I thank you for the opportunity to speak at this convention. When we look about this room at the many teachers, young and old, from several different Protestant Reformed schools, our confession certainly is that God has richly blessed us. I understand that the theme of this convention has to do with the survival of our Protestant Reformed Schools. It seems to me that the survival of any educational institution of today rests in how firmly convinced the members are of the basis of their organization. I'd like to share with you what I consider to be the basis of our schools and also have you spend some time with me examining ourselves concerning our conviction that what we are doing is work for God's sake as His servants. What then is our basis?

If we were to ask some Christian and private school administrators what the key to survival of their schools is, we would receive a variety of answers, these answers depending to some extent on the purpose for the existence of these various schools. Their basis, or reasons for existence, are many, but fall under especially the following categories—educational reform, social and moral reform, and a desire to evangelize.

A large number of schools have arisen in recent years as a protest against the weaknesses that have been present in the public school systems of our country for years, but have especially shown themselves in recent times. These schools have
begun, for example, in protest against the debilitating effect of progressive education upon the public schools around us. Those who began these schools saw that so much emphasis had been placed on the ungraded classroom, and on the desire that students be allowed to learn what they wanted to learn, at their own rate, that in most school systems in our country a student could graduate after having completed the very minimum of requirements. I know of one high school system in a prosperous city in the west that required the following for graduation—three years of English and one year of government. All the rest of the students' courses were electives. The situation in Michigan was so bad about four years ago, that the University of Michigan had to institute a reading test for those who sought admission because they found that many of those applying for admission had only mastered reading skills of the 3rd to 5th grade level. I'm sure that Michigan is not alone in this regard. Since Federal laws requiring admission of a certain number of minorities in order to qualify for federal aid, universities and colleges are complaining that in order to comply they've had to lower their standards to let in these poorly prepared minorities, and at the same time turn away qualified applicants. They were appalled at the apparent lack of preparedness for college. Many private academies and schools, then, have arisen in protest against this and have called for educational reform, spurred on by books like *Why Johnny Can't Read*.

Probably more important in formation of these schools were the moral evils present in the public schools of our day. Not surprisingly, the pleasure seeking craze of our generation has infiltrated the public schools. These concerned parents saw that in many schools authority was flaunted, and immorality of every sort was even condoned. They recognized that these schools were anti-God and, in refusing the Bible and prayer, were at the same time preaching and teaching a new morality, which would work to corrupt American youth. So to set up schools for moral and social reform they dedicated their schools to God by putting the Bible and prayer back in the schools; to home, by placing much emphasis on authority and moral instruction; and to country, by speaking against communism and advocating reform in government.

Their idea is that graduates who have learned authority and responsibility instilled in them by the private school will be able to go out into society and turn it around. We see this in many of the Baptist Academies and in those controlled by the A.A.C.S.,
where a better kingdom here on earth is sought.

The key to survival, as far as these schools are concerned, varies. Perhaps the key for some of them is federal aid in the form of direct aid or a tuition-voucher system. They argue that under the Bill of Rights they should be allowed to choose the place they can send their children to school, and deserve a piece of the tax pie to pay for their schools. They, therefore, along with the Catholics, lobby for massive federal grants. Some of these schools resist federal aid and instead devote much energy to the promotion and recruitment of new students and supporters. They speak of a “new direction” in education, of a “lasting gift” to your child, and of a generation who will reform and redirect a decadent society. If you would ask many of these people today the purpose or basis of their schools, they would probably not be able to give a clear answer. Yet most of them would probably not give up their schools. They unquestioningly figure that to maintain their school is their duty. It has become a way of life with them, or a status symbol, or a form of protest against the existing order.

Which brings us to our own schools. Our history is relatively young, beginning, I believe, in Redlands, California with a one-room school in about 1940. Now today, forty years later, we have eleven schools with an enrollment of about 1000 students (not large compared to most other school systems, but a worthy beginning, nevertheless). In a certain sense we can say we have survived those early years and are maturing. A convention here in Iowa with all of us here present is evidence that our endeavor is real. But I believe our beginnings have been different from other Christian schools. In most cases, we weren’t protesting poor academic standards, we certainly weren’t affected by integration laws. Our basis was not to evangelize as the Baptists, or to catechize as the Roman Catholics. But our beginnings were due to a conviction that our basis and reason for education was different from the schools out of which we took our children. Our parents realized that God had blessed, especially the P.R. Church, with an understanding of a basis, a covenant basis, and our fathers were convinced that basis was important enough to warrant our own schools, and for that matter our own teacher-training schools. There was much call for that, you know, in the early years of our history. Groups of concerned parents in these areas of the U.S. joined forces to erect and finance school buildings and hire P.R. teachers so that this covenantal idea of education could be espoused. What was that basis which
convinced our forefathers that our own schools were vitally necessary?

