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SEPTEMBER 2022

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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

Surveys of *The Banner* readers show that more than 70% of you are college graduates. We don't know where readers are getting those degrees, but we suspect a good number would attend one of the colleges or universities with ties to the Christian Reformed Church. Calvin University is an institution of the CRC, and the other five are denominationally related educational institutions that Christian Reformed congregations support.

### School Stats

**Calvin University** (calvin.edu)

Est. 1876 - Enrollment: 3,256

**Dordt University** (dordt.edu)

Est. 1955 - Enrollment: 1,786

**The King's University** (kingsu.ca)

Est. 1979 - Enrollment: 885\*

**Kuyper College** (kuyper.edu)

Est. 1939 - Enrollment: 126

**Redeemer University** (redeemer.ca)

Est. 1982 - Enrollment: 1,014

**Trinity Christian College** (trnty.edu)

Est. 1959 - Enrollment: 1,175

\*Number of full-time students only.

## WHAT'S ONLINE

Looking for more? Here are just a few of the stories you'll find online at *TheBanner.org*. (Try typing the headlines into the search box.)

- » News: Ontario Church Experiments in Digital Discipleship
- » News: Iowa Church Celebrates 100 Years
- » News: New Seminary Provides a Resource for Reformed Hispanic Pastors
- » Music: *Harry's House*, by Harry Styles
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**BANNER**

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## Further From Revival

The zeal for orthodoxy (correct beliefs) lulls us into thinking we can pat ourselves on the back for obeying God and loving God's truths.



Shiao Chong is editor-in-chief of *The Banner*. He attends Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ont.

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are available at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

이 기사의 한글번역은 [TheBanner.org/korean](http://TheBanner.org/korean) 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

**SOME READERS THINK** my warning against loveless orthodoxy in my last editorial (“Beware Loveless Orthodoxy,” July/Aug 2022) was aimed at synod’s decision to declare the interpretation that “unchastity” in the Heidelberg Catechism includes homosexual acts, among other unchaste acts, as confessional. To be clear, I was calling out “a spirit of censure and distrust” as loveless orthodoxy, not the decision itself. As I often do, I was focusing on “how” rather than “what,” because “how” matters (“‘How’ Matters,” February 2020). I find it telling that some would confuse that spirit of censure with the synodical decision.

I witnessed that spirit of censure and distrust during debates on the floor of synod. For instance, a delegate jumped up to propose disciplinary action on another delegate even while that person was still speaking. Or consider when delegates argued over a normally routine approval of the next synod’s host church, not because Church of the Servant had done anything wrong but because it was in Classis Grand Rapids East.

It’s not only during synod. It’s a pervasive spirit around synod and the denomination as a whole. It is seeing the denomination as locked into a life-and-death battle. As one CRC pastor put it in a podcast, it’s a “big fight” with “a lot of blood on the ground.” Another pastor, in a post-synod video, spoke of “tremendous rot” in our denominational agencies and institutions that “needs to be cleaned out.” I didn’t want to call out these examples in my previous editorial, but it seems I need to for clarity.


It was not the only spirit that I witnessed at synod. As I mentioned in my previous editorial, I also witnessed “apologies and forgiveness.” But I focused on the loveless orthodoxy of this spirit of censure because I think

it is dangerous, as it deludes us into thinking we are on track to spiritual revival when it actually takes us further from revival.

The zeal for orthodoxy (correct beliefs) lulls us into thinking we can pat ourselves on the back for obeying God and loving God’s truths. Loveless orthodoxy feeds into our spiritual pride. As I have written previously, “a spirit of fault-finding is a sure symptom of spiritual pride” (“Revival and Spiritual Pride” June 2021).

I wrote then, “The spiritually proud are often harsh in their criticisms of others, even of other Christians. (Jonathan) Edwards bemoaned how they often would cloak their prideful harshness in sanctity and bold zeal for Christ to call things out. Rather, humble Christians, said Edwards, should ‘treat one another with as much humility and gentleness as Christ, who is infinitely above them, treats them’ (Works, Vol. 1, ix.v.i).”

I have been praying for the spiritual revival of the CRC. Yes, wanton disobedience to God’s truth will lead us astray—that’s obvious. But I call out the less obvious and also our seemingly common collective default posture: spiritual pride in fault-finding, even especially intellectual, theological fault-finding. There can be no spiritual revival without genuine humility. Once again, seeking to have a right heart (“Orthocardia” June 2022) gets buried under a hyper-focus on orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Few seem to have heeded all my previous warnings. 





## REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at [thebanner.org/letters](http://thebanner.org/letters).

### Synod Coverage

I would like to commend the Banner team for doing an exceptional job of covering Synod 2022 (July/August 2022). As one of the delegates, it is my view that your coverage was fair, accurate, and balanced. Your stories about our intense deliberations, your human interest profiles of some of the delegates and your respectful coverage of the LGBTQ allies who gathered outside the event were all top notch. You fulfilled your mandate of unifying the denomination while honoring our differences.

» Geoffrey Vanderburg // Calgary, Alta.

### Youth and Hymns

From my interactions with young people at Dordt University, I have learned that many of them appreciate singing hymns, evidenced by organ-led hymn sings initiated by students for the campus community. Students tell me that they are attracted to the beautiful poetry, sound doctrine, well-crafted melodies, and rich harmony of hymns. The use of hip-hop, sampling, and pop as a basis for congregational music presents a multitude of problems. These cultural expressions made popular by solo artists on stage are incredibly difficult for a congregation to emulate. If we value congregational participation in song as a response to God, we need to carefully consider that the music in our worship promotes participation rather than crippling it. What if we introduced our youth to the wealth of sacred music passed on to us by the “great cloud of witnesses”—the classic hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles

Wesley, the sturdy *Genevan Psalter*, and Lutheran chorales—that have fed the souls of Christians for generations? This feast of sacred music awaits, bountiful and reflective of God’s grace. May we invite the next generation to this lavish banquet!

» Carrie Groenewold, associate professor of church music and organ, Dordt University // Sioux Center, Iowa

Thank you for the revealing article by Micah van Dijk (“Why Youth Don’t Like New Worship Songs,” April 2022). Those youths are not alone; their criticisms might even have played a part in the decision of some to leave the denomination. Early *Psalter Hymnal* pages instruct us about what in our worship services constitutes biblical and confessional text, as well as what is liturgically appropriate music for any new song to be introduced. Would it therefore not be a good thing for every congregation to strike a music committee that in its meetings checks any current or new song to be introduced against these guidelines? There are many fine praise songs. ... Worship songs that relate to our youth—nay, to all of us—would do well should they follow in their composition the guidelines of the *Psalter Hymnal* and in spirit the tenets of the book of Psalms.

» Frank DeVries // Surrey, B.C.

### America and Canada

I highly commend Peter Schuurman’s article “A Letter to our American Partners: Canada as a Distinct Ministry” (April 2022). It lays out in logical and meaningful detail the realities we face in this David and Goliath relationship. Recognizing us (the Christian Reformed Church in Canada) as “a distinct culture

with a distinct way of doing ministry” gives me hope that we will listen and be open to celebrate our faith in harmony without seeing the world through the same lenses.

» Mary Kooy // Toronto, Ont.

I am very disappointed with Peter Schuurman’s premise that the Canadian way of doing ministry is different from the U.S. way. Peter attempted to point out that Canadian culture is different from the U.S. one. I would agree if there were one monolithic culture in each country. I have observed that each country has a number of subcultures in it. So which Canadian culture is Peter referring to? In the article he describes how each country is politically and sociologically different. I agree, but what does that have to do with ministry differences? The CRC churches in my city are politically and sociologically different from other CRC churches in my state—vastly different in some cases. The churches in those unique cultures need to find unique ways to minister. I am not up on the differences and tensions between countries about CRC governance, but that has nothing to do with the way individual CRC churches minister to their communities.

» Phil Quist // Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Speak Life

In Rod Hugen’s article “I Made Him Cry,” the repairman didn’t cry because he received an \$18 tip. Rather, he cried because Rod said some kind words that resonated with him. This theme reminds me of Toby Mac’s song “Speak Life.” The chorus goes, “Speak life, speak life / when the sun won’t shine and you don’t know why. / Look into the eyes of the broken-hearted; / watch them come alive as soon as you speak hope. / You speak love, you speak life.” We all need to hear words of hope, love, and encouragement. Rod’s article is a great reminder that I should speak life to those around me.

» Dan Dekker // Hudsonville, Mich.



## The Church as a Recovery Program

### Diversity in the CRC

I just read several articles in *The Banner* of May 2022 and was very pleased. We should work on our problems considering what happened in Buffalo and around this country with the multiple racist attacks on creatures that God created. I stand in shock that people think they are so much better than others that they have the authority to kill them. The good articles start with the editorial by Shiao Chong and go on to the very wonderful articles “Covenantal Communication in a Polarized Culture,” “Rhythms of Justice and Mercy,” and particularly “Ethnic Diversity and the CRC.” I do thank God for creating diversity; now we need to deal with our sins, and this is laid out well in the editorial and by David R. Koll.

» Pamela Adams // Sioux Center, Iowa

### A Right Heart

I just want you to know how very much I appreciate your editorials, including the latest one on orthocardia—having a right heart (June 2022). You are always so fair and balanced, yet original with new insights that forge a path out of our polarization. I’ve also appreciated the series on “Seeking Shalom in the Midst of Polarization.” Every article was right on and just what we need to hear in these times.

» Joyce Ribbens Campbell // Greenbelt, Md.

## As I Was Saying

Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

- » Understanding God’s Grace
- » Pro-lifer 3.0 to Abortion-rights Supporters: Let’s Talk
- » The Spiritual Discipline of Deep Listening

**HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED** the idea of church being like a recovery program? For every believer, sin is our daily addiction. When we come together in worship, it is a time of encouraging each other in sobriety from our sins, just like in Alcoholics Anonymous. Even more importantly, in worship we together recognize that our only rescuer from that sin addiction is God.

I hope this isn’t a surprising statement. After all, the 12-step program is based on the gospel. Each Sunday morning, then, is like walking into an AA meeting and saying, “Hi, I’m Rob, and I’m a sinner saved by grace.”

When people decide to go through a recovery program, it’s usually because they have come to the end of themselves. They realize they have no other place to turn but to God. As believers, we need to feel the same way. We need to come to a place where we can say, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

A great example of this is found in Luke 7:36-50. Jesus was invited to an important religious leader’s house. Soon after he arrived, a woman of ill repute crashed the party, making a scene of weeping and crying while washing his feet with her tears and hair. The religious leaders there were outraged that Jesus would allow this woman to do such things, yet Jesus was unaffected by their criticism. Instead he told a parable. When people recognize the true weight of their sin and yet experience forgiveness, he says, it will be overwhelming: “Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little” (Luke 7:47).

As with this woman’s tearful expression of thankfulness, recognizing the true depth of the forgiveness of our sins should always open us to

When it comes to our addiction to sin, none of us has anything to be proud of.

sympathy for the struggles of others. And if there’s ever a place where people who struggle in this life should be able to find understanding, it should be the church.

The church should be our place of spiritual recovery. When it comes to our addiction to sin, none of us has anything to be proud of. We’re all sinners saved by grace.

With this recovery perspective in mind, the church should be a place of comfort for those who wrestle with sin, a place where we can bow our heads at Jesus’ feet and be embarrassingly grateful for the love he has given us. According to Jesus, an expression of gratefulness like the one shown by the woman weeping at his feet is a true sign of genuine faith.

How great is our gratitude compared to this woman? **B**



Rob Braun is a salesman, a freelance writer, and a part-time minister for Princeton (Minn.) Community Church. He is a member of Bethel Christian Reformed Church, Princeton.



# Preaching to Promote Conversation

By Corey Van Huizen and Tyler Greenway

**I**n his latest book, *Think Again*, Adam Grant defines preaching: “We go into preacher mode when our sacred beliefs are in jeopardy: we deliver sermons to protect and promote our ideals.”

While Grant, an organizational psychologist, doesn’t necessarily capture the biblical use of the word “preach,” he does give us a window into how some view and receive those 15 to 40 minutes in most churches on a Sunday morning: in the face of opposition or alternative options, Christians often default to defense to protect our ideals.

There are two words in the Greek New Testament that get translated to English as “preaching” but have more nuanced meanings. The first is better translated as “to herald,” and the second as “to evangelize.” Neither has anything to do with a defensive posture; rather, they indicate preachers are to be couriers. A herald is a messenger sent from one party with an important message to proclaim to another. An evangelist is, literally, a bringer of good news.

This difference between Grant’s definition of preaching and the New Testament’s definitions raises an interesting question: Why is our preaching viewed by some as the promotion

and protection of ideals and values we hold sacred and not as the delivery of good news to be discussed? Is it possible that something about the way we preach contributes to that?

Recently we completed a study in which we interviewed young people (ages 18-29) who were disconnected from the church and asked them about their experience of Christian worship services. All of them had significant church experience, almost all went regularly as children, and none of them stopped attending because of sermons that delivered good news to be discussed.

Some experienced preaching that demanded belief in the Bible without offering evidence for those beliefs.

Some experienced preaching that pitted science against faith.

Some experienced preaching that rebuked one particular group of people for their sins over others.

Some experienced preaching that ignored or avoided the social issues of today, such as climate change, mental health, systemic injustices, poverty, and the plight of marginalized groups.

We could even summarize some of the preaching they experienced as promoting and protecting ideals and values that some hold sacred.

One participant said they felt they were asked to “leave (their) brain at the door.”

Some young people did report positive experiences with preaching. Some were intrigued and enjoyed learning. Some remembered worship services and church communities quite fondly. Some hoped to attend again. But as leaders who love the church, we don’t want to attend only to the positive comments and dismiss the negative. Those negative experiences make us wonder how we can serve as messengers of good news for a new generation.

What if, as one participant suggested, preaching was an opportunity to promote conversation rather than protect ideals?

One of the ways I (Corey) try to do this is by inviting discussion and contemplation rather than speaking as though everyone in the room recognizes the authority of the message. Rather than declaring “thus saith the Lord,” I aim for “this is worth considering.”

In today’s culture, we need to preach in a way that promotes conversation rather than protects our ideals. How might we do that? Here are a few things I am changing in my preaching as a result of what we’ve learned through this study:

**Listen.** Communicating in a way that promotes conversation requires the skills of conversation, particularly the ability to listen. We must listen well to those outside the church in order to address them in our preaching. Understanding a person's thoughts and worldview is an arduous task. Take time to listen to people and learn the nuances of the way they think. Seek to understand them. One of the most interesting things that came out of this study was how wrong our assumptions were about how young people thought about spirituality and faith.

Additionally, read books, listen to podcasts, and watch movies and shows produced by people disconnected from the church. Pay attention to how they see the world. To address these points of view in your preaching, you must first hear the points of view.

**Have informed conversations.**

Preaching is by nature a one-way conversation. In order to shift your tone and make each sermon feel more conversational, include other perspectives gleaned by listening to others. Addressing perspectives in the best light possible helps people feel heard, seen, and understood. Demolishing a straw man accomplishes nothing.

