

# BANNER

DECEMBER 2022

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See the little baby · lying in a manger · on Christmas morning · See Him



at the temple · talking to the elders · How they marveled at His wisdom



See Him in the garden · praying to His Father as Judas betrays Him



See Him on Calvary · dying for our sins · but He rose on Easter · amen



2022 Year-End

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# A Bible for Those Who Can't Read



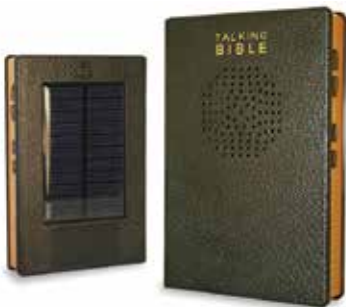
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*~Huy*



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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

Disability Concerns, a ministry of the CRCNA, offers training to become volunteer disability advocates who serve individual churches (Church Advocates) and groups of churches (Regional Advocates). See our current number of advocates below.

Percentage of people with disabilities in the community

# 20%

Number of CRCNA Church Disability Advocates: **365**

Number of CRCNA Regional Disability Advocates: **28**

» To learn more about becoming an advocate yourself, visit [crcna.org/disability/advocates-corner](http://crcna.org/disability/advocates-corner).

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

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**BANNER**

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## Christ's Humility

The second person  
of the Trinity  
becoming flesh  
in baby Jesus  
was not only  
miraculous—a  
sign of God's  
power—but also  
astonishing—a  
sign of  
God's humility.



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).

**SINCE MY OCTOBER** editorial (“Signs of Hope”), I have received a number of emails, letters, and even a homemade card from readers encouraging me and expressing their appreciation of my work. I am most thankful to all of you. You have lifted my spirits. Through you, God has reminded me that there are many gracious Christ-followers among us.

As Christmas draws near, we are reminded again of God's amazing love for us. The second person of the Trinity becoming flesh in baby Jesus was not only miraculous—a sign of God's power—but also astonishing—a sign of God's humility. It's analogous to our becoming ants. God came willingly, driven by God's gracious love, to rescue us.

In Philippians 2:6-7, the apostle Paul describes Christ's incarnation this way: “(Jesus), being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” Instead of our culture's prideful sense of entitlement, Jesus willingly let go of his divine privileges.

The original Greek word translated here as “servant” is actually the word for “slave.” Jesus willingly—intentionally—went from divinity to slavery. He went from divine Master to mortal slave. And, as an obedient slave, he was obedient to death—even a humiliating and excruciating death on a cross reserved for the worst criminals (v. 8).


Paul wrote that our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (v. 5), who humbled himself. Paul wrote this to the Philippian church, which was facing some discord and disunity (Phil. 4:2). Jesus was the ultimate role model for Paul's exhortation to “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but

in humility value others above yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). If Jesus, who had every right as God to be entitled and to be honored over others, chose to let go of that for the sake of others, how much more should we as Christ's followers?

This is a hard teaching for us. In our North American culture, where individualism, self-centeredness, competitive pride, and attitudes of entitlement rule, this posture of humility, obedience, self-giving, and self-relinquishing privileges is not only counter-cultural; it is hard. We would be seen as weak and foolish.

But the path our Lord Jesus calls us to follow is not an easy path. It certainly does not align with the consumer mindset of today's spirituality. However, God will not ignore our obedience. As God exalted Christ from his humiliation, God will raise us up along with Christ (Phil. 2:9-11).

This is not a call to do more, work harder, or strive more, as if it is all about our willpower and our obedience. That would lead to righteousness by good works.

It starts with “heart work.” God will draw close to a humble and contrite heart or spirit (Ps. 51:17; Isa. 57:15). Let us be thankful to Christ for his undeserved grace toward us. Let us set our hearts on Christ, filling our hearts with more of him and less of us. Then out of our Christ-filled hearts will flow his love and grace to others. I pray that this will be true for us this Christmas. 

Thanks to your generous support, we are at more than 84% of our annual fundraising goal of \$500,000. With your help, we will get there! Please give at [TheBanner.org/Give](http://TheBanner.org/Give). Thank you!

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## REPLY ALL

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

### Focusing on Orthodoxy

I received a twofold blessing from the September 2022 issue of *The Banner*. First, the editorial “Further from Revival” is what my soul needed. Too often I fall into a loveless orthodoxy. Thank you, editor Chong! Second, my fear of the Christian Reformed Church losing its orthodoxy was somewhat alleviated by the article “What’s Wrong with the Rapture?” The article echoes our Reformed confessions concerning the return of Christ. Please continue doctrinal studies in *The Banner*. But the burden does not rest only on the shoulders of our editor. This is a plea for all CRC churches to make sure our children and young people become well grounded in a loving orthodoxy. After all, for decades our confessions were called the Three Forms of Unity.

» Doug Aldrink // Dublin, Ohio

### Preaching

Kudos to Corey Van Huizen and Tyler Greenway on the article “Preaching to Promote Conversation” (September 2022). (It was a) very insightful way of looking at the topic of preaching, and I would assume it’s not just younger people who desire conversations around biblical topics. It could have an outsized impact if widely adopted.

» John Erro // Oakdale, Calif.

### Controversial Articles

When I finished reading the *Behind The Banner* blog post “Why We Publish ‘Controversial’ Articles” ([thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org)), I thanked our Lord for your clear voice. I know you must often feel stuck between a rock and a hard place, but if we can’t or won’t hear each other, then we really don’t have a communion of saints any longer. Please carry on with this work; you are in my prayers.

» Bart van der Kamp // Delta, B.C.

Thank you, editor and staff of *The Banner*. You are charged by the CRCNA to walk a fine line amid divergent and often strongly held perspectives. I think you do it with grace and thoughtfulness and, as the “Why We Publish ‘Controversial’ Articles” article suggests, you are biblically prophetic. Please keep us thinking and in dialogue with others.

» Curtis Korver // Port Alberni, B.C.

### Signs of Hope

I wanted to take a minute to thank you for your column “Signs of Hope” (October 2022) and for many of your previous columns. Reading your words over the past few years has often given me hope for this denomination (and) for the church itself. Your work is consistently thoughtful, humble, and clearly Spirit-led. I will not say which side of the current debate I stand on, but I have greatly appreciated your attempts to write where the Spirit has led you without taking sides. As the wife of a journalist, I am aware of how difficult that can be.

» Mary Steensma // Rochester, N.Y.

### Hospitality

The article by David Ryden really resonated with me (“Church, Can We Talk About Hospitality?”, July/August 2022). Why are some churches so friendly and others not? I decided part of the reason is that “Christian Reformed” sometimes seems to be not only a denomination but an ethnic group. I would invite people home for lunch on Sundays but was told they always go to a grandparent’s house. Birthdays were celebrated with families. So, after being unsuccessful in getting church members to our home, we began to invite international students from Calvin College. They for sure were not a part of the Christian Reformed “ethnic group” and had no family in the country. I wish all congregations could look past our last names and our looks and assume all of us are a part of the Christian family, first of all, and just happen to be members of a Christian Reformed church!

» Elisabeth Beels // Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Synod 2022

I appreciated your coverage of Synod 2022 (July/August 2022). In particular, Shiao Chong’s trenchant lament and David Koll’s five thoughtful conclusions about where our denomination is going modeled the kind of biblical imagination and prophetic critique we very much need at this moment.

» Wilma van der Leek // Surrey, B.C.

A friend gave me a copy of the Synod 2022 issue. What a sad read. ... The CRC still seems to be concentrating on punishment and retribution. Fortunately the Bible teaches us, “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). That’s the Word I try to live by even if I’m often unsuccessful. My late brother was right when he said, “We talk too much about sin.” I feel your pain, and I will pray for you.

» Willem Hart // Toronto, Ont.

## Paper Prayers: The Power of a Note

Another way to understand Synod 2022's decision to discipline Neland CRC ("Neland CRC Ordered to Comply," July/August 2022) is to see ... that love is not about enabling sinful behavior, but it is about confronting Neland, holding them to account, disciplining them, and even punishing them. The decision of Synod 2022 is showing love to our brothers and sisters of Neland.

» Judy De Wit // Sioux Falls, S.D.

**WHEN I WAS ON** pregnancy bed rest with triplets, I was blessed by people sending me notes and cards that I hung on the wall of my hospital room for encouragement. So when I sit in church every week and hear about people struggling with health, missionaries facing challenges, and friends needing prayer, I think, "I should send them a note," or I think of those to whom I'd like to send a thank-you card. But do I actually do it? No. Why? Because once I exit through the church doors, life hits me in the face, and I rarely remember the notes the Holy Spirit pricks me to send.


Guessing I was not alone, I started a card ministry. In the church narthex I set up a table with note paper, cards, envelopes, and stamps. I found a local store to donate old cards of all kinds. As time went on, congregants also started donating cards. Now, when the Holy Spirit prompts someone to write a note in church or during Bible study, there is a place to do that before they forget. I named the ministry "Paper Prayers" because it is my hope that when people write a note to someone they will also take time to pray for that person.

The apostle Paul knew the value of written notes of encouragement and wrote many "notes" to his fellow Christians. He wrote, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11).

God can speak to others through prayerfully written notes. God always knows what people need and when. From a close friend I've heard, "Your card came at the exact time that I needed it." A friend whose father died told me, "I got a note with the perfect verse written in it right when I needed those words." From a wife whose husband was fighting cancer: "Look at all these cards we received from our church, family, and friends!" In a world

God can speak to  
others through  
prayerfully  
written notes.

that moves increasingly fast, slowing down to write a note shows an amount of care and concern beyond a flippant "I'll be praying for you" in passing or on social media.

Who in your life needs a note and a prayer? A co-worker, a classmate, a relative, a missionary, or a cashier at your grocery store? Life is difficult—be a blessing! So many people need encouraging words, need to know someone cares, need your prayers. It doesn't have to be perfect. Your note can simply be a verse God put in your mind. Write a note, say a prayer, and let God minister to someone's heart through you today. 



Stacey Pylman, Ph.D., is an assistant professor of medical education at Michigan State University, a graduate of Calvin University, a member at Caledonia Christian Reformed Church, and the author of *Be Still: A Pregnancy Bedrest*

*Devotional*. Read her blog at [bedrest-blog.blogspot.com](http://bedrest-blog.blogspot.com).