It wasn’t, as I have earlier stated, due to a desire for educational or social and moral reform. It was a covenant basis. To summarize, allow me to use the main points which Rev. Engelsma uses in his book *Reformed Education* when he discusses the basis.

1. God is our God, and we are his friend-servants. We have a calling to love Jehovah our God, serve Him and glorify Him. Scriptural basis for this can be found in Psalm 19:8-10 & 14, “The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” And we have Ecclesiastes 12:13, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”

2. God’s covenant extends beyond us his children to encompass the entire creation of God. Therefore, in the schools, education in all facets of creation is important.

3. God has established His covenant with Christ, not only as Head of the elect church, but as Head of creation. Christ is the One by Whom and for Whom all things were created, and by Whom all things consist. God’s covenant is with the earth and every living creature. According to Rev. Engelsma, page 43, “This is one solid reason why a Reformed man cannot live a life of the renunciation of the created world and of the cultivation of his soul. Not only is the creation the sphere of operation for God’s love and salvation of us and the sphere of operation for our love and service of God, but also there is a relation between God and the creation. God knows and loves His creation, and the creation knows and loves its God—not apart from man, but through the man, Jesus Christ.”

4. God graciously establishes His covenant with *believers* and their children, in the line of continued generations.

This then is the basis and Scripture commands that we are to teach our children concerning this covenant basis. First from
Deuteronomy 6:6-9 which our Chairman read. "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." We read too in Ephesians 6:4, "And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Psalm 78:1-4 also instructs us concerning our responsibility to teach our children. "Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done."

Although in the early years the basis for our schools may not have been expressed in exactly the same way, I believe these four points were understood clearly by those early supporters, perhaps better than they are today.

Rev. Engelsma continues on page 14 in speaking of covenant parents, "On the one hand, this instruction of their children is one of the outstanding covenant responsibilities of parents, i.e., one aspect of their calling as God's friend-servants to love, serve, and glorify God. On the other hand, it is the means by which God brings the reborn covenant child to spiritual maturity, to a developed man or woman of God, capable of a life of good works."

"The Christian school," he continues, "is an association of believing parents carrying out this calling of God to rear the children, through a like-minded believer who is both called of God to this vital task and capable of the instruction that peculiarly pertains to the school."

Our parents were convinced that the Christian school, and more particularly our Protestant Reformed schools were a demand of the covenant. If we look back at the four points of Rev. Engelsma concerning the basis, it is not difficult to understand why Protestant Reformed parents were convinced that we should have our own schools. Regarding point #1 that we are friend-servants of our Creator and that we have a calling to love
Him—the existing Christian schools, or the public schools, whatever the case may have been—were not teaching anymore the truth of a sovereign God who created man for His glory, and loved with a particular love His chosen people. This truth had been forgotten in exchange for a God Who loves all men, and for a people whose motive to love and serve is not that God be glorified, but that somehow man though “love” can reform and redirect society.

Regarding points 2 and 3 of the basis, that God would have instruction given in the school in all facets of His creation, and that the end of all things is the glorification of the Creator though salvation of His people in Christ, our fathers saw that instruction in these truths was found sorely wanting in the existing schools. For example, many Christian schools, beginning already in the late 1950’s, were teaching Theistic Evolution, as taught by Dr. John De Vries in Calvin College, and in some cases were even propounding a doubt concerning the authenticity of the creation account of Genesis. Their motive for education was beginning to be that our children be social reformers, and that we redeem the creation for man for the sake of an earthly kingdom rather than out of love for God Who would see His own name glorified in that new heavens and new earth, through salvation of His people in Christ.

And regarding point 4 that God has established His covenant for believers and their seed in the line of continued generations, our fathers saw instead of a school whose purpose was outreach into the unbelieving community. And since God loves all men an important purpose of their institution was to evangelize and go beyond God’s covenant. The result, of course, was that students were recruited in the community, and that a sovereign God’s promises to a peculiar and particular people were hushed up so that the school could serve a broader constituency, often including children of unbelieving parents. Our fathers also saw how the tentacles of common grace all but erased the antithesis and totally clouded the scriptural idea of a cultural mandate.

