ontario	The Rev. Peter DeJong	61
1956	Bethel Reformed Church, Abbotsford, British Columbia	The Rev. LeRoy Sandee	87
1956	First Reformed Church, Cambridge, Ontario	The Rev. William Vankerkhoven	73
1956	Ebenezer Reformed Church, Mississauga, Ontario	The Rev. Richard Westra	114
1958	Grace Reformed Church, Whalley, British Columbia	The Rev. Willem VanDenBerg	84
1959	Barrle Reformed Church, Barrle, Ontario	The Rev. Jack Ritsema	26
1960	Maple Leaf Reformed Church, Toronto, Ontario	The Rev. Roeland Hartmans	170
1963	Maranatha Reformed Church, Pierrefonds, Quebec	The Rev. Cuyler Thayer	47



The most isolated churches are Pierre Fonds (Montreal), Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the three Alberta churches. They find themselves separated by 500, 1,200, and 800 miles respectively from their classes' center of activities.

The majority of pastors are still able to preach fluently in the Dutch language. Two churches have four services per month in Dutch, two have two services per month, and three churches have one service per month in Dutch. The remaining churches have all of their services in the English language.

Three churches are presently vacant.

### Forward in Faith

In May of 1969 Classis Ontario purchased a 165-acre farm and developed the property into Camp Shalom. A conference hall was built with a seating capacity of 400 and ample sleeping accommodation for campers and counselors. The Rev. John Drost has been appointed full-time camp director. The classis plans to strengthen the churches' ministry by developing additional facilities for family trailers and tents, with access to resource materials for consistories, organizations, young people and families.



The Maranatha Reformed Church, Wainfleet, Ontario.

In 1973 members of the Hope Reformed Church of Vancouver, British Columbia, purchased property in one of the fast-growing areas of their city. Body life services, a singles ministry, gym nights, potluck suppers and membership classes make up part of its outreach ministry. This group has the highest percentage of professional people of all of our churches. Many look upon the work as a pilot program of church extension in Canada.

The Emmanuel Community Reformed Church of Edmonton, Alberta, has recently embarked upon a staff ministry. Other churches are seriously considering such a possibility as well. Serious thought is also given by some churches to relocate or begin new work in some other areas of our sprawling cities.

More and more churches are organizing Bible study groups. Some are held on Sunday, others during the week and some even during the daytime.

Most evangelism is done by the pastor, the evangelism committee members or by a few members of young couples' and young peoples' groups. Slowly this work is being organized on a wider basis, involving more members in the training program. Reaching out and winning

people for Christ is difficult by an standard, but it is even more so for churches with a strong ethnic background. It is encouraging that more members accept the fact that evangelism is not an option but a mandate from our Lord himself.

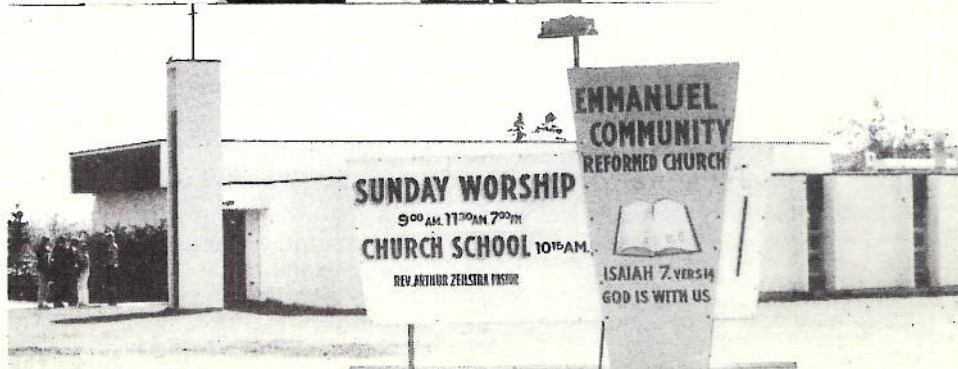
Our retired people are moving forward in faith too. "Golden age" groups are springing up throughout our churches. These organizations are providing service to the lonely and ill.

In 1974 the Canadian Council of Reformed Churches (CCRC) was organized. Through this venture of faith churches endeavor "to establish a unified presence in the Dominion of Canada, accept the calling and affirm the need of mutual consultation, supportive fellowship and joint programming" (Preamble of Constitution). Since the central office in Hamilton is now closed, immigrant work and preparing the *Pioneer* is part of the Council's responsibility. The administration is carried out from the offices of First Reformed, Hamilton, Ontario, our largest Canadian congregation.

For a number of years Canadian members have been looking for a distinct type of Canadian mission project. On request of the CCRC the General Program Council of the RCA has agreed to accept a \$12,000 share



The Canadian Reformed Churches have a \$12,000 missionary share in LAMP, the Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots. Their contributions will equip this plane with pontoons for summer service to isolated settlements in northern Canada.



The Emmanuel Community Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta.



of mission work to people living in sparsely-settled areas of Canada's north. The mission is called LAMP (Lutheran Association of Missionaries and Pilots). Our share will equip one of the planes with pontoons for landing this summer on the numerous northern lakes. We have also joined LAMP by looking for Reformed Church members who will commit themselves to a personal ministry in the north, supporting themselves in their trade or profession. LAMP assists such Christians in their effort to find employment and uses their work and relationships to share Christ in a meaningful way.