### As I Was Saying

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

- » The Hospitality of a Messy Home
- » Remembering Brother Andrew, a Fearless Smuggler of Bibles
- » Synod 2022 Did the Loving Thing



# Christmas Trees, Hallelujahs, and Finding Joy in a Broken World

By Linda Hanstra

**A**s I walked through the few remaining rows of Christmas trees, I attempted to sort out my feelings. When I was growing up, there were hundreds of acres of trees. These few were all that remained. *I should feel something*, I told myself. While a little part of me wanted to cry, the emotion that bubbled up instead was joy. I was playing peek-a-boo from behind the trees with my toddling grandson. My husband and kids walked the rows with me.

We were searching for the perfect tree, and I looked forward to the beauty and fresh pine smell it would add to my home. Of course, it would also leave sap on our hands and drop needles on the carpet.

The tree farm I grew up on reminds me that joy and sorrow often mingle side by side, especially during the holidays. Year in and year out for 50 years, my family brought the tradition of cutting down and bringing home a live Christmas tree to countless other families. It was exhilarating and exhausting. There were festivities and frustrations. It was stressful, yet satisfying. We loved it. We also looked forward to the end of the season.

About a week before Christmas, the steady stream of customers would slow to a trickle, and we could finally focus on our own family traditions. We wrapped the presents and prepared the food. On Christmas Eve, our family's traditional night to celebrate, we were ready.

After consuming our array of appetizers, main dishes, and sweets, we tore open our gifts, moving from the youngest child (and later grandchild or great-grandchild) to the oldest. Then we gathered around the piano for the most treasured moment of the night. I don't remember when the tradition started, but what began as a few simple Christmas hymns grew into a four-part amateur rendition of Handel's "Hallelujah" chorus.

As the family grew, so did the "choir." At almost 30 strong, we struggled through—sopranos straining to reach the high notes as altos, tenors, and basses searched for the harmony lines. Despite our imperfection, singing those hallelujahs soon became the main event of the night. Even the non-singers took part by running video cameras and taking photos. The littlest family members stood among us, gazing upward to the voices that drew their attention away from their new

toys. No one packed up their gifts or sent the kids to the car until the singing was over.

Just like the tree farm that attracted customers from far and wide, the opening measures of the song pulled us all together in a melodic embrace. Year after year, we could count on Mom's powerful alto voice while Dad, beaming with delight (and a little pride), helped carry the bass section.

## When Change Comes

In 2018, with my parents in their key roles, we gathered to sing in their home. Mom's beautiful tree, adorned in white lights, lace, and rose-colored ornaments, blended well with her country blue decor. Glass candy bowls brimming with her sugar-and-spice pecans were reduced to bowls of crumbs by the end of the evening.

By the following year, as Mom's Alzheimer's gradually stole her strength and skills, my parents could no longer host all 40-plus members of the family. We gathered a few miles away at my sister's instead. Although Mom and Dad attended, Mom could only tolerate the noise and crowded house for a couple of hours. They headed home before the singing.

Still, we carried on. Things weren't quite right without them, but muddling through our hallelujahs helped distract us from the gradual changes our family was experiencing.

Then came 2020, and the changes were no longer gradual. We lost Dad suddenly in July after a brain bleed caused by a fall. Though he had been aging, the abrupt end to the life of this hardworking farmer, our father, was the last thing we expected on that lovely summer day.

Mom's Alzheimer's continued to progress. Then, in late October, after tests revealed she had cancer, we arranged for home hospice care. The pandemic was raging and, difficult as it was, my siblings and I decided it was best to cancel our annual holiday party.

The following year, we finally gathered for Christmas again. It had been nearly 18 months since Dad had gone to heaven, and nine months since Mom joined him there. So much had changed. By then my nephew's young family had moved into my parents' home and changed the color scheme from Mom's country blue. The farm was still a meeting place for us all, but there was no teatime around Mom's table. And with the tree farm closing a few years earlier, only a sparse number of trees grew in the field.

In that first year without Mom and Dad, we came together at my brother's house. We tried a new gift exchange idea. My sisters and I tweaked the menu for our family feast. The great-grandchildren had grown and changed since we last gathered, and we welcomed two new little ones for the first time.

Many elements of our celebration had changed, but other traditions remained. There were dishes filled with Mom's sugar-and-spice pecans, and as usual, we critiqued the size and

Just like the  
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far and wide,  
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measures of the  
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shape of the host's Christmas tree. We talked and laughed and reminisced.

Then we sang our hallelujahs.

As we choked back tears, singing didn't come easily. But when one of us dropped out, another carried us through. Our family had changed, but the love between us—our siblings, in-laws, nieces, nephews, and "the great-grands"—had only deepened. Mom and Dad would have wanted us—no, expected us—to keep on singing.

#### Searching for the Stable

Ours is not the only family that grieves losses—of jobs, relationships, opportunities, loved ones—during the holidays. In fact, Christmastime often brings those losses to the fore.

Our yearning for tradition in the midst of loss makes the holidays especially


difficult. Celebrating and singing might be the furthest thing from our minds. Yet what a comfort it is to know that, whether we're crying or singing, "Emmanuel" means God is with us.

The evergreen trees with their glittering lights, no matter how perfectly shaped, will not heal our broken hearts. The hallelujahs, no matter how in tune and in time, cannot bring us lasting joy. Instead, we turn to the One who promises everlasting light and life, the One to whom we raise those hallelujahs.

As we walk through this Advent season, we are searching for more than the perfect tree. Our traditions might fill our earthly need for stability. But what we're really searching for is in that stable under the star. What we crave is the comfort of the Christ-child.

Despite the sadness we feel in this broken, hurting world, our faith lies in him. For "the kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord." He alone has the power to heal our broken hearts and turn our sorrow into joy. His birth promises a future celebration better than any past, present, or future Christmas party.

With the joy his promise brings, we can lift our voices and together sing, "Hallelujah!"

*Editor's note: A version of this article was published on TheBanner.org's As I Was Saying blog in 2021. *



Linda L. Hanstra, a retired speech-language pathologist, writes about what brings joy to her empty nest—family, cycling, traveling, grandparenting, and more—at [lindahanstra.com](http://lindahanstra.com). She and her husband attend Church of the Savior Christian Reformed Church in South Bend, Ind.

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Vocation/Calling

#### How do I determine when to say no (or yes) when someone asks me to do something?

Deciding how to respond to a request for help can be challenging, as each of us is different and should say yes to different things. On top of that, there might be seasons when we ought to say no to something to which we would normally say yes (or vice versa).

It is wise to ask those you trust for help in making a decision and to think through why you want to say yes to something. Do you want to do it for a wrong reason, such as making yourself look or feel better? Does the task actually fit your gifts? Would it cause a lot of stress to you and those you're helping? Does it help you love God and your neighbor? Would it bring joy to you and those you care about?

There can be much good in saying yes to something, but there's also good in saying no. We can easily become so busy that we no longer have time to be fully present to those we care about and who need us. We can also get caught up in the lie that our worth is dependent on how much we do. Practicing Sabbath rest, when you actively say no to obligations (and the guilt of not doing them) and say yes to family and friends, is one way to practice trusting that God is in control and to remind ourselves that the world won't fall apart without our help.

One final reason to say no might be to make space for others. Some of us have gotten so used to saying yes that we don't see how we might be preventing others, perhaps people who are younger or less well connected than we are, from being able to bring new perspectives and new energy.



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

May you have wisdom and courage as you listen to others and the Spirit to determine how to make these difficult decisions.

Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink is the Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of Toronto. She attends Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ont.

### Bible/Doctrine

#### Some suggest that the Bible is not a rule book and should be read as a conversation between God and his people, but Christian confessions declare it "the only rule for life and faith" (Westminster Confession). Which is right?

In your question we can discern two different nuances of the word "rule." The confessions capture the idea of a standard, norm, or measuring stick—something that lays out the way things are meant to be. In other words, Christians ought to evaluate, measure, and interpret the world according to the standard—the "rule"—that we find in Scripture. But though Scripture is the church's "infallible rule," this does not make Scripture a "rule book." Although the Bible contains various rules, commandments, statutes, and precepts, it would be a mistake to separate those rules from the larger story of Israel, Jesus, and the church.

Indeed, there are many rules in the Bible that no longer reflect the part of the story we are living in (e.g., laws concerning ritual purity). It is not that these passages have nothing to say to us; they might, for example, have much to teach us about the character of God. But the way these inspired passages remain "profitable" to us, equipping us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16) is not as straightforward rules, but as guiding moments in the story of redemption. We are called to faithfully continue the story in the places we are planted, drawing direction on what to do from biblical doctrines that give us the vision of who God is, what God is up to, and what we should be about.

This means that the Bible is not just a conversational document, but a covenantal document, making claims on the way we live together in God's world. Its authority is found in the triune God to whom it testifies, whose true story it tells, who still speaks in its pages. To acknowledge it as our "rule" is to acknowledge it as the authoritative story of the world.

To acknowledge it as our "infallible" rule means that it will not fail in accomplishing God's purposes: telling us the truth, convicting us, consoling us, and including us in God's life and love, for his glory and the good of all creation. Thus, whenever we read

the Scriptures publicly, we rightly say, “this is God’s Word” and “thanks be to God!”

Justin Ariel Bailey is assistant professor of theology at Dordt University. He, his wife, and their two children are members of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

### Church Matters

## How will our people learn Reformed doctrine in church now that synod has removed the requirement for catechism sermons?

You are correct that Synod 2022 deleted Church Order Article 54-b, which said, “At one of the services each Lord’s Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the creeds and confessions of the church, especially the Heidelberg Catechism.” Synod made that change at the same time as it deleted the words “ordinarily twice” from Article 51, which says, “The congregation shall assemble for worship on the Lord’s Day to hear God’s Word, to receive the sacraments, to engage in praise and prayer, and to present gifts of gratitude.” One could argue that it made sense to eliminate 54-b when churches would no longer be required to have two services on Sunday, and therefore couldn’t make that second service the traditional “catechism service.”

However, Article 54-a remains in the Church Order and says, “The proclamation of the Word shall be central to the worship of the church and shall be guided by the creeds and confessions.” So it doesn’t matter if your church has only one Sunday service because all sermons should be guided by the creeds and confessions. And even if synod’s requirement isn’t as specific as it used to be, ministers should continue to base their preaching on

the creeds and confessions so that the congregation will indeed learn the church’s doctrine! The confessions, especially the Heidelberg Catechism, are helpful for worship planning, offering guidance for sermon series on the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Ten Commandments. Moreover, following the catechism like a lectionary will encourage preaching that covers the full counsel of God’s Word, not only the preacher’s favorite passages and topics.