Our fathers saw these evils growing and were grieved. In many cases they tried the avenue of protest, and found to their dismay that they could not even get to first base, even with appeals to Scripture and to the Confessions. They were instead accused, and are yet, of anabaptism, and of a narrow view of creation and of the covenant. They were accused, and are yet, of being separatistic and of “splitting hairs” over unimportant
issues. Our fathers were convinced that they could no longer use those schools for instruction of their children, so they set out on their own. All of us know of the zeal shown by those beloved brothers and sisters in those early years. Much financial sacrifice was necessary. In some cases bitterness arose within families because of this steadfast desire that we have our own schools. I've been privileged to have taught in a couple of these smaller schools and continue to be amazed at the unquestioned zeal and sacrifice shown by our people. Talk to people today, from any of our smaller, struggling schools and you will see the certainty, the conviction, that the cause of P.R. education is all important.

The early years for P.R. education in the Grand Rapids area were exciting ones. Everyone was involved, including the Theological School Committee which was called upon for help. From a 1950 report to the Adams St. P.R. School society in Grand Rapids, we read the following: "The Theological School Committee has been contacted, and they have promised that they will do what they can toward giving the necessary normal training for our teachers and prospective teachers, so that our school may really be a school for Protestant Reformed education, because that of course is our one aim and purpose. The Teachers' Club in the meantime is doing what it can to give this specific training to our teachers." Our fathers desired a unity of instruction as is evident by the conclusion of that same 1950 report: "...the year that lies before us undoubtedly will be of greater importance still, when the doors of our school will be opened to receive our children, and we will have a complete unity of instruction in the home, in the school, and in the church."

A 1953 report to the Adams St. Society reveals that the Board engaged Rev. H. Veldman to write notes to "interpret history in the light of the Holy Scriptures in a thoroughly Reformed manner."

From the 1956 report to the Adams St. School society, we have the following:

"During the past year the society's mandate to the board...has been continually before us and we have mutually endeavored to discharge that responsibility in the fear of the Lord and in total dependence upon His mercy and sustaining grace. As we labored together in this blessed task of providing the opportunity to our children of obtaining the rudiments of an education, our prayer has continued to be that we might remain faithful to the basis and the purpose of this work.
Objectively this has always pointed us to the necessity of maintaining a high regard for the most fundamental need our children can have, which is to learn from those that go before, the meaning and obligation all believers have to glorify our Creator, our Covenant God, and to serve Him only. It is our task in this Protestant Reformed Christian School to unfold to our children, in their formative years, a beginning measure of all the wonders of this universe, with its myriad array of arts and sciences in such a way that the purpose and meaning of it all is clearly shown to be God's own revelation of Himself to His church, that He alone might be praised and honored.

I quote these to give us a feeling for those early days in Adams Street. I'm sure that that quiet confidence and zeal was the same elsewhere, and pray that it may continue to be so. This conviction, this confidence, I believe is the key to the survival of our schools. I quote again from Rev. Engelsma's book, page 10:

"It is of utmost importance that there be knowledge among us of the basis of Christian education—and by 'knowledge' is meant the knowledge of conviction, i.e., the knowledge of faith. There is a very practical reason why parents and teachers should know the basis: the entire endeavor of Christian education depends on it! And a large endeavor it is, in terms of time, money, energy, and struggle. Especially when the going gets tough, knowledge of the basis is crucial. It is crucial for parents who must sacrifice to pay tuition. It is crucial for teachers who have heavy workloads, suffer thanklessness and criticism, and in some cases, be paid little besides. It is crucial for Boards when they wrestle with knotty problems and become involved in painful conflicts."

Even though our schools are not very old, I believe that that hearty conviction which accompanied those early years can, and has in some cases become mere tradition. 0, tradition is not all that bad, but what I am talking about is a conviction that has possibly become a tradition, so that the basis is no longer clearly in the forefront, but other things have clouded it over so that the necessity for involvement and knowledge of the basis becomes less vital and urgent. How is this seen?

1. This is seen when School Society meetings, especially of our larger schools are often attended by about half of the membership or when Parent Teacher Conferences are poorly attended. Where is that early excitement and spirit of cooperation?
2. This is seen when parents allow the teachers to take over the education of their children, and when parents see the school as a day-care center for their children to whom they as parents pay a fee for services rendered.

