

BANNER

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Jesus Christ, who with a devil, am not my own, but I have sold myself to the LORD'S DAY

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Cover: James Boldenow holding his framed copy of Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism, words that gave him comfort and assurance while his captors forced him to stand at the edge of a mass grave.

PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN HUTTENGA

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Cast Your Bread upon the Waters

IN MY CHILDHOOD I once heard a missionary cite the first verse of Ecclesiastes 11 as inspiration for his intrepid mission to some exotic locale. This is how he quoted it: “Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall return unto thee after many days.”

Truthfully I was flummoxed. Why, even in heaven’s name, would anybody toss their sandwich into the river? It wouldn’t float, so how would it ever come back? And even if that miracle occurred, what would you do with soggy bread? At that point even the dog wouldn’t eat it! And why would God want us to do such a thing?

Enter newer translations that allow the force of the original text to pop into winsome clarity: “Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return.”

Now it makes sense: Take a risk! Don’t just hoard your harvest. Your crop may go bad, local markets may dry up, and by shipping some of your crop abroad you may be able to make a tidy profit—or not. The next verse also becomes clear: “Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.” Because we are not God and can’t control nature or the economy, and because we’re never sure what will be successful, we *should* take risks, but always wisely.

As is his habit, the writer of Ecclesiastes draws practical wisdom from his investigation of the limits God has placed on us mortals. How can we live fruitful, obedient lives within the limits?

That’s good advice as we enter a new year. We have little control over what God, the devil, humanity, or happenstance will send our way in 2013. And still “we see only a reflection as in a mirror” (1 Cor. 13:12). But huddling under the bed or in the past and refusing to venture out isn’t our best option. We need to risk faith’s journeys in so many areas of our lives and do so with our eyes wide open to those scary uncertainties.

There is one certainty we can take to the bank. Immanuel will walk with us come hell or high water. Our destination is sure even if our ways of getting there aren’t.

So take the Teacher’s advice: “Sow your seed in the morning and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well” (Eccles. 11:6).

We have an even greater certainty: Whatever we invest in God’s coming kingdom in 2013, despite many, many failures, is guaranteed to yield a rich harvest. Sowing for any harvest is risky business. Every God-fearing farmer knows that. But there’s still plenty of fertile soil for the gospel out there. Sowing God’s Word will yield a bumper crop, just as it did when Jesus went out to sow (Matt. 13). Regardless of what the new year brings, let’s never neglect to do our kingdom chores and always keep our eye on the harvest.

Have a very blessed and fruitful new year. ■

We have little control over what God, the devil, humanity, or happenstance will send our way in 2013.



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Accepting the Gift

MY DAUGHTER Mariah and I wanted to take in the annual Cesar Chavez parade. The parade honors the late civil rights leader who fought for immigrants' rights in the southwestern United States. Children from the three local schools and throngs of politicians carried flags of Central and South American countries while marching up the street. We wanted a good seat to watch. We parked ourselves along a concrete stoop only a half-block from our house. We knew there would be people we'd know. As the parade snaked toward us, energy filled the air with anticipation.

About halfway through the parade, my always high and never sober friend Tom (not his real name) was coming up the street. He carried a black backpack on wheels. He wore a black T-shirt with faded words. His head was topped with a dingy brown cap with letters that were no longer readable. Tom usually stopped by my house asking me to give him money or things to sell for liquor.

In high school he'd been a golf prodigy. The top golf awards on the living room mantel of his former home—foreclosed on three years ago—had his name on them. These days Tom searches for items to get him the next drink. I knew what to expect from him on a partly sunny March day. I was pretty sure he wanted something from me.

Once he spotted me, he gave out a hearty laugh. He was thrilled to see me. I asked him how he was doing. He said it was a good day and drinking whiskey was here to stay. He told me that he had something for me. Then he reached into his backpack and pulled out four things that made me laugh—and ponder anew.

He gave me a petite brown and red dress. Brown was never my color, and my wife will not take it, knowing who I got it from. Next he handed me an old tire gauge—wonderful for those times I need to let a little air out of my ego (and tires as well). Then he gave me a solar calculator. Since it was made by Radio Shack, I decided to keep it. That's quality stuff, you know! Last, he presented me with an old T-shirt that was

two sizes too small for me. He thought my daughter Mariah would love it. She gave me a look that meant the shirt would end up in the trash in Olympic record time. Then Tom zipped up his backpack and headed up Grandville Avenue. Before crossing the street, he yelled out, "I love you, man!" He faded into the crowd.

It was the first time Tom didn't ask me for something. Instead he gave gifts to me. Tom taught me to accept the gifts that come from the right place: a heart of gratitude. Tom forced me to open my hand and receive his gift with no strings attached, no motives to figure out. Could I become a receiver, much as I prefer being a giver? I'm thankful that Tom was Jesus to me.

I love you, man! ■



Reginald Smith is pastor of Roosevelt Park Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



I need you to help me fill my emptiness just as you need me to help fill yours. . . . Maybe it's most of what makes us human and makes us brothers and sisters.

— FREDERICK BUECHNER

Do We Need Women Advisers Again?

OPINION

The better alternative is for women officebearers to serve as synodical delegates.

SYNOD 1995 received an overture noting that at Synod 1994 only three of the 184 delegates were from ethnic minority communities. The overture asked synod to “include a minimum of 10 members from the various ethnic communities in the CRC to serve as advisers to synod . . . to help synod be alert to the perspectives of the nations (*Agenda for Synod 1995*, p. 395). Synod decided to appoint seven advisers.

In 2005 the committee that reviewed this practice recommended that the position of ethnic adviser continue as long as the number of ethnic minority delegates was less than 25. Through this practice and by other means, the denomination has become much more sensitive to the need to bring ethnic minority participants “to the table of policy and decision-making at the denominational level.”

What a contrast this is to the way we’ve dealt with women advisers! Because “the presence and input of ethnic advisers [had] been beneficial to synod and the churches” and because “women [could] make a valuable contribution to the work of synod,” Synod 2000 voted to “have up to seven women . . . serve as advisers” (*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 699).

Synod 2008, the synod immediately following the synod that permitted women to serve as delegates, voted to no longer appoint women advisers because “Synod 2007 approved the appointment of women delegates” (*Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 479). But there was no encouragement for women to attend synod or for councils and classes to delegate women, perhaps because some classes really don’t wish to see women present.

If Synod 1995 had responded to the observation that there were only three ethnic minority delegates by simply saying “ethnic minorities may be delegated to synod,” we would not be as inclusive as we are today. The effect of these two different approaches is obvious. At Synod 2012, from a rather small pool of ethnic minority denominational members, 22 were delegated (18 actually attended) and four advisers were appointed. From a much larger pool of women members, only 15 served as delegates.

Those who have served with women know that their perspective enhances the ministry of the church. Though appointing advisers is a rather artificial way of bringing people “to the table of policy and decision-making at the denominational level,” we’ve considered it necessary to make sure that the voices of ethnic minorities, women, and youth are heard. Perhaps we need to reinstate the position of “woman adviser” until there is a critical mass of women delegates. The better alternative is for women officebearers to serve as synodical delegates and for councils and classes to bring women members to the table. ■



George Vander Weit is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.



Can We Talk?

Mr. Vander Meulen writes, “As Christians, we hold dual citizenship” (“Can We Talk First?” October 2012). This idea suggests divided loyalties and purpose. The article rightly wants us all to practice love by agreeing to disagree, but the idea gives many validation of being of the world instead of just being in the world. I have heard many a Christian, in my visits to the U.S., declare they are Americans first and Christians second. This idea feeds this non-biblical thinking.

—Robert Bridgeo
Oshawa, Ontario

I would like to respectfully say that I am surprised that two huge issues weren’t covered in the dialogue between Edward Gabrielse and Kate Kooyman (“Can We Talk First?” October 2012). Abortion and gay marriage are subjects that Christians shouldn’t disagree on—the Bible is very clear that God, the defender of the defenseless, “formed” and “knew” us in the womb (Jer. 1; Job 31; Ps. 139) and that marriage is intended for one man and one woman (Gen. 2; Matt. 19; Eph. 5).

—Barb Henrickson
McBain, Mich.

Thanks, Peter Vander Meulen, for reminding us that as Christians we hold dual citizenship (“Can We Talk First?” October

LETTERS

2012), and Leon Schadelee (“Saving the Story,” October 2012) for showing us from Scripture that we are to turn neither to the left (liberal/Democrat) or to the right (Republican/conservative).

When I studied at Calvin College in the 1960s, I was a member of the Groen van Prinsterer Society. We tried to understand how all areas of life are under the sovereignty of God, including the political sphere. So we are politically active, serving God or an idol every week of our life. Voting is then a small token in that lifelong service. We learned that both the Democrats and the Republicans have Christian and unChristian roots, something that Christian historians will point out. Hence that so-called “political partisanship” is really small potatoes in the global historic kingdom of God. Jesus’ command to give unto God what is God’s and unto Caesar what is Caesar’s (Mark 12:17) will be exactly the same regardless of whether “Caesar” is Obama or Romney.

—Joe Reitsma
Cobourg, Ontario

Mr. Gabrielse states that banks collapsed because of the Community Reinvestment Act (passed in the 1970s) and because the government forced them to make loans to people without the means to pay them back (“Can We Talk First?” October 2012). This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the financial crisis. Twenty-four of the 25 top mortgage originators in 2006-2008 were not subject to the CRA. The banks failed because of human greed. He also states that he does not know of any conservative politician who would “scapegoat the most vulnerable.” I guess he is unaware of Mitt Romney doing just that when he called 47 percent of Americans lazy and takers (not makers). I expected more from an article like this than just the standard

Republican talking points from one of the participants.

—Mark Sterenberg
Ada, Mich.

I read with great interest the article “Can We Talk First?” (October 2012). In Edward Gabrielse’s view, nearly half of the population is nonproductive or marginally nonproductive due to entitlements. But those receiving entitlements such as Social Security, Medicare, veterans’ benefits, and others are, for the most part, deserving. Becoming self-sufficient is not always a reality. I enjoy my entitlements that I have worked for and do not consider myself nonproductive. Privatizing is too risky and will not make the recipients self-sufficient. Welfare and Medicaid programs are necessary for the poor and sick.

Health care should not be considered a privilege but a God-given right. Health care is pro-life. There is no better investment than the welfare of our citizens.

—Herman Klap
Sahuarita, Ariz.

Saving the Story

Mr. Vander Lugt seemed to be saying today’s Christian youth cannot relate to or reject the essential elements of our Christian faith if we present them in an essential or non-negotiable context (“Saving the Story,” October 2012). Therefore the remedy is to be more open-minded, more open-ended, expand the category of gray area, and diminish the category of essential. I think that more than ever, today’s youth need more certainty, more clarity, and more examples of Christian role models who are so sure of their faith and beliefs that they would be willing to die for them. In today’s world it is easier to merge rather than stand out. Let’s pursue the latter.

—Jim Verwoerd
Abbotsford, British Columbia

Just War

Thank you to Lee Hollar for his article “Just War, Not Just Another War” (October 2012). I am thankful for your calling the churches again to revisit and act upon the 2006 “War and Peace” report to synod.

[The Department of Defense last June] stated that in the first 155 days of 2012, 154 military persons committed suicide and that we will average more than one suicide a day. That is more deaths by suicide than lives lost in combat. I weep because so few know these statistics. We can be complacent in our ignorance, while all around us soldiers and veterans are killing themselves.

I find the CRC in the U.S. complicit in the injustices committed in these wars. We should examine ourselves in light of God’s Word and the 2006 report to synod. My hope is that at Synod 2013, we will be driven to repentance and publicly admit that we have been too silent about these wars.

—Chaplain Col. Herman Keizer, Jr.
U.S. Army, retired

Editor’s note: You can find the full version of Chaplain Keizer’s letter online.

[MORE ONLINE](#)

Correction

In its “Highlights from 2012 Classis Meetings” (December 2012), *The Banner* incorrectly reported the status of Rev. Kevin Heeres. Rev. Heeres was released only from Parchment CRC when that church disbanded and is now heartily recommended to the churches for a call. We sincerely apologize for the error.

NEWS

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A Tale of Two Pella Christian Schools

The newest Pella Christian School is located far away from the one Iowans are most familiar with. It sits in the north central town of Pignon in Haiti. What links the two schools is strong support from the people of Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa.

When Pella residents Tim and Lucia Van Maanen facilitated the building of the Haitian school, they discovered that Pella, Iowa, had chosen Pignon, Haiti, as a sister city 30 years prior. They named the new school Pella Christian.

Last summer, Calvary CRC sent several youth group members on a trip back to Haiti, putting the finishing touches on the near-complete school—painting, hanging chalkboards, and building and delivering school desks.



Calvary CRC youth group at Pella Christian School in Pignon, Haiti.

In the fall Pella Christian School in Haiti opened its doors to 153 students from kindergarten through third grade; all but a few were sponsored by members of Calvary CRC.

"We come back and we don't live lives the same here again,"

Van Maanen said. "We make different choices, and we see Calvary doing that. The whole thing is about changing lives. It's changing lives in Haiti, but it's also changing lives in Pella, Iowa."

—Melissa Holtrop

Ontario Pastor Sings the Blues

Pastor Daryl Meijer has been singing the blues a lot lately—to appreciative audiences in Harriston, Ontario. He recently took a role in the premiere production of *Job's Blues*, a blues opera based on the life of the biblical Job.

Meijer, who is currently on a study leave and serving as interim pastor at Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Woodstock, said he saw the casting call for musical *Job's Blues* and knew immediately it was for him.

Job's Blues, by R. William Muir, sets Job's story in a sketchy blues bar where Job, a Chicago blues singer, has arrived to play a show.

Meijer played the bartender character, a sort of narrator. "The show received great response, with standing ovations each night," he said. "I had been experiencing blues of my own over the last couple years. God used the whole experience to help me consider my own sufferings and struggles, to admit my desperate need for God." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Anita Brinkman

Rev. Daryl Meijer plays the bartender in *Job's Blues*.





CRC's Publishing Ministry Forced to Cut Staff

Faith Alive Christian Resources, the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, cut 18 percent of its editorial and marketing staff in December. The move came after a plan to increase revenue fell short of its objectives.

Even with an increase in ministry share funding, a new marketing plan, hiring field sales staff, and more, income for the first third of this fiscal year was almost 25 percent short of what was budgeted.

"Despite our best efforts, Faith Alive's financial situation remains unstable," said Faith Alive director Mark Rice. "I have said all along the last thing I would do is eliminate positions; unfortunately, that day is upon us."

Rice said that while the decisions are painful, Faith Alive must face the fact that it is a smaller ministry than it was seven years ago. "In the coming months Faith Alive's leadership and staff will continue the work of deciding what we are going to focus on and how our ministry can best serve the church."

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—Gayla R. Postma



ERIC SCHROEDER

Chuck Vanden Bosch (right) atop a camel at the Egyptian pyramids with his father, Bill Vanden Bosch (left).

Michigan Group Makes a Special Trip to the Middle East

"I wanted to learn where Jesus walked and taught," said Kayla Fylstra, 19. Fylstra, a member of Holland Heights Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., is one of several adults with intellectual disabilities who traveled to the Middle East in October on the Heart of God Tour.

The tour was led by George DeJong, senior pastor at Holland Heights, who leads three study trips a year through Under the Fig Tree Ministry, often with pastors from developing countries.

The reason for this unique trip? "To make God smile," said DeJong.

A group of some 40 people, including 14 participants with special needs, traveled through Egypt, Jordan, and Israel on the two-week tour. They rode camels at the pyramids, visited a mosaic shop that employs people with special needs, and hiked three hours upstream through the gorge at the Arnon River in Jordan.