One of the greatest discoveries for me as I listened to the views of others was how open people were to the idea of God and spirituality. Their points of view were much more nuanced than I had previously thought. None of the participants told us they were staunch atheists, but many held some level of agnosticism. Preaching should work with these new assumptions in mind. Assuming openness, not opposition, changes a preacher's tone.

**Use relational logic.** I am retiring the phrase "the Bible says" as a justification for belief. One of the frustrations expressed by participants in this study


We must listen well to those outside the church in order to address them in our preaching.

is when people say that if the Bible says it, that settles it. I'm not changing my trust in the words of Scripture, its infallibility, or its inspiration. But I'm changing the way I communicate that trust.

Instead of saying, "The Bible says our hope is in the resurrection of Jesus," I'm saying, "John, one of Jesus' closest apostles, believed that there would be life after death, not out of some blind hope, but because he saw Jesus risen from the dead." I am locating the evidence for my belief in the witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. We believe that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace, not because "the Bible says so," but because the incarnate God, Jesus, was the best representation of that fruit, and if his Spirit lives in us, then we too will bear that kind of fruit. If we locate our belief in the Bible without any nuance or explanation, it confuses that belief with other ideas found in the Bible that we might not hold, such as stoning someone for not obeying the Sabbath (Num. 15:35).

The foundation of our faith is not a book. It's a historical event documented by eyewitnesses whose

accounts were eventually included in a book. The tools we use to assess many taken-for-granted historical events, such as Alexander the Great's conquests, when applied to the gospels make the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus one of the most well-documented historical events known to humanity. So I've opted to drop the phrase "the Bible says" from my preaching as a justification of spiritual truths and started locating them in the eyewitnesses of the resurrection.

If the goal of preaching is to herald good news for people, then we must communicate that good news in a way that makes sense for those people. 

*The authors thank the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship for a grant used to support this work.*



Corey Van Huizen was the founding pastor of The Caledonia (Mich.) Gathering. Currently he resides in Memphis, Tenn., with his wife and son. Follow @coreyvanhuizen on Instagram for links to more blogs and articles.



Tyler Greenway, Ph.D., is the director of research for the Fuller Youth Institute based in Pasadena, Calif. Currently he resides in Wayland, Mich., with his wife and children. He is a member of The Caledonia Gathering.

1. What was one of the best sermons you have ever heard? Can you identify why you liked it so much?
2. Would you agree that a lot of sermons aim to "protect and promote our ideals"? Why or why not?

**READ MORE ONLINE**



## BIG QUESTIONS

### Faith Formation

**Leaders in many Christian churches are embracing Enneagram personality typing. I would be very glad to have solidly Reformed feedback on this practice.**

Over the years, many personality inventories have become trendy and have helped people think about what they are like and how they interact with others. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, for example, has roots in the work of Carl Jung, a psychologist from about 100 years ago, although the test itself didn't become available until the 1980s. Since that time, though, there have been many such tests, from the Birkman to StrengthsFinder to the latest trend, the Enneagram. These tests become popular because the insights they give us into ourselves and those around us often feel true.

The theory behind the Enneagram goes all the way back to 14th-century Sufism (a branch of Islam), although the modern Enneagram dates only to the 1970s and '80s, and any direct connections to religion are no longer clear. The Enneagram suggests that there are nine personality types—those who seek integrity, those who seek personal connection, and so on.

One thing that all of these personality inventories have in common is that they help us think about our personal strengths and weaknesses as well as the strengths and weaknesses of others. For instance, a person who is an Enneagram



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

Type 1 tends to be a perfectionist. That's a useful trait, but it could lead to holding others to impossible standards. These insights can help us have patience with others and remind us that we are all valuable people who bring different sets of skills to our community.

As long as we remember that all of these tests, including the Enneagram, are imperfect representations of who we are, we can gather valuable insights into ourselves and those around us by considering how each of us is unique and made in God's image.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children's ministries at 14th Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich. Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.

### Relationships

**My husband and I can't agree on whether we should be cremated or not. Is there any biblical instruction for this?**

Every culture, tribe, and people group of the world develops protocols and rituals for laying its dead to rest. But burial and cremation rituals vary enormously from age to age. An area's climate, dominant religion, and local traditions, current fears and fads, and poverty or wealth all influence the funeral customs of any

given era and culture. Because of the great discrepancy in burial and cremation rites over many centuries, one can only conclude that the only thing we all have in common is that everyone dies, and burial or cremation rituals will thus always be necessary.

How we mourn, conduct a funeral, and have a loved one's body prepared for burial or cremation will continue to vary the world over in a thousand ways throughout the ages.

Therefore, one's preferred way of being mourned and remembered cannot be said to be Christian or non-Christian. To try to find Christian guidelines, what century would you choose? What country? Whose rules and rituals? Is the "correct" (i.e., Christian) funeral simply the one you're most familiar with, and does it then follow that another kind must be mistaken or unbiblical?

For me, burial or cremation are equally valid choices. Both accomplish the passing away of our earthly bodies, which Paul likened to clay vessels or mere tents (2 Cor. 4-5).

I think Emmylou Harris says it best in her song "All My Tears": "It don't matter where you bury me / I'll be home and I'll be free / It don't matter where I lay / All my tears be washed away." That is the gospel truth.

Judy Cook is a family therapist and a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ont.

## Missional Living

### How do we measure being 'missional'?

At just about every church leadership event, the first question attendees ask of one another is "How big is your church?" (i.e., "How many people attend on Sunday mornings?").

Follow-up measurements of success include how many newcomers, conversions, baptisms, or donors we have had in the past year. By these counts, many of us would be deemed to have failed.

But what if we asked different questions?

That could change everything, including how we think about what it means to be God's people and "succeed" in God's mission.

One of the questions I now often ask church leadership and pastors as we begin to assess where they are at missionally is, "How much time, energy, and resources are allocated to your neighbors, to participating in God's mission where the Spirit has sent you to remain?"

It changes everything. What if, instead of asking "How can we get people to church?" or "What project, program, or service can we provide for the community?" we asked, "Where is the Holy Spirit at work in our neighborhoods? How will we discover what God is up to, and how can we join in?"

What if we counted how many conversations with neighbors we had each week, how often we sat down for a meal with our neighbors and listened to their stories, or how many of our congregants were participating in neighborhood activities, events, and volunteer opportunities?

What if in our home visits we asked, "How are you keeping the greatest commandment by loving your

neighbors? What are you learning and discerning about God, your neighbors, God's mission, and yourself as you seek to bear witness to God's loving reign in your ordinary everyday life on this block?"

And what if "joining the Spirit on God's mission in our neighborhoods" was part of the job description for everyone in church leadership? And what if these neighboring stories were shared at council meetings, encouraged, affirmed, and reflected upon with discussion? What might God be saying to us as we seek to love our neighbors? And what might be a next step?

That could change everything. We might find that many more of us in our seemingly small and insignificant congregations are "successfully" and, more importantly, faithfully living missionally.

Karen Wilk is a Go Local catalyzer with Resonate Global Mission and Forge Canada. She is a pastor of Neighborhood Life, a home church movement in Edmonton, Alta., where she also enjoys being a wife, mom, and neighbor.

## Ethics

### We know that it's wrong to physically harm people. But is it ever right to hurt people's feelings for the sake of God's truth? For instance, Jesus called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers."

The phrase "for the sake of God's truth" makes a big difference. In the passage you cite (Matt. 23:29-36), Jesus isn't so much insulting the Pharisees as using a vivid metaphor as part of a prophetic critique of their mindset and their actions. In Scripture, snakes are sometimes associated with deception and temptation, and the viper, of course, is a poisonous snake. So Jesus is criticizing some of the leaders of his day for a

dangerous deception that was leading Israel away from God's call.

That leads to the question of whether Jesus's approach ought to be a model for us. At least two considerations are important: First, what is our intention when we address those we think are wrong? It should not be to insult or demean, but to testify to the truth. There might be times when strong, potentially hurtful rhetoric is appropriate. But any hurting of feelings should be incidental to arguments toward justice, mercy, and truth rather than intended as insult.

Second, there is the issue of strategy and effectiveness. If our goal is to persuade those we think are wrong, then we should think twice before using rhetoric that labels them in strongly pejorative ways. We all know how easy it is to adopt a defensive, counterattack mentality when we feel attacked. Of course, sometimes we experience even legitimate critique as a personal attack. In short, there is no guarantee that any of the approaches we take in our arguments on behalf of God's truth will be received in the way we intend.

In all of this, while we Christians are indeed called to testify to the truth, we also should bear in mind the fact that we sometimes get things wrong. And we should remember Jesus' warnings about self-righteousness and judgmentalism. Awareness of the planks in our own eyes will go a long way toward helping our dialogue partners to consider the specks in theirs.

Matt Lundberg is the director of the de Vries Institute for Global Faculty Development at Calvin University. He and his family are members of Boston Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Got a Big Question for any of our panelists? Email it to [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org) with "Big Questions" in the subject line.

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# After Synod 2022: Discerning What's Next

## NEWS

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Synod 2022, in declaring the church's historic stance on same-sex relationships to have confessional status, closed the door on a "local option" approach in which individual congregations could discern how God calls people to live chaste lives in response to God's grace. What does that mean for members, pastors, and congregations who have felt led in a different direction?

Synod is the general assembly of the Christian Reformed Church. At its meeting June 10-16 it received the anticipated human sexuality report, requested by Synod 2016, and adopted most of the report's recommendations. (See "Synod Recommends Sexuality Report, Upholds Traditional Stance," July/August 2022, p. 18.)

One of synod's rulings was about Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, which asks, "What is God's will for us in the seventh commandment?" ("You shall not commit adultery," Ex. 20:14 and Deut. 5:18). The catechism answers its question by saying, in part, "God condemns all unchastity." The question before Synod 2022 was: What is understood to be included under "unchastity"? Synod declared that the term "encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex," and called this affirmation "an interpretation of (a) confession' (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 603). Therefore, this interpretation has confessional status."

Confessional teachings must be upheld by all who hold office in the church, including clergy, professors at denominational schools, elders, and deacons. Those who publicly speak against a confessional teaching may be disciplined, including suspension or removal from office.

Previously (since 1973), the CRC's position on homosexual sex (the desire for someone of the same sex is not in itself sinful, but same-sex sexual acts are) had the status of a synodical decision. One can publicly disagree with a decision of synod,

but Synod 2022's decision took it further. Officebearers of the church can no longer publicly disagree with it.

This raises a host of questions.

## When One Disagrees with a Confession

The first questions are for those who have already publicly disagreed with the action taken by Synod 2022. If the synodical ruling now has confessional status, can they continue in church office? And if so, what can they now say and not say?

Asked about this in the discussion at Synod 2022, the reporter for the committee charged with presenting the human sexuality report, Doug Fakkema (Classis Pacific Northwest), said, "We have a process. We should trust the Church Order."

In an interview with *The Banner*, Fakkema reiterated this advice, noting that the Church Order provides ways to disagree with a confession of the church.

In the Church Order (Art. 5 supplement), a dissent from the confessions is called a "gravamen." There are two kinds of gravamina (plural of gravamen): confessional difficulty (a personal concern of an officebearer that is to be judged by the church council and possibly the classis (regional group of churches)), and confessional revision (a formal request for the denomination to revise its confessions). A confessional-revision gravamen is exceedingly rare in the history of the Christian Reformed Church. Henry DeMoor, retired professor of church order at Calvin Theological Seminary, could think of only two instances. He noted that the CRCNA is not set up to handle large numbers of gravamina. He said it would likely "lead to significant chaos." In DeMoor's opinion, by its action "synod has squandered the unity of the church and damaged its mission."

A confessional-difficulty gravamen, though, begins and usually ends with





Photo by Steven Herppich

### Hands lifted in prayer during Synod 2022.

one's own council. Councils frequently handle dissents from confessional teachings informally.

Fakkema said that in his own experience as a pastor, confessional disagreements, often about infant baptism, have usually been handled internally by the council. The person who disagrees with the church's teachings—say, a prospective elder or deacon—informs the council of the disagreement; council most often will note the disagreement but allow the elder or deacon to continue to serve.

The Church Order supplement that describes what to do with a confessional-difficulty gravamen suggests that if a council is unable to make a judgment about someone's qualifications to serve, it could go to the next assembly (classis) and then, if a judgment still can't be made, to synod.

### Institutional Guidance

Questions about gravamina and the obligations connected to them are among 32 queries addressed in a list of frequently asked questions prepared by the CRC's Office of General Secretary following Synod 2022. Posted online and distributed to churches July 20, the FAQ's introduction read, "We recognize that for most, if not all of you, your interest in these church order matters is not theoretical. You are asking difficult questions that affect you as pastors, elders, deacons, and church members. We would encourage you to create intentional time for prayer, discernment, and open and respectful dialogue about these matters."

In an earlier communiqué to pastors, general secretary Zachary King said, "In preparation for Synod 2022, many of us were literally and figuratively on our

knees in prayer before our Lord, pleading for wisdom and grace. I would ask all of us to continue that posture as we step into ministry and conversation after synod."

Calvin University is also preparing guidance. Shortly after synod, Calvin indicated its board of trustees would form a task force "to better grasp the implications of Synod's decisions." Provost Noah Toly said in an email that "moments like these may prompt some to wonder whether this is a place where they can continue to pursue their scholarly vocations." But, he said, "for many decades, Calvin has been a place where (confessional fidelity and academic freedom) have sharpened each other."

Toly affirmed Calvin's commitment to LGBTQ students and colleagues: "The church teaches that they, no less than others, should receive 'loving support and encouragement' as they live out their calling as Christ's disciples."

In mid-July, in an article by editor-in-chief Abigail Ham, Calvin's student newspaper *Chimes* reported, "More than 200 faculty, staff and emeriti signed a July 15 letter to university administrators and the board of trustees seeking protection for a range of viewpoints on human sexuality to continue coexisting at Calvin. ... A July 17 response from President Wiebe Boer and Board of Trustees Chair Bruce Los affirmed the university's commitment to finding a solution that works for all stakeholders and asked for prayer as the process continues."

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor  
with reporting by Clayton Libolt

## In Brief



**Lloyd VanderKwaak**

### CRC Names Interim Chief Administrative Officer

Nonprofit adviser Lloyd VanderKwaak, who has served as volunteer facilitator of the Christian Reformed Church's joint ministry agreement process, has been named interim chief administrative officer in the denomination's Office of General Secretary. He started in the role June 28. The role was created as part of the restructuring recently approved by Synod 2022 and is responsible for all administration and ministry operations within the CRCNA organization. A search team had hoped to hire a chief administrator to start at the same time as the new general secretary, but that search was not successful.

Synod appointed Zachary King as general secretary and authorized his office to complete all necessary hiring. VanderKwaak has agreed to serve until the end of the calendar year or until a permanent CAO is found.

VanderKwaak, 65, will work primarily in the denomination's Grand Rapids, Mich., office but expects to spend time in the Canadian office too.

In a letter to denominational staff, King wrote, "I am tremendously thankful for Lloyd's diligence, orientation to partnership, and desire to serve Christ and his church" as VanderKwaak takes this gap position.