3. A lack of concern with that covenant basis of education is also seen when the other extreme happens—when we as teachers try to take over the schools or our own classroom and leave the parents completely out of the picture, because we say, what do they know about education. We're the educators after all. We like to keep them in their place. Especially in conferences, we use our educational jargon and fail to listen to them when they have suggestions or complaints concerning their child. We forget sometimes that we are servants, and try to be masters. I'm bothered when I see that, especially in the Grand Rapids area, the task of support for Christian schools is being put squarely into the lap of parents only. The baptismal vow through which the whole church pledged and promised to see to it that they intended to instruct these children in the fear of the Lord, now has come to be more particular, and those with school-age children are largely left to support the schools while younger parents, or those with children out of school wash their hands of the affair. And often times our School Boards, instead of educating their school society concerning this problem, will fail to actively seek new members and fail to make school projects or drives an activity that all can participate in. Perhaps a return to Board Propaganda committees is in order in this respect. I believe we can see when we look at some of our small schools, that the more in the congregation that are involved in the school, the stronger the movement for Protestant Reformed Christian education will be, not only financially, but morally and spiritually too.

4. We as teachers sometimes coast along. We don't show conviction when we fail to pray and study God's word daily to hear what God says concerning that awesome responsibility we have to instruct children in the fear of the Lord. We sometimes forget that each day the Holy Scriptures and the Confessions are to be the solid basis for all the instruction we give. When we do fail to diligently search the Scriptures daily, and use them as a basis for all our teaching, then we are, to use Rev. Engelsma's words "building the Sears Tower, but using a chicken coop for a foundation."

I believe we're running on tradition and not by conviction when we teach every year from the same moldy notes, not
bothering to update them, or rethink and re-examine the subject matter we are to teach. We should, as a matter of fact, grow, not only in our knowledge of the subject matter, but also in the ability to bring the Scriptures to bear on it. If we are stagnant, and are running on the gasses of stagnancy, then we have ourselves to blame, when interest wanes in our schools. We shouldn't forget that to be Reformed is to be constantly Reforming.

We have seen Teacher's Clubs and Seminars come and go. We can give reasons why they weren't the answer. But what are we doing today when we fail to continue actively to move forward with other study and new challenges such as continued work on P.R. textbooks or toward P.R. training for our teachers? Do we think we are at a stage in our history when we have arrived: Or have we lost our energy and decided to coast along for awhile? Or do we think we have more understanding and are wiser than those who came before us, so therefore there is no need in this area? I doubt that that is the case.

Furthermore, a conviction for the cause of P.R. education demands a unity of mind among teachers, but also in the constituency. I believe that among our constituency there are many groups with their own private interests and prejudices. Take the Grand Rapids area, for example. There have been in the past several "sectional rivalries." Hope society began and built their school prior to 1947 with little support and cooperation as far as I know from the east side of town or from the Hudsonville-Holland area. Later Hudsonville and Holland sent their children to Hope and in 1950 Adams Street completed their school. But surprisingly, even today, as in the past, there are yet some parents and even teachers who carry some kind of grudge against one of the two schools. It used to be that Hope was the "hick" school and Adams was the "city slicker" school. Then when Adams Street prospered and Hope struggled, some in Hope were envious and were calling for cooperation, meaning, I guess, that they felt Adams should share some of their prosperity with Hope. Now, when the situation, at least number wise is reversed, there are those from the east side of town who are bitter and who do not like to see the rapid growth toward the western part of the Grand Rapids metropolitan area. There are those today who claim with supposed authority that Adams St. is the place to send your children because they obviously can do a better job because of their smaller class size. Then there are those from the other side of town who wouldn't send their kids to Adams Street because it's in the "ghetto area." We can ignore these kinds of
statements when we hear them, or we can *speak up*. We should ask ourselves whether we as teachers, as leaders, are doing all we can to get rid of this type of animosity. I wonder sometimes, where our schools in the Grand Rapids area would be today if petty jealousies were put aside and all worked together at the task of educating the covenant seed. We have to understand too, that if we can't cooperate over small things now, what will happen if we are forced to work together in adversity? We are after all *not* for *schools*, for particular schools, but for P.R. education.

The story of education here in Hull and Doon is equally dismal, I think. The early years here in Iowa showed little cooperation between these two towns, but for a few exceptions. I remember about 13 or 14 years ago, when the decision was made in N.W. Iowa to build a school in Doon, not two weeks later men in Hull were complaining that since the school would be built in Doon, obviously Doon wanted nothing to do with Hull. There of course are many factors that entered in, but the fact of the matter is that *all* those interested in P.R. education were invited to those early meetings, and for some reason only some showed up. Practically speaking, maybe two schools in this area are better than one, but where is the harmony? I think in this area of the country also, too many prejudices and misunderstandings exist. I'm encouraged that in both areas this animosity is dying down, but there is much to be done as far as real unity is concerned. With a unified effort here in N.W. Iowa I can envision one school plant with a k-12 program, but separately, is that possible?

