

Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman



Facing change



Regular readers of *Christian Courier* will likely be aware that my employment situation has changed. My family and I are facing a period of uncertainty. It has hit home to

me that certainty itself is an illusion; by definition, life will never stay the same. Although we are still in the middle of this change, I thought I would share some aspects of our journey.

The first lesson I had to learn is that unwanted change involves not just one's head, but also one's emotions. During this time my wife spontaneously painted a picture entitled "Change," which illustrates a brew of feelings – including turmoil and acceptance. As an engineer I have been trained to problem-solve using rational methods (a technical approach not always appreciated by my wife). However, feelings of grief, disappointment and uncertainty are certainly part of the process too. As someone familiar with holistic Reformational thinking, this shouldn't have surprised me.

I have also discovered that unwanted change enhances one's ability to experience empathy. Never again will I respond to the news that someone has lost his or her job with a shrug of the shoulders. Although I can still only imagine what it must be like to deal with failing health and other more catastrophic changes, I now have a bit of an inkling about the nature of grief.

But change also brings a fresh opportunity to take stock

of one's life and reexamine direction and goals. Although we are sad, we are also excited about the possibility of change. I have found the wise advice of respected friends, colleagues and peers invaluable as I sort through various options and opportunities. I have also been delighted by the expressions of care and concern. Never before have I had so many free cups of good coffee over a long chat. Recently I met with a former colleague at Starbuck's and when we approached the cash register to pay we were informed that our order had already been paid for by the woman in front of us. Although I did not recognize her, I rushed to thank the woman as she was leaving. She responded that she was a former Redeemer student who wanted to show her appreciation.

Discernment and prayer

How does one discern God's will as one moves forward? By God's grace, I am evalu-

ating several possible opportunities. A trusted acquaintance gave helpful advice. He suggested that I consider four categories: gifts, temperament, passions and community. I need to start by evaluating my God-given gifts and seek areas of service where they can be employed fruitfully. Second, I need to understand my temperament, a type of self-knowledge that one learns over time. What is my predisposition and in what environments do I flourish the most? Third, what am I passionate about? In the words of Frederick Buechner, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Finally, communal considerations: what is the impact of a potential move on my wife, my children, my neighbourhood and my church? I am not just an individual; I live and work within a community of which I am only a part.

All of these considerations need to be nested in prayer. As I write this column, my wife and I are planning a retreat. We will go away for a few days to talk, read Scripture and pray about our future plans. In another moment of encouraging providence, I recently found an anonymous note in my mailbox. It contained some cash along with an unsigned note indicating that the money was for my wife and me to get away for a time of discernment. Although I am uncomfortable receiving gifts like this, the timing was impeccable and the money a token of grace. A former colleague whom I deeply respect talked about



"Change" by Carina Schuurman.

how he and his wife went away together for a time of prayer as they faced a big decision. He said that when they woke up the next morning, they both had a sense of peace about their next steps. My hope is that we will experience the same sense of peace in this process.

Finally, my personal situation has brought some remarkable "teachable moments." I shared with my class the familiar words of Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." We can't lean on our own understanding (or our jobs, income or credentials), but we all must submit to the Lord and trust him to make our paths straight, even when we aren't sure where they might lead. ➤

Derek Schuurman has worked as an engineer and as a Christian college professor. He and his wife are in the process of discerning their next steps.