**The hands of Cragmor CRC pastor Daniel Bud on a prayer walk at the University of Colorado—Colorado Springs.**

### Colorado Church Does College Campus Prayer Walks

Cragmor Christian Reformed Church in Colorado Springs, Colo., a few minutes' walk from the local campus of the University of Colorado, hopes to deepen its relationship with students this semester. Ahead of the students returning to campus, some congregation members spent summer Friday mornings on campus prayer walks.

Using a prayer-walk guide from discipleship ministry The Navigators, two or three prayer partners from Cragmor CRC met Friday mornings beginning in June to pray along campus sidewalks, at the main entrance, and in various student gathering places, praying particularly for the 2,800 new students arriving in September.

Cragmor CRC offers students use of The Upper Room Coffee House for free Wi-Fi, coffee, and snacks. That ministry, a donation-based coffee house in the church's former parsonage, partners with DARE College Ministry, a small student organization started by the church's outreach director, Brandon Anderson.



Photo by Isaac Omondi Aduda

**Christian Reformed Church of East Africa church plants in Turkana raise goats to generate income.**

### Mission of Hope Africa Planting Kenyan Churches

In the past seven years, Mission of Hope Africa, founded by Isaac Aduda, has planted 12 Kenyan churches affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church of East Africa. Recently the mission's vision to restore hope through the Great Commission and empower communities to be self-sufficient has gained the support of Bethel and Haven Christian Reformed churches in Zeeland, Mich., and Niekerk CRC in Holland, Mich. In 2021 Aduda visited each church to speak about his ministry. Seven congregants now serve as Mission of Hope board members and have worked with their deacons to designate church offerings for the organization.

Aduda said building physical structures for the churches has been key because without them services often are canceled due to heavy rainfall or to extreme heat in the dry season. "When the church gathers together, the Holy Spirit works in powerful ways," Aduda said, and "spiritual fruits come from hearing the Word in congregation with others."

—Banner news editor and correspondents

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# U.S. Supreme Court Decision Overturns Landmark Abortion Cases

The Banner has a subscription to republish articles from Religion News Service. The following includes reporting from an RNS article published June 24 and quotes from a June 28 statement from the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

After nearly 50 years, *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that legalized abortion across the United States, was overturned in a 6-3 decision June 24. The court overruled both *Roe*, decided in 1973, and a 1992 decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, which had reaffirmed the constitutional right to abortion. The June ruling came in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which challenged a Mississippi law that imposed strict restrictions on abortion.

"Abortion presents a profound moral question," the Supreme Court ruled. "The Constitution does not prohibit the citizens of each State from regulating or prohibiting abortion. *Roe* and *Casey* arrogated that authority. We now overrule those decisions and return that authority to the people and their elected representatives."

## CRC Statement References Past Synodical Decisions

On June 28, Zachary King, general secretary of the CRCNA, shared a statement about the decision on [crcna.org](https://www.crcna.org). "The overturning of this decision is of such importance in our mandate to care for children, and for the sanctity of human life, that we wanted to share some reflections with the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the broader community. While there is no such law against abortion in Canada, the following reflections are relevant in both countries," King said. "We are thankful for increased protection of the lives of unborn babies, and we pray that it will ultimately reduce the number of abortions in the United States. Yet we also



AP Photo/Steve Helber

**Demonstrators celebrated outside the U.S. Supreme Court on Friday, June 24, 2022, after the court ended constitutional protections for abortion that had been in place for almost 50 years.**

recognize the limits of this decision," the statement continued. "The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* will not necessarily result in a cultural shift that supports men and women facing unplanned pregnancies. It will not walk alongside them during what can be an excruciating journey of panic, isolation, and shame. Nor will this decision eliminate abortions in all cases."

King's statement referenced decisions of Synod 1972 and 1998. "For those with unwanted pregnancies, we urged 'churches to give more attention to sensitive ministry to those who carry children to term, to the care of unwed mothers and their children, and the social ills associated with this issue. We further encourage governmental agencies to support programs which will address these needs' (*Acts of Synod 1998*, p. 401)," King wrote.

He concluded, "Reducing or outlawing abortion must be accompanied by public policies and personal/corporate

actions that address injustice, poverty, and racism and that honor the sanctity of all human life and demonstrate love to people facing the painful struggle of an unwanted pregnancy." Read the full statement at [bit.ly/crcna\\_roe](https://bit.ly/crcna_roe).

—Religion News Service,  
Alissa Vernon, News Editor



## Grand Rapids Church Celebrates Reconciliation With Chaplain to LGBTQ People

Twenty-four years after Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., declined to offer a call to chaplain Jim Lucas because the organization in which he wished to minister to gay and lesbian people held views on same-sex marriage that differed from the denomination's, the church offered an apology. That homecoming, marked on May 17 in Eastern Avenue's fellowship hall, started months earlier as members of the church talked with Lucas about what he saw as his exile from the CRC and his longing to come back.

Lucas had been ordained in the CRC, and in 1989, when the church he was pastoring closed, he was available for call. Lucas is gay and, though he was celibate, he said, potential calling churches did not seem to be ready to call a gay pastor. At the time he was a member and an elder at Eastern Avenue CRC, which held his ministerial credentials for nine years as he awaited a call. But when he asked Eastern Avenue to be his calling church for two ministries—a chaplaincy at Butterworth Hospital (now Spectrum Health) and As We Are (AWARE), a Christian organization that provided faith-based support and advocacy for people who are LGBT—the church denied Lucas' request. AWARE's position on same-sex unions was that they could "be an expression of God's grace and within God's will," while the CRC position, articulated by synod in 1973, is that same-sex relationships are "incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture." Eastern Avenue's decision not to extend Lucas a call led to the termination of his credentials with Classis Grand Rapids East.

Feeling betrayed and abandoned, Lucas stopped worshiping at Eastern Avenue. "It was too painful for me to endure," he said. He joined Plymouth United Church of Christ, which welcomed him and provided him ministerial standing. "I genuinely appreciated this welcome,"



**Jim Lucas (left) and Sid Sybenga, interim pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC, serving the Lord's Supper, May 22, 2022.**

Lucas explains, "but as the years went by, I discovered that I never felt truly at home in my new church and denomination. I felt as though I was in exile from my spiritual home—the CRC—and longed to be invited back home."

In 2018 Lucas spoke about this longing in a talk he gave at Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids. Sid Sybenga, an elder and interim pastor at Eastern Avenue CRC, heard Lucas speak. "We were struck to the heart," Sybenga said. He and a few others from Eastern Avenue who had been at Sherman Street that day soon formed a group to discuss reconciliation and restoration.

Norm Sneller, a retiring deacon, said that apologizing and welcoming Lucas back this year was something many at Eastern Avenue had wanted to do for years. "We were merely closing up and finishing what they (the 2018 council) started," Sneller said.

On May 17, Lori Keen, Eastern Avenue's council president, read aloud the church's

apology while Lucas and others sat in a circle in the fellowship hall and listened. "We could have stood with you," Keen read. "We could have worked to enlarge the tent for so many gifted and loving individuals."

In March 2022 Eastern Avenue's council approved six affirmations to include LGBTQ people in congregational life and worship. "These affirmations are the fruits of years of relearning, listening, and discussing," the council said. "They express our stance as a church about the acceptance of LGBTQ+ persons."

Lucas said it was a powerful and personal moment. "I forgive you," he told the church.

The following Sunday, Eastern Avenue held an evening reconciliation service where Lucas spoke and served communion.

Since May 22, Lucas has been attending services again at Eastern Avenue CRC. He doesn't have an official role at the church, and his ministerial standing

## Neland Avenue CRC to Appeal Denomination's Order

remains with the United Church of Christ. Lucas retired from his position with Spectrum Health in January 2020. Since 1992 he has served as chaplain of faith-based LGBT support and advocacy organizations, first AWARE and now Gays in Faith Together (GIFT) in Grand Rapids.

Eastern Avenue's apology and Lucas' reinstatement in the congregation came one month before the denomination's general assembly codified the CRC's position on same-sex relationships. Synod 2022 adopted the 2020 human sexuality report, which reiterates the CRC's 1973 position, and officially included homosexual sex in its interpretation of the Heidelberg Catechism's admonition to thoroughly detest "all unchastity." (See "After Synod 2022: Discerning What's Next," p. 14.)

A statement from Keen said, "This spring EACRC affirmed its commitment to full inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons. The reconciliation with Jim was an important demonstration of that commitment; we needed to apologize for past harms in order to live into our affirmations. We are deeply grieved at the actions of Synod 2022. We remain committed to full inclusion of our LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ."

—Callie Feyen



Photo by Otto Sellies

### Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

At its council meeting June 27, Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., determined not to rescind the appointment of a same-sex married deacon as Synod 2022 had ordered the council to do. (See "Neland Avenue CRC Ordered to Comply with Denominational Position," July/August 2022, p. 22.)

Religion News Service reported on the decision June 29. "The deacon told Neland Avenue's church council Monday (June 27) that she wanted to continue serving on its deacon board," RNS reported. "The council, a group of about 20 individuals that includes the church's two co-pastors, a group of deacons and a group of elders, then unanimously voted to appeal the synod's injunction to remove the deacon."

"We take the admonition of Synod 2022 very seriously," the church council said in a statement. "However, as we prayed, wrestled with the Word, and discerned the Spirit together, our conscience told us that we would be both disobedient to God's call and less than fully loving to all his children if we 'immediately rescinded' our decision to ordain this deacon. After prayerful consideration of the directives of Synod 2022, we have decided to appeal its decisions."

Zachary King, general secretary of the CRC, said in an email to Religion News Service that the Christian Reformed Church would "work to discern how to process this appeal and how it fits into our CRC Church Order." About the task given to him by Synod 2022 to appoint a committee *in loco* (a local committee of synod), he told *The Banner* at the end of June: "I am engaging in a prayerful process to select committee members who feel called to engage in the pastoral discussion with Neland with complete integrity to synod's decisions, but who also have a Christ-like pastoral love for Neland and all God's people." By July 25 six people had been approached to serve on the committee, and they were expected to gather for an initial meeting in August. Names of the committee members and the date of the meeting were not available at the time of publication.

Despite Neland's intended appeal, its council's statement said, "We also welcome the appointed synodical committee *in loco* to visit and discuss this decision with us at a future full Council meeting. Our next scheduled meeting is in August."

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## Canada Corporation Discusses 'Opportunity Statement,' Fall Plans

The directors of the Canada Corporation of the Christian Reformed Church in North America met by video conference for one of their four yearly meetings July 25. Directors heard ministry reports from staff directors, welcomed new members who will be elected and appointed as directors at the board's fall membership meeting, and provided feedback to a draft "opportunity statement" prepared by an ad hoc group.

The statement, which at-large director Henry Eygenraam said would be used for "guiding the Canada Corporation board going forward in its work," will go back to the ad hoc committee for finalization and be presented to the board at its October meeting.

The board also heard updates on plans for a September gathering of the board with representatives from Christian Reformed congregations across Canada.

"The purpose of this gathering is two-fold," read an invitation sent to stated clerks in Canada on July 8. It's "an opportunity for the board to provide an update on the establishment of the Canada Office and other matters related to the implementation of the SALT restructuring report" approved by Synod 2022 (see "Structure Changes Adopted," July/August 2022, p. 32) and "a listening time to hear what is bubbling up" as "the decisions around the HSR (human sexuality report) are causing

turmoil in some of our churches and classes." The final agenda is being determined by the ad hoc group in consultation with the Canada Corporation's executive committee. A second meeting will follow in January 2023.

Greta Luimes, the board's treasurer, said, "These gatherings offer a time of honest sharing and careful listening, of building relationships and supporting each other while working together toward the mutual purpose of expanding God's kingdom here in Canada."

The board said the meetings will be patterned after an earlier virtual gathering to discuss concerns about the then still-developing structure changes. "This is a fairly new venture," a second communication to stated clerks on July 14 acknowledged. "Since this event likely precedes your next classis meeting," the interim committee or executive in each classis "will need to solicit volunteers who wish to participate in this conversation," the invitation said. Classes (regional groups of churches) in Canada are each invited to send four representatives to the meeting, reporting names to the board's executive by Sept. 8.

In receiving reports from staff directors, the Canada Corporation board acknowledged some staff changes, including the retirement of human resources director (Canada) Maureen Beattie (effective Aug. 19); the appointment of Lesli van Milligen, team leader for regional engagement in the CRC's Canadian office, to be director of congregational ministries in Canada (Peter Elgersma, who had served in that role since 2020, resigned July 5); and a change in title for Terry Veldboom, director of finance and operations (Canada), now known as chief administrative officer (Canada).

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. John Van Hemert*

1936-2022

A unique and colorful character, John Van Hemert was known for his tenacity, optimism, and exuberance. His passion was spreading the gospel. "He had no problem," said one of his daughters, "holding up the line in a store if the cashier was receptive to hearing about the Lord." Van Hemert, 85, died May 26, just 87 days after a pancreatic cancer diagnosis.

He graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, and he was ordained in 1965. Over the next 35 years Van Hemert served Edson (Alta.) CRC; Willoughby Church, Langley, B.C.; Pine Grove Community, Pinellas Park, Fla; Faith Community, Boynton Beach, Fla (twice); Sunlight Ministries, Port St. Lucie, Fla; Stephenville (Texas) CRC; First CRC, Vancouver, B.C.; and Good News Community, Kent, Wash. He retired in 2002 but five years later began 20 years as chaplain among seafarers on ships in the ports of Bellingham, Wash., and Palm Beach, Fla.

Van Hemert loved old cars, traveling, meeting people, praying, singing, storytelling, picking flowers from the roadside, and growing vegetables.

Predeceased by daughter Joy, he is survived by Jean, his wife of almost 63 years; four children and their spouses; 11 grandchildren and their spouses; and two great-grandsons.

—Janet A. Greidanus

READ MORE ONLINE



## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Gerald (Gerrit) Hogeterp*

1942-2022

The great joys of Gerald Hogeterp's life were preaching the gospel of Jesus, listening to classical music, and singing choral music. He is remembered for his authenticity, frankness, dry sense of humor, and passion for justice, as well as the power of his voice during congregational singing. Hogeterp, 80, died June 16 from multiple myeloma.

Hogeterp's parents immigrated to Canada from the Netherlands in 1952 with their 11 children. Hogeterp graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and was ordained in 1969. With his wife, Jackie, he served High River (Alta.) Christian Reformed Church; Cornerstone CRC, Chilliwack, B.C.; Bethel CRC, Saskatoon, Sask.; Calvary CRC, Ottawa, Ont.; and Covenant CRC, Woodstock, Ont. Their remaining years in ministry were spent in Nigeria with Christian Reformed World Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission), where he worked with Beacon of Hope, an HIV/AIDS awareness and care program.

Hogeterp enjoyed reading and being in nature. When once asked to list his goals for summer home service in Ontario, he answered, "To smell the pines and hear the call of the loon."