"When the tour began, those of us in support roles assumed we would minister to the participants," said Andrea Bult, who wrote the trip's blog. "As the trip went on, it became very apparent that we had it backward. We were the ones being ministered to."

—Susan Vanden Berg



Jonathan VonDobschutz prays at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Bernard Pekelder

1922-2012

Rev. Bernard Pekelder, 89, a gentle, trusted, and authentic spiritual mentor of several generations of students, passed away from congestive heart failure.

Pekelder served Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan and New Jersey. But he will be remembered best for his long and respected association with Calvin College.

Pekelder began his ministry at Calvin as chaplain in 1962 and ended it as vice-president of student affairs in 1985. To "Pek," as he was affectionately known, these functions were *ministry* in the best sense of the word, marked by unswerving commitment to his Sender, empathetic love for students, and warm relationships with colleagues.

He had a wonderful sense of humor. His carefully prepared chapel meditations live on in the memories of students and faculty.

Pekelder was preceded in death by his wife, Jane, who passed away in 2007. He is survived by five children and their spouses, 20 grandchildren, and 30 great-grandchildren.

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available each year in the front pages of the Christian Reformed Church's annual Yearbook.

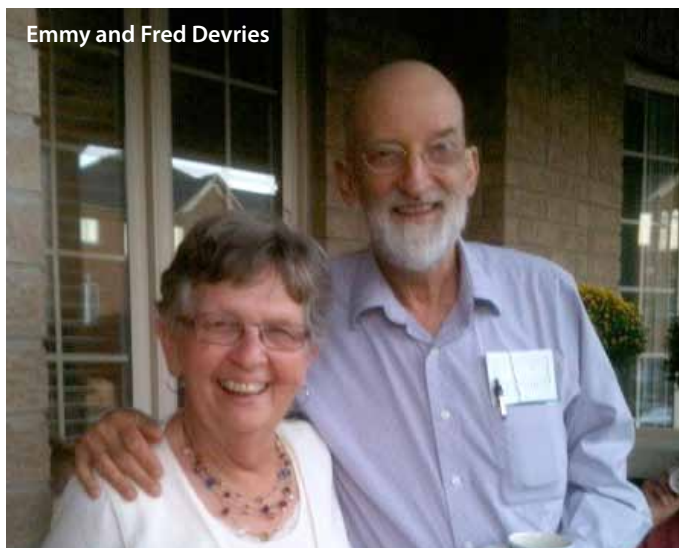
NEWS

Alberta Church Reconciles with Pastor after 35 Years

Centrepointe Community Christian Reformed Church (formerly Glad Tidings CRC) in Edmonton, Alberta, held a special service to confess and apologize to a brother and sister in Christ who were wronged 35 years ago.

Glad Tidings began as an outreach ministry in the early 1960s. In 1970, Fred Devries was hired as a ministry leader and evangelist. Under his leadership and that of his wife, Emmy, the ministries of Glad Tidings flourished. However, because Devries was not ordained as a minister of the Word, he could not administer the sacraments.

All agree that the decision to organize as a church in 1976 was done correctly but that the issue of Devries's role with the congregation was handled poorly and unjustly. After a farewell party, the Devries family left for Ontario. The situation was very hurtful at the



time, but Fred and Emmy said they have not harbored any ill feelings.

Meanwhile, for 35 years the actions surrounding the Devrieses' departure remained an unsettling event for many in the church. Bill Diepeveen said, "Many of the leaders at the time were getting old, some key people had already

passed away, and if something meaningful was to be done, the time was long overdue."

At the service, a litany of confession was read, and Devries was invited to serve communion together with Rev. Roy Berkenbosch, a former Glad Tidings member.

Emmy Devries said, "We were overwhelmed by the love, sincerity, and generosity of the church. It was, in fact, a true, God-glorifying reconciliation and celebration."

The "Litany of Confession" is available at thebanner.org.

—Janet Greidanus

Mental Health Conference Helps Churches and Families

A medical doctor talked openly about his suicide attempt. A loving couple jointly presented their story of a marriage and family that survived a bipolar roller-coaster ride more than four decades long. A young mother described her ongoing struggle with depression and dark moods.

Those were some of the workshops at "Spreading the Word—Making the Difference," a November conference held in Cobourg, Ontario.

More than 120 people took part in the two-day event, bringing to the discussion their own experience as mental health caregivers, patients, pastors, and family and friends of mental health patients.

Faith and Hope Ministries, which sponsored the conference, is supported by Classis Quinte, a regional group of Christian Reformed churches in eastern Ontario.

—Ron Rupke

91-Year-Old Baptized in California Church

Gary Groot, age 91, looks back on a long and amazing life, but a life without commitment to God. That is, until now.

Groot made public profession of faith and was baptized at Crossroads Christian Reformed Church in San Marcos, Calif.

Mark Vermaire, pastor of Crossroads, said, "I knew Gary was a unique person the first time he met me at the church. He walked in with two small books, a Bible and a prayer book, both of them with Nazi stamps of approval in them—signs of his time in the prisoner of war camp."

Groot's good humor came through in his testimony. He said,



"I am thankful for the opportunity to make my profession of faith in our Crossroads Church in front of you, my friends," he said. "I am 91

years old. You can see I don't make decisions hastily." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Heidi Wicker

Pastors' Spouses Recharge

Kathy Roosma has been a pastor's spouse for 17 years, and she's learned a lot along the way.

"I've learned that my first [responsibility] is to my husband and my children, and after that come the people of the church," she said. "I've learned that we need to be ourselves and use the gifts God has given rather than fit into the mold a church may want."

But even with that healthy perspective, Roosma said that attending her third Christian Reformed Pastors' Spouses conference in November was important to her well-being. One hundred women attended the sold-out event.

"This time it was the validation of the complexity of feelings that one might not be able to share in our own church, both the difficult things and the joys," she said. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Roxanne Van Farowe

One hundred women attended the sold-out Pastors' Spouses conference.



Joints for Jesus in Alberta

A recent dinner and auction raised over \$50,000 from selling joints. Actual prostheses were auctioned off to the highest bidder, along with more typical auction items such as vacation rentals and winter snow removal.

The funds were raised in support of Alberta orthopedic surgeon Thomas Greidanus, a member of West End Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, who has been leading about 50 health care professionals on medical missions to Cuenca, Ecuador.



Dr. Thomas Greidanus (far right) doing surgery in Ecuador with sons Dr. Nelson Greidanus (left) and Dr. Tom Greidanus.

The team's free surgeries provide hip and knee replacements for adults and repair club foot and hip dislocations in children.

"[The surgeries] give patients increased mobility and freedom from pain," explained Greidanus. "We [also] teach at the local medical school. We have noticed that medical care in the local hospitals has improved over the years."

—Tracey Yan

January Conference to Address Canadian Role in Binational Church

Delegates from each region (classis) in Canada have been invited to a forum in Toronto in mid-January to talk about the future of ministry in Canada within the Christian Reformed Church.

"C3: Canadian Catalytic Conversation (Canadian Forum 2013)" grew out of an October conversation at the meeting of Classis Toronto that raised questions about what is happening within the denomination and in Canadian ministry. By the end of the conversation, the idea for a forum had passed unanimously.

Rev. Richard Bodini, spokesperson for the forum's organizing committee, said, "We want to give space for Canadians to speak with one voice into the denominational processes that will impact the Canadian portion of the denomination. The core discussion question for this event is 'What is God calling us to do in our unique Canadian context, and what are the leadership, structure, and strategies required to do this?'"

Classis noted that "various leaders within and outside Classis Toronto have expressed concerns about developments that seem to dim the CRC witness in our Canadian context."

Bodini said that the forum is intended to be a positive contribution to various task force and planning processes going on in the denomination, not to circumvent established structures. "[The classes] might then have an opportunity to include insights from this event in their own deliberations regarding how to contribute to Synod 2013." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Gayla R. Postma

NEWS

Texas Church Encourages Small Group Meetings Over Sunday Morning Worship

If you don't have time to attend both Sunday morning worship and a small group, choose the small group.

Members of Sunrise Community Christian Reformed Church in Austin, Tex., are accustomed to hearing this announcement every Sunday. It's part of the church leadership's commitment to making church small groups successful.

"We decided that if we're going to do [small groups], we're

going to do this 100 percent," said Mark Hilbelink, pastor of Sunrise. "We recognized that today's version of what we call church (Sunday morning worship) is not spiritually formative in the same way that small group spiritual formation occurs."

Hilbelink said the church wants to create "intimate community within the Christian faith that drives accountability, recovery,

saving marriages—things like that.

"A lot of that stuff could not happen in a Sunday morning worship service. We actually believe that the more formative environment is intimate community and not public worship," he said.

Hilbelink estimates that approximately 70 percent of the church's members are involved in a small group. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Sarah Boonstra



The children in Faith CRC's daycare program sing enthusiastically for their Marine Corps visitors.



Claude Bos leads the Calvin CRC choir performing a piece he composed.

JANE VANWYNGAARDEN

Two Illinois Churches Celebrate Milestone Anniversaries

Two Illinois churches celebrated significant birthdays in October 2012. Lombard Christian Reformed Church celebrated 100 years, while 20 miles away Calvin Christian Reformed Church (Oak Lawn) celebrated its 125th anniversary.

Lombard CRC had an open house and banquet attended by nearly 200 people, followed by a combined morning worship service on Sunday. Just one week later, 140 friends and members gathered at Calvin CRC for a worship service and luncheon to commemorate their 125 years as a church.

"Our church has had ups and downs over the years," said Al Diepstra, who chaired the event for Lombard CRC. "Throughout it all we have gotten stronger through our weaknesses and more determined than ever that we have God's work to do in Lombard at this time."

He noted that the church was the first Christian Reformed Church in the Chicago area to have worship services in English; in 1975 they moved to their current location in Lombard.

Marion Dykstra chaired the anniversary event for Calvin CRC. "We went from a Dutch-speaking congregation that peaked at 415 families in the 1940s to perhaps 50 to 55 families today," she said. "Today we are reaching out to our neighborhood, and many Sundays we see new faces. We are intentional about evangelism." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Melissa Holtrop

Marines Serve with CRC Church in Guam

United States Marines completed a special project while deployed on the island of Guam, led by Christian Reformed Chaplain David Jeltema.

Working with Faith Presbyterian Christian Reformed Church, the Marines cleared brush and debris from a beach area and did landscaping for Pacific Islands University, a small Christian college near the church.

Afterward, the guests were treated to an island-style barbecue, singing by the university choir, and an informal worship service.

"This congregation is one of the warmest, most hospitable CRC groups that I have ever met," said Jeltema. "This day will not be soon forgotten by any of the sailors or Marines who attended, [and] it strengthened their fledgling faith during a long deployment far from their households of faith. I think it represented the power of our CRC affiliation and cooperation at its best."

—Heidi Wicker

Life-size Furniture Brings Tabernacle to Life



Life-size wooden tabernacle furniture at Spring Lake CRC.

This fall, adults and children of all ages at Spring Lake (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church experienced the Old Testament tabernacle as it might have been with life-size wooden furniture made by their own members.

"The furniture has been a nice visual reminder of what we're doing and has helped to capture people's interest," said Drew Sweetman, pastor of the church.

The church is using the WE curriculum created by Faith Alive, the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. The curriculum's "Enter the Tabernacle" series includes instructions to build tabernacle furniture out of cardboard boxes. "Since we would be using them on a Sunday, we

thought we could make something better than that so they wouldn't collapse," said George Suchecki, one of two men who built the six large pieces, including the altar of burnt offerings and the ark of the covenant out of wood.

Cheri Ter Haar and her three children under the age of 12 have especially enjoyed conversations that make connections between the lesson and their lives. "We love having hands-on activities to help us learn about the tabernacle," said Ter Haar.

The church hopes to pass on the furniture to another church that may want to use it.

—Daina Kraai



Officer James Herring

Oregon Officer Creates Texting Program to Combat Bullying

Some middle school students are reluctant to report bullying to the school office for fear of becoming the bully's next target. James Herring, a member of Sunnyslope Christian Reformed Church in Salem, Ore., has made it possible for students to report bullying with the touch of a button.

Herring, a Marion County sheriff's deputy and school resource officer, created "Bullies Beware," a texting program now in its second year.

Students may report a bullying incident by texting Herring or by sending him an email. Herring follows up on every report, notifies the parents of those involved, provides counseling, and holds the bully accountable. "The biggest reason for bullying is not because schools don't have systems. Schools have zero tolerance. Kids are afraid of being called a snitch," explained Herring.

Technology such as texting and Facebook has intensified bullying, making it a 24-hour-a-day occurrence.

"You can use bullying as a teaching moment and help [kids] understand how words can hurt and kill people," he said. "We have to work together as a community to keep one another safe."

—Amy Toornstra

New Mexico Principal Receives National Education Award

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) honored John Hartog with the National Distinguished Principal of New Mexico award.

Hartog, a member of Bethany Christian Reformed Church in Gallup, N.M., has served the Gallup-McKinley County school district for 43 years—22 as a teacher and 21 as a principal. "I love kids," he said. "I really want to see kids do well in the next stages of life."

Ron Donkersloot, director of human resources for Gallup-McKinley County Schools, nominated Hartog for this award. Donkersloot, also a member of Bethany CRC, said, "I nominated John because he is a well-respected member of the community and is a successful principal. This recognition is well deserved for the work he has done for over 43 years."

—Shashi DeHaan

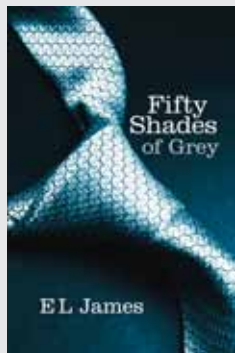
John Hartog receives the National Distinguished Principal of New Mexico award in Washington, DC.



NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

'Fifty Shades of Grey' Moves Evangelicals beyond Black-and-White Sexuality



Many evangelical women say they wouldn't touch the best-selling book *Fifty Shades of Grey*, often described as "mommy porn" because of its escapist appeal to working mothers and suburban housewives. But evangelical leaders also realize that some members of their churches and Bible studies can't resist.

"I think they're asking first of all, 'Is it truly pornography?'" said Terri Stovall, dean of women's programs at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Tex. "We say yes it is because it creates pictures in your head."

Even as many prominent women leaders cautioned against reading it, Stovall said that closing one's eyes to the phenomenon just isn't a good option for evangelical women. "If they don't know it and we can't talk about it, they're going to get caught out in ministry blindsided."

Author Shannon Ethridge said fantasy about one's spouse within a Christian marriage can signify a healthy sexual relationship. "However," she added, "fantasizing about individuals other than one's spouse (fictional characters included) serves no healthy or holy purpose."

Susie Hawkins, author of *From One Ministry Wife to Another*, noted, "A lot of Christian women say that this book (*Fifty Shades of Grey*) has spiced up their marriage, but you have to realize you're bringing another person in there, another party," said Hawkins. "That's just not a road that is going to lead to contentment."

She hopes more churches and ministries will have discussions and not fear talking about something people have already read or are considering reading.

"Lead the way. If you don't, they will be swayed," she recommends. "It's messy and it's gross and you don't want to put it in your own mind, but we have to do that." —*Religion News Service*

'Two and a Half Men' Star Becomes Christian, Blasts Show

After trashing his show, the teenage star of "Two and a Half Men" apologized for calling his show unbiblical "filth" and encouraging people not to watch it.

"I apologize if my remarks reflect me showing indifference to and disrespect of my colleagues," Jones said in a statement.