It is gratifying and encouraging to see an increasing number of second generation members assume roles of leadership within congregations, classes and synods. Also, more than two dozen of these members have entered full-time Christian service. In-

deed, the involvement of an increasing number of these second-generation members is another measuring stick whereby we are to judge the effectiveness of our ministry in Canada.

### What of the Future?

While the future of all things is totally in God's hand, the holy Scriptures tell us that wholehearted commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ is the basic answer to the above question. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Only as this happens will growth in knowledge and service take place. If Jesus' ministry was powerless in his hometown because of unbelief, shall we assume that today's half-heartedness will fare differently?

A number of our leaders have expressed concern about lack of congregational involvement in the program of outreach, Sunday desecration, materialism, lack of respect for authority, moral breakdown within society, spiritual indifference within the community and lack of stewardship responsibilities. There is much debate about the charismatic phenomena and closer relationships with others Canadian denominations. Only full commitment in Jesus Christ will enable us to effectively deal with these difficulties and challenges.

It is my personal conviction that our congregations find themselves at a fork in the road. They can either embark on a new and fuller ministry or take a route that will lead to decline over the years.

For many years our church aims and goals were written within the hearts and minds of a few local leaders. This too must change. Aims and goals are to be examined, shared and discussed. The future will be better and brighter when commitment and competence join hands.

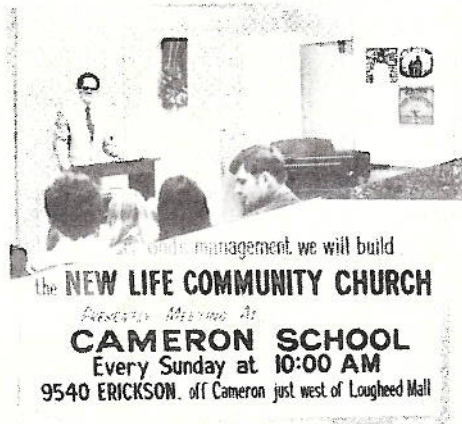
### Tribute of Gratitude

The RCA has proved to be a special blessing in the lives of hundreds of immigrant families—those who have come to the faith in Jesus Christ through her ministry and who now want others to know him too. Again and again these members have said, "If it was not for the Reformed Church, we would not be what we are today."

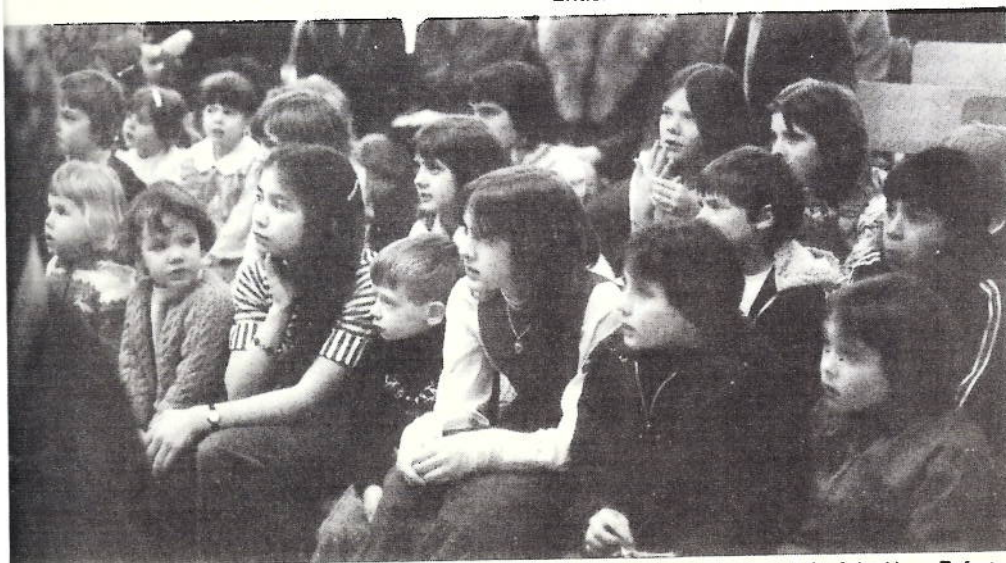
Indelibly written upon many hearts and minds are the labors of scores of dedicated people who sacrificially served the immigrants in their spiritual and material needs. Some of these people have served for a short time, others for long years. Most of these servants lived and labored in Canada, some later returning to the land from which they came. Others never lived on Canadian soil; yet their sacrificial labors on behalf of the RCA's Canadian work has been manifold. We also pay tribute to those who are now with their Redeemer and Lord. Scores of others came as immigrants themselves, and many are still actively engaged in their labors for the Lord. The total services of all are known to him who is the indisputable head of the Church. ✠



The Guelph Reformed Church, Guelph, Ontario.



The New Life Community Church, Vancouver, British Columbia.



Children are at rapt attention at the New Life Community Church, an outreach work of the Hope Reformed Church of Vancouver, British Columbia.