He is survived by Jackie, his wife of 56 years; four children and their spouses; and nine grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. John T. Malestein*

1923-2022

When John Malestein received Calvin Theological Seminary's 2011 Distinguished Alumni Award, it was said of him, "He preached poignant, revealing sermons. He practiced hospitality. He engaged a broad range of people, from laborers to bank presidents—including unbelievers—with consistent intelligence and grace. He lifted up Jesus Christ in everything." Malestein, 98, died May 31.

In 1942, after finishing high school, Malestein served in the U.S. Army Air Corps on the island of New Guinea. He later graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and, after ordination in 1951, served Escalon (Calif.) Christian Reformed Church; Lafayette (Ind.) CRC; New Hope Church, Lansing, Ill; Richfield CRC, Clifton, N.J.; and North Hills CRC, Troy, Mich., where he stayed for 20 years until retirement in 1988. At its 50th anniversary, North Hills established a scholarship in Malestein's name to be given annually to a Calvin seminarian demonstrating giftedness in homiletics (preaching).

Malestein was predeceased by Thelma, his first wife, to whom he was married for 38 years; Lavonne, his second wife, after 16 years of marriage; and two children. He is survived by five children and three stepchildren and their spouses; 18 grandchildren; 33 great-grandchildren; and three great-great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Timothy K. Chan*

1951-2022

Whether serving as pastor of a congregation or as outreach minister, Kwan Yiu Timothy Chan always felt his work was a privilege and a joy. He dearly loved the Christian Reformed Church, the broader church community, and the East and Southeast Asian communities he served. Chan, 71, died June 8 after living with cancer for six years.

Born in China, Chan graduated from Hong Kong Baptist College and Seminary before joining the pastoral staff of the Swatow Baptist Church in Hong Kong, where he served for just over seven years.

Chan immigrated to Canada in 1983. After ordination in the CRC in 1991, he pastored the Chinese CRC in Toronto for 14 years, ministering to people from East and Southeast Asia living in the greater Toronto area. He was then called to outreach work and for his remaining years served in the FaithHopeLove Ministry at Grace CRC in Scarborough, Ont., reaching out to immigrants from China living in Toronto and helping to bring them into a nurturing community of Christians.

Chan's passions included singing, playing the harmonica, and table tennis.

He is survived by his wife, Catherine, two sons, and one grandchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus



# **Running the Race Together: Five Benefits to Peer Learning Cohorts**

By Gillian Ferwerda, Raise Up Global Ministries

There's a reason schools were started to educate children. It isn't solely because of the efficiency of having one teacher for several students; it's also because learning in a group setting can bring many benefits. While we can read a book on our own or learn any number of things via YouTube videos, having a community of people learning together can help us explore a topic more deeply and gain from each other's wisdom.

That's the idea behind peer learning and small groups. Global Coffee Break, Timothy Leadership Training, and Educational Care, programs of Raise Up Global Ministries, all use peer learning and small groups for powerful personal, communal, and kingdom change. Here are a few examples:

#### Peer Learning Broadens Perspectives

"When we learn together, we see our situation or problem through another's eyes," explained Raise Up director Sam Huizenga. "We also stand in the shoes of another and enter into their situation. This helps us to see the path before us with new eyes."

What Raise Up has seen through its programs is that the world becomes differently colored as each person in a small group shares from their God-given gifts and experiences. It allows each individual to become a dispenser of the grace God has given them.

"New options, possibilities, inclusivity, empathy, and healing are gifts that arise as our perspective is broadened," Huizenga said. "Peer learning is both intensely personal, with the ability to focus individually, but also uniquely expanding."

In Uganda, for example, male and female teachers from the Bari community have been participating in learning groups to explore Educational Care's interactive manual *A Biblical Worldview*. This includes an exploration of what it means to be a servant.

According to Raise Up's local partners, within the Bari community there is a strict division between men and women in domestic work. Women do most of the domestic chores, such as cooking, cleaning the house, caring for children, and acquiring food. While the men have their own roles to play, they are used to being waited upon by the women in their lives.

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**Bassirou Karbo with the chickens he raised while learning from another TLT trainee in Nigeria.**

However, as the peer group interacted in the cohort together, this began to change. Discussing the manual and hearing about the experience of women, the men decided of their own volition to serve the women. They washed the women's hands, served them food, and cleaned up after the meal.

Alex, a head teacher, testified about his changed mindset when it came to domestic work. "I now will be serving God by serving others, especially mothers," he said. The path in front of them was changed and steps along a new path were taken—together.

#### Peer Learning Brings Depth

When people move from passive to active learning, Huizenga said, "it effectively engages what educational professionals call the 'learning loop.' This includes reflection on our situation, gaining new information and perspectives, application and experimentation about what we have learned, and then evaluation and feedback. We do more than just solve (a problem) or take an expert's generic advice; we also begin to understand deeply what this means for us, our calling, and our community."

This is exactly what happened when Marian Lensink invited women from across Canada to experience a taste of Global Coffee Break. Fifty women signed up to meet together via video conference to explore the study *Discover Prayer*.

The women formed two groups and met for seven weeks. While the participants expected to leave the study with more information about prayer, they also experienced unexpected outcomes. As Lensink asked curious, open-ended questions, the women found themselves building relationships. They heard about each other's struggles and began to care deeply for one another. They learned about the value of discovery and the depth that comes from praying together. Some even decided to put learning into action by continuing their learning in new small groups when the group ended.

"While this study was about prayer, I believe that the learning that took place went way beyond that," Lensink said.

"Participants also learned about listening to others and about the value of community, and each deepened their own faith and understanding of relationships along the way."

#### Peer Learning Brings Safety

"Transformation is alluring, but it can also be challenging," explained Huizenga. Peer learning creates safe spaces where participants can grow and expand their thinking. These safe places level paths, strengthen knees, and heal



the lame, as it says in Hebrews 12:12-16. Safety gives people courage to try new things and step out in grace.

Global Coffee Break, for example, creates safe places for people—especially those new to the Bible—to connect with the Word of God and ask challenging questions.

Bae Jeong Eun participated in a Global Coffee Break program in San Diego. When she joined the group, she did so as someone who was skeptical about Christianity but curious about the Bible as a book of wisdom.

“I remember the first time I came to Global Coffee Break,” she said. “I was a person who had only a vague desire to read the Bible, but I had no faith. I just wanted to add more knowledge. I had some fears and doubts at first because I was studying the Bible, but nevertheless, the Global Coffee Break sisters accepted me as I was. They responded to my wacky questions seriously. I liked the way the small group leader encouraged communication among the group, helping us learn through sharing.”

The mutual sharing helped Bae in her spiritual journey. Unlike other Bible textbooks or study groups, she said, Global Coffee Break materials and her leader did not come with an agenda. They did not judge her as a nonbeliever and did not force her to accept any answers.

“Even if it was a bit slow and challenging, it was about finding my own faith through the Word,” Bae said. “I think that might be the most valuable achievement I received through Coffee Break.”

Bae was baptized on Easter Sunday 2022.

### Peer Learning Offers Accountability

“All too often,” Huizenga said, “we find ourselves in situations where we have knowledge but have not applied it. We fail to clearly define the destination or the steps needed to arrive. Accountability keeps the focus on practical application and results as we share our next steps and changes with the group.”

The accountability that comes from learning with others not only fosters greater learning, but results in praise to God as learners step back and deliberately recount the changes they have seen.

“No longer are the small progress steps lost in the longer journey,” Huizenga said. “Instead, we become accountable to God to share the unique perspectives and experiences he has given us with the wider body of Christ.”

Consider Bassirou Karbo’s story. Karbo is from Niger and participated in a peer cohort with Timothy Leadership Training (TLT). Together, the group went through the manual *Christian Stewardship* and explored the idea that we have all been given gifts from God, who wants us to use those gifts to flourish and to further God’s kingdom.

“The idea that came to me was to raise chickens,” Karbo said. “I asked the local Bible school for a small space, and they granted me some. I made a chicken coop so that my hens would not be in contact with other hens, to possibly avoid diseases.”

The accountability from other group members helped him persevere. He reported back to the group about what he was learning and the challenges he was facing. His TLT trainer connected him with someone from Nigeria who has training in raising chickens. Bassirou now has peer support and a friend to walk with him. With this partnership, he plans on setting up a larger coop to raise broiler hens and eggs to benefit his family and his church.

### Peer Groups Remind Us That We Are Not Alone

“One of the greatest potholes in the path of transformation is the isolation we experience and the feeling of being alone,” Huizenga said. “But as a group, we pick each other up when we fail and we find new strength, together, to continue. There is a unique camaraderie born from running the race together.”

Peer learning gives new perspectives, but it also creates shared ground. The grace-based accountability we experience as a group gives us motivation to persevere.

It can be easy to minimize the encouragement that comes from the relational aspect of learning. In our individualized, information-based world, we often feel that other people are unnecessary. This, however, is the very heart—the power, the energy, the shaper—to learning.

In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis says, “Friendship ... is born at that moment when one person says to another, ‘What! You too? I thought that no one but myself ...’” That’s true for learning, too. Brain science continues to underline that learning is inherently relational. Transformation happens when we share our lives as well as our knowledge.

We all know what it felt like when COVID hit, when the path in front of us seemed to drop out of sight like a bridge falling into the water. The TLT Trainers Care Network provided an international peer group to persevere together using a social media platform called WhatsApp.

Most of the TLT training groups were completely shut down during the pandemic, with no access to Zoom or streaming services for getting learners together. This trainers’ peer group used the technology they had available to encourage each other and share steps they were taking in their communities. They reported that even when their hands were weak, they were able to continue praying for each other.

As a result, TLT training was able to adapt and change throughout the pandemic and could pick back up once restrictions were lifted. Today, TLT groups and leaders continue to find the WhatsApp group a source of learning and encouragement. **B**

## The Benefits of Breakouts

### AS CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

in North America staff members reviewed the assessments coming in after the pilot of a newly developed training course called Thriving Essentials, two words stood out: breakout rooms.

The CRCNA launched Thriving Essentials in early 2022 based on the belief that there are some things every ministry leader in a local congregation should know regardless of one's specific role. These paradigms are so fundamental that they shape every ministry of the church and should affect how each leader leads.

"Whether your congregation is in a time of transition or stability, Thriving Essentials provides a way for all the ministry leaders in your church—elders and deacons, volunteers and staff, newbies and old-timers—to become aligned on core concepts of mission, discipleship, discernment, and leadership," explained curriculum developer Elaine May.

The program is funded with generous support from Lilly Endowment Inc. and therefore is free for CRC congregations. Leaders can participate on their own or with a group of other leaders from their own congregation. The pilot program began in July 2021, and more than 300 people have already taken part in the training course online. What has been surprising is how valuable the virtual small-group discussions have been.

"I thought it was very helpful to have the course offered via Zoom, which, while it presents some unique challenges, was also the most convenient way for me to participate from my own home. I'm not sure I would have taken part otherwise," explained one participant. "I also really enjoyed the breakout rooms and the discussions and ideas that were shared in there. It allowed me to connect with some



people from churches across North America, which was pretty cool."


"We pored over the data from 300 participants across the United States and Canada," May said, "and an overwhelming majority found the breakout rooms to have been one of the most helpful elements of the course. We were surprised by the feedback, in part because of our personal experiences with ineffective breakout rooms in the past."

As the team reflected on this more, however, they realized that what made these breakout rooms so successful was the structure, management, and content.

"Leaders feel anxiety when confronted with a lack of leadership," May said, "so their natural response to a breakout room that lacks direction or facilitation is to step into the leadership gap. When that happens, they are no longer participants. By carefully crafting short opportunities for small groups to discuss what they had just learned in a larger group setting, the breakout rooms became fertile ground for exploring the day's lesson."

Leaders could discuss what they had learned and begin to apply it to their own contexts. When they met with other leaders from their own congregation, they found concrete applications for the lesson. When they met with leaders from other parts of the continent, they gained new insights and perspectives to help sharpen their own thinking.

"The breakout sessions were so helpful because (they) put me in touch with those who were in the trenches," one participant said. "I got the sense that we all had our own set of troubles, and it was nice to share and gain perspective outside my own context also. It was helpful to hear the good and the bad. It was all encouraging."

You can learn more about Thriving Essentials at [crcna.org/Thrive](https://crcna.org/Thrive). After completing the initial course, participants may join learning cohorts with other congregations via a newly launched part of the program called Thriving Practices. 

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,  
CRC Communications

**The View from Here**

# The Power of Learning

**NO ONE CAN DENY** the value of ongoing learning in our life and ministry, yet, curiously, we often overlook it. For 12 years I was a missionary with Resonate Global Mission in Haiti. I remember early in my mission ministry, I got very tired. I had learned a new language, gotten to know a new group of Haitian leaders and mission staff, and overcome some serious illnesses and family challenges. I seemed poised to enter a period of fruitful gospel labor. Though outwardly things were going well, inwardly my energy and engagement were waning.

Eventually I realized I was in a ministry rut, and what I missed was the discipline of ongoing learning. A discerning person once wrote, “Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold” (Prov. 3:13-14). One of the ways God shares wisdom and understanding is through the ongoing learning that happens in intentional peer mentoring relationships: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17).

Two fellow missionaries and I started a peer mentoring group and began to meet regularly. I learned that I could share all my joys and sorrows confidentially with my peer mentors and

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receive their prayers. We reflected on the shared ministry challenges we all were struggling with. We held each other accountable to be the fathers and husbands God was calling us to be. We chose books to read and discuss together.

The insights and learning I gained from my peer mentoring group were for me springs of nourishing water for the soul. The challenges of life and ministry in Haiti never abated, but I experienced learning and growth, both intellectually and spiritually.

The stories you'll read this month in Our Shared Ministry reflect the blessings that Christian Reformed folks are experiencing through peer and cohort learning. Some of the greatest services that CRC agencies and ministries offer help congregations with peer and cohort learning ideas and models.

Perhaps many of you have already experienced the blessings of peer and cohort learning through small-group ministry. Maybe you have a good friend or friends who function like a peer mentoring group for you. Whatever the case is, I am sure you

would witness to the impact this has had on your life and ministry.

Globally, we are at an inflection point in the history of Christianity. In the West, churches are losing or have lost their cultural influence. In other places in our world, the church and its influence are rapidly expanding.

Our societies are changing at the speed of the internet. Our neighborhoods are becoming more diverse through immigration and migration. Social and cultural assumptions that have existed for centuries are crumbling. If there was ever a time to listen to God's wisdom, it is today.

Through peer mentoring and cohort learning, God can open our minds to faithful and innovative ways of thinking about Christian life and ministry. I believe Christ is calling the CRC folks out of anxiety about these changes and into the opportunity these changes provide for mission. Learning together is one way we can be faithful to that call.



Rev. Zachary King is the general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He is a member of Fuller Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.



## What's In a Name?

**HEARTS EXCHANGED** is a learning and action journey being offered across Canada to prepare Christians to build relationships marked by mutual respect and reciprocity with Indigenous communities. But why is it called “Hearts Exchanged”?

In part, the name comes from a Christian Reformed Church in North America initiative way back in 2000. The 2000 Cross-cultural Ministry Forum allowed participants to share and listen in a new way.

At that forum, Dale Missyabit, an Indigenous staff member from the Indigenous Family Center in Winnipeg, Man., said, “It was beautiful to share in an open and honest way, to look at each other, to say I still love you.”