The 19-year-old's view of the show, which features raunchy jokes and voluptuous vamps, apparently changed during his spiritual conversion.

With one year left on his contract, Jones told *Christianity Today*, "I know I am there for a reason, but at the same time I have this strange twist of being a hypocrite—a paid hypocrite," he said. "Even though it's my job to be an actor, I have given my life to God." —*Religion News Service*

See full articles at thebanner.org

Sports Accomplishments

High School

South Christian High School (Grand Rapids, Mich.), football and boys' soccer state championships.

Grand Rapids (Mich.) Christian High School, football state championship.

Unity Christian High School (Hudsonville, Mich.), boy's soccer state championship.

College

Calvin College (Grand Rapids, Mich.), MIAA championships in men's and women's soccer, men's and women's cross-country, women's volleyball, and men's golf. National competition yielded second place finishes for men's cross-country and women's volleyball.

—*Banner news correspondents*

For more on these stories, please visit thebanner.org.

Calvin College VP of Finance Steps Down

Henry DeVries, vice president for administration, finance, and information services at Calvin College, stepped down from his position by mutual agreement with the college.

The announcement was made by college president Michael Le Roy on November 26. Calvin College, located in Grand Rapids, Mich., is owned by the Christian Reformed Church.

DeVries's departure comes following the revelation that the college is facing payments on more than \$100 million in debt resulting from investment losses that will come due in 2017. The college is currently undergoing an 18-month review to redirect about 10 percent of its budget to service the debt. —*Gayla R. Postma*

Red Mesa Churches Refresh Discipleship Skills

A discipling workshop in Classis Red Mesa is back by popular demand after the first one was filled to capacity.

The workshop "Real Grace: Disciples Making Disciples" was developed by Brian Kruijs, the son of missionaries to the Navajo. Since then it has been offered twice more in varied formats.

Workshop participant Tim Eisenga said, "Real Grace is a great tool to deepen your spiritual friendship in Christ with a fellow believer, new believer, or seeker through discipleship." Eisenga said he is actively using the skills he learned in the workshop as he "continues passing on grace to others."

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—*Shashi DeHaan*

FAQs

Justice

Q Why are some justice issues considered moral issues but others are not?

A Issues such as abortion and capital punishment are often labeled moral issues, while issues such as poverty, human rights, and pollution are considered social issues. A historical or theoretical explanation would take more space than this column has.

In practice, this distinction is problematic. It is used to elevate the importance of so-called moral issues, draw lines around what should be discussed in church, or convey that moral issues have simple answers while others are complex. In my experience, these distinctions often hinder Christian witness in the world. So-called moral issues are complex, but they are often discussed in such narrow, black-and-white terms that we miss good solutions. Other issues receive too little analysis through the lens of moral discernment that considers right and wrong action. In Canada, for example, it took a campaign to establish care for creation and climate change as a moral issue so that more churches would discuss it.

The Bible does not make this distinction when it talks about how we should live. More verses deal with right and wrong in wealth distribution, for example, than with sexual purity. The Bible calls for moral action in all areas of life.

Not all issues are the same. I have found it more helpful to diagnose an issue in terms of what elements are personal choices about right and wrong, interpersonal choices, and societal choices. Every issue is a mix of these factors in our integrated world; unfortunately, none is simple.

—Kathy Vandergrift

Kathy Vandergrift teaches public ethics to university students and advocates for the rights of children.

“Reformedness” is a communal way of being together.

Faith Formation

Q Is it important for our children’s and youth ministries to be intentionally Reformed? I hear loud voices proclaiming both yes and no as well as maybe.

A I understand our Reformed identity to have two central foundations. First is a way of reading Scripture that focuses on the unity of the story of God’s sovereign faithfulness from creation to new creation, a story that finds its coherence in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and includes us as we die and rise in him. We don’t answer questions by pasting in proof texts; we don’t favor one Testament over the other; we look at the entire narrative flow of God’s story and seek to discern how our lives today are embedded within it. I’m always amazed at how this approach opens up the Word for God’s people in rich, life-giving, fresh, and fruitful ways.

Second, “Reformedness” is an *ethos*, a communal way of being together. It honors the reality that because life is messy and complicated, simplistic answers almost always wound people in ungracious ways. Instead, we have room for diversity in our unity and nuance in our thinking. So we honor various viewpoints—but not every viewpoint—on matters like women in office, children and communion, and interpreting Genesis 1-3.

These two foundations are not billboards that we paste all over our children’s and youth ministries but rather embedded foundations that are liberatingly present in all that we are and do.

Yes, being Reformed matters.

—Syd Hielema

Syd Hielema is a professor of religion and theology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, and a member of the CRC’s Synodical Faith Formation Study Committee.

Calling

Q Nearly a third of young adults profess no religious affiliation, according to the latest Pew research. In my own congregation I look out and see more gray hairs than anything else. How do we interest young people in church?

A Many religious leaders are noting that while formal religious affiliation is on the decrease, a hunger for genuine spirituality is on the increase. This presents an opportunity. The key is to again allow churches to be out and among the communities we are a part of, seeking to make connections with people where they already are.

Many people of all ages are pursuing spirituality and seeking to grow their faith, but not through the usual channels. Consider this an invitation to get out and join them! Join a local book club, start a regular discussion group at a local coffee shop, or get together over a few pints. You’ll find that young people, on their own turf and on their own terms, are much more open to faith than you might expect—particularly a faith that is deep, rooted in tradition, and authentic.

Attempts to “contemporize” our worship gatherings will only go so far—in fact, this may not be the place to focus our energies at all. Be present. Get out there. Connections are waiting to be made.

—Bryan Berghoef

*Bryan Berghoef is a church planter starting a new faith community in Washington, D.C., and author of the book *Pub Theology: Beer, Conversation, and God*. ■*



GRACE IN TIMES OF EVIL



LISTENING TO former Vice President Dick Cheney defend mock executions on the morning news, my mind flashed back to Guatemala, just over 30 years ago.

I am sitting on a terrazzo floor, mostly naked, an interrogation hood covering my head. “OK, this is it. You’re not cooperating,” says the man in the sweat suit. He passes a rifle into my limited field of vision, asking, “Do you know what this can do?”

“Yes,” I reply. Having previously been drafted into the U.S. Army, I know exactly what an M16 could do.

The man chambers a round, and for a moment the rifle disappears from my sight. Then I feel it against my head. “Who are you?” the man demands again.

“James Boldenow,” I reply yet again.

“I am going to kill you unless you tell us who you really are.” Silence. *CLICK*. Silence. A chuckle. The man says, “OK, now tell us who you really are.”

I was abducted by a right-wing death squad during a trip to Guatemala in September of 1982 while conducting a field visit as the new Central American director of Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), now called World Renew. Still learning the culture and programs, my language skills were just adequate.

Political Turmoil

Guatemala that September was in political turmoil. Efraín Ríos Montt, a general

in the Guatemalan army, had taken power in a military coup five months earlier ousting President Lucas García. At first there was hope that Rios Montt, a confessing Christian, would bring reform, but within months, rumors of atrocities were being reported across the country. Meanwhile, the Reagan administration was pushing Congress to resume military aid to Guatemala, which the Carter administration had stopped in response to human rights violations.

One purpose of my trip was to explore collaborative work with Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM). This involved traveling in the CRWRC's Land Cruiser with Moisés Colop, a national staff person, and CRWM's Jim Dekker to some work sites with the National Presbyterian Church. In one remote area, Jim's coworker was having trouble with a clutch, so we loaded it into the Land Cruiser to take to the capital for repair.

The trip went well, but along the way we heard some horrible tales of torture and mass graves. Arriving in the capital, Jim suggested that he take the CRWRC vehicle to bring the clutch to be repaired. Moisés and I could use Jim's car and meet him at his house for dinner that evening.

Abducted

As the two of us, in Jim's car, were nearing his house, three vehicles forced us off the road. Two men armed with fully automatic M16 rifles jumped out of a dark Suburban. They opened my door and pulled me out, yelling that they would kill me if I resisted. They covered my head with a smelly sack and threw me into the back of the Suburban onto a mat soaked with blood and vomit. They tied my hands painfully behind my back with wire and held me out of sight while speeding away.

When the Suburban bumped to a stop, the men hauled me out. They took my passport and wallet. Even though my vision was restricted by the sack, I could see the ground in front of me as they prodded me to the edge of a gully with the rifle. A stench came from below, where I could see bodies in what appeared to be a mass grave. I assumed I was at an execution site

and that I would soon join those bodies. I heard radio chatter in the background.

Waiting for the bullet, time was suspended. I found myself reciting, "That I, body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ; . . . that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can be blown from my head . . . he assures me of eternal life. . . ." I asked God about my 3-month-old baby, Sam, who would never know me. I heard God assure me that he would take care of my wife and kids. God told me not to be afraid. I visualized a comical picture of the resurrection with my large body rising up with a group of much smaller indigenous Mayan people. I awaited eternity with expectation, wondering what heaven would really be like.

Suddenly the reverie was over—it was almost a letdown. My captors demanded to know if I was Jim Dekker. More radio chatter, more questions. Once again I was thrown into the Suburban and brought to an isolated site for interrogation. During the transfer I flinched as I felt myself falling. Thinking that I was resisting, they butted me across the face with a rifle, breaking several teeth. My captors replaced the wire on my wrists with handcuffs and added leg chains stamped "Made in the USA." They removed most of my clothing and put over my head a black interrogation hood that restricted my vision.

Then the interrogation began. A man in a sweat suit did most of the physical work while a man wearing a well-tailored suit asked questions. First they attempted to elicit an admission that I was Jim Dekker using an alias. Later they moved on to what I knew about Jim's activities, as well as my own purposes for being in Guatemala. My interrogators assumed that I was withholding information that needed to be forced out of me, and they employed a variety of strategies.

They threatened to break my arms, legs, and ribs. The man in the sweat suit tapped me with a club in various places to show how it would be done.

They staged three mock executions, including the one I described earlier.

They used sexual humiliation and abuse. An M16 was held to my genitals

with the threat to blow them off if I did not talk. I was fondled with the barrel of the M16 and called a homosexual. I was stripped naked except for the hood; my captors discussed and ridiculed my physical attributes and threatened worse consequences if I did not start cooperating.

They applied sensory deprivation. I was kept on the floor of a dimly lit room and left alone for periods of time between sessions.

They withheld food, water, and toilet facilities.

Although I was not subject to waterboarding, my captors demonstrated the equipment as a threat.

Released

Suddenly there was a radical change. The man in the well-tailored suit brought my clothes and told me that some important people were looking for me. He said I should call my embassy as soon as I was free. After bringing me food and water, I was blindfolded, loaded into a vehicle, and dumped into an alley behind a hotel.

I called the embassy.

They asked if I needed medical attention and said that the U.S. ambassador to Guatemala would be at the hotel in 20 minutes. The State Department did a debriefing. They explained that Secretary of State George Shultz had contacted President Rios Montt to release me, as killing a missionary would jeopardize future military aid.

The State Department was surprised I was alive; my release confirmed that the right-wing paramilitary had abducted me. Had they captured Jim Dekker, they said, he would have been assassinated. They explained that the Israeli intelligence agency, doing surveillance work for the Guatemalan government, had picked up Jim's activities, probably through a phone tap. Jim had been helping people escape from the army and writing articles about the situation in Guatemala under a pen name. My interrogators, the State Department believed, were likely Argentines of German Nazi heritage. They were concerned about the use of Suburbans, military M16s, restraints, and other U.S. equipment in Guatemala. »

Grace

Because we had traveled together earlier, I knew that Jim Dekker had helped some Presbyterian Church leaders escape oppression. I also knew that throughout Guatemala, people were being displaced and killed. But none of us knew the extent of the genocide that was taking place. And Jim had no idea of the dangers his activities were causing to himself and, inadvertently, to others. Had I been in Jim's place, I hope I would have acted similarly to save the lives of fellow Christians.

The U.S. ambassador to Guatemala was the first of many to call my experience a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Only God knows whether

But God provides peace and grace. The prayer that I uttered when I expected to die was a form of communion with God. Though in mortal terror, I was completely at peace, anticipating eternity.

This ongoing intimacy with God in prayer is a gift I continue to receive. There is grace in knowing that Christ bore not only my guilt but also my sorrow and shame. There is grace when I have unwanted memories of abuse, when I need to read or spell in public, when I am anxious, or when I fall into sinful behavior. God pulled me from the pit of alcohol and other self-destructive behaviors long before they could destroy my career or family. He gave me a supportive and patient wife. On my own I am weak and broken; only God's grace gives me strength. Of course, this is true for all Christians. My gift is being able to realize it in my life.

Speaking Out

Rios Montt's dictatorship lasted less than 18 months, during which tens of thousands of people were killed. Most of these were indigenous people in the countryside caught between the guerillas and the army. He has been named the worst among the modern Latin American dictators, condoning the indiscriminate murder of men, women, and children by the army and death squads. There is evidence that many women were raped before execution, and children were reportedly thrown into burning homes or tossed in the air and speared with bayonets. Rios Montt's scorched earth policy left millions homeless and hungry. Now he is under house arrest, awaiting trial for genocide and crimes against humanity.

In December 1982, President Reagan called Rios Montt a man of integrity and said that he was getting a bum rap on civil rights issues in spite of abundant evidence—including some CIA memos that later came out—that atrocities were being committed in Guatemala. It is hard to believe that the president and his administration were unaware.

In January 1983, within hours of the Republican Senate being strengthened by the 1982 elections, a military aid package for Guatemala was passed. A lingering

question is how I was abducted using new U.S. resources *prior* to lifting the ban on military aid.

Credible evidence, including a 2004 U.S. inspector general's report, suggests that the CIA was teaching interrogation techniques including waterboarding, sexual abuse, mock execution, and sensory deprivation as early as the 1980s. When, almost 30 years after my abduction, I see newspaper photographs of naked men in chains and interrogation hoods being ridiculed by U.S. personnel, and when I hear a former vice president defend mock executions, I am called to speak out.

As citizens of the kingdom of God, Christians must condemn torture—including the "enhanced interrogation" carried on by the U.S. This includes torture by U.S. contractors, shipping people to other countries where torture is allowed, and torture in secret prisons. As citizens of the U.S. and Canada, blessed with the priceless privilege of speaking freely and voting, we are called to use our influence to stop the practice of any torture.

Many Christians seem to be afraid that the world is collapsing around them. Some of them may agree with Cheney that the war on terror will not be won by turning the other cheek. But the kingdom of God on earth is not built by might or by power, but by the Spirit of God.

Condemning the use of torture does not in any way justify communist or terrorist governments and groups, which need to be restrained. At the same time, restraining evil can never be accomplished by practicing similar evils.

It is not only wrong but shortsighted for a government to condone torture or support corrupt and oppressive regimes. Violating God's commands, even in the service of boosting security, is never right. By their very nature, such actions will come back to trouble us. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



James Boldenow is Network and Helpdesk Team Manager of Information Services for the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Previously he worked as a contractor with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

I asked God about my 3-month-old baby, Sam, who would never know me.

Jim Dekker would have been killed if I had not been in his car. But I believe that I was the right person in the right car in the right place at the right time. God used these events to build his kingdom, weaving together my best interests and those of Jim Dekker, Moises, and many others, according to his just and merciful will.

Initially I tried to carry on as if nothing had happened. Over time, though, I experienced the classic symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. My own sinfulness, and weaknesses including attention deficit disorder and dyslexia, combined with several life-threatening events to result in real brokenness. I experienced frequent flashbacks, reliving the events of my abduction, especially the mock executions and sexual humiliation. I was anxious and easily startled. I tended to avoid situations and people who brought back unwanted memories. Most destructive was my escapist behavior. Within a year I realized that I was drinking too much and had to stop using alcohol altogether.