One church planter I know spent his first year preaching through the Heidelberg Catechism, starting with Q&A 1—“What is your only comfort in life and in death?”—and drew on the theme of “comfort” throughout the year. The small group was blessed and grew in numbers and in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God!

Rev. Kathy Smith is senior associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, adjunct professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, and adjunct professor of congregational and ministry studies at Calvin University. She is a member of First CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Digital Life

## Where’s the best place to get news you can trust?

I’m not sure there is one place. As unbiased as professional journalists try to be, it is really hard to be totally unbiased. Worse, information consumers like us relish our own biases and are always on the lookout for content that affirms what we already believe. If it’s what we agree with, it must be trustworthy, right?

It might be helpful to think about our media consumption like our food consumption: try for a well-balanced diet.

Think of Twitter and your social media feeds as candy. It’s so good, so readily available, and so satisfying that you think you’ll never get sick of it—until you do. For something a bit more substantial and tolerable on a regular basis, perhaps subscribe to a couple of daily e-newsletters (but only a couple). Think of those as breakfast or lunch. For dinner, subscribe to—yes, pay money for—an online general interest newspaper or magazine. Whatever you choose, be deliberate about what you put in your head.

Staying with the food analogy, it’s not only important what we eat but also how much we consume. We live in rich countries and have the time and resources to take in as much as we want. Most of us need to seriously cut back on the information we ingest. Do we really need to read minute-by-minute updates from six sources about the same event that has no bearing whatsoever on our lives?

Two researchers at Oxford University have been working on a 50-year newspaper—producing a paper about events that happened 50 years ago because they believe bad news travels fast and good news takes time. Their 50-year newspaper is amazingly balanced and trustworthy. But don’t look for it on a newsstand near you any time soon.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. What does your media diet look like? Tell him at [dean.heetderks@gmail.com](mailto:dean.heetderks@gmail.com).



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.

# Light Display Tells Gospel Story from Creation to Redemption

## NEWS

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**Printed and audio guides tell the story of Christ's coming into the world to bring redemption.**

Cascade Fellowship, a Christian Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids, Mich., is continuing a new tradition it began last year: “A Walk-Thru Christmas” tour.

The self-guided tour includes eight scenes spread out around the church's campus, starting with the creation story in Genesis and culminating in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The idea for the display came in part out of the church's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“During the COVID shutdown (in 2020), we held an amazing outdoor Christmas Eve worship celebration with a light tunnel on our driveway, lots of decorated trees and lights, hot cocoa delivered to cars, and concluding with ‘Silent Night’ by candle-light standing outside in the snow,” said Julie Beezhold, Cascade Fellowship's connection coordinator. “Several cars drove up because they thought it was a light show.”

So church leaders discussed the idea of a Christmas light display. Cascade Fellowship received a \$5,000 outreach grant from Classis Thornapple Valley (a regional group of Christian Reformed congregations) to purchase lights and other supplies.

Next, church members developed the concept. Recorded scripts would be accessible via posted QR codes, and displayed signs would tell the biblical story. Beezhold said the script and scenes were based on Sarah Young's children's book *Jesus Calling: The Story of Christmas*.

“The beauty of this book is how it presents more than the baby in a manger,” Beezhold said. “The story and the walk-thru begin with creation and lead through God's story of love and desire to spend eternity with us.”

In 2021 Cascade Fellowship hosted a hospitality tent at the end of the tour on two different Friday nights. In 2022 these will be presented as “Friday Night Lights,” with the church's youth center open with extra lighting, hot chocolate, music, and opportunities to visit.

“(The light display) has been a wonderful way to draw our church family together,” Beezhold said, noting all the volunteer opportunities of building and installing the scenes, recording the scripts, and hosting the hospitality evenings.

The 2022 walk-thru didn't require an additional grant. The display will be active Dec. 1-31.

—Greg Chandler



## California Churches Tell Nativity Story through Living Portraits

Five churches in Long Beach, Calif., are continuing their annual Portraits of the Prince of Peace Pageant in 2022, welcoming guests to tour 16 staged settings portraying the Nativity story. The tradition resumed last year after being put on hold in 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Long Beach Christian Reformed Church has participated since 1973.

"This is one of my favorite events that we do," said service and events director Nicole Cecil. "When my family first began attending this church, I was 12 years old. This was the first major event that I participated in at the church, and I have been a part of it since—nearly 20 years.

"As I've gotten older, it's become so impressive to me that these churches from different denominations come together to tell one story. I've heard countless stories about the pageant being the first time someone has heard the real reason for the season, or that someone is bringing their friend who isn't a believer. That just adds to the joy of this event for me."

The five churches—Long Beach CRC, The Neighborhood Church, St. Luke's Lutheran, University Baptist, and St. Cornelius Roman Catholic—are within two city blocks of each other. A pageant committee with representatives from each congregation coordinates the yearly event. Long Beach CRC stages four scenes and hosts one of six musical presentations. In 2021, Cecil said, that included vocal choirs, soloists, and a hand-bell choir.



**Long Beach (Calif.) CRC's 2021 depiction of the pageant scene "King Herod and the Three Wise Men."**

The pageant is staged as a series of living portraits or tableaus modeled after Pageant of the Masters, a 90-year-old arts festival in Laguna Beach, Calif.

The four scenes Long Beach CRC hosts require about 14 actors or actresses, but in all about 30 volunteers are needed to prepare costuming, set the stage and lighting, and mark pathways. About 1,200 people came each night of the two-day 2021 event, Cecil said.

Everything to stage the pageant is stored from year to year in a shipping container in a parking lot of one of the churches. "We have work days before and after the pageant to ensure that everything is returned and stored appropriately," Cecil said. She serves as coordinator of the five-church pageant committee.

"We take such joy in getting to share the Nativity story with our community," Cecil said.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## Ontario Church Hosts Advent Craft Nights



**Naomi, 3, with the Charamico tree, a craft celebrating Advent traditions from the Dominican Republic.**

Crosstowne Church, an emerging Christian Reformed congregation in Milton, Ont., welcomed families to explore crafts and Advent traditions from around the world in 2021. The church is remounting those drop-in programs for three evenings in December 2022, this time on Fridays instead of Sundays.

Last year's program took a global focus, with participants exploring festivities from the Dominican Republic, Uganda, the Netherlands, and the Coptic Orthodox tradition.

Crosstowne rents space in an old Presbyterian church near growing neighborhoods where thousands of new homes were recently built. The congregation previously met in a building in a more commercial part of the city.

"Pastor John Bouwers suggested this (drop-in focused on neighbors) to the leadership team, and we all thought this was such a great idea, because maybe they (the neighbors) would resonate with some of the traditions (and) see themselves around the table too," explained Pastor Courtney Saldivar.

The switch to Friday evenings, Saldivar said, will make the gatherings "like a Christmas craft club open to anyone who wants to drop their kids off on a Friday and go Christmas shopping—without the kids."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

## Classis Watch: Fall 2022

Many classes (regional groups of churches) of the Christian Reformed Church gathered for fall meetings, acting on matters with the guidance of the CRC's Church Order. Church Order articles are noted here with several actions taken by classes in the past few months.

### Candidates **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church**

(Arts. 6 and 10): Joseph Steenholdt, Aleah Marsden, Kiseok (Daniel) Kang, Anthony Vander Schaaf, Mark Elffers, William Roelofs, David Jooheyng Kim, Sheri Admiraal, Ivan Santoso, Ben Wimmers, Mario Perez, Rebecca Hall, Rebecca Tjapkes, Noelle Jacobs, and Brad Bootsma.

Ministers welcomed **from other denominations** (Art. 8): Revs. Han Gyu Park, Hun Joon Park, Jin Sung Ahn, Marno Retief, Sungwoo (Alex) Park, Eun Suk (Peter) Oh, and John Kim.

Ministers **loaned** (Art. 13-c): Revs. Kiseok (Daniel) Kang to the Korean United Church of Modesto, Calif.; C.L. to the Evangelical Formosan Church of Houston, Texas (effective Dec. 15); Josiah Youngquist to Ebenezer Reformed Church of Oregon, Ill.; Daniel Rhee to Living Water Church of Houston, Texas.

**Ministers on leave** (Art. 16): Rev. Amos Hyunmo Joung from The Loving Church in Tucson, Ariz.

**Ministers released from a congregation** (Art. 17-a): Revs. Marc Nelesen, Ph.D., from Georgetown (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church; Greg VanderHorn from Trinity CRC in Fremont, Mich. (released as pastor of New Community Church in Newaygo, Mich.); Reese Vander Veen from Modesto (Calif.) CRC; Verlan Van Ee from Kenosha (Wis.) CRC (disbanded); Dale Fopma from Hope CRC in Grandville,

Mich. (disbanded, effective Jan. 5, 2023); Ryan Hoogerbrugge from La Glace (Alta.) CRC (disbanded); Don Ridder from Grace Fellowship CRC in Pella, Iowa; Dominic Palacios from Hope Fellowship CRC in Denver, Colo.; Darren Roorda from Providence CRC in Beamsville, Ont; and Heidi de Jonge from Westside Fellowship CRC in Kingston, Ont.

VanderHorn, Van Ee, Fopma, Hoogerbrugge, Ridder, de Jonge, and Revs. Kyung Lok Jang and Andrea Baas are **eligible for call**.

### Leaving Ministry in the CRC

*Classes may end a pastor's ordained ministry status, guided by Church Order articles 14 and 17 and indicating a designation reflecting the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office.*

**Honorably released:** Richard Visser, Jin Lee, Allen Pontarelli, Jonathan De Ruiter, Keith Mannes, Cary Gephart, and Sangmyung (Samuel) Lee; **released:** Charles Van Hoffen.

**Ministers retiring** (granted emeritus status, Art. 18): Revs. Thomas De Does, Loren Kotman (effective Dec. 15), Randal Young (effective Dec. 27), Perry J. Tinklenberg (effective Dec. 31), Jack DeVries (effective Jan. 1), Douglas MacLeod (effective Jan. 6), Michael Kooy (effective Jan. 20), Will Hensen (effective Feb. 8), David Prince, NamJoong Kang, Albert Sideco, Mark Stephenson, George De Jong, Raymond Yeo, Piet Heerema, Tom Walcott, and Sung Chang Choi.

### Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Keith Hoekstra (Classis Heartland), Nate Rusticus (Grandville); Caley Meza (Chicago South), Annie Jamieson (Central California), Eric Crawford (Northern Illinois), Insuk Rebecca Dunne (Ko-Am), Ruben Sinnema (Yellowstone), Brad Engbers (Central

Plains), Gary Hoeksema (Red Mesa), Jessica Kuncaitis (Grand Rapids South), Joel Gagnon (Atlantic Northeast), Leah De Vos (Niagara), Sean Folkerts (Alberta North), Carlos Tamayo (Arizona), Chris Avery and Erick Rodriguez (California South), and Luis Becerra, Judith Becerra, and Paul Hannemann (Rocky Mountain).

Shaun Buikema (Illiana) was **released in the status of one deposed**; Carrie Rodgers (Georgetown) and Rene Rivery (Arizona) were **released**; and Anthony Vander Laan (Ontario Southwest), Lisa DeYoung (Grand Rapids East), David Mosterd (Holland), Brian Bylsma (Quinte), Justin Dudney (B.C. South-East), Bryan Vander Tuig (Southern California), and Aaron Deboer (North Cascades) were **honorably released** from ministry as commissioned pastors (Art. 24-d).

**Classis Rocky Mountain** approved the separation of Sunrise Community Church and Commissioned Pastor Kimberley Masters.

**Commissioned pastor emeritus status** (Art. 24-e) was granted to Henry Perez (Wisconsin), Richard Silversmith (Rocky Mountain), Louis Bosma (Ontario Southeast, effective Dec. 31), Kathy Kiesser (B.C. North-West), and Bob DeVries (Muskegon, effective Jan. 31).

### New Ministries and Ministry Changes

*An emerging (unorganized) church does not have its own council and is under the care of the council of a neighboring CRC. An organized church has its own council (Art. 38).*

Christ Community Church in Plainfield, Ill., had been part of Classis Northern Illinois but reverted to emerging status and is now under the authority of the council of Orland Park (Ill.) CRC, part of Classis Chicago South. The emerging church is now known as Plainfield (Ill.) CRC.

## Noteworthy

Also recognized as **emerging**: The Light and Salt Church of the World in Palisades Park, N.J., and Peace Community Church and Hope CRC in Houston, Texas.

Orange Hope Church in Fullerton, Calif.; Indonesian CRC in Dover, N.H.; and Grangeville (Idaho) CRC **organized**.

Iglesia Buenas Nuevas (Good News) CRC in Miami, Fla., reverted to **unorganized** status.

The following congregations **disbanded**: Kenosha (Wis.) CRC; Hope CRC in Grandville, Mich.; Jacob's Well Church Community in Evergreen Park, Ill.; Hope CRC in Rapid City, Iowa; New Life Ministries in Hawthorne, N.J.; Ridgewood (N.J.) CRC; La Glace (Alta.) CRC; Faith CRC in Nashville, Tenn.; Community CRC in Fort Wayne, Ind.

Emerging congregations Southwest Community Church in Wyoming, Mich., and The Springs Community Church in Austin, Texas, **closed**. The emerging congregation of Friendship Community Church in Sergeant Bluff, Iowa **merged** with a non-CRC church, becoming **disaffiliated** from the CRC.

My Beloved Church in Coquitlam, B.C., and Vancouver Dream Church in Burnaby, B.C., **affiliated** with the CRC and are recognized as **emerging** churches (Art. 38-c). First Reformed Church of Lincoln Park (N.J.) **affiliated** with the CRC through Classis Hudson after disaffiliating from the Reformed Church in America.

**Name changes**: Middleville (Mich.) CRC is now **Restoration CRC**; Westmount CRC in Strathroy, Ont., is now **Compass Community Church**; Jusung Mission Church in Anaheim, Calif., is now **Joo Sung CRC**.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

**Monroe Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., was named best venue for the city's 2022 ArtPrize**, a designation it earned after 13 years of hosting the annual September festival. 2022 was the second year the church hosted artists in **its new ministry center—a renovated 1960s industrial building**. The project, completed during the 15 pandemic months Monroe Community Church met on Zoom, **earned the architect, Grand Rapids-based Elevate Studio, a commercial design award from the American Institute of Architects**.



Photos by Jeff Tippett Photography



**Wiebe Boer, Calvin University's 12th president, was formally inaugurated Oct. 26.** The son of Christian Reformed missionaries who spent 30 years living in Nigeria, Boer is a Calvin alumnus and has a Ph.D. in history from Yale University. He was head of Shell of Nigeria's renewable energy division before arriving on Calvin's Grand Rapids, Mich., campus at the end of June. He succeeds Michael Le Roy, who stepped down after a 10-year term.



**Bethel CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, celebrated 100 years of ministry in 2022.** Members planted a tree on the church property to commemorate the occasion, symbolizing both rootedness and future growth. "Anniversaries are milestones that invite us to look back as a testament to God's faithfulness and call us to look ahead to God's ongoing mission in the world," said Pastor John Lee.

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# CRC Council of Delegates Discusses Confessional Exceptions, Congregational Ministries, and More

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church met Oct. 12-14 in Grand Rapids, Mich., with a full agenda.

The Council serves synod, the broadest assembly of the CRC, between synod meetings. It includes one delegate from each of 49 classes (regional assemblies) plus up to 10 at-large members. Additionally, the delegates form distinct corporation boards, one American and one Canadian, for legal corporate governance and decision making in their respective countries.

## Requesting Exceptions to Synod's Decisions

Council of Delegate members signify their agreement with the teachings of the Christian Reformed Church's creeds and confessions by signing the Council's Statement of Agreement, a practice akin to officebearers in a local church signing the Covenant for Officebearers.

But following Synod 2022's decisions regarding human sexuality, particularly in affirming the confessional status of the interpretation that "unchastity" in the Heidelberg Catechism's Q&A 108 includes homosexual sex, some Council members have been seeking a process to file exceptions indicating their difficulty with that decision.

Delegates discussed the recommended process at length and, though not entirely in agreement, decided that when a delegate requests an exception, the Council's executive committee will make a decision on whether or not to grant it based on the centrality of the belief for which the exception is sought and the member's agreement not to publicly contradict the synodical position or teach or act against it.

Inspire 2022 evaluations were positive, but attendance was much lower than at previous Inspire gatherings.

Delegate Amy Nydam, Classis Alberta North, felt that the requirement not to contradict or to teach or act against the synodical position was too broad and nonspecific. "Can someone speak beyond Council and classis (to) share that this is a struggle?"

Council Vice President Michael TenHaken replied, "We ask that if you have an exception, use good wisdom and judgment, recognizing you are part of a larger body, that synod has a decision binding on (you). If you feel that this is going to stifle you too much, I think we're asking individuals to seriously consider whether they can serve on the COD."

The executive committee's decisions on exceptions would be final and be documented in executive session minutes. Public minutes note only the number of exceptions requested and how many were granted or denied. Subsequently, a petitioner whose exception was approved would sign the Statement of Agreement book with an asterisk next to their name. The written exception would be kept in a confidential file until the member concludes service on the Council.

Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, said the proposed practice of taking an "exception" to the Reformed confessions affirmed by the CRC is problematic. "We make a promise as leaders in the CRC to teach and preach everything found in the confessions, and we expect others in positions of leadership in the CRC to do the same, which is how trust is developed among a diverse people," he said. "But now there will be essentially an undisclosed list kept of some who no longer promise to do that. That covenant, which was supposed to bind us, is essentially now broken."

The Council voted 41-5 to accept the proposed process for requesting exceptions. Andy de Ruyter, Council president, noted that there have been eight requests so far.

## Congregational Ministries

Nine separate ministries serving CRC congregations have merged into a single agency called Congregational Ministries. The Council affirmed a co-director model for this entity. Lesli van Milligen was appointed in July by the Canada Corporation as director of Congregational Ministries-Canada. At the October meeting Chris Schoon was appointed by the U.S. Corporation as the Congregational Ministries-U.S. director, effective Jan. 1. Schoon will replace Lis Van Harten, who plans to retire in April.

Congregational Ministries comprises ministries focused on serving congregations and their needs, including Safe Church, Chaplaincy and Care, Race Relations and Office of Social Justice, Faith Formation, Worship, Disability Concerns, Candidacy, and Pastor Church Resources. Those who had been directors of those agencies are now team leaders working together across Congregational Ministries to share resources while each still concentrating on their own ministry specialty.

In speaking with a committee of the Council, Amanda Benckhuysen, Safe Church leader, noted that the reorganization process is helpful for building collaboration among the ministries, but mentioned that budget pressures have created challenges with respect to synod mandates. The budget for congregational ministries has decreased by about 28 percent over the past three years, from \$9 million to \$6.5 million.

Mike Hogeterp, leader of the Christian Reformed Committee for Public Dialogue in Canada, also said the reorganization represents a change in capacity for ministries such as the Office of Social Justice and Race Relations. Justice ministries and their networks have concerns that consolidation risks diminishing these ministries. The consolidation does not affect the Canadian justice ministries.

## Raise Up Global Ministries to Merge with Resonate Global Mission

The Council endorsed the merger of Timothy Leadership Training, Educational Care, and Global Coffee Break (currently under Raise Up Global Ministries) with Resonate Global Mission, the CRC's mission agency. That process is expected to be completed by Jan. 1, 2023.

## Inspire 2024 Under Study

Rather than moving ahead with plans for Inspire 2024, the denomination's biennial ministry conference started in 2017, the Council asked staff to study its viability in light of Inspire 2022's low attendance and high costs.

Attendees at Inspire 2022, which took place Aug. 4-6 in Tinley Park, Ill., reported a positive experience, but attendance was much lower than previous Inspire gatherings, and revenue (near \$115,000) did not cover costs (about \$142,000, not including staff time dedicated to planning and execution).

For ministry share giving to go well, pastors and deacons have to promote it. "We need personal connection to the ministry so we have a good reason to give."

—Jonathan Kim, Classis Ko-Am

The Council asked staff to report their findings at the February 2023 Council meeting.

## Ministry Shares Check-in

Now that the denomination has completed its first budget cycle using a pledge system to collect ministry shares (the money contributed by member congregations to be used for joint ministries), Synod 2022 asked the Council to get feedback on how the system is working. Starting with its own members, the Council spent time in small groups at its October meeting to discuss whether the pledge approach to collecting ministry shares is working as intended. The Council also sent surveys seeking feedback from classes.