In the same way, the Hearts Exchanged gives participants an opportunity to walk through the history of interactions between the CRC and Indigenous people and carefully consider how to reconcile relationships today. More than 250 people in 15 groups have already participated.

The name “Hearts Exchanged” implies holding each other’s perspectives and hearts carefully. It also echoes Ezekiel 36:26: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

So, what does this look like in real life? Terry Veldboom, a Hearts Exchanged participant in Classis Niagara, wondered, “Is ‘exchanged’ a matter of transforming my heart, the one that beats within me and makes me tick? Little steps. Or does ‘exchanged’ involve me giving away my heart to another and receiving one from another in return? Big steps.”

The answer seems to be a little bit of both.



Hearts Exchanged participants from Classis Niagara gathered together for their last session of 2022.

Syd Hielema joined a Hearts Exchanged group in Ancaster, Ont., with other members of his congregation. He said that his “group of 17 has become a tight-knit community, sharing insights, difficult questions, and other helpful resources that we have found on our own.”

Along the way, he has grown as an individual—gaining better understanding of his Indigenous brother-in-law’s struggles—and as part of a group.

“Hearts Exchanged helps one to clearly see how a Christian faith syncretized with colonial greed and violence has profoundly harmed Indigenous communities and persons,” Hielema said. “We have recognized how this perversion of the gospel lives on in our own hearts and communities, and together we have experienced significant distress concerning this. But our monthly time together has given us opportunities to share this distress in open, honest, and vulnerable ways.

“We hope that the collective learnings of our group of 17 will impact the entire congregation in some ways,” he added. “We are in conversation with an Christian Indigenous preacher at the nearby Six Nations Reserve. He joined our Hearts Exchanged group and continues to participate in Hearts Exchanged activities. We hope to develop additional organic ways to cultivate friendships with our Indigenous neighbors.”

New cohorts of Hearts Exchanged began this fall, and several participants will participate in a Canadian National Gathering in Ottawa, Ont., in May 2023 to further this gentle carrying of hearts.

—Victoria Veenstra,  
Justice Communications  
Team Coordinator

## Slowing Down in God's Word

**AFTER GRADUATING** from university in India, Brijesh expected life to slow down. He soon learned that wouldn't be the case. Pursuing and advancing his career in the technology field left him feeling overwhelmed.

"I soon realized that I wasn't leaving any time for connecting with God," Brijesh reflected about that time.

That's when a small change made a big difference in Brijesh's life.

One day, Brijesh received a short message from a friend, inviting him to watch a short devotional video from ReFrame Ministries' partners in India. It simply offered a quick reflection in God's Word, but it was enough to leave Brijesh feeling renewed in his faith.

"That was my first time seeing your videos," Brijesh explained. "The message touched my heart, and I so appreciated it."

Brijesh liked the video so much that he decided to find out more about the devotionals. He contacted the ministry team and also subscribed to ReFrame's Hindi video channel. The videos, called *Jeevan Vriksh* (Tree of Life), provide devotionals, praise songs, and other biblical reflections from ReFrame's Hindi ministry team.

While Brijesh's life has hardly slowed down since he watched that first video, he said that taking time to watch each short reflection reminds him of what's really important in his life.

"The videos ground Brijesh in God's Word," said Kurt Selles, ReFrame's director. "They offer him an opportunity to reconnect with his faith with a click of a button."

Every day, ReFrame's partners around the world are working hard to create meaningful messages in print, video, and other forms for people like Brijesh. While some of these programs are longer, almost all of ReFrame's 10 language teams have found that they need to offer short, daily messages like the one that Brijesh watched.

—Brian Clark,  
ReFrame Ministries



Brijesh often felt like he didn't have enough time for God.

## The Power to Do Good

**ON SATURDAY**, April 23, Safe Church staff joined with ministry staff and officebearers from around classes Niagara and Hamilton to take a new training course called “The Power to Do Good: The Use and Misuse of Power in the Church.”

Throughout the morning, the group reflected on the institutional and relational power that ministry leaders and officebearers have in the church. They also spent time discerning how they could use their power to support the flourishing of congregations and church members.

“We talked about different ways and reasons ministry leaders might violate the trust that has been given them and misuse their power to bring harm to their congregations,” said Becky Jones, volunteer and communications coordinator for Safe Church Ministry. “We also talked about what both ministry leaders and council members can do to establish good practices of accountability, self-care, and boundary setting as a way to foster cultures of goodness that resist abuse.”

One of the participants was Wendy de Jong, stated clerk of Classis Niagara, who also served as Safe Church coordinator for Classis Niagara from 2019 to 2021. “The Safe Church staff covered a lot of material in a short period of time, keeping us on track and engaged,” de Jong said. “Particularly worthwhile was reading the Code of Conduct out loud as a group and, through that, recognizing just how important this document is and can be for our churches. A number of the participants commented that they were considering a similar reading at the first council meeting of each new season.”

Other participants agreed. In a feedback form, one participant who serves as a deacon noted, “I learned a lot. The



Delegates to Synod 2022 were led in a Power to Do Good exercise to consider the types of power each of them brought to the meeting.

power audit was a surprise to me. I didn’t realize that I have power. That was a good reality check.”

Another participant added, “I really liked the CRC Code of Conduct. I think it would be a good idea to implement it and to go through it once a year with each member of council reading a portion.”

As a denomination, the Christian Reformed Church in North America wants churches to be places that not only prevent abuse but also support the healing of those who have been affected by it. The Power to Do Good training for ministry leaders is an important part of this work.

This training is available for anyone interested in learning more about institutional power and how to use their power for good in the church. This free online course can be accessed through our denominational learning platform ([crcna.org/learn](http://crcna.org/learn)) or through our Safe Church website ([crcna.org/SafeChurch](http://crcna.org/SafeChurch)). It also can be offered as an in-person training for groups of 20 or more.

In addition to The Power to Do Good, Safe Church ministry provides other forms of training for congregations or classes related to abuse of power:

» **A 60-minute training for church visitors and councils** dealing with situations of abuse by ministry leaders. The training covers abuse, its impact, and the process for handling abuse allegations well. This training is currently available through Zoom. By late fall, it will be available in video format.

» **Training in restorative practices.** Safe Church, the Office of Social Justice, and Pastor Church Resources are partnering with FaithCare of Shalem Mental Health Network to form a team of people qualified to offer training in restorative practices. For more information, see [crcna.org/safechurch/restorative](http://crcna.org/safechurch/restorative) or email Eric Kas at [ekas@crcna.org](mailto:ekas@crcna.org).

—Amanda Benckhuysen,  
Safe Church Ministry





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## Flight of Faith

**AS WE MOVE FROM SPRING** into fall, the weather begins to cool, and in the North the trees begin to show their fall colors. The birds who have happily feasted on the surplus of bugs and abundance of space found in the North begin to think about making the long flight back to their wintering grounds. Birds of every shape and size take flight and wing their way south. Some go as far as South America, others take refuge just below the snow line, and others, such as the snowy owl, simply find a place with a little less cold weather.

Some birds travel at night, using the stars to navigate. Others travel by day. But all seem to know where they are going and how to get there—no map

needed. The incredible act of migration sees birds who weigh about as little as a pen embark on an incredible journey covering thousands of miles. Along the way they depend on undisturbed landscapes for food and for taking a rest along their flight. They face dangers and uncertainties. It takes a lot of hard work (flying hundreds of miles a day, sometimes over open water, is no easy task!), but every year birds faithfully make the journey. How they do it is a puzzle that scientists still are trying to unravel. I doubt the birds themselves understand how and why they make this journey or realize the dangers they will face. Yet year after year they take wing, trusting their God-given instincts to fly thousands of miles twice a year.

What can we learn from the flight of these small birds? First, know that God is in control. Even though we might not understand it, there is a reason for all things. Second, as with the birds, sometimes our journey can be unknown and fraught with difficulties. It might feel as if we have no idea where we are headed, but we have to trust that God knows exactly where we are going and will get us there.

### Dig Deeper

Read Jeremiah 17:7-8 and 29:11 and Hebrews 11:1. What do these passages tell us about faith and trust?

### Try This

Research a bird that makes a migration journey and see how far it flies every year. Now try to figure out how long it would take you to make that trip on a bicycle. Many people can bike 60 miles (100 km) a day. Do you think you could make that journey twice a year? How does this affect how you see migration? **B**



Susie Vander Vaart is an environmental educator and ecologist who spends most of her time outside exploring creation.



# A Reunion for Ernie Benally

By James Calvin Schaap

**W**hen he was 13, Ernie Benally almost died. No one, not even the nurses, expected him to live. A rattlesnake bite was almost always fatal.

Traditional Navajos once had strong feelings about rattlesnakes, even worshipping them after a fashion, even though (and maybe because) they so deeply feared rattlesnake bites. Folk wisdom claimed that once the venom entered the bloodstream, the victim was forever poisoned.

In his own life story, *My Walk of Faith*, Ernie Benally says he had, from the time of the snakebite, a kind of reticence about him. He was shy—shyer, in fact, than his bashful father had been—in part because friends and acquaintances, even family, were hesitant to get near him. The kid held venom in his veins.

Just a few years later, in 1956, Ernie Benally was a rarity on the Dordt

College campus: a full-blooded Navajo in a world of fair-haired Dutch-American students—and Calvinists at that.

After Ernie proved his abilities at the school in Rehoboth, N.M., the principal recommended he consider this new college a world away in a place called Iowa. So Ernie bought a ticket and got on a Greyhound. He'd been to Phoenix, where he'd graduated from the Phoenix Indian School, so Sioux Center was not his first experience off the reservation. But a quick trip through Ernie's childhood illustrates just how much of a foreigner this Native American must have been in Sioux County, Iowa, in 1956.

Ernest Benally was born at home in 1935, in a hogan via traditional Navajo ways, his mother kneeling on a sheep pelt, holding to a sash belt hung from a sturdy log in the ceiling, his father behind her for support, while Grandpa chanted ceremonial songs. His mother always thanked him, he says, for coming quickly. Ernie was one of his

mother's seven children, the oldest boy. Navajo tradition not only allowed for bigamy, but even expected it when special family situations arose. So his father took a second wife and had six children with her.

The family sat on the floor when they ate meals in that one-room hogan. Even though neither parent had attended school, Ernie's father respected those friends of his who had, those who held down respectable jobs. For that reason, his father would often tout the importance of getting an education.

Traditional Navajo medicine men were plentiful in his family, and their presence prompted Ernie to evaluate his childhood as being very religious—so religious, in fact, that his mother, who noted the strength of her son's prayers and his love of singing, told him, "Maybe you should consider becoming a medicine man too."

When he was 10 years old, Ernie Benally was enrolled at the Crownpoint (N.M.) government



boarding school, where he first heard the gospel. Time each week was set aside for “religious instruction,” often led by a missionary who would tell Bible stories Ernie learned quickly to love.

Much of the Christian Reformed Church’s early mission efforts in the region were centered on this kind of religious instruction—an hour or so in which Christian people, many of them missionaries, could talk to boarding school kids about the Christian faith. It was government-approved and government-supported religious instruction.

That startling mix of church and state, unheard of and even illegal today, paid significant dividends. Ernie wasn’t the only boy or girl to come to know something of the gospel by way of religious instruction at the government boarding school.

But while it might seem that a government-sponsored religious program would be a wonderful blessing for spreading the gospel—and it was thought so at the time—religious instruction as just another feature of life in a government boarding school had the deleterious effect of making Christianity appear to be just another part of the cultural heft Native American people had to carry because of the colonizing power of white people. All too often Christianity became simply “the white man’s religion.”

In his life story, Ernie says he didn’t become a Christian at Crownpoint, even though the quality of those richly detailed stories was enticing (imagine not having TV or internet and hearing the story of the cross and the open grave for the very first time!).

One can, of course, enjoy the drama of a whole range of Bible stories and miss or not understand the nature

And now for  
sure this story of  
young men from  
such different  
worlds becomes  
everyone’s story.

of redemption. In his memoir, Ernie explains what happened to him and why the Christian faith was “challenging, in a way even fearful”:

Accepting and being led to accept the Christian way was fearful, because the missionaries didn’t tell me exactly what to believe in so much as they just told me the stories. In fact, to tell someone he is a sinner and must believe in Jesus Christ because he died for your sins is too much to grasp, especially when there is no such concept in your own religion.

Still, Ernie loved those great tales from Scripture. When he talked about those stories at home, however, he angered his father, who told him he hadn’t sent him to school to become a Christian.

“You have your own religion,” he told his son.

But Ernie was determined to go his own way. When a number of people he trusted told him they believed he was being called by God to pursue more education—education that would lead someday to the ministry—that direction seemed to open for him. Their prompting and his own resolve put

him on a bus toward a little junior college (enrollment 70) amid massive corn fields, a place that would very soon be given the name Dordt College (now University).

There is no record of how his fellow commuting students evaluated their food in 1956. The fare was as different as the different homes where they boarded. “My experience at Dordt was very positive,” Ernie says in his memoir. “I started out with a couple of immigrant roommates from Friesland,” which turned out OK, he says, “but the food was terrible.” It’s not surprising that a kid from the rez might find the food tasteless, but, even worse, he couldn’t help feeling the helpings he was getting were skimpy.

That the fare was bad explains what happened next to a man as much a stranger in a strange land as anyone coming through Ellis Island. One Sunday, when Ernie attended First CRC in Orange City, he was blessed by way of a dinner invite to the home of another student, Harold Bruxvoort. Even without fry bread the meat-and-potatoes of a hearty Sunday dinner at the Bruxvoorts’ came as welcome relief.

Mom Bruxvoort wasted no time when she heard Ernie’s evaluation of what he’d been fed. “Why don’t you just move in with us?” she said. He thought it would be a good idea. He could ride back and forth to Sioux Center with Harold.

So that’s what happened: a Bruxvoort blessing, even though Mom Bruxvoort never learned how to make fry bread. No matter—pot roast will do, Ernie might have said. The truth? Ernest Benally put on 20 pounds during the two years he spent at Dordt College.

In May of 1958, Ernie graduated from Dordt, a junior college, with an associate of arts degree, having taken the

pre-seminary track of Greek, Latin, and Dutch. No Navajo.

He went on to study at Reformed Bible College (now Kuyper College) and Calvin College (now University) in Grand Rapids, Mich., eventually completed a master's in social work at the University of Utah, and went back home to the reservation to serve as the director of social work for Indian Health Service, working all around the reservation—at Winslow, Dulcie, Fort Defiance, and elsewhere.

One professional life later, he became ministry director of Classis Red Mesa for Christian Reformed Home Missions. Throughout his life, Ernest Benally's service to and with the church was not without trials, at least some of which arose from the racism a Native man could experience in an overwhelmingly Euro-American church. In his first job as a mission translator, Ernie says, it was hard for him not to feel the kind of institutional racism that showed itself in distrust and discrimination. His life experience is a textbook of the perils that can undercut Indigenous ministry. In later years, via his own persistence, he served for many years as a lay leader for Classis Red Mesa, the largely Native American churches in the region.