Good Girls Need Grace

I'VE NEVER BEEN A PROSTITUTE. Or been demon-possessed. Or lived with five different men. I've been a pretty good girl, not troubled with unseemly secrets.

And that's my problem. Good girls like me read the stories of the women Jesus encountered during his ministry. We're happy that Jesus intercepted them, thankful for his sensitivity and wisdom, grateful for his healing power. But somehow those stories don't seem to connect with mine. They stay on the pages of my Bible. If I'm honest, I feel a bit left out. I don't have that "aha" encounter. I haven't experienced that same gift of Jesus' freeing, healing grace.

I'd like to know how it feels to be so lavishly thankful that pouring oil worth a year's salary seems perfectly reasonable. I wonder where the no-holds-barred living, the can't-keep-my-mouth-shut exuberance comes from. But I'm one of the good girls, and I don't have those lows and highs.

Then I look at the story of the good and faithful woman with a gynecological problem that vexed her for 12 years. She's caught in a nasty web of Mosaic laws and cultural expectations that isolate her from most everyday activities.

Her story helps me realize that good girls are just as needy as any of the women Jesus encountered. We just don't always know it. We're just as hurt, just as plagued, but differently—perhaps in ways we don't usually discuss in Bible studies or announce in the church bulletin.

Though unwelcome, the woman breaks into a crowd. Jesus notices. Turning, he calls her "Daughter" and says her faith has healed her, adding, "Go in peace."

Why? Because that woman needed healing for so much more than her bleeding issues. Jesus knew that she had been isolated for 12 years, and he understood how it affected her.

Feelings of bitterness, jealousy, anger, shame, and worthlessness come immediately to mind—poisonous feelings that don't allow a person to thrive. All those feelings needed healing too.

So Jesus offers the woman peace—completeness. Grace with all its wholeness, health, tranquility, welfare, harmony, and joy.

Long before he suffered, died, and was buried, long before he rose again, Jesus offered peace to those in need of it.

And that's where good girls come in.

Good girls can be jealous, judging, covetous, controlling, demanding, needing to please. They harbor bitterness, anger, resentments. The difference is that good girls are very good at camouflaging those feelings. Good girls are good at doing good things.

It's only when I realize that my quiet, controlled, good-girl heart needs healing just as much as my sisters who act out their



Good girls are just as needy as any of the women Jesus encountered.

bad behavior that I finally hear Jesus call me "Daughter." When I confess the hidden junk in my heart, I receive Jesus' blessing: "Go in peace." It's the same lavish grace that Jesus offers those who embrace overtly destructive behaviors. We stand in the same need of healing.

I will never be able to live in the fullness of Jesus' grace if I don't name my hurts, dysfunctions, resentments, and stuffed feelings and ask Jesus to shine the light of his mercy and healing grace right there.

I know there are more good girls longing for grace. After I lead a seminar or retreat, I hear from them. They describe a sense of loss, of missing out, of feeling a bit jealous of their sisters who have encountered and embraced the lavish grace of Jesus when he met them in their "not-goodness."

To all of us, Jesus says, "Daughter, your faith in trusting me with everything, including all those gnawing attitudes and buried feelings—that faith heals you. Go in peace."

That's living in grace. ■



Ruth Vander Zee is a speaker and author whose most recent book is *Woman Meets Jesus*. You can follow her blog at journey-of-faith.com.

Everyone Welcome

By Lis Van Harten

Members of the Tea and Tots group at Discovery Church in Bowmanville, Ontario.



“It was a fantastic problem! We had 40 moms with about 80 kids trying to find enough parking places—which our facility didn’t have,” said Pastor Martin Spoelstra of Discovery Church in Bowmanville, Ontario.

Things have come a long way since September 2006, when the church first opened its doors in a residential community filled with young families. About 150 people come for Sunday worship services. Most of them are about 30 years old.

“The kids are coming in droves,” Spoelstra said. One of the reasons for the increase is the church’s new Tea and Tots play group.

Chantel Westerman, Discovery’s youth director, had gone to a nearby midwife center as she looked forward to the birth of her second child. There she began to make connections with other moms who were looking for a social outlet for themselves and their young children. That’s

when the idea of Tea and Tots came to her.

Discovery received a Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE) Health & Renewal grant to launch the Tea and Tots ministry. The first gathering attracted eight moms with little ones. Just over two months later, 20 to 30 moms were coming each week to join church members and their children, building relationships and community.

“I have personally learned how lonely a world it can be for a lot of people,” Westerman said. “Tea and Tots has been a huge blessing in getting to know people, hearing their stories, offering prayers, and . . . opening our doors and being vulnerable to the community around us.”

Kids in summer camp at Discovery Church.



Hospitality is also the focus of another SCE Health & Renewal grant project in Lincoln, Nebr.

Northern Lighthouse CRC initiated the Bread of Life project, which fosters care and community in the congregation and with inmates from the local prison through Sunday meals.

“We see the value of hospitality as a biblical calling,” says Pastor Jeff Heerspink. “We realized the inmates were not

You add.
God multiplies.



Serving lunch at Northern Lighthouse CRC.

getting lunch if they came to church and understood this as an opportunity for building relationships. People need and are desperate for community, whether they are inmates or not.”

The project means that “people do not need to rush off to eat as they can stay, go deeper in the Word, share experiences, pray together, and build relationships in small groups,” Heerspink explains.

SCE’s Health & Renewal (HR) grants encourage churches to think creatively about how they can nurture the health of their congregation and how they can impact their communities. Grants are awarded for projects a church designs for its particular ministry setting. Since no two settings are identical, each project is unique.

Funded projects have focused on leadership training, youth ministry, outreach through community gardens, small groups, prayer, worship, vision casting, discipleship, and more. If you have an idea and want to explore it, please contact the SCE office toll-free at 877-279-9994, ext. 2805.

Christian Reformed congregations with 150 or fewer active adult members are eligible for SCE programming. The deadlines for HR applications are June 1 and December 1. More information can be found at crcna.org/sce. ■



Lis Van Harten is program director for Sustaining Congregational Excellence.

Learning to Listen

Last fall three specialized ministries of the Christian Reformed Church began intentionally working together more closely.

The staffs of Safe Church Ministry, Pastor-Church Relations (PCR), and Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE) have been exploring how we can do more together.

In our conversations we have identified a common thread that runs through these ministries: We are intent on helping congregations live out hospitality, a key teaching of the Bible’s story. Hospitality is about creating space and making room in our lives for the sake of others. It’s about using our resources of time, space, listening ears, and seeing eyes. It’s about offering ourselves to others.

The office of Safe Church Ministry has been encouraged by the use of restorative practices such as the listening circle. These circles allow for conversations that, for many reasons, might not otherwise happen. Listening circles provide occasions for words to be spoken in grace and truth, and for participants to focus on hearing one another.

The gift of simply but honestly being heard can be a surprising taste of shalom. It also can begin the process of healing for broken relationships—making room for each other and nurturing an attitude tilting toward the other’s flourishing.

One of the consistent themes in the work of Pastor-Church Relations is viewing conflict as an opportunity to engage with others for listening and growth. Seeing differences as potentially enriching rather than instinctively threatening is a persistent refrain.

Recently Rev. Norm Thomasma, director of Pastor-Church Relations, participated in a joint leadership event sponsored by Classes Georgetown, Holland, and Zeeland. He focused on types of conflict and the ways in which conflicts might be opportunities for relationships to deepen as we make room in ourselves to hear what is being said.

Rather than posturing or making disagreements hurtful and personal, hospitable listening focuses on simply ensuring that we hear one another. It allows us to make room for each other as brothers and sisters in Christ while focusing our attention on issues.

Hospitality includes concrete activities such as providing meals and inviting others to join the circles within which we live; it also describes an attitude that is rooted deep in our spiritual core and deep in the heart of the triune God.

Healthy conversation and respectful deliberation are marks of hospitality—and marks of a church intent on becoming more and more like the God in whose image they are being renewed.

—Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis is pastor/congregation consultant with Pastor-Church Relations.



Rev. Cecil Van Niejenhuis teaches about hospitality.

Talking in Circles

For more than a year the elders had been spinning their wheels without any traction. Our church was changing, and a previously strong children's ministry had disappeared. We felt called by God to do something, but we didn't quite know what.

Should we resurrect the old way? Find a new way? Which new way? All the options seemed good enough. Meeting after meeting, we prayed and talked about

options and approaches, but we never got much closer to making a decision. We needed help.

Help eventually came through a Restorative Circle. After a church potluck, we invited the congregation to sit in our fellowship hall in two circles: one big one on the outside and one little one on the inside. The little one included our elders and an empty chair.

From there we held a kind of public elders' meeting. A facilitator asked questions: What values do you have for children's ministry? What are the options? What is preventing you from making a decision?

As the questions were asked, the elders spoke and the congregation, gathered around, listened. We laid out the issues as we saw them: our hopes, our concerns, and the causes of our sleepless nights.

Then, after hearing us, the congregation began coming, one by one, to fill the empty chair. Joining the conversation, they shared what turned out to be immensely helpful perspectives. Otherwise timid voices were able to speak because they were in "the chair" and it was their turn. More dominant voices

were restrained because they couldn't stay in "the chair."

As the meeting ended, most voices were heard. Finally the elders felt that a next step was possible.

What happened here? Our church, like a lot of churches, isn't very good at communicating. The elders felt stuck, but didn't know how to effectively communicate that or seek help from the congregation. We wanted feedback but didn't want to make people feel guilty.

Congregational meetings are good for some things but tend to draw out only the boldest voices. The Restorative Circle was just right. The congregation understood why little progress had been made; the elders received encouragement and helpful advice. From that day, we have taken steps, not just as elders but as a congregation, toward intentionally encouraging the faith of our children. ■

—Rev. Sean Baker is a pastor in the Grand Rapids area.

Quick Facts: Pastor-Church Relations

- Advocates for healthy relationships among congregations, pastors, and staff.
- Manages ministerial and church profiles in the search process, credentialing for non-ordained staff, and endorsement of specialized transitional ministers.
- Provides direct consultation in times of crisis.
- Oversees continuing education fund for pastors and church staff.
- Distributes educational and resource materials for congregations and staff.
- Works with and through pastoral mentors, regional pastors, and church visitors to provide support, encouragement, and counsel to congregations and staff.

Prayer Requests

- For congregations to support their pastor's spouse and family in ways that are meaningful and upbuilding.
- For good fits in mentoring relationships between new and seasoned pastors so that both will be blessed as they walk together.
- For the 17 specialized transitional ministers who are serving congregations through times of significant transition.

Participants in the children's ministry.



You add.
God multiplies.

Working Together Makes Us Stronger

A growing trend in denominational ministries is the movement toward alliances and partnerships to leverage resources and enhance ministries.

Last October at Park CRC in Holland, Mich., Classes Holland, Zeeland, and Georgetown held a joint fall ministry kickoff and invited denominational staff to join them.

Two of the denominational staff who attended were Bonnie Nicholas of Safe Church Ministries and Rev. Norm Thomasma of Pastor-Church Relations.

Nicholas met with congregational leaders to reaffirm the importance of maintaining a safe church environment for children and for everyone in which each person is valued and abuse is not tolerated. She highlighted new resources available from Safe Church Ministry.

The group shared ideas about how to meet challenges associated with abuse awareness, prevention, and response.

Thomasma engaged participants in conversations about “early warning” conditions that make congregations vulnerable to destructive conflict. The conversation led to thinking creatively together about what kinds of things congregational leaders can do to address conflict proactively so that when it happens, conflict can be constructive rather than destructive.

He noted that isolation from other churches and leaders is a contributing factor that makes a congregation vulnerable. When denominational ministries, classes, congregations, and leaders work together, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. ■

—Pastor-Church Relations staff



Norm Thomasma (left) at the fall ministry kickoff in Holland, Mich.

Quick Facts: Sustaining Congregational Excellence

Sustaining Congregational Excellence (SCE) seeks to foster health in pastors and smaller congregations so they can flourish. It specifically focuses on the denominational priority of creating and sustaining healthy congregations.

Programming includes grant opportunities, learning events, and conferences. Sixty-five percent of all CRC congregations are eligible to participate in SCE. To date, more than 70 percent of eligible churches have done so.

Prayer Requests

- For smaller congregations as they engage in ministry in their communities.
- For pastors who are called to minister in challenging situations.
- For the health of congregations, their pastors, and their pastors' families.

Quick Facts: Safe Church Ministry

Safe Church Ministry is a resource for churches in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. Churches reflect our Lord best when

- the environment is safe and free from the threat of abuse;
- relationships are open, honest, and respectful;
- children and those most vulnerable are protected;
- leaders use power and authority appropriately in loving service to others; and
- the response to abuse is compassionate and just, leading to healing.

Prayer Requests

- For wisdom and insight in responding to complex situations that are often difficult to unravel.
- For effective use of “Circle of Grace,” a prevention program for children and youth that can help churches build a culture of respect.
- For Safe Church Teams to function well as resources to churches and for teams to be formed where there are none.

Defying the Law of Averages

I've read that the average person laughs 15 times a day. The average person's feet hit the floor 7,000 times a day. On an average day in the United States, 500 million cups of coffee are consumed, 250 animals are buried in pet cemeteries, 5,962 weddings take place, and 28 mail carriers are bitten by dogs. All of this—and much more—I learned from a book titled *American Averages*.

Reading that book prompted someone else to write an editorial in which he described the average sermon. Perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek, he claimed the average sermon was 22.3 minutes long—shorter than 20 minutes and listeners do not think they are getting their money's worth; more than 30 and they may want a refund. The average sermon, he went on, has three points, 7.2 sub points, and 67 listeners who think the former pastor could have done it better. That average sermon contains 1.7 jokes, 4.3 illustrations, 2.6 Greek words, and one poem—preferably, he said, following the third point.

More than 50 years ago Elton Trueblood wrote a book called *The Company of the Committed*. In it he claimed that most folks—another way of saying “the average person”—assume that the church of Jesus Christ “is not in the least connected with what means most to them.” I do not claim to know how many folks actually think that, but I know from experience that the number is far greater than we would like it to be.

It seems to me that the apostle Paul—himself far from average, even as an apostle—did not think of the church as disconnected from what means most to us. And he didn't want us to think of it that way either. He prayed for the church at Ephesus “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him

better . . . that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you . . . and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Eph. 1:17-19).

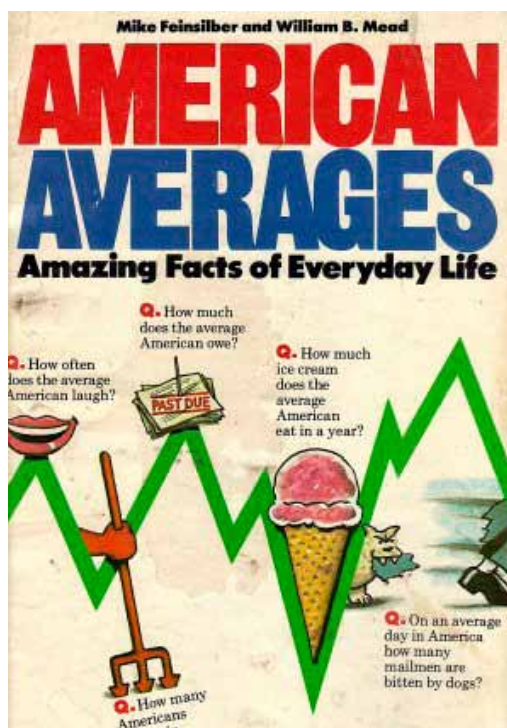
That, I suggest, is anything but an average prayer for anything but an average church consisting of anything but average believers. And it's worth remembering at the beginning of a new year.

