



A MESSAGE OF CONFESSION AND RECONCILIATION CHRISTMAS, 2003

This year, 2003, was the 100th anniversary of Rehoboth Christian School. A century ago, in December of 1903, the first six students came to Rehoboth. Throughout this centennial year, we have celebrated the blessings and successes of the past. We also have honestly recognized the mistakes we have made as our mission has been carried out through the years. As we prepare for a new century of service to the people of this region, it is important that we acknowledge these errors and learn from the past.

In some ways, it is risky for us to be so public; but true reconciliation cannot occur unless it is preceded by confession. Such is the teaching of Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate in this season, and whose life, death, and resurrection bring hope, redemption, and reconciliation to our world.

In that spirit, this past June we engaged in a day of thoughtful reflection, confession, and testimony as part of Rehoboth's anniversary celebration. Graduates and historians alike addressed the victories and failings of our 100-year effort. The day concluded with Rev. John Rozeboom, Executive Director of Christian Reformed Home Missions, Ron Polinder, Executive Director of Rehoboth Christian School, and Rev. Stanley Jim, Regional Director of Christian Reformed Home Missions, speaking words of repentance and promise.

The Rehoboth Christian School Board and administration want to make excerpts of those remarks public, in order to share the substance of those proceedings.

Confession of a School Leader

How does one do public confession? How can I repent for a missionary from the 40's or a dorm matron from the 50's? I'm not sure, but the high priest in the Old Testament did represent the people, spoke on behalf of wayward Israelites, and offered sacrifices, even sacrifices for sins the people did not know they committed. I can repent of my sins, and hope that I am also speaking for others. Thus I dare use "we," and most often that refers to us white folks.

- We have talked too much. A lot of us white folks have a hard time keeping our mouths closed, and I am one of them. Therefore we listened too little. How many times did we dismiss comments from Native Americans, sometimes made in halting English, because we didn't think they made sense? The real problem was that we were not really listening.

- We didn't read enough, and still don't. We don't know enough about Native religion, cultural patterns, history, or tradition. Closely related, how unfortunate it is that most of us did not learn Dine' Bizaad. How we regret showing dishonor to languages other than English.

- We apologize for what were, at times, heavy-handed discipline methods. We did not understand the grace of God to the extent we could have. There is a Christian way to do discipline—we did too much the way the rest of the world does it. And we are sorry for not building more friendships with Native American people. We often have missed the joy of cross-cultural friendship.

- We must repent of our hard-hearted spirituality and our neglect of God, all the while being in a Christian institution. Fools that we are, Jesus still invites us to an abundant, full life. We went to our own well, rather than drinking of the springs of living water. Our mission was hampered by our failure to imitate and represent the Lord Jesus accurately.

- We were so caught up in the arrogance of Western culture. A cultural superiority prevailed. It oozed out of us, not always, but too often. Today, the term is institutional racism, and we acknowledge it. It took on a Dutch tint and tone at Rehoboth. Our comfortable, cloistered community has not been very good at welcoming those different from ourselves.

Our miscalculations regarding language, culture, and the boarding school has left a scar on our history and on some of our students. It was likely not intentional, but painful, nonetheless. Can you find it in your heart to forgive us? I hope you will extend us that grace!

Ron Polinder
Executive Director
Rehoboth Christian School

Confession of a Denominational Leader

I am here to acknowledge the errors of the past by the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) as it led and carried out its mission with Navajo and Zuni people over more than 100 years. Confession is a time to own up, name errors, confess real blindness, admit mistaken thinking and acting—the results of which we struggle with today. I want to name the mistakes but not blame persons or boards or a church. They all sincerely did the best they could. Our aim is to learn from past mistakes and the brokenness caused so that we may embrace today and act in the future as brothers and sisters.

The CRC came to the Southwest with the gospel wrapped in theology worked out in every detail. That theology emphasized excluding, not embracing. There was little working, praying, talking, wrestling to prize what God in his everyday grace gives us in Native American culture. As a result, the CRC mission was mistaken regarding culture.

As Christians in the Reformed tradition, we confess that God speaks in the book of nature, in culture, through the world and its people. We didn't learn enough from that book. Love of land and place, awe for God, awareness of the spirit world, love of family, clan, and tribe, attitude toward possessions—all gifts God offered in Indian culture but for the most part the Christian Reformed Church did not accept. We said, "You take our life, but we won't take yours."