Ernest Benally married Martha Jean Begay in Gallup, N.M., on Jan. 3, 1960. To that blessed union three girls—Deborah, Diane, and Tina—and one boy, David, were born. Years passed. Physical problems came along sometimes and made things difficult; emotional darkness swept in and out occasionally, as it has and does to many of us.

Soon after Ernie transitioned from his social work position to a new position with CRC Home Missions (now Resonate Global Mission), his beloved wife Martha developed pancreatic cancer and died just three months later.

Ernie's position as regional director of Home Missions brought him into contact with other professionals



**Ernie Benally (left) with Harold Bruxvoort**

working around the reservation, including a schoolteacher named Ruth Brink Heil, whose grandfather, the Rev. L.P. Brink, had been a much-beloved pioneer missionary who created a written language out of the difficult Navajo tongue because he felt strongly that effective missionary work could not be done without knowing the language. After Martha's death, Ruth became the second love of Ernie's life. They married in August of 1997. Ernest Benally was 62 years old.

When the two of them required additional care, they moved their household to Michigan to be closer to Ruth's daughter Susan and her husband.

A few years earlier, when Ernie and Ruth were in Michigan visiting family, Ernie looked up the telephone number of his old friend, Harold Bruxvoort, who'd spent most of his life teaching at Reformed Bible College. "I was so surprised to hear from him," Harold says. Harold called three other old friends from way back in those early years at Dordt, and five of them, he says, had a wonderful visit.

Then, in May of 2021, Ernie called Harold again to tell him that he and Ruth were now living close, right there in Hudsonville. He called to say hello and to give Harold his address—and oh, by the way, Ernie and Ruth were looking for a Michigan church home. Harold, in a pattern begun 65 years before, invited them to his

church—and they came. Soon Harold stopped over for coffee.


Ernie, sadly, was dying. He was 86 years old, and, as Ruth tells it, his body simply shut down in a way that soon made hospice care inevitable.

And now for sure this story of young men from such different worlds becomes everyone's story. In Ernie's case, the end of life was in sight. Hard of hearing for years already, his deafness kept conversations to a minimum. But even in silence, fellowship between old friends blossomed once more.

On three Sunday mornings, Harold Bruxvoort told Ruth that if she'd rather not miss church, he would be glad to come over and sit with his old college friend, who by that time was doing a lot of sleeping. Ruth smiled thankfully and took Harold up on the offer.

So for three Sunday mornings as the end drew closer, the two of them sat together, often in silence but together, two long lifetimes of service and worship between them, two Christian souls edging slowly toward what both believed was and will be, in one mysterious moment, both an end and a beginning. Together they marveled at the mysterious ways of the good God they had worshiped for so very long. They couldn't help but agree, Harold says, "that God is faithful."

Ernest Benally died Dec. 5, 2021, in hospice care.

Soli Deo gloria. 

*Editor's Note: This article originally was published in The Voice, the alumni magazine of Dordt University.*



James C. Schaap has contributed often to denominational publications, from occasional stories to a CRC history. After 37 years at Dordt University, he retired from teaching a decade ago and continues to work at writing.

He and his wife are members of Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa.

## Moving In

Being in the midst  
of a pandemic,  
there was no  
funeral. It  
seemed so bleak.



John Groen is a retired Christian Reformed minister who served congregations in Trenton and Richmond Hill, Ont., and Ann Arbor, Mich. He attends Ann Arbor (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church.

**IN AUGUST 2018**, we moved in. It was the right time and, we believed, the right home in the right neighborhood. Before long we met the neighbors and realized we were the younger couple on the block—and I was in my late 60s.

Ray and Pat lived across the street from us. It didn't take long before we were on a first-name basis with them. Ray was a veteran, had been a motorcyclist with a few cross-country trips under his seat, and had worked as an engineer for various companies. But his lifelong passion was music. He could play banjo and mandolin with the best, and he did. Every February, Pat and Ray hosted a "blahs" party, an event soaked in music from musicians who came from hundreds of miles away. They provided a hoedown worth more than diamonds.

Pat is a retired school teacher who knows Pinckney and Livingston County history and the people who have populated these locales for the past 80 years.

The winter of 2018 found me blowing snow off their sidewalks and driveway in exchange for conversation. I got the better part of the deal. When we went out of town, they would take out our garbage and replace the empty garbage can in our garage—little things we didn't have to worry about.

Fast-forward to late 2019.

It soon became evident that Ray wasn't feeling well. He was becoming frailer. After an accident with Pat behind the wheel, I became an appointed driver for doctor's visits. I was privileged to attend the visits with them and heard straight from the doctors what it was that ailed Ray. It was not going to get better—only worse.

In March 2020 Ray came home after a short hospital stay into the care of the local hospice agency.

Our visits continued, and we were enfolded deeper into the lives of this couple. Prayer became an integral part of our time together. Late one Sunday afternoon it became evident that the end of Ray's life was imminent. I spoke with him alone. We prayed, and I asked Ray to say hello to Jesus when he saw him. He raised his head from his pillow and said, "I will, John. I will."

Ray died a few hours later. Pat called us over. We checked his vital signs and made the necessary phone calls. We cried together—my wife, Pat, and myself. It's what you do when a loved one dies.

Being in the midst of a pandemic, there was no funeral. It seemed so bleak. Ray had asked for a "blahs" party to honor his passing. We're waiting for that event, hoping that enough of his musician cronies are able to make it.

Life goes on. Shortly after Ray's death, on Friday evenings, we would take Pat to visit the local Dairy Queen and then, ice cream in hand, go for a drive for an hour or two. We explored the broader area of our neighborhood. We learned so much—not just about the landscape, but about the history of the county, the politics, and who lived where, then and now. And we talked about Ray.

Pat became part of our pandemic bubble. We got groceries together, made doctor's visits as needed, and had conversations on the porch, weather permitting, but moving to the couch when winter set in.

Leanne and I know that we've not just moved into the neighborhood. We've been enveloped. We don't need to ask "Who is our neighbor?" We have been accepted as a neighbor in the truest and fullest sense of that word. **B**



# What's Wrong with the Rapture?

I believe that Christ will renew this world rather than destroy it.



Shiao Chong is editor-in-chief of *The Banner*. He attends Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ont.

**I REMEMBER READING** a Christian comic book as a youth back in Southeast Asia that depicted the rapture and the end times. But I have since changed my mind about rapture theology. Reformed theology does not support it.

## What Is Rapture Theology?

The rapture is an end-times event some faith traditions believe in, one in which faithful Christians will be physically taken (raptured) from this earth. It is based mostly on Bible passages such as Matthew 24:39-41 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. This theology gained prominence in the 19th century thanks to the *Scotfield Reference Bible*. Since then it has been popularized through some Christian books, such as the *Left Behind* series.

In the most common version of this theology, the rapture is seen as rescuing the saints from impending suffering and Earth's destruction. Christ's second coming is seen as a two-stage event. First, Christ will secretly come to rapture his saints before a period of great suffering known as the Great Tribulation. Only rapture-ready Christians are taken into heaven, leaving others behind to suffer. After the seven years of tribulation, the second stage of Christ's second coming will happen, this time for all to see. Christ will physically and politically reign for 1,000 years (the Millennium) from a throne in Jerusalem as king of the nation of Israel. During the Millennium, all the biblical promises to the nation of Israel will be literally fulfilled, and all Jews will become Christians. At the end of the Millennium, Satan and his forces, including human allies, will challenge Christ in the final battle (Armageddon), which will likely end up destroying the world in a nuclear holocaust. The final judgment will then occur, and the new heaven and earth will replace

the destroyed Earth. This, in very brief summary, is the most popular version of rapture theology.

## Implications of Rapture Theology

Two main implications of this theology are a diminished view of God's creation and an overemphasis on "getting ready for heaven." In this theology, Earth is mostly seen as a transient, hostile place. As a popular hymn goes, "This world is not my home; I'm just a-passing through." Hence, this viewpoint fosters a lower concern for creation. Why care for the environment if it will eventually all go up in flames?

Likewise, if the world is doomed for destruction, why bother trying to make it a better place? This theology also fosters an apathy for social reforms. As that aforementioned hymn continues, "My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue." The Christian spiritual life on earth is viewed mostly as about getting rapture ready by laying up "treasures in heaven" and, of course, by evangelizing to get others ready for heaven too.

Ultimately, rapture theology is based on wrong biblical interpretations. Let's take a look at some of the major relevant passages.

» Matthew 24:39-41 (Luke 17:26-35, parallel passage)

This is the famous passage about two men in a field; "one will be taken and the other left." Although this passage is often interpreted as describing the rapture, it isn't. In its context, Jesus is drawing a parallel to the flood in Noah's day. As it was in the days before the flood, people were doing their regular things until the flood came and took them all away (v. 39). Only Noah and his family, the righteous ones, were left behind to repopulate the earth. For Jesus, then, the one



taken is taken away to judgment. So, far from supporting a rapture theory, this passage describes the opposite!

» 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18

On its face, this passage looks as if it teaches the rapture: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, ... and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (vv. 16-17).

We need to understand the original Greek and the historical context of this letter. There are two groups of people explained by important Greek words in this passage: *parousia* (v. 15, coming / to come)—those who are left till the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord; and *apantesis* (v. 17, meeting / to meet)—those caught up together with the resurrected faithful in the clouds to meet (*apantesis*) the Lord. These two words together refer to a scene familiar in much of ancient Greek and Roman writings of a king or emperor coming to visit a city or a province. As

the king approaches, the citizens go out to meet him at some distance from the city—not to leave and live with him, but to welcome him and to escort him into the city. “Meeting the Lord in the air,” therefore, is a welcoming party for Christ’s triumphant return to Earth. The implied meaning is that we will escort Jesus to Earth and be with the Lord forever *on Earth*.

This is how the original Thessalonian Christians would have understood this passage. The rapture is not a rescue of Christians from Earth, but a welcoming party to escort Christ, the returning King who will judge and remove the evil in the world.

#### **A Renewed Earth**

I believe that Christ will renew this world rather than destroy it. The Greek has two different words for “new”: *neos* and *kainos*. *Neos* means new in time, or that which has not yet been. For example, babies are *neos*. *Kainos*, however, means new in quality, new and improved, renewed. In Revelation 21:1-5, the apostle John speaks of a “new heaven and a new earth” using

*kainos*, not *neos*. It is a renewed heaven and earth. Even in verse 5, when Jesus says, “I am making everything new,” that’s also *kainos*.

Some might object that 2 Peter 3:3-13 suggests the world will be destroyed by fire and not renewed. But Peter also uses *kainos* for the new heaven and earth there. He also referred to the Flood. The Flood did not annihilate the world, but restored it by removing evil. So Peter with his fire image was likely thinking of a refining fire burning off all evil so that only good is left behind. This fits perfectly with Matthew 24’s comparing the end times to the Flood.

This is not new for Reformed theology. The 16th-century Belgic Confession said of the Last Judgment, “Our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven. ... He will burn this old world, in fire and flame, in order to cleanse it” (Art. 37). The burning is seen as a cleansing and renewal of Earth rather than its destruction. Even Jesus spoke of “the renewal of all things” (Matt. 19:28, NIV).

God will renew the world, the home God created for us. Caring for this world and bringing social reform and justice in this lifetime is joining God’s renewing and reconciling of all things (Col. 1:15-23). Far from being futile, these good things are what will remain, left behind, after God removes evil. **B**

1. How did you learn about the rapture? What did you think or believe about rapture theology?

2. How did you previously understand Matthew 24:39-41 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18? Have you always known this interpretation, or did your views change at some point?

**READ MORE ONLINE**

# Watch Enthusiasts Cheer for Hodinkee

**REMINISCING** about my childhood, I asked my parents to search my old closet looking for my \$20 Casio Twin Graph watch that I bought with my own money when I was 12 years old. When my parents told me they couldn't find it, I started searching online for a replacement. I was very surprised to discover that my cheap Casio watch was now considered "hard to find" and was fetching a price of \$450.


Despite the fact that many people can now tell time by glancing at their phone, there is a thriving subculture of people who feel passionate about traditional watches. More than an object that keeps time, traditional watches hold memories and tell stories. Many of us can recall the gold watch on our grandfather's wrist. We think fondly of the watch we wore on our wedding day. We can still remember the watch that gave us that lucky feeling as we interviewed for our first job. Of all the precious heirloom items that get passed down through the generations, a beloved watch is often one of them.

Founded in 2008, *Hodinkee* has become an indispensable resource for modern and vintage watch enthusiasts. If you visit its website or click on its YouTube channel, you'll find a plethora of information about watches (horology). There is a traditional magazine you can find as well, but it started as an online company and that is where it is best situated. In 2019, Hodinkee was named one of Fast Companies' "Most Innovative Companies in Media," and you can also find it on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook.

One of my favorite *Hodinkee* videos to watch is called "Talking Watches." Just like my love of the Casio Twin Graph, Hodinkee hosts sit down with a variety

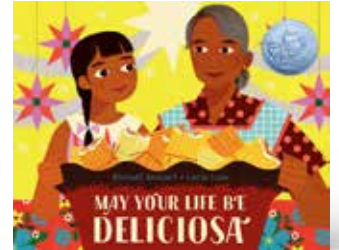
of famous people to talk about their favorite watches. Guests have included John Mayer, Brooke Shields, Ronny Cheing, J.J. Redick, Andre Iguodala, Jack Nicklaus, Mario Andretti, David Robinson, and Bethany Frankel, to name a few. Their watch collections come with stories about special moments on the concert stage, significant career accomplishments, eBay finds, and birthday gifts.

Other media produced by *Hodinkee* that is worth noting includes "A Week on the Wrist" (impressions after wearing a watch for a full week), "Watching Movies" (watches that make an appearance in favorite films), "Steal vs. Splurge" (similar looking watches at very different price points) and "Buying, Selling, & Collecting" (read the article that sneaks a peak at the watch collection of President Joe Biden).

Now that I've told you about *Hodinkee*, you can spend hours clicking around, watching, and reading about one of humanity's most important and interesting inventions—the wrist watch. For me, I need to continue scouring the internet to find my childhood Casio Twin Graph for less than \$450. (YouTube, Hodinkee.com) 



Sam Gutierrez is the Associate Director at the Eugene Peterson Center for the Christian Imagination at Western Theological Seminary. More of his creative work can be found at [printandpoem.com](http://printandpoem.com)



## May Your Life Be Deliciosa

*By Michael Genhart,  
illustrated by  
Loris Lora*

Reviewed by Sonya  
VanderVeen Feddema

Young Rosie loves to spend Christmas Eve with her extended family in her abuela's kitchen as they embark on their tradition of making tamales. Abuela shares stories as she gives each person a task, and they work together. Wisely and deftly, Abuela finds a metaphor for each part of the tamale to equip Rosie to remain resilient and loving within her family context.

Illustrator Loris Lora explains that her artwork was inspired by her Mexican family's rich tradition of making tamales. Her vivid and engaging pictures capture the "warm essence of family, food, and togetherness" as she had hoped they would. (Harry N. Abrams)





## Star Trek: Strange New Worlds

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

Fans of Star Trek have a reason to rejoice (yet again!). *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds* is currently streaming on Paramount+ and on Crave in Canada. Set 10 years before the original *Star Trek* series, the show follows Capt. Christopher Pike and a young Spock as they navigate the newly minted Enterprise on its first mission to explore the galaxy.