The story of the location of Covenant Christian High in G.R. involved the same type of wrangling, and to this day there are those that are bitter about that. It seems to me that if our schools are to survive we are going to have to do more than we have done in the past to bury these bones of contention for good.

Remember when you first entered the profession? I remember when I did. I had all kinds of dreams about cooperation between teacher and parent, teacher and board, teacher and staff. Although most of these dreams turned out to be true ones, there were always incidents that really discouraged me. There did not always seem to be a unity of purpose, a real dedication! We didn't always speak the same language.

Disagreements with parents over treatment of their children have occurred. Often times conferences would straighten out difficulties but sometimes both parents and I went away frustrated. Sometimes teachers and school boards seem to be adversaries instead of those working in harmony toward the
glorification of God through proper nurture of God's children. There seems to be a growing mistrust between many of the teachers and the parents and the school boards. We sometimes let ourselves lose our cool, for example, when we hear someone talking about those overpaid, underworked teachers. We then loudly proclaim our underpaid status and say a bit more than we should have. As a result the mistrust is not removed—it is maintained. It's time we learn that if we have a personal problem concerning finances we should go to the School Board and speak there. Then if we cannot in good conscience feel we can continue, maybe it's time to move on quietly rather than make louder noises. I think sometimes when we speak about the respect we deserve and the pay we should get, we end up looking to our friends much like a spoiled child asking for two peppermints instead of one. Times are going to change, and it may well be that we will be forced to sacrifice much much more than we do now. Let's work to gain added respect of the parents, rather than fight with them. We are, after all, servants for God's sake. And let's remember too that the teachers are the "publicity departments", the "symbols" of the schools. Let's have the attitude of one teacher who said recently when talking about teacher strikes in Grand Rapids—"My contract is with God!"

There are many bright spots in P.R. education. We have never had more capable and well trained teachers than we have now. The Lord is blessing us with numerical growth. We have material prosperity. In recent years Covenant, Lynden, Hull, and

"...Our schools are Christian, e.g., having to do with Christ, with Christ Jesus. They are centered around Christ! They are devoted to Christ! There is nothing there that is unrelated to Christ, or that is related in some other way than being on its knees to Him! For the message of Scripture: God glorified in Christ! Man's whole duty, according to the same Scripture, is: fear God by believing on Christ, and obey God by bowing the knee to the Lord Jesus.

Such teaching is the task of the Christian schoolteacher. It is work, hard work—by the sweat of your face. God demands it; the Boards demand it; the parents demand it. *The work of the teacher is not so much marking papers, as it is teaching Scripture thus.*" Reformed Education, p. 37, by Rev. David Engelsma
others have added teachers with full support of the societies. Hope just recently decided to go ahead with a ten room satellite school. Those of you who were at the meeting can witness to the faith in God shown by the members present. God has blessed us too with the Federation—we have our workshops, our new materials, our mini-courses. There is talk of teacher training under Protestant Reformed instructors.

But the future will not be easy for the Protestant Reformed Schools in America. Prof. H. Hanko wrote in the Sept 1, 1975 issue of the Standard Bearer (p. 469) in his article “Christian Schools and the Law” the following:

”Hence if we soberly evaluate recent trends, we ought to be able to see that storm clouds are gathering on the horizons of history, and that presently the storm will break in all its fury against the church and against our covenant schools. What ought we to do? First of all, we ought to condemn sharply such practices of the government at every opportunity. Secondly, we ought to be doubly thankful for our schools, and we ought to support them with every means at our disposal as long as the Lord gives them to us. And finally, we ought to prepare now for the evil days which are soon to come. We ought to work while it is yet day, ere the night cometh in which no man can labor.”

In a very real sense, we teachers are the schools. We can’t be content to blame parents or the school society when the conviction is not present. We are, with all that is in us, to live in the knowledge that God’s promise is sure, and with renewed zeal we can go forward in conviction of heart that His will will be done through our schools. May this Convention be an instrument through which we may be strengthened and encouraged in our work.

I close with a final quote from Reformed Education, page 88, concerning our calling as teachers:

“But it is God’s work. Here, Christian teachers and parents rest. The covenant is God’s. The covenant and the covenant promises are gracious. They depend on no man. God makes covenant children; God brings them to spiritual manhood; God works in them to will and to do the life and labor of the Kingdom. Therefore Christian teachers, like the parents in whose place we stand, we ought to work praying nothing doubting. Jehovah, God of the covenant in the Lord Jesus, save the covenant children, and glorify Thy name through them.”

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