Further, a confession about leadership. "Who gets to drive?" In the past, the CRC mission essentially said, "You can ride along, but you will have to wait to drive." Despite good will, smiles, pats on the back, there is no question, in past days, who was behind the wheel. I look back and confess fear of losing control. And I confess a lack of faith to believe that we may be taught God's love and how to love in a different way.

"Perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18). Acknowledging the fear of readily accepting leadership gifts among all, I pray for enough of God's love to do much better in the future.

John Rozeboom
Executive Director
Christian Reformed Home Missions

Confession of a Native Christian Leader

Reconciliation is a word that calls the giver and receiver to act out of the heart. It literally means "to exchange, to bring into a changed relationship." Reconciliation takes place only if there is brokenness. Broken relationships call for reconciliation.

As I reflect on the multicultural communities in which we live, there is a real sense of hurt that is felt by the indigenous people. Relationships are sometimes strained between the people groups that we represent. Living in harmony with one another seems so near, yet far away from us.

The Rehoboth Christian School community has seen and felt these hurts, and their effects still linger. The relationship between this Christian institution and the surrounding communities that it serves has been strained at times.

We, the indigenous people, may want to hold this institution responsible for the rest of our life's journey, but it only does more damage. But how does one move beyond this attitude?

Reconciliation then comes into the picture. It requires confession on both sides. Yes, we, the indigenous, people can recite all the wrong done to us, but we also need to confess the bitter roots of sin in our hearts to Anglo people. You see, hurt goes both ways. It affects both sides.

Forgive us for talking about you and calling you names behind your backs. It was often safer for us to do that.

Forgive us for being so silent. When hard issues come, we tend to go deep within ourselves and never come out. We should have been bolder to help you understand our way of life.

Forgive us for the many times we have given up. We have said, "They don't understand us." We did not want to come to your level of understanding, so we gave up. We pitted ourselves against you, and the terms "we" and "they" became our everyday language.

I am sure that I did not fully name how we have wronged our Anglo people, or dare I say, relatives, for we are all made in the image of God.

In reconciliation, confession alone is not the end. A commitment to sustaining a lifelong changed relationship is key to living in harmony.

We must leave the sins we confess at the foot of the cross. Let us not return to them. Rather, we must move forward as a forgiven people, bearing the image of Christ.

Stanley Jim
Regional Director
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As we close our first 100 years, we do so in the spirit of confession. We are also grateful for the hundreds of students who attended Rehoboth and received a quality Christian education. Numerous graduates have asked, "Where would I be without my Rehoboth education?" We honor them for their accomplishments in our local community and across the nation.

Now we face a new century and we invite the entire community to join with us! We do so with enthusiasm, anticipation, and thanksgiving. Rehoboth Christian School is a vital institution to our region. Our graduates are providing leadership in the church, medicine, politics, education, engineering, and many other fields. Thus, we eagerly plan for the future. We look forward to doing an even better job of serving the Native American and Gallup communities.

We want to make some promises toward that end:

- We will work hard to teach Southwest Studies and the Navajo and Spanish languages.
- We will aggressively look to balance our staff with highly qualified Native and minority teachers and support staff.
- We will make our community comfortable, welcoming, and diverse.
- We will build stronger bridges and friendships with the Gallup and Native American communities and the churches that send us their children.
- We will pray that we may live up to our motto: *Vigorously Academic, Beautifully Diverse, Thoroughly Christian.*

In the Spirit of Christian unity, the Rehoboth Christian School Board and administration, composed of Native American, Anglo, Hispanic, and other minority parents and graduates, now moves forward with confidence. We have looked at the past, but we will not dwell there. We now look to the future, together! With the blessing of God, who has made room for us in a place called Rehoboth, we hope to flourish in this land. (Gen. 26:22)

Rehoboth Christian School Board and administration:

Margo Voltz, Vernon Long, Ann Miller, Harry Begay, Randy Freeland, Kim Kamps, Thomas Roskamp, Perry Benally, Jerry Cronin, Gloria Lee, Vickie Olson, Karen Schell, Natasha Hanley, Ron Polinder, Ron Donkersloot, Tim Stuart, Carol Bremer-Bennett, Jim Holwerda