There is a power that far surpasses jet propulsion and nuclear fission, making those forces seem positively average by comparison. It's the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and seated him at God's right hand and “placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” (Eph. 1:20-22). That power not only exists but is at work even now in us and through us.

I urge you, dear reader, to pray this prayer. Pray it for yourself. Pray it for your family. Pray it for your friends. Pray it for your congregation. Pray it for your denomination. Pray that God's resurrection power may be present in us and working through us, transforming both us and the world around us.

Pray not just that the Christian Reformed Church in North America will become bigger and better in 2013, but that we who make up that church will have eyes to see “the hope to which he has called” us and the “riches of his glorious inheritance.”

That, I know, will find us defying the law of averages. It will transform us from average people who spend our average days as members of an average church in a world that sees us as no more than average to people who are living enthusiastically and vibrantly for “him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20). ■



“I've read that the average person laughs 15 times a day.”



Rev. Joel Boot is executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Honoring Women Murdered in Mexico

Calvin College art professor Mandy Cano Villalobos chose pale pink thread to embroider the nearly 400 white shirts in her recent exhibition, *Voces*, which ran at the college's Center Art Gallery.

She chose pale pink because that is the color of the sun-faded crosses lining the highways in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Each was erected in memory of a woman who was murdered there.

In *Voces*, each white shirt represents a woman and is embroidered with her name.

The exhibition commemorates the women killed in Chihuahua, Mexico's largest and northernmost state, which shares a border with Texas.

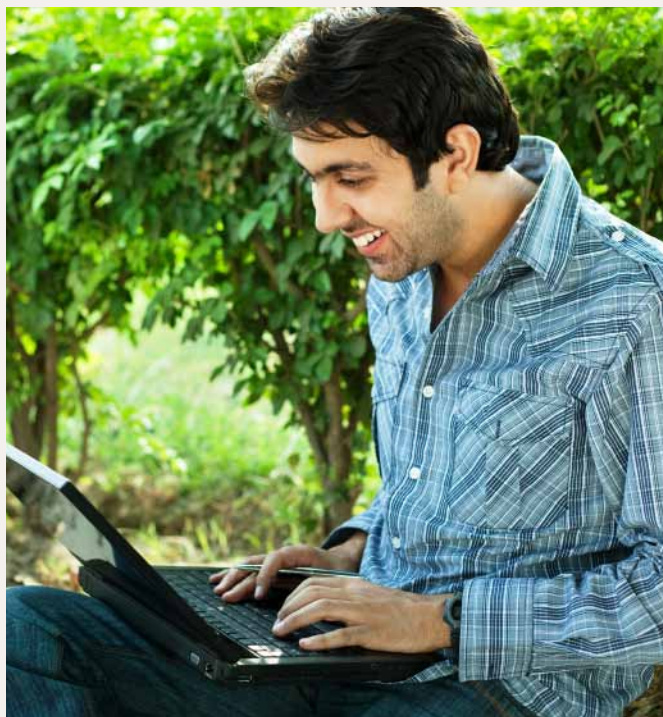
"A lot of women are being killed there, and their murders are directly linked to their being women," said Villalobos, who has taught at Calvin since 2009.

Most of the victims have been raped, beaten, and tortured, their bodies discarded in the desert or along the highway.

"I'm very much interested in bringing to light these women, who have worth," said Cano Villalobos. ■

—Myrna Anderson, Calvin College

Calvin College's Mandy Cano Villalobos stands before her artwork titled *Voces*.



BTGMI Arabic ministry team uses Skype to disciple seekers in the Middle East.

Reaching Muslims with Skype

Eight years ago, Safwah (not his real name) came to Christianity through the message of Christ's love and the help of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI).

After Safwah became a Christian, he contacted BTGMI's Arabic ministry leader at least once each month.

"Since then he has regularly asked me to pray for his witness to his family," notes the ministry leader. "I am so thankful—after eight years, he reports that his sister and brother-in-law have come to faith in Christ."

In July 2011, the Arabic ministry made it easier for seekers and new believers like Safwah to contact BTGMI through

Skype, a technology that enables people to meet face to face through the Internet on their computers.

"Through my Skype conversations with Safwah we became friends," says BTGMI's Arabic leader.

In engaging with Muslims, says the ministry leader, it is important to listen patiently, to pray for their salvation, and to be hospitable and caring.

What's most effective is to spread the message of self-giving love. This message resonates with Muslim seekers. ■

—Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministries
International

Tilling God's Garden in Romania

Steve and Jan Michmerhuizen do not readily fit the customary definition of "missionary."

Although both are experienced leadership trainers, they



Steve Michmerhuizen, Joel Hogan, and Joel Huyser with Bea Lórinz, a youth leader.

did not go to Romania with a predetermined program to implement.

Think of the Michmerhuizens as tillers or cultivators. The seeds of the gospel have been planted in Romania by others. Many of these seeds have grown into plants that are already bearing life-giving fruit.

But tillers or cultivators do not think only about individual plants. They are concerned with the whole ecosystem of the garden. So the Michmerhuizens have done a lot of listening and learning.

For almost two weeks last fall, I was part of a group that had the opportunity to listen to people and learn about God's work in Romania. During the visit, we met with leaders of renewal movements in

Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal, Catholic, and Romanian Orthodox churches.

One morning the Michmerhuizens invited two pastors, one Hungarian Reformed and the other Romanian Baptist, to join us for breakfast. We watched the eyes of the Romanian Baptist pastor grow wide as the Hungarian Reformed pastor talked about nominal members coming to a personal commitment to the Lord. The Baptist pastor then

exclaimed, "I didn't know that you Reformed believed in that sort of thing."

We also were thrilled to visit with a young Hungarian Reformed couple who are thinking of church planting that would go beyond their ethnic group.

We also saw the Impact Club, a program for youths aged 13 to 18 developed by New Horizons Foundation in Lupeni, Romania. In Impact, the youths themselves plan

and implement community service projects.

Already two Iowa congregations have organized Impact Clubs based on the Romanian model.

I left Romania grateful to see that the Michmerhuizens and others are exploring possibilities for working together to expand God's church. ■

—Joel Huyser, *Christian Reformed World Missions*

Online Students Visit Seminary

Walking the hallways of Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS), one of the students in the seminary's new distance learning program got a strong sense of history and continuity by looking at photos on the walls.

Another reported, "I had all kinds of ideas and expectations coming to Grand Rapids. But my experience here has exceeded all my expectations."

The students were at CTS as part of their curriculum, which calls for the 14 students from all over North America to gather on the campus two times in this first year.

This time they met for five days at the start of the fall semester to attend Gateway, the seminary's orientation course for new students.

With a compressed schedule that ran into most evenings, the students attended lectures and ate lunch in the student center and dinner at the parsonage.

Throughout the week, members of the first-year cohort also had the opportunity get to know each other.

Coming from diverse walks of life, they expressed a common gratitude for the journey on which they've embarked.

Another of the 14 students enrolled in the new online M.Div. program said, "I'm grateful that I can continue serving my home church and still get an excellent seminary education."

To learn more about the distance learning program, visit calvinseminary.edu/academics/distance-learning. ■

—Calvin Theological Seminary



Distance learning students visit Calvin Theological Seminary's campus for five days of orientation.

Hector Cue Solis at work in the coffee plant.



Coffee Farmers Transform Community

A lifelong coffee farmer, Hector Cue Solis is always eager to discuss the business of coffee. Standing amid the massive gears and dryers of the coffee production facility at La Palmera, Guatemala, he sweeps his arm toward the surrounding hillsides and details the production process.

“Most of what we grow is coffee, but we also have bananas, macadamias, and some lychee,” Solis says. “The fruit trees are primarily to shade the coffee plants.”

As beneficiaries of World Renew programming in Guatemala, Solis and the 200 members of the Farmers’ Association of San Jose have been able to lift themselves out of the cycle of poverty, limited education, and poor health that plagues many rural communities in Guatemala.

The first step in breaking that cycle came in 2003. That’s when community members of La Palmera came together to form a farmers’ association with the idea of pooling their money to purchase the 380 acres of farmland they previously had been renting.

With it came the antiquated but functional coffee production facility they use to process and sell their coffee collectively.

“We get a better price working together because we can sell more,” Solis says. “We work in groups, so one group harvests the coffee and the other one works here to process it.”

Despite their efforts, Solis said, community members were still burdened with poor health and poverty. In 2008, working through partner agency Vid y Pompanos (Vine and Branches), World Renew stepped in to help.

“Four years ago we started with health programming for the kids,” Solis says.

Through Vid y Pompanos, World Renew also started adult education classes in the community, helping teach rural farmers to read and write.

With childhood malnutrition widespread in the community, World Renew has trained several community health workers to monitor the monthly growth of young children, educated parents about the need to diversify local diets, and linked

the community to organizations that provide free vaccinations.

Through Vid y Pompanos, World Renew also has educated the farmers of La Palmera about 27 core farming principles that help them both increase their yield and preserve and protect the environment.

Solis and his fellow farmers took those lessons to heart. They produce about 6,000 pounds of compost from the coffee pulp each season. “Because of the lessons we have learned, we use it for compost each year,” Solis says.

Perhaps the most positive impact of World Renew’s efforts here, Solis believes, is that of uniting the community.

“Now our group is where our ideas of what we need are born,” he says. ■

—David Snyder is a writer/photographer who traveled to Guatemala for World Renew.

Look at You!

Just look at you! You have one amazing body. You have 200 bones, 600 muscles, millions of glands, billions of nerves, trillions of cells, and a whole lot more. And your body is different than anyone else. Surely someone greater than you put you together.

King David understood that when he said, "How you made me is amazing and wonderful. I praise you for that" (Psalm 139:14, NIV *Kid's Devotional Bible*). To that we can say "Amen!"

You know that God made your body wonderful, but how often do you take time to think

about that? How often do you thank God for your toes or your tongue or your two arms?

Let's do that right now. We'll take some time to look at a few of these neglected parts, and then thank God for all the parts of your body.



Tongue Twisting

Take a good look at your tongue. See those tiny bumps? They're not really taste buds. Each of those bumps covers *many* taste buds. You were born with about 10,000 taste buds on your tongue. Ten thousand! You lose some over the years. Older people usually have around 5,000. That's still a lot of taste buds.

Can you curl your tongue when you stick it out? Not everyone can do that. No one knows why. But that doesn't matter. Your tongue can do all the things that need to be done.

Your tongue moves food around in your mouth, pushes it to the back of your throat, and helps you swallow. Without your tongue, you'd have to eat mostly liquid food.

To prove that, grab some raisins and try to eat them without using your tongue. You can't do it, can you?

But there's more to your tongue than helping you eat. Your tongue, of course, also enables you to talk. Try to say "This is my tongue" without moving your tongue. It's impossible! Now say, "Thank you, God, for my amazing, tough tongue."

Just for fun, try tackling these tricky tongue twisters:

- Twelve twins twirled twelve twigs.
- Sam's shop sells spotted socks.

Now you make one up!

Happy Feet

Try to walk around the room without bending your toes or ankles. Now try to run that way. Awkward, isn't it? You need to bend your toes and ankles to walk well.

That's why you've been given so many joints and other things in your feet. One-quarter of all the bones in your body are in your feet—26 bones in each foot. Each foot also has 33 joints and more than 100 muscles. All those muscles and bones are knit together with lots of tendons and ligaments. And they're all put together exactly right so that you can walk and run and hop and skip and jump. Your feet are mechanical works of art!

Now take off your shoes and socks. Watching your feet, walk slowly around the room. See how your toes bend and spread? Stand on tiptoes and watch your ankles work.

Thank God for your wonderful feet.





Thumbs Up

To find out just how handy your thumbs are, tape both of your thumbs down so that you can't use them. Try to keep them taped down for a day.

We have what are called opposable thumbs. "Opposable" comes from the word *opposite*. We can put our thumbs opposite our fingers. We can grab. That's a very big deal, as you'll discover when you tape your thumbs. What things were hard—or impossible—to do without opposable thumbs?

Thank God for your opposable thumbs.

Differently Abled

Some of you use cool tools and technology or other means to help you see, hear, speak, or move.

- Kids with visual impairments might need special tools or a special friend to help them get around. Maybe you wear eyeglasses or contact lenses to see better. Or use a cane to walk around safely. You might even have a service animal to help you move around independently—a dog, a miniature horse, or even a pig who wears a special harness and is trained to be your helper.
- Hearing aids or cochlear implants help some kids hear better. Some know what other people are saying just by watching their lips move. Some use sign language to talk to other people with their hands. Do you know any sign language? Have you ever learned the signs for "Jesus Love Me?" If not, ask someone to teach you the signs!
- Some kids use special technology to help them talk. You may use a special communication device, an iPad, or a laptop to talk to family, friends, and teachers. You may use pictures or symbols to ask for something, answer a question, or say hi.
- Some kids use wheelchairs, walkers, or power chairs to get around. Some wheelchairs are also standers, which means you can stand up right with your chair!

However you see, hear, speak, or move, you are made in the image of God. Thank God for the wonderful tools and technology that help you each day.

—Beverly Stephenson is a special educator who lives in Zeeland, Mich.

Private Eyes

To watch your eyes work, make sure you are in a well-lit room. Take the mirror and put it close enough to your face so that you can see the pupils (those black holes) in your eyes. Then close your eyes tightly for a full minute—count slowly to 60. Open them and immediately check your pupils in the mirror. You should be able to see them shrink from big black holes to pin pricks. Your eyes automatically adjust to light.

That colored part around each pupil, the iris, does the adjusting. It's got three different layers of cells and lots of muscles. It's also got all the cells that give your eyes color.

The combination of color cells and tissues in your irises is yours alone. No one else has irises that look or work exactly like yours. They're absolutely unique.

Thank God for your eyes. They're beautiful, they're complicated, and no one else has eyes just like yours.

FuN Facts

1. Feet have around 250,000 sweat glands. That's why your feet sweat a lot. And it might explain those stinky tennis shoes!
2. Your tongue pushes saliva to the back of your mouth and helps you swallow it.
3. Your eyes send upside-down pictures to your brain. Your brain flips the picture.
4. The middle part of your ear is no bigger than a Smartie. Three bones that are in your middle ear could fit on top of a penny.



Joanne De Jonge is a freelance writer and a former U.S. National Park ranger. She attends West Valley Christian Fellowship in Phoenix, Ariz.



Simple Living

Toward God's Great Shalom

I'D LIKE TO HAZARD a guess right here and now that the majority of you who have read the title to this article have already formed some pretty vivid impressions about what “simple living” means. It’s fair to say that for many it suggests some kind of bucolic scene, perhaps a bygone era not fit for the myriad challenges of the present day.

Maybe in your mind’s eye you see a family of homesteaders, Laura Ingalls Wilder style, feeding the woodstove so they can prepare a dinner from food planted, tended, and harvested by their

own hands. There they are, gathered by the fire after dinner, piecework in their laps, a hushed silence descending as they mend, knit, and sew. Or maybe you’re thinking of your hippie neighbor who’s relentless about recycling and saving water and riding her bike and who sells the eggs produced by her backyard hens. There are many riffs on this theme, but I’m betting that “simple living” makes you think about a lifestyle that’s different from yours.

This is no cause for alarm, but it is cause for thought. You see, I’m convinced that living simply is the only way of living that leads to the kind of shalom most of us are

so keenly seeking. For Christians, the injunction to live simply begins with the Scriptures, where God’s intent for our lives is woven through stories, letters, visions, and admonishments. Many writers have helped us think through the biblical requirements for us to tend and care for the whole of God’s creation (see “For Further Reading” for just a few of them).

