

## **From the Pastor's Desk 1980-1989**

### **Shaking Hands**

Do you still remember when the elder shook the hand of the minister before he entered the pulpit and after the end of the service? Was it just a matter of politeness towards the minister? No it was a gesture with deep meaning. It was part to the liturgy. The shaking of hands before entering the pulpit signified that the consistory gave the pastor the right to preach the word. The minister is not on his own. He opens the word under the auspices and supervision of the consistory. After the service, an elder shakes the minister's hand again; though there have been occasions that the elder has refused to do so. Why? The elder disapproves of the sermon, Does this mean that the consistory has to approve every word a minister says in his sermon? Is there no freedom of ecclesiastical exegesis of Scripture? As Reformed people we don't have an approved ecclesiastical exegesis. It is quite possible that a minister may have a different way of looking at a text than some of the consistory members. And this will often be the case with members in the pew. There is always a great measure of freedom. However freedom is not license. A minister is bound by his commitment to the confessions. In the preaching of the Word the pastor is carrying out his God given office. As Christ's servant he stands before the congregation but the task has been given by the Lord through the congregation, represented by the office bearers. With the hand shake after the end of the service, the elder expresses that the minister has fulfilled his mandate. The Word has been proclaimed. So the handshake was more than a simple gesture of politeness. It is rich in symbolic meaning. The congregation witnesses that the preaching of the Word is not a private affair, Even the pulpit is surrounded with a fence of discipline. The pulpit is not for riding theological hobbyhorses or for the exposition of private concerns. Do we still have the conviction that the minister, despite his weakness and his faults, opens the Word as the ambassador of Christ? We must remember together that the Reformed pulpit still has a fence around it - a fence of confessions, which must be guarded by the elders.