Jonathan Kim, Classis Ko-Am, said that for ministry share giving to go well, pastors and deacons have to promote it. "What's not working is sending out pieces of paper from the denomination about ministries," he said. "When I can show what PCR (Pastor Church Resources) has done for continuing education, people give. We need personal connection to the ministry so we have a good reason to give."

## No More Charity Vetting?

The Council is recommending to Synod 2023 that synod discontinue its practice of evaluating nondenominational charitable organizations and curating an approved list to recommend to local churches.

There was little evidence that the list is used, the Council noted, and the vetting requires significant time and attention from finance staff that seems redundant when information about charitable organizations is already available online.

## Job Searches

Searches for a denominational chief administrative officer, a synodical services director, and a Resonate Global Mission director were not complete at the time of this publication. A special Council meeting was planned for November 16 at which Council expected to appoint a CAO and ratify a synodical services director.

—Gayla R. Postma

# Calvin's Board Votes to Retain Faculty Members Dissenting from Synodical Decisions

Calvin University's board of trustees decided to "retain faculty members who expressed disagreement with part of the CRCNA position on human sexuality that was formalized by the CRC's Synod 2022." In a press release announcing the Oct. 28 decision, Calvin's director of communications, Tim Ellens, wrote, "The board decision requires faculty to honor the church's position and strengthens guidelines for teaching, scholarship, and personal conduct that align with CRCNA doctrine."

Calvin was founded by the Christian Reformed Church in North America in 1876 and remains in ecclesiastical partnership with the denomination. Calvin trustees and faculty sign



the Covenant for Faculty Members, a document akin to the denomination's Covenant for Officebearers, which signifies affirmation of "three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, ... whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. These confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture (and) direct the way we live in response to the gospel" (Calvin's *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*, p. 43).

Synod 2022's interpretation of a piece of one of those confessions, "that 'unchastity' in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 encompasses adultery, premarital sex, extramarital sex, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex, all of which violate the seventh commandment," was concluded by synod to have confessional

status (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922). That prompted Calvin to pull together a task force to determine implications for the institution, including for those who signed the covenant but do not agree with the interpretation now determined to be confessional. (Calvin publicly announced this in a June 17 Facebook post.)

Calvin board chair Bruce Los said, "For more than 150 years, the Calvin University community has benefited from having diverse viewpoints among its faculty while remaining committed to upholding the confessional standards of the CRC." Synod, Los said, "has historically recognized the

value of viewpoint diversity among Calvin faculty and endorsed the university's approach to confessional commitment and academic freedom."

Ellens wrote that "several faculty ... submitted a formal expression of their difficulty with this particular CRCNA doctrine," a process

provided for in Calvin's *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*.

Ellens wrote that the board's decision "allows disagreeing faculty members to continue to serve at the university and requires them to abide by university guidelines consistent with its commitment to CRCNA standards. Based on Calvin's existing positions and policies on human sexuality, which have not changed, those guidelines establish requirements for faculty members related to teaching, scholarship, and personal conduct, which apply regardless of a faculty member's personal perspective on an issue."

The specific expectations were not publicly available at the time of publication but were expected to be released to all faculty a couple of weeks after the Oct. 28 board meeting.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Lloyd Wolters*

1929-2022

Lloyd Wolters's heart for sharing the gospel was infused into every interaction, from sermons to everyday conversations.

"Spreading the gospel was his life," said one of his daughters. Lloyd, 92, died Oct. 7.

A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Lloyd was ordained in 1957, then served Church of the Savior CRC, South Bend, Ind.; Beacon Light Chapel, Sheboygan, Wis.; Cedar Falls (Iowa) CRC; Bethel CRC, Fulton, Ill.; Des Plaines (Ill.) CRC; Lamont (Mich.) CRC; and Saugatuck (Mich.) CRC. After Lloyd's wife Cass suffered a stroke in 1990, he retired early to care for her. She died 15 years later. God surprised him with the delight of marrying Marjorie in 2007.

Following retirement Lloyd passionately volunteered with Audio Scripture Ministries, which records and distributes audio Bibles worldwide. He had a playful side, loved a good laugh, and was a competitive board game player. He loved to sing and played trombone in the Good News Gospel Band, ministering in nursing homes across West Michigan.

Predeceased by Catherine (Cass), Lloyd is survived by Marjorie and their combined family of 10 children, 44 grandchildren, 90 great-grandchildren, and their spouses—a total of 194 family members, each of whom Lloyd knew and loved.

—Janet A. Greidanus



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# The Priority of Time



By Kristen deRoo VanderBerg, CRC Communications

One of the lessons COVID-19 taught us is that we are very busy people. Being forced to stay at home and give up many of the things that previously had filled our time was eye-opening. Commutes, midweek programming, children's activities, sports, Bible studies, book clubs, family commitments, and more were suddenly gone. To some this change in routine was isolating and lonely. They didn't know how to fill all this newfound time. To others it felt like a much-needed respite from a much-too-busy pace of life.

As pandemic guidelines eased and things opened back up, each of us made conscious decisions about which time-consuming activities we would add back into our lives. Unfortunately, in many cases, people have not returned to the volunteer roles they had before the pandemic. An April 2022 *Forbes* article said two-thirds of volunteers in a study had reduced their volunteer time or stopped volunteering altogether as a result of the pandemic.

That's why those who have continued to volunteer, who have returned to volunteering, or who began after the pandemic are so important. "For where your treasure is," Matthew 6:21 says, "there your heart will be also." The same can be said for our time. The items on our calendars are a reflection of the priorities we have.

Our congregations rely on volunteers to help them run. Denominational ministries do as well. The following pages highlight a few of these volunteers who are giving selflessly for the sake of God's kingdom. To them and to others who volunteer, we extend a hearty thanks.

**Matt Beukema** volunteered for a year with Resonate Global Mission in Lupeni, Romania. He recently joined Resonate's team of missionaries and is planning to serve for at least two more years. Beukema's work in partnership with the New Horizons Foundation includes building mountain biking trails to develop adventure tourism in the Jiu Valley.

"I get to be part of cultivating new life in the Jiu Valley by joining an organization that rebuilds social capital and plants seeds of economic opportunity in a struggling coal-mining valley," Beukema said. "I'm glad and grateful that I can work with Resonate and join in the work that God is already doing here in Romania."

**Amber Wagner** goes on one-week mission trips with her congregation every summer to help disaster survivors through World Renew. This year's trip was her fifth.

**Matt Beukema serves with Resonate Global Mission in Romania.**



Amber Wagner volunteers every summer with World Renew Disaster Response Services.

"I enjoy spending a week to serve others with my church as we work hard and have fun repairing homes," said Wagner, who is from Highland Park, N.J. "Many disaster survivors wait for years for their homes to be repaired. I love experiencing their hope and joy as their home is transformed."

**Marlene Wolters** was born in Burns Lake, B.C., to an Indigenous father and a white mother. She volunteers on the Canadian Indigenous Ministries Committee and is passionate about bringing education and reconciliation to all.

"I help collaborate on projects run by the committee through listening and offering feedback from my perspective," she said. "There are many people who have felt out of place in our churches. There are many people who have been 'othered.' I volunteer because I want them to know there are more people out there who've experienced this. You don't need to stay silent. You belong, body and soul, just as much as everyone else."

### Volunteering in the CRCNA

Have you ever wondered how much time the average Christian Reformed church member spends volunteering for their congregation? Or have you thought about how the amount of time people volunteer in your congregation compares to their volunteering at the local Christian school or other organizations in the community?

Every year, the CRCNA conducts a survey that provides in-depth data on questions like these. The survey is shared with one-fifth of all Christian Reformed congregations each year so that every congregation is given the opportunity to participate every five years. Here are the results of the 2022 survey:

#### Hours volunteering at your local congregation

- Zero - 20%
- 1-2 hours per month - 27%
- 3-5 hours per month - 23%
- 6-10 hours per month - 16%
- 11-20 hours per month - 8%
- 20+ hours per month - 6%



#### Hours volunteering at another organization or program

- Zero - 39%
- 1-2 hours per month - 21%
- 3-5 hours per month - 15%
- 6-10 hours per month - 10%
- 11-20 hours per month - 6%
- 20+ hours per month - 9%



#### Hours spent attending programs at your local congregation other than worship services

- Zero - 16%
- 1-2 hours per month - 28%
- 3-5 hours per month - 24%
- 6-10 hours per month - 18%
- 11-20 hours per month - 8%
- 20+ hours per month - 6%



Marlene Wolters is a member of the Canadian Indigenous Ministries Committee.



Francisco Phiri (right) shows off the cash box that he and his wife use to share their earnings. Neither of them opens the box without telling the other.

**Francisco Phiri** is a gender justice volunteer with one of World Renew’s local partners in Zambia. “Before joining Diaconia in 2016, my life and way of living was not so pleasing,” he admitted. “I used to drink a lot and many times would beat my wife. My wife never had a voice about anything in the family. I dictated everything according to my own understanding and liking. I decided what to buy for the family, and I controlled all the proceeds from our harvest.”

Through a World Renew program, Phiri learned about farming, but he also learned about gender justice and the need for families to work together. He stopped drinking, apologized



Jenna Hoff co-edits the Disability Concerns Canada newsletter and serves on the Disability Concerns Advisory Committee Guiding Coalition.

to his family, and began to share decision making with his wife. Phiri brought home a cash box in which they keep their savings, which have increased due to his new farming skills and his lack of drinking. The couple also made a commitment that neither of them would open the box without telling the other.

When Diaconia wanted gender justice volunteers, Phiri stepped forward. His story of transformation inspires other men to change and raises awareness about the importance of ending gender injustice and violence in the home. He said he enjoys playing a role in the journey toward thriving relationships, families, and communities.

**Jenna Hoff** has three adopted children, two of whom have intellectual disabilities. She combats ableism, blogs about her own physical disability, and volunteers with the Christian Reformed Church's Disability Concerns. She co-edits the Disability Concerns Canada newsletter, which includes interviewing people and writing and editing articles. She also serves on the Disability Concerns Advisory Committee Guiding Coalition, where she attends meetings, shares her thoughts and ideas, and provides perspective from her life experience.


"As both a person with a disability and a mother to young people with disabilities, I have experienced and witnessed firsthand the pain of living in a world where ableism is very common and can sometimes be the norm," she said. "I want to take a stand against ableism by doing what I can to effect positive change. Our churches should be places where love is most often felt, but sadly this is not always the case. When

we all work together to combat ableism and create inclusive and loving environments, we follow Jesus' command to love one another."