So what does “living simply” entail? Here’s one phrase people have used to define simple living: *I choose to live simply so that others might simply live.* It sounds helpful, but what does that really mean? I believe that negotiating a fuller description of what belongs under the

banner of simple living requires us to recognize this starting point: In North America, we're part of a system of wealth creation and retention—consumer capitalism—that inherently degrades our own humanity as well as the humanity of other people, creatures, and environments around the world. Speaking coherently about what simple living entails means acknowledging our participation in this economic system and allowing it to alter our way of life.

Making these connections for ourselves and for one another is the most vital key to unlocking the puzzle of simple living. Until we're willing to admit that our fraught, consumptive lifestyles are degrading life for other people all over the world, until we know it with our minds and feel it with our hearts, we will not care enough to change.

Where do we start? Let's begin with where we find ourselves right here and now, living in a time and place that places great expectations on us every single day. We're supposed to be wonderful bosses and coworkers, parents, friends, cooks, wives, children, neighbors, cleaners, party hosts, Facebook friends, and Tweeters. In short, society asks us to live disintegrated lives. Simple living, on the other hand, calls us toward integration and the call for shalom that is at the heart of God's Word.

What's for Dinner?

Simple living affects each and every corner of our lives. But to help us think more clearly and concisely about making the kinds of connections we need to make between our lifestyles and the creation, I want to place one particular aspect of our lives under the "simple living microscope." We're going to engage in a bit of careful thinking about dinner. That's right—we're going to consider the implications of putting dinner on the table.

That's one of the more mundane aspects of our daily existence and therefore one we usually don't endow with much consideration. But there are all sorts of ways of putting dinner on the table that can diminish the lives of other people and of the creation as a whole. We

Maybe you're thinking of your hippie neighbor who's relentless about recycling and saving water.

must become good at asking difficult, time-consuming questions about our food and about our habits of eating.

Let's start by recognizing that the way we eat does affect the lives of other people. When, for example, we eat out of season, we are participating in the system of energy-intensive transportation that's necessary to ship food from far away so we can eat what we want when we want it. When we shop with only price as our bottom line, buying foods simply because they are cheap, we're ignoring the hidden costs that allow for such savings. The reason it's cheaper to buy industrially produced foods from large manufacturers is precisely because they participate in practices that degrade the creation. If we want to be part of a food economy that does not diminish either people or the environment, we must be prepared to pay the real price. That requires an almost complete paradigm shift. For decades North Americans have seen the average household food expenditure as a percentage of all other expenditures fall lower and lower. When you find green beans at the grocery store for under a dollar a pound, you can safely assume that there's a sinister reason for this, a reason that diminishes some other person and some other place.

But there's good news too. There are ways we can experience God's healing

embrace for ourselves and for the whole of the creation as we gather food and prepare and consume it. It's my belief that food we have prepared ourselves over time, food we have sourced responsibly and carefully, food that we share with our neighbors and friends connects us in some quietly profound ways with God.

Here's how that might look. Perhaps one night a week you could choose to eat simply—say, beans and rice. With this act you stand in solidarity with those around the world whose only sustenance is beans and rice; it connects you to God's people. Perhaps you could choose to eat meat for dinner only half the time, knowing that it takes more resources (animal feed and water) to grow meat than it does grains and vegetables. As a result, you will be more grateful for the meat you do eat. Or maybe you could plant just one of the foods you like to eat—say, kale or basil—and feel deeply connected to God as you tend, harvest, and eat that bounty. It's also possible that none of these suggestions is right for you in your endeavor to live more simply. That's part of the glorious diversity in God's creation. If we ask the Lord to show us how to live more simply, he'll do so.

Ultimately, I hope that we can see simple living as an invitation, not as a burden or a fad, not something only for the rurally inclined. The invitation to us today is to go back to those first thoughts we had about what simple living looks like and try, with grace for ourselves, to image *our* lives lived more simply for the glory of God—and then to begin. ■

For Further Reading

- Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, Baker, 2001.
- Doris Janzen Longacre, *Living More with Less*, 30th ed., Herald Press, 2010.
- Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed., Fortress Press, 2001.



Helen Aupperlee and her family live in Grand Rapids, Mich., where they work, grow vegetables, eat with neighbors and friends, and try to live more simple lives.

How Should We Then Eat?



IT'S HARD TO KNOW WHAT TO EAT given all of the books highly critical of the way our food is produced, processed, and marketed.

Modern Meat (Vintage) by Orville Schell is one of the first books of this genre, detailing how feedlots cheated by defying a ban on DES (diethylstilbestrol) to boost weight gain in lean beef cattle.

Michael Pollan has written several books, including *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Penguin), all highly critical of farming that uses pesticides to fight weeds, insects, diseases, molds, and mildews.

I have been an agricultural journalist for about 50 years and I am rather alarmed by how misleading or one-sided many of these books can be.

A clearer view comes from *Tomatoland* by Barry Estabrook (Andrews McMeel Publishing). He tells how Florida became the unlikely place where most of North America's fresh tomatoes are grown and marketed during the winter. The empha-

sis is on yield and supermarket eye appeal, which means that nutrition and taste have been sacrificed.

Also sacrificed has been the welfare of the people who toil in the tomato fields. Some have been poisoned by pesticides on farms that ignore warnings about safe use. Others are literally slaves, bought and sold by crew bosses who keep them desperately poor.

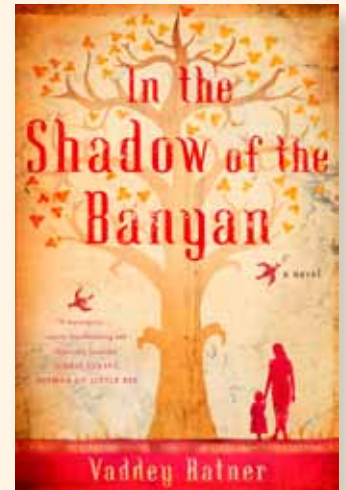
For a more reassuring read, I recommend Maurice Hladik's recently-released *Demystifying Food from Farm to Fork* (iUniverse). The book tells how North American farmers keep the public supplied with huge amounts of nutritious and affordable food and exposes the false reasoning behind many of the critic's claims about modern agriculture.

As interest grows in how our food is produced and processed, writers have found an eager audience. Unfortunately, through a lack of knowledge or established biases, some are producing books that mislead readers. ■

It's hard to know what to eat.



Jim Romahn is a freelance journalist in Kitchener, Ontario, where he belongs to a church plant called *The Journey*.



In the Shadow of the Banyan

by **Vaddey Ratner**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

As a child, Vaddey Ratner experienced the Khmer Rouge's tyrannical subjugation of Cambodia from 1975 to 1979. She survived forced labor, searing hunger, and near execution. This gripping novel based on her story reveals a world gone mad, in which the oppressors reduced Cambodians to this dictum: "To keep you is no gain; to kill you is no loss." Written from a Buddhist reincarnational worldview, *In the Shadow of the Banyan* gives readers an insider's view of a time that had "no logic to it." Even so, many stories of love, hope, and courage emerge amid the chaos. (Simon & Schuster)





Unstoppable: The Incredible Power of Faith in Action

by Nick Vujicic
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Born without arms and legs, Nick Vujicic faced many obstacles. But with the help of God, who is “abled,” and his Christian parents, he overcame his disability and became a motivational speaker, evangelist, and director of Life Without Limbs. In this book—a combination of memoir, pep talk, and evangelical sermon—Vujicic urges readers to put their faith into action by sowing “good seeds” for God wherever they find themselves in the world. He shares stories of Christians who have done just that. (Waterbrook)



Bully

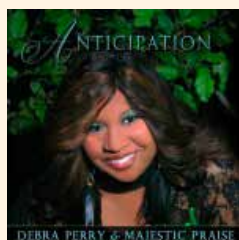
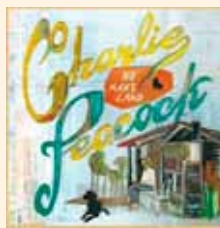
by Patricia Polacco
reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Lyla and Jamie are new to sixth grade, and they quickly become close friends. Little do they anticipate that their friendship will be tested and that they will learn what it means to be a scapegoat. In *Bully*, the prolific and beloved Patricia Polacco has created another picture book that speaks the voice of the vulnerable child. “What would you do?” the friends ask the reader at the end of their story. *Bully* offers an opportunity to open conversations with upper elementary and middle school students about the pain and hurt of bullying. Ages 7 and up. (Putnam)

No Man’s Land

by Charlie Peacock
reviewed by Robert Keeley

Charlie Peacock’s solo albums usually lean toward jazz-flavored pop. This time Peacock wanted to honor the music of his grandparents: roots music from Louisiana and Oklahoma. Typically Peacock’s innovative piano is out front, but on this album it takes a backseat to acoustic guitars, steel guitars, and fiddles. It’s great to hear these crack musicians dig into such well-constructed music. But Peacock is a thinking person’s artist, and I find myself wondering if he thinks too much—the songs can seem just a little too clean and clever. But if that’s a problem, it’s a small one. *No Man’s Land* is a fine album that will please long-time fans and new listeners too. (101 Distribution)



Anticipation

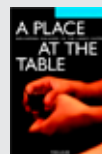
by Debra Perry and Majestic Praise
reviewed by Reggie Smith

Calvin College alum Debra Perry and her gospel group, Majestic Praise, have given us Christian music for “grown folks.” The 17 tracks are mature, smooth, and balanced. The strongest track, “I Am Determined,” anchors the album, a musical journey with stops at praise and worship, psalms of reflections, and hip hop. Get on board with them. (Joint Heir Productions)

THE LOWDOWN



Found: Looking for inspiration? *Finding God*, edited by John M. Mulder, offers the conversion stories of 60 Christians from the apostle Paul to Sojourner Truth to Bono. (Eerdmans)



Make Room: Small groups can look to “A Place at the Table” for a three-session, DVD-based study on welcoming children to communion. (Faith Alive)



More Room: *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* by Barbara J. Newman gives church leaders the information they need to do exactly what the title says. (Faith Alive)

Fiction Family

It’s a Fact: The collaborative effort known as Fiction Family (Jon Foreman and Sean Watkins) produces their sophomore album, *Fiction Family Reunion*, late this month. (Rock Ridge)

Beasts of the Southern Wild

reviewed by Josh Larsen

There is a tension in this temporary world between the ugliness of sin and the inklings of the glorious, restored creation that is to come. It’s a tension captured by the astonishingly original film *Beasts of the Southern Wild*. Set in a lowland community whose impoverished residents have refused to move to higher ground, the movie centers on a young girl whose eyes are attuned to the natural beauty around her. Gritty, magical, and apocalyptic, *Beasts* is a strange and wonderful brew that recognizes that love and mercy have their place, even in the muddiest spots on earth. On DVD now. (Fox Searchlight)



MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

**Confessions of
a First-Grade
Sunday School
Teacher**



THIS MAY COME AS A SURPRISE to you, but Jonah wasn't really swallowed by a whale. In spite of what children's story Bibles, coloring books, *Veggie Tales*, and—gulp!—your Sunday school teacher may have taught you, it was a fish that swallowed the runaway prophet, albeit a big fish—a *huge* fish, as the Hebrew (Jon. 1:17) and Greek (Matt. 12:40) terms imply. But we can't say with any amount of certainty that the fish was a whale or, as one of my 6-year-old Sunday school kids recently hypothesized, "a shark because they have really wide mouths."

Confession time: In the 25 years I've taught Sunday school, I may have described the fish as a whale.

But as a curriculum editor who receives regular input from theologians whose job it is to make sure we get the story right, biblically speaking, I've been set straight on that whale issue. I've also discovered some other fishy "facts" that need to be reeled in. Read on to see if any of these tall tales sound familiar.

The whole world was beautiful when God created it. The Hebrew word for the garden in which God placed Adam and Eve is *gam*, which means, literally, "bounded place, a pleasant place isolated from surrounding wilderness." There's no doubt that the world God called into being was good. But while beauty is most certainly in

If Eve had been standing in an orchard in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia . . . she might have picked a Red Delicious or a Granny Smith off the tree.

the eye of the beholder, the creation probably didn't look anything like the manicured gardens at Versailles.

Eve ate an apple. If this part of God's story—humanity's fall into sin—had taken place in the 21st century, and if Eve had been standing in an orchard in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia or in Wenatchee, Washington, she might have picked a Red Delicious or a Granny Smith off the tree. But Eve was in the Garden of Eden, and that garden was located in the Middle East. So it's much more likely that the fruit she plucked from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" was a pomegranate or a fig—or some one-of-a-kind fruit that was never seen again (Gen. 3:1-7).

There were two of every animal on the ark. True, God told Noah to take two of every kind of animal on board the ark (Gen. 6:19-20). But God also instructed him to take seven pairs of every clean animal (Gen. 7:2-3) for burnt offerings (8:20) and food (9:3). So while we're not sure if the animals boarded the boat in a parade of pairs, we do know that the ark was quite a zoo.

Mordecai was Esther's uncle. Truth is that the two of them were cousins, not uncle and niece (Esther 2:7).

An angel choir sang to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born. Scripture indicates that "a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel" (Luke 2:13). But in spite of what's depicted in countless Christmas dramas and story Bibles, they were *saying* the good news, not singing it.

A virgin (in this case, Mary the mother of Jesus) is someone who isn't married. Sunday school teachers are most likely to give this truth-bending answer when a young child, after singing "Silent Night" or after hearing the story of Jesus' conception (Luke 1:26-38) and birth,

pipes up with the question, "What's a virgin?" If you think that's an awkward moment when you're a parent, just imagine what it's like when you're standing in front of a class of wide-eyed 5-year-olds looking up at you! (That same awkwardness may lead a Sunday school teacher to tell kids that Rahab was an innkeeper or that Potiphar's wife just wanted Joseph to stay a little longer.)

There was no room at the inn. While it's true that there was no room for Mary and Joseph when they arrived in Bethlehem, it's also true that *there was no inn!* The Greek word *καταλύματα* (*katalumati*) indicates the guest room of a house. In this case it may have been the house of a relative who already had extra company. The 2011 New International Version of the Bible corrects this misconception by translating it like this: "She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them" (Luke 2:7).

There were three wise men. The more accurate title for these special visitors is "Magi," and we don't know how many of them came to see Jesus. We know they brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11), but that doesn't mean there were three Magi any more than counting the gifts at a baby shower will tell you how many guests were at the party.

The Magi visited baby Jesus on the night of his birth. Although your tabletop manger scene may include a set of three wise men to place alongside the shepherds, Jesus probably wasn't a newborn when the Magi arrived. The Magi traveled first to Jerusalem to look for the "one who has been born King of the Jews" (Matt. 2:1-2) and then to Bethlehem, where, "on coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him" (v. 11). The fact that Herod ordered the execution

of all boy babies up to the age of 2 "in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi" (v. 16) also indicates that Jesus was older than a newborn when the Magi visited.

The Bible is primarily a book of stories with morals that teach us how to be good people. While it's tempting to teach Scripture as a series of virtues that help us grow in wisdom and stature, that's not the intention of God's Word. The Bible is the story of God's redemption and restoration of his fallen world through Jesus. Its purpose is to put us in touch with the God who, by God's Word and work, transforms us. Understanding the Bible as a book of morals may make you a nice person, but it won't provide you with any more hope and comfort than you'll get from a book of etiquette.

