

***A Spiritual House Preserved: A Century in the River's Bend*** edited by Calvin Kalsbeek. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2016. Pp. 752. [Reviewed by Jay Kalsbeek]

Christ builds his church. That can be seen throughout scripture from the birth of Seth to the Apostle Paul's mission work. It is also evident throughout history as the church spreads worldwide. Christ uses weakest means for the spread of the gospel. Christ even uses wicked men and persecution to fulfill his work. History is loaded with examples.

Christ has built his church here in the United States and there is evidence that that church is being built in Africa and Asia as well. One small remnant is seen in our own Protestant Reformed denomination that has existed for the last century. And in that small denomination we see Christ building and maintaining his church in one small congregation, Hope Protestant Reformed Church.

"Geography serves history. This principle of a Reformed understanding of geography underscores the truth that God in his inscrutable wisdom designed the creation in such a way that it would further the cause of his kingdom, as that cause is realized throughout history. The geography of the land of Canaan demonstrates in a powerful way how God's purpose in the gathering, preserving, and defending of his Old Testament Church was served by it." So says the editor in his epilogue page 677.

Hope's beginning was a direct result of its location. The Grand River was a formidable obstacle for the people living on the Walker side of it. A ferry was their only means of crossing and then that was discontinued in 1914. A trip all the way to Grand Rapids was difficult especially during the cold west Michigan winters. The solution for those trapped by the Grand River and their distance from Grand Rapids was to begin their own church.

The first section of *A Spiritual House Preserved* gives a brief history of Hope's beginning in the river's bend. How and why are two important questions that are answered. The brief history continues to be explained through the men who pastored this small congregation and who took it through the two noteworthy controversies of the Protestant Reformed denomination; the controversy of 1924 and then again of 1953. The history is given further depth as the former pastors give their perspectives of their time spent serving the Hope congregation. Following this are the oral accounts with long time members and former members who bring a unique and personal viewpoint to the history of Hope church. The section ends with the memories of those who watched and experienced the tornado of 1956.

The second section gives a lasting foundation and the spiritual principles upon which Hope was built. Much of this section is mirrored in the way many churches of the Protestant Reformed denomination are built and raised up. The foundation is Christ and the spiritual principles require sound preaching, faithful officebearers, and honoring Christ Jesus. All three of these elements make up sound worship and this is developed in chapter 10. Sound worship includes diligently frequenting the house of the Lord. It includes the regulative principle of worship and the inclusion of children during the worship service. Sound worship requires distinctive and polemic preaching and the administration of the sacraments. To go along with sound worship and a church built upon the foundation of Christ alone, comes the responsibilities of membership and the privileges gained by that membership.

The third section gives evidence of God's blessings as seen through out the one hundred year history of Hope. From the beginning, there was communion and fellowship and because of this the various societies were developed for the study of scripture and the progression of knowledge in God's word. God also used Hope and its focus of sound worship to raise up qualified men for the gospel ministry. In this way, Hope has served the entire Protestant Reformed denomination. But Hope has seen its share of teachers as well. And Hope was used by God for covenant, distinctive education as seen by Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School that sits nearby the edifice of Hope Church. Included in this section was the development of daughter congregations as Hope swelled in size and was unable to find the necessary room for its many congregants. And finally, this spiritual house hosted seven Young People's conventions throughout its brief one hundred year history.

I found this book to be fascinating. I spent much time pouring over the map of Walker and the map of Talmadge on the front insert of the cover trying to find exactly where Hope Church was located. I am familiar with the area but had to access Google maps to help me. Then when reading the first chapter, I found that maps were included to help the reader see exactly where the bend in the Grand River was and the location of Hope Church.

I have never been a member of Hope but have close family members that are members there. I have attended services there and I attended Covenant Christian High School which is just down the road from Hope Church, so this history holds special interest for me. Even though I have never been a member, I am honored to be included in this history (see picture, page 220). I have attended weddings at Hope Church and several funerals, that of a close friend and classmate, Rosy Rau; and that of my grandfather, a longtime member of Hope Church.

I enjoyed the three accounts of the memories of the great tornado that swept through the area. I must admit that Prof. Englesma's account carried me along on a wave of emotion. I didn't just read about it, I experienced it! The terror, the disbelief, and even the humor that God spared the Vista-Drive-in Theater and the "beer-garden," two places that obviously should have been destroyed never to be seen again. The closest I can get to relating to this is the tornado that struck the northern Colorado town of Windsor in 2008. I didn't witness the tornado but I did see the aftermath and the swath of destruction left in its wake. The destruction in Standale could be no different.

I read with interest the second section of this book and couldn't help but compare the aspects of worship that Hope does with the way it is done in my own congregation. The similarities are many and the differences few. Hope requires prelude, offertory, and postlude to be worshipful and maintains the principle that only Psalter numbers be played at this time, something that is not done in my church. Also, with respect to the reciting of the Apostle's Creed, we sit down for this while Hope congregants remain standing. The beauty of attending a Protestant Reformed church service is that almost without exception the order of worship is the same. From Redlands, to Lynden to Pittsburgh the order in which the services are conducted remain consistent. The editor and writers of *A Spiritual House Preserved* give good grounds for their practices and policies in reformed worship services, much of which can be applied to each individual congregation as well.

Not only did I find myself comparing the aspects of worship I also compared the society life in Hope's congregation with the society life in mine. Of interest to me was the use of an after-recess discussion, something that seems to have fallen by the wayside. In connection with this, there was one after-recess that I would have liked to have attended in particular (page 520) on April 28, 1959. This is the one where 'Marilyn Dykstra took the stand against smoking, and Ray Ezinga and Gib Schimmel took the position in favor of smoking.' I believe the editor must have made a mistake in printing this. Ray Ezinga would never favor smoking!

There are many contributing writers to this book. This makes it easy to read and digest. Certain ones stand out for their clarity and style but all are easy to read. Included are the many quotes inserted throughout the text in text boxes which add emphasis and the pictures that add personality.

This book is not only a history but also a confession. It is a confession of God's powerful goodness to his people and those, in particular, found in the river's bend, south and west of Grand Rapids. It is a confession of God's continued care and blessings to one small congregation throughout one hundred years of history. It is a confession that God will continue to care for his people, not just here but throughout the world, wherever his saints are gathered. God preserves his spiritual house wherever she might be found.