Stylistically, the creators chose to harken back to the feel of the original 1960s series, first by making the show more episodic than serialized. Each episode tells a complete story with its own beginning and end, though story arcs can build on previous episodes. The sets and costumes also take their cues from the fashion of the original series to create a fresh translation of mid-century modern style. (Paramount+ and Crave)



## Severance

Reviewed by Daniel Jung

Produced by Ben Stiller, the multiple-E Emmy-nominated series *Severance* centers around Mark Scout (Adam Scott) and his job at Lumon, a dystopian corporation with cult-like aspirations of global proselytization. All employees of Lumon are subjected to a medical procedure called “severance” in which their memories are surgically divided between their work and home lives.

For the Christian viewer, *Severance* is a chilling reminder that to be a people who were created in the image of God means to accept the entirety of our human experience. Our memories, no matter how painful or distressed, give us reason to step into the experience of creation and embrace life as those who have been grafted into a furiously intimate relationship with the Creator. (AppleTV+)



## The Lost City

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

*The Lost City*, starring Channing Tatum and Sandra Bullock, follows the tried-and-true recipe of other lost-treasure caper movies. Bullock, as a frustrated romance novelist, is superb at physical comedy, and Tatum knows exactly how to play it straight as her muscle-bound cover model in this screwball comedy. Beyond the silliness, the two soon forge a tender bond that feels real even in preposterous circumstances. Brad Pitt’s cameo might get the biggest laughs, but the two leads generate authentically heartwarming moments.

Rated PG-13 for some language and sexual innuendo, *The Lost City* is a bright light in what is often a dark, gritty moviemaking landscape. It just goes to show that sometimes high-quality ingredients mixed in a time-tested way are just the ticket. (Paramount+, Amazon Prime)

## The Lowdown

**Glorifying God in a Diverse World:** In the bestselling book *The Next Worship*, now rereleased as part of the IVP Signature Collection, Sandra Maria Van Opstal provides biblical foundations for multiethnic worship along with practical tools and resources for planning services that reflect God’s invitation for all God’s peoples to praise him. (IVP)

**The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power:** This epic drama series, set thousands of years before the events of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, brings to screens for the very first time the heroic legends of the fabled Second Age of Middle-earth’s history. (Sept. 2, Amazon Prime)

**Starring Saoirse Ronan, Adrien Brody, and David Oyelowo:** Set in 1950s London, *See How They Run* is a farcical mystery in which plans for a movie version of a smash hit play come to an abrupt halt after a pivotal member of the crew is murdered. (Searchlight Pictures)

**Behind Miranda’s Other Broadway Smash (Audiobook):** *In the Heights: Finding Home* reunites Lin-Manuel Miranda with Jeremy McCarter, co-author of Hamilton: *The Revolution*. In this audiobook, they give listeners an intimate look at the decades-long creative life of *In the Heights*.

## Is the Bible Full of Contradictions?

We don't faithfully engage the Bible by anxiously denying the existence of these texts. Instead, we need to take them seriously as a way of taking people seriously.



Michael Wagenman is the Christian Reformed campus minister and a professor of theology at Western University in London, Ont., and a part-time New Testament instructor at Redeemer University College. He attends Forest City Community Church.

**PROVERBS 26:4-5 READS**, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly. ... Answer a fool according to his folly.”

Readers of the Bible might find themselves confused as to whether Hazor was destroyed in the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 11 says it was, but later in Joshua and in Judges 4 we're told it was inhabited).

Others might see a contradiction about when Jesus cleared the Jerusalem Temple (John's gospel places it at the very beginning of his ministry while the other three gospels place it at the very end).

Isn't the Bible full of contradictions? In our missional campus ministry at a diverse public university, I hear this question a lot. And every time I hear it, I feel the pressure from anxious Christians to answer, “No! Of course not! The Bible is the Word of God, so there can't be contradictions!”

The problem with this response isn't its faith in Scripture's reliability. The problem is that it doesn't respect the person honestly asking the question.

We don't faithfully engage the Bible by anxiously denying the existence of these texts. Instead, we need to take them seriously as a way of taking people seriously. These kinds of questions are asked by honest and thoughtful Christians, adherents to other religions, and interested skeptics and seekers. How we answer is part of our witness.

Whether the Bible is full of contradictions is a question considered in the massive scholarly field called “hermeneutics”—the theories and methods of how we interpret texts. Some solid hermeneutical principles can help with this question.

First, this question is actually asking about *apparent* contradictions. The word “apparent” is important because it reminds us that what we think we

observe might, upon closer study, turn out to be something other than what we first assumed.

Next, we should ask which genre or type of literature we're looking at. The Bible is not so much a book as a library of books (at least 66 books in the Protestant version), and each book is filled with different types of ancient literature. We need to read all those different types of literature the way they were intended to be read.

Compare this to scrolling through your social media feeds. You are (often unconsciously) interpreting the different things you see. Your mind is trained to identify and interpret a news report differently than a meme. You know that poetry is read and interpreted differently than prose.

The same is true in the Bible. Parables are different from prophecy and poetry. But here's the catch: even a kind of literature that seems the same in the ancient world and in today's world might not be functioning in the same way. Take history books, for example: ancient historians operated with different assumptions and levels of creative license than historians today. This accounts for the differences in Joshua's portrayal of Hazor and John's unique placement of the temple clearing in his narrative of Jesus' ministry. On further study, these aren't contradictions. We only think they're contradictions because of the assumptions we've brought to the text.

But what about Proverbs 26:4-5? Well, this is wisdom literature. Wisdom is discerning how to live in different circumstances. With some questions, the wise response is to answer. But there are other questions—and other questioners—in which wisdom requires us to just walk away. Those two verses aren't a contradiction; they are wisdom for living in God's beautifully complex world. **B**

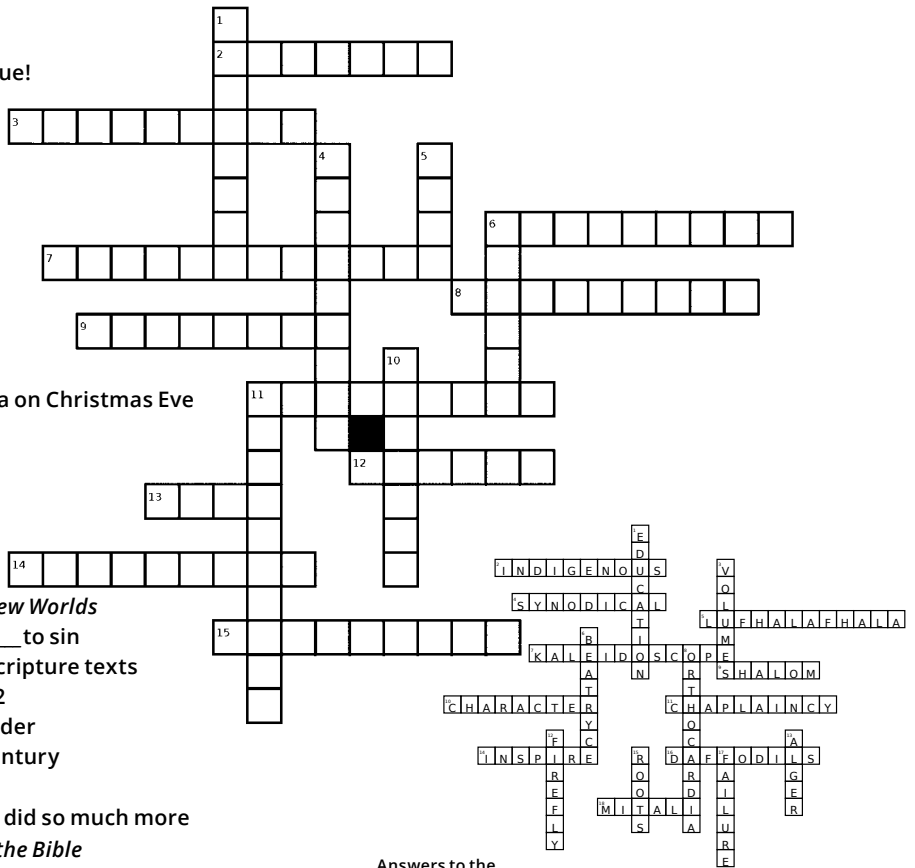
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

**Down**

- 1. A 2022 U.S. Supreme Court decision overturned two landmark \_\_\_\_\_ cases
- 4. A September Canada-wide gathering will offer “a time of honest sharing and careful \_\_\_\_\_”
- 5. Where you write if you’ve got a news tip: \_\_\_\_\_@thebanner.org
- 6. Mission of Hope \_\_\_\_\_, a ministry planting churches in Kenya
- 10. What young Rosie loves to make with her abuela on Christmas Eve
- 11. Literally, “bringer of good news”

**Across**

- 2. Ernie \_\_\_\_\_, a Navajo man who became ministry director of Classis Red Mesa for Christian Reformed Home Missions
- 3. Last name of the reviewer of *Star Trek: Strange New Worlds*
- 6. Church can be a recovery program for the \_\_\_\_\_ to sin
- 7. The theories and methods of how we interpret Scripture texts
- 8. One of author Paul Delger’s focus words for 2022
- 9. A confessional difficulty, according to Church Order
- 11. A personality test that dates back to the 14th century
- 12. A Greek word that means “new in quality”
- 13. The man who kept the refrigerator stocked and did so much more
- 14. *Four (and a half) \_\_\_\_\_ on Homosexuality and the Bible*
- 15. Birds heading south for the winter



Answers to the June 2022 puzzle

# JOB OPENINGS

We invite applications and nominations of qualified individuals for the following positions:

## Director of Latino Ministries

The Director of Latino Ministries is a regularly-appointed member of the staff who will have faculty status as well. This position is open to any field or discipline within theological education. The allocation of responsibility between administration and teaching will be based on the experience level, qualification, and competencies of the candidate. The emphasis in the position is on developing, cultivating, and managing the Latino Ministries Certificate and MA programs at Calvin Theological Seminary, along with teaching various courses in Spanish or English.

Faculty rank will be assigned at a level commensurate with experience and the candidate’s degree. A Ph.D. or other terminal degree is preferred. Preference will also be given to those who have a theological degree and extensive pastoral and/or administrative experience. The initial three-year appointment (possible tenure track) may begin as early as January 2023.

## Faculty Position in New Testament (open rank)

The faculty position in New Testament is a regularly-appointed, tenure-track faculty member holding the rank of assistant, associate, or full professor. The position involves the full range of faculty, departmental, and committee privileges and responsibilities at Calvin Theological Seminary. The emphasis in the position is on training students, preparing future scholars, and serving the church in the areas of biblical Greek, interpretation of the New Testament, and New Testament theology informed by a Reformed accent. The person filling this position is expected to begin her/his or her responsibilities on July 1, 2023.



**CALVIN**  
THEOLOGICAL  
SEMINARY

- We desire faculty members who engage students, the church, and the wider culture through teaching, mentoring, preaching and scholarship.
- We especially encourage applications from women and members of ethnic minority groups and would welcome nominations for these positions as well.
- Tenure track faculty members will be asked to commit to the confessions and mission of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

To apply, please send your CV, statement of interest, and cover letter which addresses your (1) familiarity with Reformed Theology, (2) teaching philosophy and experience across different modalities, (3) leadership and ministry experience, (4) scholarship and/or publications and, (5) contact information for three references to [facultyopenings@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:facultyopenings@calvinseminary.edu).

Review of applications will commence on **November 1, 2022** and will continue until a candidate is selected. If you have questions, please direct them to [facultyopenings@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:facultyopenings@calvinseminary.edu).



**DEADLINES:** 9/12/22 October; 10/10/22 November. Subject to availability. Details online. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

**PRICES:** Most ads are \$0.45<sup>US</sup> per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.38<sup>US</sup> per character and \$65 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

**TO ADVERTISE:** Place your classified ad online at [thebanner.org/classifieds](http://thebanner.org/classifieds) or email it to [classifieds@thebanner.org](mailto:classifieds@thebanner.org) or fax it to 616-224-0834. Questions? Call 616-224-0725.

**Denominational Announcements**

**CLASSIS KALAMAZOO** will hold their fall meeting on Tuesday, October 18, 6-9 PM at Heritage CRC in Kalamazoo.

**Congregational Announcements**

**FINAL CELEBRATION: FAITH CHURCH, NASHVILLE.** October 2, 2022 10:30 a.m. Faith Church is closing its ministry with a celebration of 50 years of faithful witness. Friends and former members are invited to join us for this special final worship service. If you cannot attend, we ask you to send a reflection on how Faith Church has touched your life in some way. These notes and/or reservations for the catered luncheon following the service must be received by September 15. 615-593-0435 [hmstyle@comcast.net](mailto:hmstyle@comcast.net)

**Church Positions Available**

**FIRST CHURCH IN RIPON, CA** is currently seeking a full-time Director of Youth Ministries who will be responsible for the junior high, high school and post-high ministries of our church. To learn more please visit us at [www.riponfirstcrc.org](http://www.riponfirstcrc.org).

**FULL TIME PASTOR** Exeter CRC in Ontario, Canada, is prayerfully seeking the next pastor God has prepared for us. We are an imperfect church looking for an imperfect pastor who will be the perfect fit in our multi-generational congregation. Exeter is a rural community nestled in the Great Lakes basin of southwestern Ontario and located 40 minutes north of London (pop 540,000). If you are interested or intrigued in this position, please contact us in confidence at [pastorsearch@exetercrc.on.ca](mailto:pastorsearch@exetercrc.on.ca). We would love to hear from you!

**FULL TIME PASTOR** Kanawha Christian Reformed Church is a small church in a small community which we believe is a blessed asset to the Lord's Kingdom in our area of Iowa. Our theology is traditional CRC yet is open, affirming and contemporary in spirit. We are seeking a full time Pastor. Interested? Please contact Pastoral Search Comm at [luppenlj@gmail.com](mailto:luppenlj@gmail.com).

**IMMANUEL CRC OF WAPPINGERS FALLS, NY SEEKS PASTOR** full time or bi-vocational to lead our small dynamic small church in the heart of the scenic Hudson Valley. The pastor we are looking for should be devoted to preaching the word of God and be able to walk beside us in our faith journey. Please contact Mike Toth, Secretary of Search Committee at [mi.toth@yahoo.com](mailto:mi.toth@yahoo.com)

**INTERIM ASSOCIATE PASTOR** Bethel CRC Listowel, Ontario is seeking a part time Interim Associate Pastor. Request job description or submit your resume to [wilmar.bakker@gmail.com](mailto:wilmar.bakker@gmail.com)

**Church Anniversary 125 Years**

**SULLY CRC SULLY, IA** will be celebrating 125 +1 years of God's providential care on October 2, 2022. We invite former staff and past members to join us. For more information contact the church office at 641-594-3491.