Sunday school teachers have all the answers. If you've read this far, you already know that, like parents, preachers, theologians, and other believers around the globe, Sunday school teachers don't know everything. The Bible is full of things that are hard to understand. It's important to resist the urge to fill in the blanks when we don't have an answer to a question. Instead, we can invite kids to wonder along with us and show them that we have much more to discover about God and God's ways. We need to admit honestly that the Bible contains many things we can't explain. But we believe anyway. That's what faith is all about! And that's the best kind of confession of all. ■



Karen De Boer is the author of *Home Grown: Handbook for Christian Parenting (Faith Alive)*. She attends The Journey, a church plant in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

Living with the Mystery

Editor's note: This column presents another perspective on the topic raised by Bernard Van Ee in his article "Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?" (Reformed Matters, August 2012).

IS HISTORICAL, FACTUAL INTERPRETATION of the first 11 chapters of Genesis necessary? I believe the short answer is no. Nor is it feasible for many Christians today as they try to balance interpretations of Scripture with worldviews also developed through scientific and literary study.

According to Michel Shermer, a noted thinker on the subject of myth, "Myths are stories that express meaning, morality or motivation. Whether they are true or not is irrelevant. But because we live in an age of science, we have a preoccupation with corroborating our myths."

Although Shermer is a professed agnostic, his definition requires some unpacking in the biblical context. Trying to unravel the story of creation in its original prose (that is, in the style of a myth) in a scientific age is simply unreasonable.

The biblical creation has some similarities to (and important differences from) Babylonian creation myths. It is written in a way that is culturally relatable. But rather than stating that the creation of the world was a byproduct of a conflict among the gods (as in the Babylonian story Enuma Elish), the Genesis account states that creation was a deliberate act—and it was good! Whether or not the biblical creation story is true in the strict factual sense, it remains a myth (by Shermer's definition) and teaches something important about God's character. This mythological writing differs from the firsthand and secondhand accounts of Christ's resurrection recorded in the New Testament, which can be interpreted in the factual sense and require a different interpretive lens than the writings of the Torah.

It is very important to consider the entire biblical historical narrative when looking at Christian theology, but must we hold a strict factual and historical interpretation of the first 11 chapters of Genesis? Is it possible, perhaps, to glean some truths and also live with some mystery? Let's consider the plot of Genesis 1-11 in general terms:

1. God created the world and it was good.
2. God created humans who willfully chose (and continue to choose) to sin against him.
3. God promised to send a Redeemer.

The biblical creation story . . . teaches something important about God's character.

Without a literal "Adam," I don't have a well-defined idea of how the fall occurred. But for me the main idea is that sin is a choice, and that the world is fallen, and that the promised Redeemer of Genesis 3:15 is Jesus Christ as described in the New Testament. I take this general truth from the *mythology* without having to invoke a strict factual historical interpretation of the specific events.

Let's also consider the Westminster Confession of Faith. Chapter 1 describes God's revelation in three ways: through his creation, through his Word, and through his Spirit. I believe we must interpret revelation of all three in light of the others, and I believe that part of God's revelation of himself is through our understanding of the physical world. If we consider the best well-accepted biological science of today (more specifically, the science of genetics), it is not possible to consider that all humans were descended from a two-person pair (a literal Adam and Eve). And if we insist on a dogmatic view of Genesis 1-11 as being historically factual, we will inevitably force those who hold a high regard for today's science to either reject their science or reject Christianity. We need a middle ground.

The discussions surrounding interpretations of Genesis are important and very valuable. But ultimately some Christians will have to accept that they must agree to disagree. The most important thing is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . [and to] 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37, 39). ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Joseph Brunsting is a graduate student in engineering at the University of Guelph, Ontario. He is a member of New Life Christian Reformed Church.

ADS

Deadlines: Feb. issue is 1/7/2013; March issue is 2/4/2013. Details online.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.33^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.26^{US} per character applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements. Photos are \$22^{US} extra.

To Advertise: Place your classified ad online at www.thebanner.org/classifieds or email it to classifieds@thebanner.org or fax it to 616-224-0834. Questions? Call 616-224-0725.

Denominational and Classical

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS ILLIANA will meet on March 5 at 9 am at New Hope, Lansing, IL. Email agenda items to firstcra@netnitco.net by January 22.

Laryn Zoerhof, SC

Available for Call

RIVER PARK CRC OF CALGARY on behalf of newly formed Lantern CRC, would like to announce that Pastor Layne Kilbreath is available for call. His email is layne.kilbreath@gmail.com

ALAMEDA CRC sincerely recommends Rev. Frank C. Guter to the churches for a call. The anticipated financial support for an established campus ministry at Berkeley UC where he served since June 2011 has not materialized. He can be contacted at frank.guter@gmail.com or (616) 307 1440

Announcements

JOIN US for winter worship services at Farnsworth Hall, 6159 East University Dr., Mesa, AZ. The Maranatha Community CRC meets at 10 AM each Sunday from 12-02-12 thru 4-14-13. Contact Rev. Gary Hutt @ 509-499-4561 for more information.

LOOKING TO ESCAPE the northern cold winter? Consider warm, sunny paradise on the S. W. coast of Florida at Venice. Enjoy warm, friendly welcome at the Reformed Church, 1600 Banyan Dr. (US Highway 41 and Center Rd.) Sunday morning worship, 10:30, 941-493-3075.

LAKE ALFRED MINISTRY--CRC/RCA January thru April 14, 10:30 AM, 5:50 PM. Located on Rt. 17/92, Lk Alfred, Fl. Close to Winter Haven & Rt. 27. Preaching Jan. Rev. A. Jongsma; Feb. Dr. J. Nederhood; March-April 14 Dr. G. Kroeze. Phone: 863-422-2187, 863-422-6442.

Birthdays

90th Birthday

NELLIE HEERINGA, 1720 Liberty, Apt. 301, Lynden, WA 98264, will celebrate 90 years on January 14. Tom and Lorna, Harvey and Audrey, Ed and Denise with her 6 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren wish her many blessings on her special day and in the years to come.



FRANCES RIBBENS VANBAAK of 2500 Breton Woods Drive SE #4007, Grand Rapids, MI 49512, celebrates her 90th birthday January 20. Fran served faithfully with Rev. Edward in Christian Reformed World Missions, in China, Japan, and HongKong. Her children arise and call her

blessed: Andy & Arlene, Shirley & Bill Martinus, David & Nancy, Tom & Lesley, Ruth & Keith Griffioen, 13 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

TRUDY (DEROOY) VERMAIRE will celebrate her 90th birthday on January 23, 2013. Her children, Mark and Lori Vermaire, Pete (deceased) and Marcia Bosscher, and Bob and Marcia Vermaire, 11 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren, praise God for her full and loving life and the blessing she is to them. Trudy resides at 2111 Raybrook, #2015, GR, MI 49546.

80th Birthday

EVELYN GREYDANUS WESTENBURG 207 Market Street #16, Alamosa, CO. 81101. An open house celebration was held on Dec. 29th to honor our mother, grandmother and GG at the Alamosa CRC fellowship hall in Alamosa, CO.

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary

SLINGS Harold & Martha 607 E 3rd St. Rm. 201, Pella, IA 50219 celebrated Dec.20 with children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. We praise and thank God for His love and faithfulness

65th Anniversary

MULDER Bill & Harriet (Bouwman) 511 Palm Ave, Ripon, CA 95366 will celebrate 65 years of marriage on Dec 26,2012. We praise & thank God for His love & faithfulness to Pop & Grams, love your children Bill & Kim, Rich & Bev, Ed & Cheryl & Sandra along with 18 grandchildren & 18 great grandchildren. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

60th Anniversary

BLOEM Jack and Dora (Buurma) of Grand Rapids, MI plan to celebrate 60 years of marriage on December 30, 2012. Their children Russ and Jackie Bloem, Ken and Stephanie Bloem, Phil and Mary Ellen Bloem

and Brad and Kathy De Boer with their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren praise God for His love and faithfulness for all these years together.

GRITTER Dr. Roy and Jean Ann (Hollemaans) 1350 Ala Moana Blvd. #1507, Honolulu, HI 96814 celebrated 60 years of marriage on Thanksgiving Day, November 22. Children: Suzanne (Dr. Matthew Gritter, son), Marianne, Hollianne, Louanne & Michael Ginocchio and Julianne (James and Jeffrey, sons). Hawaii is No Ke Oi!

Obituaries

BOSMAN Charles A. age 82, of Denver, CO went to be with his Lord on Nov 6, 2012. Survived by his loving wife of 59 years Betty (Zwaanstra); father of Jim Bosman, Ginny and Jeff Carpenter, Chip and Lynn Bosman, Beth and Diar Shipman; dear "Papa" to 16 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Preceded in death by brother Clarence (Mabel) Bosman, and survived by sister Clara (Bill) Buikema, and brother Andrew (Audrey) Bosman. Great is the Lord's faithfulness from generation to generation.

DE WITT Jacob Calvin, 83, of Phoenix, AZ went to be with his Lord Oct. 28, 2012. Survived by his wife Ruth (Verduin), sons Bill (Triek), Paul (Tracy), Jon (Nancy) and daughter Laurie (Tom) Joustra, brother Henry (Shirley) and sister Ida Van Wyk (Rogell). Preceded in death by his parents William and Jennie De Witt, sister Jennie and her husband Hans Ledri and grandson David Joustra.

2013

Winter Tour

DORDT COLLEGE CONCERT CHOIR

The Concert Choir, under the direction of Dr. Benjamin Kornelis, is bringing the music of Dordt College to a location near you!

Admission to the concert is free, with a freewill donation taken.

TUES
JAN 8 7:00 PM Concert
Sioux City, IA
First Presbyterian Church

WED
JAN 9 7:30 PM Concert
Sutton, NE
Hope Reformed Church

THUR
JAN 10 7:30 PM Concert
Overland Park, KS
Rolling Hills Presbyterian Church

FRI
JAN 11 7:30 PM Concert
St. Louis, MO
St. Paul's Evangelical Free Church

SAT
JAN 12 7:30 PM Concert
Cedar Rapids, IA
Noelridge Christian Church

SUN
JAN 13 9:30 AM Service
Cedar Rapids, IA
Peace Christian Reformed Church

6:00 PM Service
Pella, IA
Calvary Christian Reformed Church




BROUWER Marion age 85; November 10, 2012; 2111 Raybrook SE, Unit 4000, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; She is survived by her husband: Harv, of 59 years; children and spouses.; Kathy and Larry Wells from Caledonia (Jennifer, Jeff, Jon Knol), Brian and Jan Brouwer from San Diego (Marissa, Scott), Karla and Dan Harris from Cincinnati (Philip, Stephanie), and Tim and Laura Brouwer from Grand Rapids (Chris, Brendan, Mallory); step-grandchildren: Brad and Iryna (Nadia, Markian), Nick, Doug and Audrey, and Dave Wells; brother: John Van Genderen; sister: Ruth Klooster; brother-in-law: Floyd (Ann) Brouwer; sister-in-law: Alma DeKock.

Church Position Announcements

LEAD PASTOR First CRC of Bellflower, CA is seeking a full-time pastor for our established church as we strive to reach our diverse community in sunny Southern California. We are searching for a pastor who is passionate about preaching God's word and shepherding his people, and who has strong leadership skills, an enthusiastic attitude, and an ability to relate to all ages. For more information, contact Marv at 562-896-9339 or Bell1SearchCommittee@hotmail.com.

DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP First CRC of Ripon, CA is seeking a gifted musician who deeply appreciates Reformed theology and can utilize a broad range of musical expressions (both past and present) to be our next full-time Director of Worship. For a full job description and to apply, please contact our church office at office@riponfirstcrc.org or 209-599-3225.

PASTOR: Bethel CRC in Listowel Ontario is seeking a Pastor for approximately 50% position for Pastor of Congregational Care. Responsibilities include pastoral care, some preaching, teaching catechism and related ministry. We are looking for a Pastor that is willing to be involved in a Team Ministry that will help to implement the vision plan recently adopted for the church. We are looking for a candidate who is willing to live in the Listowel area. [Contact the church if you would like a copy of our job description.] Please send enquiries to our Human Resources Committee at officebethelcrrc@gmail.com or 519.291.4000.

FULL TIME PASTOR Phoenix CRC in Phoenix, AZ is seeking a full-time pastor. We are a young and growing service oriented congregation located in the central Phoenix area. We desire an upbeat pastor who is committed to sound biblical teaching and able to interact with the youth as well as the neighboring community. If interested, or would like to send a resume contact Andy Keizer, search@phoenixcrrc.org, 602-956-5440, website: www.phoenixcrrc.org

PASTOR Calvary CRC in Orange City, a growing community of over 6,000 in Northwest Iowa, is seeking a pastor who will follow Christ's leadership to shepherd us into the next phase of our ministry, is gifted in strong Biblical preaching, desires to nurture our youth, and has a heart for missions. Our new pastor will help us champion our mission to "Glorify God, Equip Believers, and Lead Seekers". Please send your letter of interest in confidence to secretary@calvaryoc.org. Resumes accepted until position filled.

PASTOR Alberni Valley CRC in beautiful Port Alberni, BC, Cda, is seeking a Senior Pastor. We are a diversified, loving, vibrant community church worshipping in relaxed contemporary style service. Church profile is available upon request. Contact Richard Wu at richardwu@shaw.ca (www.avcrrc.org)

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STUDENT LIFE DIRECTOR Haven CRC of Zeeland, Michigan is seeking a full-time person to help provide for the spiritual guidance of Haven youth (seventh grade through college) and youth leaders through administration, fellowship, discipleship, prayer and service. Please contact the church office at lori@havenchurch.org for more information and a full job description.

DE NOOY Margaret (Marge) went to be with her Lord and Savior on November 8, 2012 - two weeks before her 94th birthday, at the Holland Christian Home in North Haledon, NJ. Preceded in death by her parents; her siblings: Garret De Schaaf, Jack De Nooy, twin sister, Henrietta Brandes, Jean Boonstra, and Carrie Schaaf. Survived by a sister, Kathryn (Rev. Harry) Arnold of Portage, MI, and step-sister Pauline Van Beekum, sister-in-law Wanda De Nooy, and many nieces and nephews, as well as, grand-nieces and grand nephews. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." (Rev. 14:13)

DRACHT William H. of Marion, MI. went to be with the Lord October 22, 2012 after a brief battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife, Mary, and children: Ed and Brenda Dracht, Erin and Doug Heuker, Alyssa and Steve Raterink, Krista and Mike DeMaster, Steve and Betsy Dracht, Phil and Heather Dracht, and Laura and Tim Pegman and 19

grandchildren. Memorials may be made to World Renew, a cause dear to Bill's heart.

HANSUM Hattie (Groen) Platte, SD died on Nov. 11 at age of 97. Preceded in death by her husband Adrian, and brothers and sisters. Survived by children Norma (Glen) Spears and Bruce (Ruth) Hansum, 3 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.

RHODA Thomas A., 86, went home to be with the Lord November 25, 2012. Beloved husband of Arlene R. (Brummel) Rhoda for 64 years; father of Michael (Barbara) Rhoda, Rilla (Jeffrey) Reinsma, Suenell (Don) Terreault and Kenneth (Ellen) Rhoda; grandfather of Eric (Julie) Rhoda, Lauren (Jay) Marrs, Arletta Rhoda, James and John Reinsma, Nicole, Larissa, Janelle and Thomas Terreault, and Kellen Rhoda; grandpa to Shannon (James) Zielonka; great grandfather of 6; great grandpa to 2; brother of Jeanette VandenBosch, David (Shirley) Rhoda and Ronald (Shirley) Rhoda, Carol (the late William) Rhoda, Coral (the late Richard) Rhoda; and brother-in-law of Diane (the late Robert C.) Bloem.