**Ron Hosmar** has spent the past eight years as a Youth Ministry Champion for Classis Eastern Canada. In this role, encouraged and supported by Faith Formation, he connects with churches in the classis about the ever-changing landscape of youth ministry.

"Our world is changing. Churches are changing, and youth ministry is changing," Hosmar said. "It's hard to navigate all this, whether you are a volunteer youth leader or a paid staff person. I have the privilege of coming alongside these persons and supporting them as they figure out their church youth ministry in their own context."

Hosmar said he volunteers in this role because young people today live in a foundation-moving and faith-challenging world. They need church communities that can surround and raise them as was promised at their baptism. This takes work.

"I enjoy talking with youth leaders and paid staff about the successes they are witnessing as they walk with their youth in their church," he said. "I also enjoy just listening to their hearts. Each youth leader does youth ministry because they have a passion to see the lives of their youth grow deeper in faith. My role helps them do that. That is very rewarding. I also have the privilege of meeting with fellow Youth Champions and learning from them. This is an invaluable resource that helps me in my own youth ministry as well as those of our classis." 



Ron Hosmar has spent the past eight years as a Youth Ministry Champion for Classis Eastern Canada.

## The View from Here

## An Incarnate Love

**AT CHRISTMAS** we celebrate the incarnation, the eternal Son of God taking on flesh and being born as a baby among us (John 1:14). Incarnation is one reason I love being a Christian. We don't serve an aloof and unconcerned God hovering in the heavens. Our God comes down and gets dirty alongside us—or, as Eugene Peterson paraphrases John 1:14, "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood."

Our God cried (and cries) with us. Our God laughed (and laughs) with us. Our God died and was raised for us.

Today, the man Jesus Christ, our Lord, sits in the flesh beside God the Father, watching over us and listening to our prayers. I love Christmas because it reminds me of the incarnation. Because of Christ's incarnation I am never alone—not in my deepest doubts or my greatest joys. Emmanuel is God with us.


Incarnation is also a way of life. In Philippians 2:5 Paul says, "In your relationships with each other, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." The rest of that passage speaks of the incarnation. My takeaway from this passage is this: to be a Christ-follower means I am called to be with people and to serve them in all parts of life.

In this section of *The Banner* this month you will read several stories about the need for and opportunities to volunteer in ministry. To serve as a volunteer is to have the "same

To be a Christ-follower means I am called to be with people and to serve them in all parts of life.

mindset as Christ Jesus," who took on flesh. Whether we serve our congregations as an elder, deacon, Sunday school teacher, or usher, serve our community as a kitchen attendant, after-school tutor, bus driver, or crossing guard, or serve our global community on a mission trip or as a long-term volunteer, our service is a concrete expression of our Lord's incarnation.

When we volunteer from a Philippians 2 perspective, we take on the Christ-like values of humility, service, and love. This is a beautiful Christmas present. In fact, it is the gift that keeps giving. We bless others through our volunteer service, but we ourselves are blessed too. As Jesus once said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

May you be blessed this Christmas season as you remember the incarnate love of God expressed through a baby in a manger and as you live out your gratitude in incarnate ways to those around you. 



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

## 성육신하신 사랑

성탄절이 되면 우리는 영원하신 하나님의 아들이 육신이 되어 우리 가운데 아기로 오신 성육신을 기념합니다 (요한복음 1:14). 성육신은 제가 기독교인 된 것을 기뻐하는 이유 중 하나입니다. 우리는 하늘에 떠 계시는 냉담하고 무관심한 하나님을 섬기는 것이 아닙니다. 우리 하나님은 이 땅에 내려 오셔서 우리 곁에서 더러워지는 것을 마다하지 않으시고, 혹은 유진 피터슨이 요한복음 1장 14절을 의역한 것처럼 "그 말씀이 살과 피가 되어 우리가 사는 곳으로 이사 오셨습니다."

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이 달 배너의 이 섹션에서 여러분은 사역에서 자원하여 섬겨야 하는 필요와 섬길 수 있는 기회에 대한 여러 이야기들을 읽게 될 것입니다. 자원봉사로 섬기는 것은 육신을 입으신 "예수 그리스도와 같은 마음"을 품는 것입니다. 우리가 속한 교회에서 장로, 집

## Un amor encarnado

그리스도를 따르는 자가 된다는 것은 삶의 모든 영역에서 사람들과 함께 하며 그들을 섬기라고 부르심을 받았다는 것입니다.

사, 주일학교 교사, 안내위원 그 어떤 일로 섬기든지, 혹은 지역 커뮤니티에서 주방 보조, 방과 후 학교 교사, 버스 운전기사, 건물 목 지도로 섬기든지, 혹은 선교여행에 동참하거나 장기 헌신으로 선교에 참여하는 식으로 글로벌 커뮤니티를 섬기든지 우리의 섬김은 우리 주님의 성육신을 드러내는 구체적인 표현입니다.

빌립보서 2장의 관점으로 우리가 자원하여 섬길 때 우리는 겸손, 섬김, 사랑이라는 그리스도의 가치를 가지고 섬기게 됩니다. 이것은 아름다운 성탄절 선물입니다. 사실, 이 선물은 멈춤이 없는 선물이지요. 우리는 자원하는 섬김을 통해 다른 이들을 축복하지만, 우리 자신들도 축복의 대상이 되는 것입니다. 주님께서도 “주는 것이 받는 것보다 복이 있다”라고 말씀하셨습니다. (사도행전 20:35)

이번 성탄절에 구유에 누이신 아기를 통해 온전히 드러내신 하나님의 그 성육신의 사랑을 기억하시며, 그 감사를 여러분 주위 분들과 이 같은 성육신의 방법으로 표현하며 살아가시는 기간이 되기를 바랍니다. **B**

재커리 킹 목사는 북미주 개혁교회 교단 사무총장입니다. 미시간 주 그랜드래피즈의 풀러 애비뉴 CRC에 출석합니다.

**EN NAVIDAD CELEBRAMOS** la encarnación, el Hijo eterno de Dios que se encarna y nace como un bebé entre nosotros (Juan 1:14). La encarnación es una razón por la que amo ser cristiano. No servimos a un Dios distante y despreocupado que merodea por los cielos. Nuestro Dios baja y se ensucia junto a nosotros—o, como parafrasea Eugene Peterson en Juan 1:14, “El Verbo se hizo carne y sangre, y se instaló en el barrio”.

Nuestro Dios lloró (y llora) con nosotros. Nuestro Dios se rio (y se ríe) con nosotros. Nuestro Dios murió y resucitó por nosotros. Dios está con nosotros porque también es nosotros.

Hoy, el hombre Jesucristo, nuestro Señor, está sentado en carne y hueso junto a Dios Padre cuidando de nosotros y escuchando nuestras oraciones. Me encanta la Navidad porque me recuerda la encarnación. Gracias a la encarnación de Cristo nunca estoy solo, ni en mis dudas más profundas ni en mis mayores alegrías. Emmanuel es Dios con nosotros.

La encarnación también es un estilo de vida. En Filipenses 2:5, Pablo dice: “La actitud de ustedes debe ser como la de Cristo Jesús”. El resto de ese pasaje habla de la encarnación. Lo que me deja como aprendizaje este pasaje es lo siguiente: ser un seguidor de Cristo significa que estoy llamado a convivir con la gente y a servirles en todos los ámbitos de la vida.

En esta sección de The Banner durante este mes leerá varias historias sobre las oportunidades y la necesidad de ser voluntario en el ministerio. Servir como voluntario es tener la “actitud...como la de Cristo Jesús”, que se encarnó. Ya sea que sirvamos a nuestras congregaciones como ancianos, diáconos, maestros de escuela dominical o ujieres; que sirvamos a la comunidad como ayudantes de

Ser un seguidor de Cristo significa que estoy llamado a convivir con la gente y a servirles en todos los ámbitos de la vida.

cocina, tutores extraescolares, conductores de autobús o guardias de cruce peatonal; o que sirvamos a nuestra comunidad global mediante un viaje misionero o como voluntarios a largo plazo, nuestro servicio es una expresión concreta de la encarnación de nuestro Señor.

Cuando nuestro voluntariado emana de la perspectiva de Filipenses 2, asumimos los valores de humildad, servicio y amor propios de Cristo. Este es un hermoso regalo de Navidad. De hecho, es el regalo que sigue dando. Bendecimos a otros a través de nuestros servicios voluntarios, pero nosotros mismos también somos bendecidos. Como dijo Jesús en una ocasión: “Hay más dicha en dar que en recibir” (Hechos 20:35).

Que sean bendecidos en esta temporada navideña al recordar el amor encarnado de Dios expresado a través de un bebé en un pesebre y al expresar encarnadamente su gratitud por ello con todos quienes les rodean. **B**

El reverendo Zachary King es el secretario general de la Iglesia Cristiana Reformada de Norte América. Es miembro de ICR Fuller Avenue en Grand Rapids, Mich.

## Exploring Faith Practices on Four Continents (and Counting)



Attendees pause to engage the faith practice of wonder at Inspire 2022.

**TWO YEARS AFTER** the first resources from the Christian Reformed Church's Faith Practices Project launched, people around the world are growing in faith as they explore faith practices together. As the multiyear project continues to unfold, here's how ministry leaders in different contexts are using and contributing to the resources:

Diana Boot worked as a Christian education specialist with Resonate Global Mission in Kampala, Uganda, before retiring in the summer of 2022. Her local house group with Kampala International Church began using the Faith Practices Project in its weekly meetings and found the reflection and discussion questions offered for each practice particularly useful.

"The format is clear and straightforward," Boot said, "yet the questions

elicit deep reflection and conversation, especially in our multicultural community. Each segment has enough content for an evening of discussion without being overwhelming."

In Australia, the Uniting Church in Australia's Children and Families Ministry spent six weeks highlighting the faith practices of listening, service, wonder, prayer, celebration, and remembering. It shared reflection questions and images provided by the Faith Practices Project on its Facebook page each week to invite engagement and direct folks to the newly released resources for intergenerational worship and gatherings.

In the United Kingdom, Jill Weber, global convener of the Order of the Mustard Seed, joined an episode of *Open to Wonder* to explore the faith practice of prayer with hosts Chris Schoon and Karen DeBoer. She described how she helps people assess

how they are already practicing faith, look for ways to let go of distractions, and then follow the invitation of the Holy Spirit.