**Birthdays**

**BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS**

**REV THEODORE (TED) VERSEPUT** celebrated his 95th birthday on July 12. A family celebration held on July 16 included children, grandchildren, and 27 great grandchildren. We, his family, thank God for the rich life Dad has lived. His address is 2589 44th St SE, # 202, Grand Rapids, MI 49512.

**BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS**

**AGNES (VAN OSTENBRIDGE) DE BOER** celebrated her 90th birthday on July 28. Her children Ruth (Ron), and Doug (Marge) and Lisa, and her five grandchildren and three great grandchildren are grateful for her faithful life. 17095 Timber Dunes Dr, Grand Haven, MI 49417.

**ANDREW (ANDY) MIEDEMA** of Orange City, IA, will celebrate his 90th birthday on September 18. He and his wife, Joan, will celebrate their 68th wedding anniversary on October 1. They are blessed with 5 children, 13 grandchildren, and 7 great-grandchildren, and attest to the faithfulness of a loving and gracious God from whom ALL blessings flow. Cards are welcome at 301 Hartford Ave SE, Orange City, IA 51041.

**Anniversary**

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 72 YEARS**

**SCHOOLLAND,** John and Helen celebrated their 72nd anniversary on August 8, 2022. John turned 97 on August 17 and Helen will turn 94 on November 14. Much love and gratitude from their children- Judy, Gary and Gail Schoolland, and Renee and Ted Viss, 13 grandchildren, and 34 greats!

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS**

**DE GRAAF,** John and Alieda thank God for 70 years of marriage on August 13, 2022.

Celebrating with them are their children, 13 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren. 2121 Raybrook Manor, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546.

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 65 YEARS**

**DEKOEKOEK,** Joe & Eleanor will celebrate their 65th on Sept 20! Thankful to God for His eternal faithfulness as they celebrate with their children Dan & Carol, Ron & Cheryl, Kevin & Sue, & Joey & Sandy as well as their 11 grandchildren & 7 great grandchildren.

**DENOUDSTEN,** Henry and Nel will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary on September 11, 2022, DV. Their children: Murray (Joyce), Henry (Katherine), Leona (Marc) and Roxane (Ron), along with their 9 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren are thankful for God's faithfulness and continued blessings in their lives.

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS**



**STEEN,** John and Carolyn (Bielema) celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 29. Their children Bonnie and Jim Griffioen, Shelley Steen, Kevin and Melissa Steen, and 5 grandchildren, praise God for their faithfulness to Him and to each other. They reside at 523 Curran Place, Franklin Lakes, NJ, 07417

**Obituaries**

**DROST,** Albert, 97, of Grand Haven, MI, was called home to the Lord on July 17, 2022. Beloved husband of the late Ruth (Cooper); father to six sons: Dirk (the late Sue), Daniel (Dawn), Douglas (Julie), Timothy, Kurt (Joni), Thomas (Frances); grandfather to 11 and great grandfather to three. He is survived by sister Sheila Buus. He was a member of Coopersville CRC.



**FERWERDA,** Joy (Dykstra), age 47, Somers, CT. Beloved wife of Peter Ferwerda, Jr. Daughter of Richard and Marion Dykstra, brother, Brent (Michelle). She loved Jesus and she is now with Him. Joy did not doubt His plans even as she struggled with cancer, and her testimony encouraged others to know and trust Him.

**HOOGENDAM**, Bert of Sarnia, Ontario, went to be with his Lord and Savior at the age of 87 on May 31, 2022. He was preceded in death by his wife of 54 years, Frances (nee Verdun) in June 2019, and is lovingly remembered by his children Bernie (the late Jennifer), Karen (Dan) DeYoung, Sue Clark and Bob (Tracy) Hoogendam, 11 grandchildren, siblings Hillie (Bert) VanZeumeren, the late Huib (Teunie), and Joop Hoogendam and in-laws the late Harry (Helen), John (Cheryl), Marina, and Peter (Betty) Verdun.

**KOEKKOEK**, Arnold, 89, passed away on June 30, 2022. He was an active member of the Sioux Center, IA, 1st CRC and taught at Dordt College for 34 years. He is survived by his wife, Carol of 63 years.



**POTMA**, John William (Bill), age 86, passed away peacefully on May 27, 2022 after a short illness, surrounded by family. He is now in heaven with his Lord and Saviour. Bill is predeceased by his wife Joan (née Borgdorff) in 2003 and survived

by his wife of 14 years, Tina and son Stan (Teri) and daughters Leslie (Paul) and Julia (Karl) as well as many grand and great grandchildren. Bill spent his working life in the mining and material handling equipment industry and became known as a Conveyor Specialist. Bill was a member of the Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, ON, Dollard-Des Ormeaux, QC, Coquitlam, BC and Surrey, BC where he served faithfully as a deacon in his local church and with the BC Diaconal Conference. He also served as a board member with World Renew for many years, participating in trips to Africa to observe and encourage the work being done in various communities there. Bill was passionate about the forest and the trees that filled them. He walked in the forest daily and was dedicated to sustaining the parks in his community. His was a life well lived on earth to the glory of God! Condolences may be sent to [kjraven@shaw.ca](mailto:kjraven@shaw.ca).

**ROODVOETS**, William Guy, age 90 of Caledonia, passed away Thursday, June 30, 2022. He was preceded in death by his wife, Frances; sister, Ruth Stewart; and brother, Roger Roodvoets. He is survived by his children, Dan (Kathy) Roodvoets, Julie (Glenn) Van Ryn, Joel (Ellen) Roodvoets; grandchildren, Jonathan (Katie) Roodvoets, Dennis (Jessica) Roodvoets, Bill (Michelle) Roodvoets, Jessica (Justin) Wigger, Geoffrey (Leah) Van Ryn, Christopher (Holly) Van Ryn, Jennifer (Kevin) Vanderson, Valerie Van Ryn (fiancé Greg Garipey), Lauren (Tim) Nykamp, Brittany (Brent) Boverhof, Kaylee (Josh) Morgan, and Jordyn Roodvoets; 23 great-grandchildren; brother, David Roodvoets; sister, Sarah (Ken) Meyer; and many nieces and nephews. He was a longtime member of Millbrook Christian Reformed Church, and more recently, Brookside Christian Reformed Church.

**VAN HEUVELEN**, Dee of Grandville, MI passed on to her heavenly home on July 9, 2022. She is survived by her husband of 60 years, Clare; children, Cindee and Steve Hulst, Cari and Kevin Wiersema, Curt and Chris Van Heuvelen; 7 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.

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**VANKUIKEN**, Ronald, age 91, of Hudsonville (formerly of South Holland, Illinois), went to be with his Lord and Savior on Sunday, March 6, 2022. He is survived by his wife, Myra (Schreur) VanKuiken; children Kathy & Peter Vink, Dave & Gail, Barb, Jim & Diane, Rob & Heidi, Steve & Jill; 16 grandchildren & spouses, 21 great-grandchildren.

**ZONNEVELD**, Nellie (Visser) passed away on Feb. 18, 2022 at the age of 77. She is survived by her husband Jacob Zonneveld, children: Alexandra (Jeffery) Brown, JohnPaul (Shima), Julia (Bob) McSheffery, Krista (Sean) Purcell, and 7 grandchildren. Nellie will be remembered for her love to her family and friends in the legacy of her art.

### Employment

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## Practicing Gratitude and Grace

No matter how difficult life becomes, thankfulness is always the best option.

**GOD IMPRESSED UPON MY HEART** in late 2021 my focus for 2022: gratitude and grace.

I stopped making New Year's resolutions several years ago and replaced them with goals. However, the goals I made were about the same each year, so the practice didn't seem beneficial. I was ready to tackle something different.

Gratitude and grace have always been a challenge for me. Centering my thoughts on these two areas this year has resulted in improvement, but I could definitely grow more.

The pandemic serves as a major stealer of gratitude. How can I become thankful when I am worried about getting sick from COVID or battling pandemic effects such as sky-high food and fuel prices and supply shortages? Where can I find gratitude when a spirit of fear casts its shadow all around me?

It seems easier to grumble and complain than to express thanks to the Lord. I read somewhere this analogy: "If you are so fixed on getting two potatoes, you won't be happy with the one potato you already have." That struck me like an arrow hitting a bull's eye.

My thankfulness revolves around small and big things. I praise God that I get out of bed every morning on my own even though I face numerous health challenges. Thanks flow when my temperamental garage door works. Thanks happen when my dishwasher completes the job, for without it I would have to spend a chunk of time washing dishes with only one largely functional hand.

Stepping outside, I hear the sweet sounds of birds chirping. I see beautiful flowers, plants, trees, many different colors, flat and hilly ground, and various animals. I experience the sound of thunder, see blue skies, and at night view the stars. Thank you, Lord.


And what about my relationship with the Lord? He loves me. He saved me. He lives inside me through the Holy Spirit. He forgives all my sins. I can fellowship with him through Bible reading and prayer. He knows all about me. He cares. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

No matter how difficult life becomes, thankfulness is always the best option. I remind myself of another form of thankfulness: "Things could always be worse."

As difficult as gratitude may be sometimes, grace seems to be an even larger problem for me. I grew up in a Christian Reformed church that seemed to stress God's judgment rather than his grace. Its focus on performance implied people needed to earn God's favor. Where is the grace in that scenario? Therefore, I reasoned, if God doesn't give grace (his forgiveness), then how can I forgive myself? And if I struggle with forgiving myself, how can I forgive others?

This grace journey requires lots of self-talk. I remind myself about God's truth. God loves me. I am his child. He is for me. He wants the best for me. He will never leave me or forsake me. He cheers for me. I am freed from proving myself to him. When I am secure in God, I can lower my ultra-high expectations and give myself grace. My positive self-talk becomes something like, "Paul, even though you may have messed up this time, you are only human, and you will do better next time. You've got this."

I invite you to join me on this road to gratitude and grace. If you have difficulties, as I did, begin by thanking the Lord for small things. Let your gratitude flow. If grace presents problems, remind yourself that God created you as a special person with worth.

Having a proper view of gratitude and grace will aid not only us, but others too. 



Paul Delger, who lives in Kanawha, Iowa, is a longtime professional writer and an inspirational speaker to young people.

## Sodas and Water

Quiet faithfulness seems to be a lost art in our fast-spinning world.



Rod Hugen is pastor of the Village Church and leader of the Tucson Cluster, a church planting effort in Tucson, Ariz.

**THE REFRIGERATOR WAS FULL** of sodas and water. It'd been that way for years. Every week it got replenished. Sunday rolled around, and people opened the fridge and found their favorite soft drink or a bottle of cold water to accompany their post-service meal or to sip on during the worship service. It was almost magical how it filled up again and again, week after week. Much like the widow's oil, it was constantly replenished. Colas, root beers, lemon-limes, and ginger ales. Diet and sugared, caffeinated and non—all sorts of delightful elixirs to accommodate individual tastes. It's been a wonderful thing.

Of course, it wasn't magic. It was John. John was a kindhearted, somewhat nondescript man who was always sort of in the background at church. He preferred to not be noticed. But things somehow always got fixed when John was around. The lock on the door that no key could turn was replaced. The leaking faucet stopped leaking. The refrigerator was always full. There was no paycheck, nor were these tasks assigned. It was just John being John, looking for things that needed doing and doing them.

John found his way to the church back when the Presbyterian church he was part of closed down. When asked why he joined us, he'd say he liked the people and liked helping out. And helping out is what he did. Always quietly. Always kindly. Always generously.

Quiet faithfulness seems to be a lost art in our fast-spinning world. For John it was a way of life. He was faithful to his wife, faithful to his church, faithful to his family—faithfulness always expressed in service, in simple acts of kindness and love. A year after year of keeping-a-refrigerator-filled-with-soda kind of faithfulness.

All things end, of course. We age and can no longer do what we once did. The

time came for John and Sylvia to pack up their little house and move closer to family in Georgia. Of course, even that is an act of kindness. Better that he and Sylvia move closer to nephews and nieces so as not to be a burden to them when final medical choices must be made, wills must be executed, and possessions disposed of. Making life easier for the family is exactly what John would do. And he did.

John set a marvelous example.

Peter is 19. He follows in the way of Jesus. He asked me after church one Sunday what kind of soda I liked best. I told him I drank a lot of Diet Pepsi, but I'd always been partial to Vernors ginger ale. I said it was difficult to find out here in Arizona, so I rarely drank it.

The next Sunday the fridge was again stocked with water and sodas—including some cans of Vernors ginger ale.

John set a marvelous example of faithful generosity.

It didn't go unnoticed. **B**

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**READY FOR WHAT? ANYTHING.**



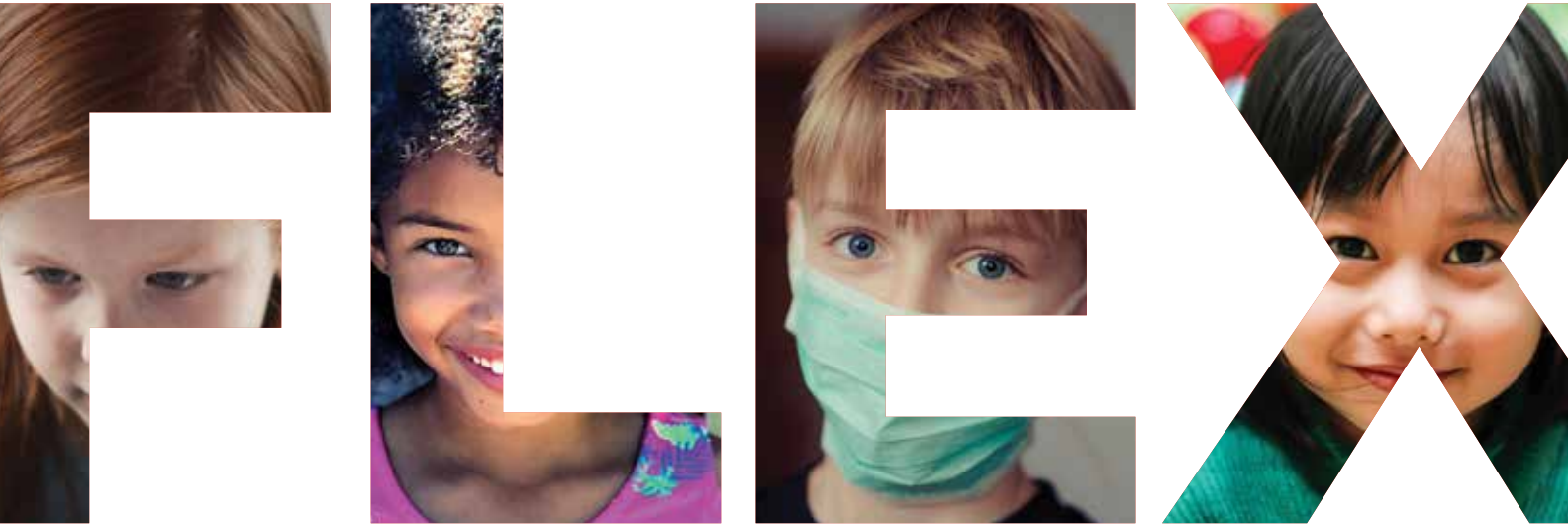
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