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Provost Search Committee
Kuyper College
3333 East Beltline NE
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E-mail:
provost.search@kuyper.edu

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Preceded in death by Albert & Marie (Holwerda) Rhoda, Robert (Norma) Rhoda, Eleanor Rhoda, William Rhoda, Richard (Elizabeth) Rhoda, Robert C. Bloem. Committal with Army Honors followed at Ft Logan National Cemetery, Denver, CO.

SCHIERBEEK Charlotte (nee: Hoekstra); aged 88; November 4, 2012; Grand Rapids, MI; She was preceded in death by her husband, James Schierbeek, and an infant son. She is survived by her children: Virginia (Bernard) Schierbeek Momber, Rosemary (David) Mange, Annette (Jerry) Broersma, Julia Free, and Heidi (Steven) Beukema; grand-daughters: Sarah Mange, Lisa Mange, Alison Broersma, Lauren Broersma, Rachel Beukema Ball, Andrea Beukema, Kaitlyn Beukema; sister: Marie Werner; brother and sister-in-laws: Lucille Schierbeek, Don (Judy) Schierbeek, and Marge Klinge.

VANDERKOOY Vernon L., 77, Ada, MI passed peacefully into the arms of Jesus November 13, 2012. Vern will be greatly missed and lovingly remembered by his wife of 55 years, NellaMae (Lubbinge) and his 5 children; Scott (Janice) VanderKooy, Dawn Alison (Steve) Watt, Mark (Vera) VanderKooy, Ruthie (Butch) Hubers, Maria (Jon) Uekert and 15 grandchildren. Memorial contributions for his special needs grand-daughter, Alexa C. Watt (c/o Stephen Watt) may be mailed to: 7 Old County Rd. Amesbury, MA 01913.

VAN KLEY Helen Priscilla Van Kley nee Hawks was born on May 30, 1936 in Binghamton, New York. She was the second daughter of the Reverend William Sturtevant Hawks and his wife Helen Hawks. She is survived by her husband of fifty-three years, Dr. Harold Van Kley, daughter Cynthia Van Kley and son Michael Adrian Van Kley. She loved the Lord and sought to communicate that to others. We shall miss her.

WIGBOLDY Richard C., age 80, went to be with his Lord on October 13, 2012. 507 Briar Hill Nampa, ID 83686. He was preceded in death by his parents, Paul & Minnie; his brothers, Homer & Jack; and son-in-law, Dick Vander Schaaf. He is survived by his beloved wife of 61 years, Betty (Teunissen); his children, Rose Vander Schaaf, Lori (Rev. Carl) Leep, Rick (Sharon), Judy (Jeff) Van Groningen, Sue (Bill) Pastoor, 19 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren; his sister, Dorothy Miersma; sister-in-law, Betty C. Wigboldy; his brother, Roger (Darlene) and many nephews and nieces.

Employment

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT Kuyper College is seeking a Student Services Administrative Assistant. Kuyper College is a Christian College, located in Grand Rapids, whose mission is to equip students with a Biblical Reformed worldview to serve effectively Christ's church and His world. This position is an afternoon part-time position. To see the full job description, go to www.kuyper.edu/Faculty_and_Staff_Positions

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DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR SOUGHT DeMotte Christian School is looking to hire a Director of Development. DMCS is accredited by Christian Schools International, as well as by the state of Indiana, and promotes a Reformed Christian educational perspective. This northwest Indiana community is located 60 miles southeast of Chicago, Illinois. This growing school community of 250 students, which has served its community for 65 years, assists Christian families by providing a Christ-centered education for their children in grades PK 4 through 8th grade. To request an application or gain more information, contact Jim Rozendal, school administrator, at jrozendal@dmchr.org or call 219-987-3721.

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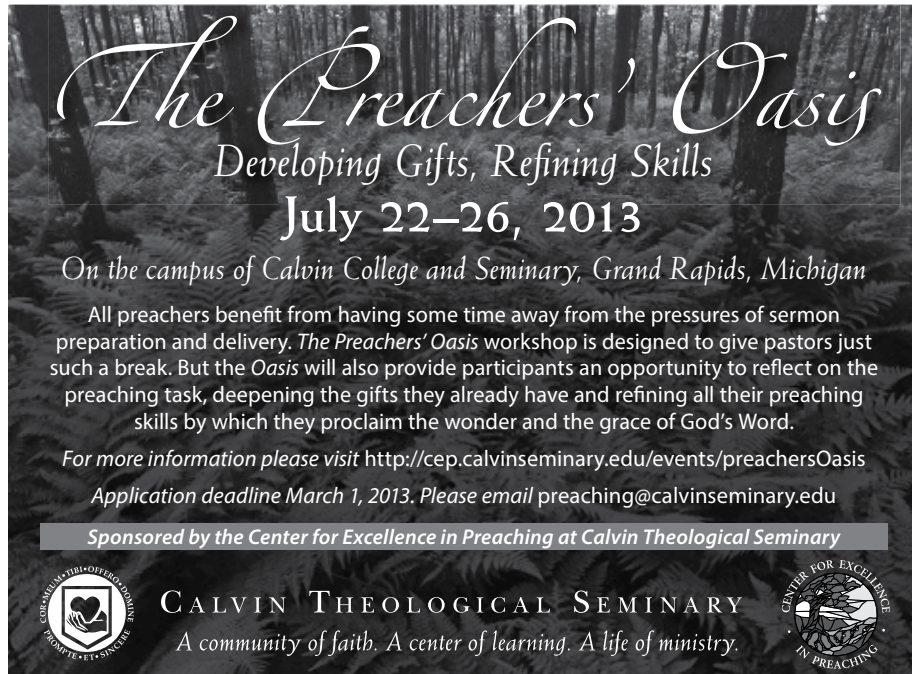
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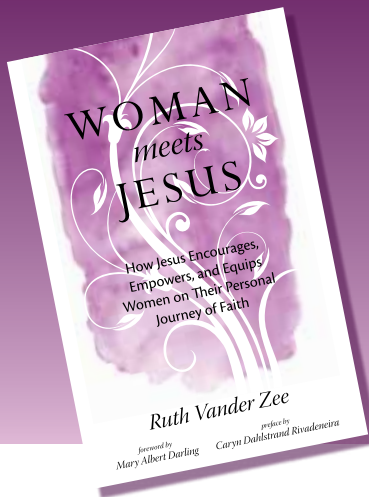
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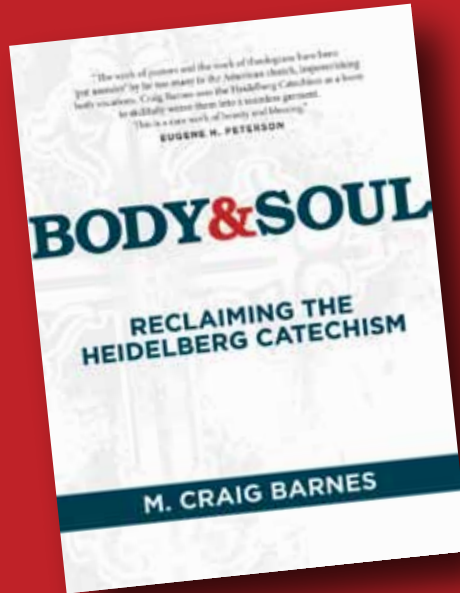
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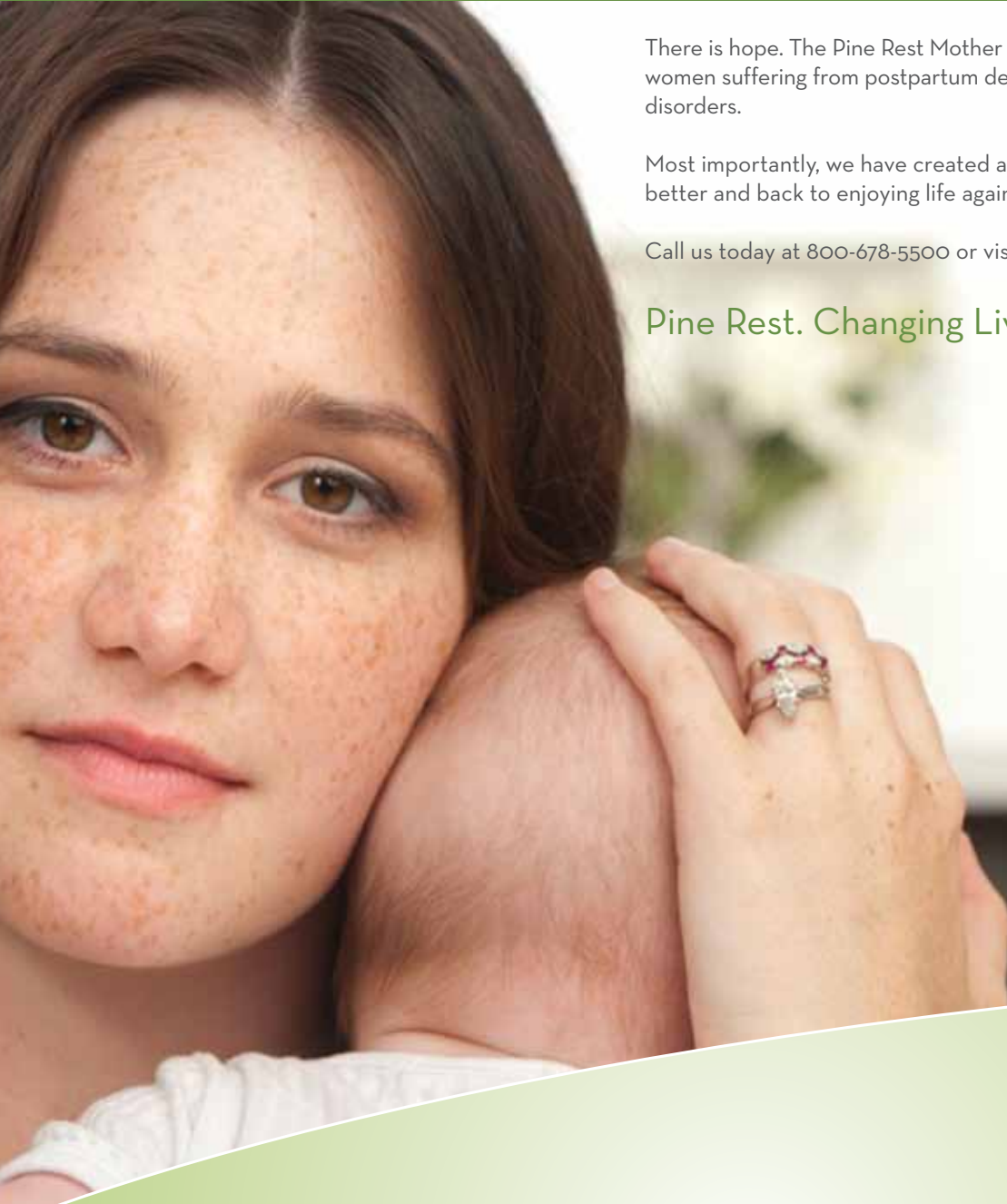
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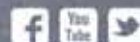
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Punch Lines

What has made *you* smile lately? Got a joke or funny incident you'd care to share with your wider church family? Please send it to *The Banner* at 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560; or email it to editorial@thebanner.org. Thanks!

A Sunday school teacher was telling her class the story of the Good Samaritan. She asked the class, "If you saw a person lying by the side of the road, wounded and bleeding, what would you do?"

One thoughtful little girl broke the hushed silence: "I think I'd throw up."

—Lynn Setsma

I was driving in the van with my 4-year-old daughter when she proudly announced that she knew what all the colors of a traffic light mean. She said, "Red means stop, green means go, and yellow means speed up!"

—Dan Hoolsema

Because of the nature of her surgery, the patient needed only a local anesthetic. While recovering, a nurse asked how she was feeling.

"I'm OK," she said, "but I didn't like the four-letter word the doctor used during surgery."

"What did he say?" asked the nurse.

"Oops!" replied the patient.

—George Vander Weit

On the way home from church one Sunday morning, one of our kids started crying loudly in the back seat of the car. When I asked why she was crying,

she said, "You know how it says in the Bible that if someone punches you, you shouldn't punch back? Nick didn't do what the Bible says because when I punched him, he punched me back."

Her older brother vehemently defended himself, also using Scripture: "It says in the Bible to treat others the way you want to be treated. When she hit me, I figured that was how she wanted to be treated, so I punched her back."

Seems our family has either a pastor or a lawyer—or both—in our future!

—Janette Groenewold

Q How does Moses make his tea?

A. Hebrews it.

—Richard Van Huizen

Our son-in-law was dropping off his 2-year-old daughter, Makayla, at the church nursery. She's into the "why" stage and asked him, "Why do we go to church?"

He responded, "Because it's God's house and we want to worship and pray to God."

That night, they were reading a story from the children's story Bible about how God lives in our hearts. He asked, "Makayla, where does God live?"

She thought for a moment and said, "Um . . . at church."

—Annette Zylstra

Last Halloween, my friend convinced her youngest son to reuse a cowboy costume, saying he could dress up as Indiana Jones. When he got sick of being called a cowboy, his mom suggested he say, "I'm Indiana Jones!" whenever people opened the door. As the evening wore on, thank-yous were being forgotten. My friend prompted her son by saying, "What do you say?" To which he loudly responded, "I'm Indiana Jones!"

—Louise Boutin

Our 3-year-old granddaughter asked her dad if she could help him clean up after communion was served in church.

"Sure," he said. "Why don't you go through the pews and bring me any communion glasses you find."

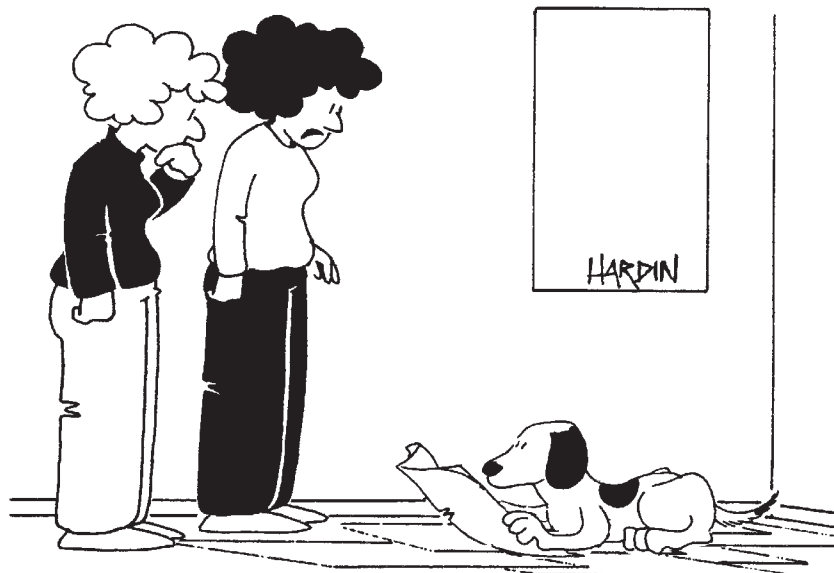
She turned and was about to walk away. Then she paused and asked, "Daddy, what's a pew?"

—Trudy Snaterse

A Sunday school teacher was discussing the Ten Commandments with her 5- and 6-year-olds. After explaining the commandment "Honor thy father and mother," she asked, "Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?"

Without missing a beat, one little boy answered, "Thou shalt not kill!"

—John Veltkamp



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21 Monday

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22 Tuesday


MIKE KIM *
North Korea-China: A Modern
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23 Wednesday

CHAP CLARK *
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