In Oklahoma, youth at First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater are focusing on the theme "Following Jesus" this year using resources from the Faith Practices Project. "I've looked at a ton of faith practices materials (and) curriculum, and (the) CRCNA's offerings are the most usable by far," said Jenna Campbell, director of children and youth ministry.

To encourage youth to engage each practice at home, they're building faith practices journals with instructions for meditating on Scripture (*lectio divina*) at the front. Each Sunday, they add a page to their journals with a description of the faith practice, a Scripture passage to engage, reflection questions with space for journaling or drawing, and a "practicing the practice" section where they commit to trying one or two practices during the week.

"I love how in (these) resources, it really narrows down the 'why' of faith practices: to love God and neighbor, to listen for the Spirit, and to be more like Jesus," Campbell said.

Her hopes for how her church can engage faith practices capture the ethos of the project: "Those are our outcomes we're hoping for—that reading the Bible, praying, serving, listening, etc., aren't just things we do to check off a box and be a 'good Christian,' but it's about a way of life that we pattern our lives around, those holy habits that move us out in the world, inspired by the Spirit to live and love like Jesus."

Find resources for your context at [crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject](https://crcna.org/FaithPracticesProject).

—Megan Herrema,  
Congregational Ministries

## ReFrame's Chinese Ministry Offers Reminders of God's Faithfulness

**IN CHINESE**, the name Mingli means “fame and fortune,” and Yanfei means “to spread her wings and fly.” When a couple named Mingli and Yanfei, with law degrees from China’s elite Peking University, got jobs involving some of China’s most high-profile cases, they felt that success was their destiny.

“Everything in our world seemed to be under control,” Mingli reflected. “We had a career-oriented, well-off, and worry-free family in Beijing.”

But that sense of control began to deteriorate a few years later when the family moved to New York to continue their law studies. They attended some community events at a local church, which led to their joining a worship service and eventually being baptized. They would soon need to rely on their faith that God was in control.

In New York, Yanfei was pregnant with the couple’s second child when they learned their unborn son had a medical complication that would cause developmental delays. Doctors encouraged them to end the pregnancy, but they refused, sensing it was God’s plan for their family to keep this child. That didn’t make things any easier as they signed documents waiving their right to an abortion.

“Every word in those disclaimer waivers felt like a giant weight,” Mingli said.

### Samuel

For Mingli and Yanfei, most of that weight disappeared just a few seconds after meeting their son, Samuel. The heaviness was replaced by feelings of joy, acceptance, and patience.



Mingli says he thanks God every day for his son, Samuel.

As Samuel grew, his parents focused less and less on their careers, moving to part-time work and deciding to stay in the U.S. rather than moving across the world to a setting where people with disabilities are often looked down upon.

“We all learned an important lesson: only God knows the mystery of his will,” Mingli said. “Samuel may look weak on the outside, but what dwells in him is far greater than the world.”

### Sharing the Good News

As Samuel grew, his parents raised him in the Christian faith, and Samuel has become a daily reminder of God’s faithfulness and plan. Now the family is sharing their story with others. They worked together with their church to create a short video testimonial. They are also partnering with members of ReFrame’s Chinese ministry team to share their testimony in a book.

The book, a collection of testimonies from graduates of Peking University, recently was published by ReFrame’s Chinese ministry team and is being shared with Chinese speakers around the world.

“The name Samuel means ‘God has heard,’” added Kurt Selles, ReFrame’s director. “Samuel’s story reminds us that God loves us and cares for us daily. God has heard us, and he has sent us his Son to show us his amazing love.”

— Brian Clark,  
ReFrame Ministries



# We're almost there, and we're counting on you!

*The Banner* is a journalistic ministry that impacts lives. But we can't do this without your financial support. This year, our campaign goal is \$500,000 and we're almost there. But we need you!

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# Ever-awesome Evergreens

**HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED** why evergreen trees make such great Christmas trees? They are always green! Evergreen trees are great for holiday decorating, but they also are strong trees that provide food and shelter for many forest animals.

## What Are Evergreen Trees?

Evergreen trees stay green all year long. These types of trees are known as conifers and include trees such as pine trees, firs, spruces, and cedars. Conifers also have cones that grow on their branches. Inside the cones are seeds that can grow into trees over 100 feet (30 meters) tall!

## Why Are Evergreen Trees Always Green?

Evergreen trees have very strong leaves called needles. These needles catch sunlight to make food energy for the trees. The needles also have a waxy coating that helps keep water inside the trees. This helps the evergreen trees stay green all year!

## Where Do Evergreen Trees Grow?

Evergreen trees can be found on every continent except Antarctica. Many evergreen trees grow in North America, Asia, and Europe. Most people think that evergreen trees only grow in cold places, but some evergreen trees like cedars can be found in deserts.

## Holly Jolly Evergreens

Did you know that the special holiday plant known as holly is an evergreen? Holly trees usually have waxy, dark-green leaves and red berries. They are popular in Europe and North America to use as decorations during the Christmas season.

## Fun Facts About Evergreens

» Giant sequoias are the world's largest trees. They can grow to be nearly

300 feet (91 meters) tall and over 20 feet (6 meters) wide!

- » The tallest tree in the world is a redwood tree in California's Redwood National Park. It is 380 feet (115.8 meters) tall!
- » About 1 million acres of land in the United States are used as Christmas tree farms.
- » Palm trees are considered evergreen trees because they do not shed their leaves in any season.

## God's Love—Like Evergreen Trees

Isn't it wonderful that God has created so many amazing living things on Earth for us to enjoy? All of God's creation points back to God's awesome power and glory. Evergreen trees can also remind us of God's love for us. Even though evergreen trees eventually die over time, God's love for us will never die, turn brown, or dry up. The Bible even talks about evergreens in the book of Psalms:

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,  
they will grow like a cedar  
of Lebanon;  
planted in the house of the LORD,  
they will flourish in the courts of  
our God (Ps. 92:11-12).

The next time you decorate your Christmas tree, remember that God's love for you is everlasting! **B**



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# Conflict: A Bridge to Love

By Lorilee Craker

“**H**ow could she?”  
The email from my friend “Miriam” splintered my peace in an instant. Seemingly out of

the blue, she confronted me about a Facebook post. It’s understating things to say I was deeply upset and unnerved.

Miriam and I met years ago through a mutual friend; she was one of my first friends in my new city. Even though we had significant differences in our political and theological worldviews, it didn’t matter. She was a devoted friend who was always there for me, and I for her. Our bond deepened when we both lost our dads before they turned 70, and we hung on to each other through a quarter century of changes, including her moving half an hour away. We set up a date once a year when we would meet downtown and talk for four hours straight. Our time together was one of the highlights of my year as we laughed, cried, and fused together in the way known only to kindred spirits.

Fast-forward to the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial tensions that blew up in the wake of George Floyd’s death. By the time winter of 2021 came, I hadn’t seen Miriam in two years. When I received no reply to several emails and calls, I worried that she had COVID, and there was no way for me to find out short of driving to her house and knocking on her door.

I was on the verge of doing just that when The Email came. Miriam, who isn’t even on social media, had somehow seen my post on a hot-button issue. She strenuously disagreed with me and didn’t know if she could meet with me again.

Abruptly, a friendship I viewed as being unbreakable—a mighty oak



Photo by Jarno Images/Unsplash

tree—had been hit by lightning. Could Miriam and I come back from this terrible fissure? Had the bridge between us burned to the ground?

## **Rocket Fuel for Conflict**

Miriam and I were not alone in experiencing rancor in our relationship. Especially since the onset of COVID-19, interpersonal conflict seems to be at an all-time high. Friendships and family bonds are being severely tested by sharp divisions over polarizing issues such as masks, vaccines, Black Lives Matter, and LGBTQ concerns.

“Relationships are falling apart,” a therapist friend said. “People used to tolerate differences of opinion, but these issues have become so loaded that it is no longer possible to keep them out of our relationships.”

Unfortunately, we *have* put ideals over people and tend to sort, “other,” and silo those with whom we do not agree. Social media makes things worse—we bicker with one another as disembodied avatars in forums that are actually the worst places to have any kind of delicate conversation.

Where does that leave us as Christians, charged by Scripture to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3)?

According to Rich Villodas, a pastor and author of *Good and Beautiful and Kind: Becoming Whole in a Fractured World*, “The problem isn’t conflict; the problem is how the conflict is addressed.”

To be human is to clash with others. Many of us were taught to avoid conflict at all costs, while others are spring-loaded to come out swinging. Neither option reflects the way of Jesus. Both cause their own brand of damage.

Because we as a society are so poor at handling conflict, we have shallow friendships where we avoid getting too close or quietly move on when things get uncomfortable or tense. Worse, families, churches, and friendships disintegrate, causing intense division and profound pain.

As we navigate tumultuous times, it’s more crucial than ever for our most important relationships that we learn how to work through conflicts together. The good news is that, yes, even though conflict is awkward, distressing, and downright scary, it is possible to come out stronger and more unified when it’s handled properly.

Our God’s speciality is repairing, restoring, and redeeming that which is broken. As I learned through my

near split with Miriam, on the other side of strife can be renewed connection, support, closeness, and unity. I came to understand in a new way that conflict can be a bridge to love.

### **Conflict Avoidant**

Real talk: Most of us come from families that never learned how to handle conflict. Some of us come from cultures and ethnic groups that avoid directness at all costs, and others have personalities that are wired to avoid confrontation. We might think it's more important to be nice than to be truthful.

The "nice" or conflict avoidant among us like to jump straight to forgiveness or "keeping the peace" without wrestling with all the messy hurt and anger. It's like when you know company is on the way, so you shove all the junk in your living room into a closet. The mess is still there, needing to be dealt with, but it's hidden—for the time being.

"People who suffer from 'nice disorder' aren't less angry or assertive or needy than other people," writes Nicole Unice, author of *The Miracle Moment: How Tough Conversations Can Actually Transform Your Most Important Relationships*. "They are just less willing to acknowledge it, which means their needs often come out sideways. ... Real relationships require vulnerability, good fights, and a much more powerful kind of love than 'nice.'"

When Miriam sent me that email, it felt so unfair. I accepted things about her that I didn't agree with; why couldn't she do the same? It wasn't until I allowed myself to feel angry about it, praying that I could be "angry but not sin," that the fire burned itself out. I was able to process and move through it.

Had I pretended that Miriam's email didn't bother me, the hurt and anger would have simmered, bubbling to the surface in unhealthy ways. "This never

Abruptly, a  
friendship I had  
viewed as being  
unbreakable  
had been hit by  
lightning.

works," writes Unice. "Unreconciled hurts just stay unreconciled. Over time they create resentment, mistrust, and distance."

### **Face Time Is Grace Time**

How did people in Scripture handle conflict? "The Bible," writes Villodas, "is a collection of severely broken, sinful people poorly navigating through life and consistently encountering a gracious God."

The author highlights the clash between Peter and Paul, two pillars of the church, as described in Galatians 2:11-13:

Peter was hanging out with Gentiles, eating Gentile food (baby back ribs, maybe?). But then a bunch of legalistic church guys showed up, and Peter suddenly pretended he wasn't with the Gentiles or eating their food after all. In fact, he was against them now. "Ironically (and hypocritically), Peter made this judgment with greasy hands and food stuck between his teeth," Villodas writes.

Paul, angry that Peter was leading people astray, confronted him "to his face" (v. 11). Confrontation, a terrifying prospect for many of us, doesn't have

to mean shouting or spewing wrath, Villodas notes. It simply requires face time. "Too much of ourselves goes missing through texting and emails," he writes—not to mention social media. It can be so easy to become ensnared in arguments online, triggered by someone's meme or post.

Yet arguing online is futile, writes Mónica Guzmán, author of *I Never Thought of It That Way: How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times*. An online exchange, says Guzmán, lacks the elements of a quality conversation: time, attention, parity (it's not level ground if the person whose post you are commenting on can block you at any moment), containment (everyone and their uncles are listening in) and embodiment (unless you are face to face, you are not expressing yourself fully).

So how can we have those bridging conversations so vital to resolving conflict?

First, we must get our hearts in "fighting shape."

### **Like-hearted Is Better than Like-minded**

I felt defensive and offended after Miriam's email and spent way too much time arguing with her in my head about all the ways she was wrong and I was right.

I didn't even realize I was sinking into a victim mentality. Every time I rehearsed how she had hurt me, that miry pit got swampier. However, in the midst of my angst, I did fire off a few pop-up prayers for grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love. The Holy Spirit began to whisper love into my spirit—for me, for Miriam.

With God's help, I began to lean the other way, in the direction of love and the possibility of repair. I started to realize that it was more important to reinforce the relationship than to

---

defend my position, to surrender my need to be right and focus on my wish to stay connected.

Organizational psychologist Adam Grant said in a social media post, it's "easier to accept that you're not like-minded if you are like-hearted." Miriam and I were like-hearted, I knew. So why did we feel so differently about the same issues? My curiosity began to spark, which, for the purposes of crossing the breach between us, was a very good thing.

### **Curious, Not Condemning**

I had been coming at this schism with Miriam from the wrong angle. After I processed my hurt and anger, it was time to stop mentally defending my position. What if I could see her different opinions as invitations to learn instead of direct threats to my beliefs? It was time to get curious, not condemning, and to try to understand where she was coming from.

Miriam had to have good reasons for her opinions. She would never have risked our friendship by confronting me otherwise. But why? I had to replace my (intense) desire to be right and replace it with a desire to seek understanding. That shift in posture would be the game changer. I became curious. I could start to see Miriam (or anyone who made me mad) as a human being who was more than just an opinion or belief.

I thought of the verse painted in graffiti art on the outside of our church's youth building: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14).

I leaned into that truth. I couldn't tear down the "dividing wall of hostility" on my own strength, but in God's strength, maybe I could. Slowly but surely, the wall began to come down. I

crept toward Miriam in reconciliation, just as God had moved toward me.

### **Tough Conversations**

In relationship fixes, as with a house renovation, repairs happen one step at a time. You can't skip steps; otherwise you will have cracks in your foundation. You also can't wait too long, as I did, because that allows negative emotions to fester—a perfect breeding ground for a victim mentality. That's not a good look on anyone. It might be time to have "the talk."

Making the first move is a good idea, even if the other person is possibly wrong. We serve a merciful, grace-filled God who made us in his image and who loves to answer prayers for mercy and grace. Don't go into a tough conversation on an empty spiritual tank. Fumes won't get you where you need to go: crossing the bridge to love.

Do:

- » Assume positive intent. As much as possible, reframe the situation positively. What positive motives could your friend or family member have for saying what they said or acting how they acted?
- » Seek understanding with questions or statements such as "Help me understand why this is so important to you" and "Tell me more." "If there's one question I want to persuade you to ask more often," Guzmán writes, "it's 'What am I missing?'"
- » Remember to stay curious. "When you want to explore why they're wrong, explore what you're missing. When you want to know what their problem is, try to know what their concerns are," Guzmán writes.

### **A Bridge to Love**

Resolving conflict is really tough. It requires maturity, humility, and courage. But goodness can be on the other

side of the chasm. When the air is cleared, you have deeper understanding and a stronger commitment, a new richness and closeness—beauty for ashes. The process might not be pretty, but neither are ashes. "That's the incredible thing about being human," Villodas writes. "We are flawed, but we are never finished."

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone," the apostle Paul urges in Romans 12:18. Again, this doesn't mean pretending nothing happened. Process your emotions thoroughly. Do what you can do, and surrender the rest.

Four months after Miriam's email, I emailed her (it was still pandemic times). "We come at these issues from a very different place, and we will never persuade each other to think differently," I wrote. "But our friendship has never been about debating issues, and I don't want it to be about that now."

That winter, I drove home from our annual dinner downtown with the biggest smile on my face. I had my beloved Miriam back. Yes, it had been wretched, but God's healing power had proved stronger than the divide. Satan wanted me to burn that bridge, but God had other plans. In his hands, my conflict with Miriam became a thing of beauty, a bridge to love.



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. The author of 15 books, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her on Instagram @thebooksellersdaughter or on the podcast *Eat Like a Heroine*.

1. Have we, in general, elevated ideals over people lately? Why or why not?

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)

## Love in the Face of Differences

Why do we see  
God's image  
bearers as persons  
to be set apart  
from us, less than  
us, unworthy of  
our care and love?



John Groen is a retired Christian Reformed minister. He has served congregations in Trenton and Richmond Hill, Ont., and Ann Arbor, Mich.

**IT WAS HARD.** I entered kindergarten as a child of immigrant parents who spoke English as a second language. I spoke English with a Dutch accent. My fellow students soon picked up on that. "He's different," they said. "Different" meant I was not one of them. The difference had to be highlighted.

I was not allowed to use the bathroom. They barred the door with their bodies. I wet my pants. Walking home I was not allowed to walk on the road. I was forced into the ditch, often getting soaked to my knees. My mother was not happy with wet pants.

I was not the only "different" person on the playground and in the classroom. My friend Tom had a younger brother. He was a person with different abilities. He didn't fit. He received the bullies' attention.

They kept him from entering the schoolyard. In the winter some of them would take his coat, hat, and mittens. Looking back 60 years later, I cringe at this display of extreme bullying. No adult seemed to notice.

"Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words penetrate deep into our psyche, leaving wounds that may never heal." That's what Neal Plantinga said to us in one of my seminary classes.

One Sunday morning Tom's brother went with his family to the local church just a block from their home. Near the end of the service, he asked his parents if he could go home. Permission was granted. When the family came home, they found him hanging from the shower in the bathroom. He had ended his own life.

We came home from our Christian Reformed church as the noonday sun shone brightly. I remember coming home and hearing the sirens, knowing they meant trouble somewhere but not knowing who was in trouble. Tom's family entered into days, weeks,

months of grief. They soon moved away from the village.


Why do we do this to each other? Why do we see God's image bearers as persons to be set apart from us, less than us, unworthy of our care and love? What blinds us from seeing the other as sacredly formed as we are, worthy of respect, worthy of dignity?

How is it that a young boy no older than 7 comes to the conclusion that life is not worth living? Where does he find the resolve to end it all?

The hardest question of all might be, "Why didn't God step in to change the situation and stop the bullying?" Why didn't this boy experience a great intervention? After all, Mary sang a song celebrating God's desire and power to right what was wrong in the world.

I've come to the conclusion that the command to love our neighbor is the most challenging there is as we give ourselves in love to God. Following the command to love one another is maybe the best way we can demonstrate that God is truly with us.

"A meaningful relationship with God takes seriously the breadth and difference of God's people," John Swinton reminds us. He also writes, "I take Jesus quite literally and seriously when he says: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another' (John 13:34). Such love relates to intentionally adopting an attitude wherein we recognize the inherent value in other people, and we are genuinely glad that they are with us."

There is much difference to overcome in our world, our neighborhoods, our communities. It just might be that the difference we celebrate will be enough to convince another that life is worth living. 

## Liberal, Conservative, or Christian?

If you take time to listen to people, you will find more anomalies than cookie-cutter shapes.



Susan LaClear lives in Hudsonville, Mich, and serves as the director of candidacy for the CRCNA. She is a member of Alive Ministries in Jenison, Mich.

**THERE HAS BEEN** a long-standing felt need in our culture to affiliate with one of two established camps: “liberal” or “conservative.” Once affiliated, a person determines their level of comfort with others based on whether they stand in the same camp. Our culture has operated this way for many years. But more recently, with separation from community and heightened anxiety creating even more of a need for black-and-white thinking, people have engaged in this labeling ritual with even more intense fervor.

Certain words, whether spoken or written on social media, trigger a reflex to slap on a label:

Has someone used the words “green,” “justice,” “choice,” “racism,” “inclusive,” or “vaccination”?

Watch out, you might be dealing with a **LIBERAL!**

Have they mentioned “family values,” “pro-life,” “freedom,” “tradition,” “America,” or “rights”?

Step back, you’re talking to a **CONSERVATIVE!**

Once the label is applied, a variety of assumptions about the person’s political and religious beliefs are attached. Many of them might be completely inaccurate, but I might never know that because once I’ve determined I’m talking with someone in the opposite camp, I become prickly, nervous, and defensive, preparing to fight or take flight.

This is the sad reality of how our culture operates. And although it’s reasonable to expect that we Christians, so saturated with creeds, catechisms, and countless years of Bible studies, are equipped to live above this type of treatment of others, it’s been pretty evident that this is not the case. Even our understanding of

the words “theologically conservative” and “theologically liberal” (which should describe only a person’s way of interpreting Scripture) have become muddled with cultural issues and political stances that have little to do with those terms. This way of viewing our world runs contrary to the way of God’s kingdom shalom, undermines the effective life and witness of the church, and makes unity impossible.

We need to remind ourselves in these times that the body of Christ is not made up of two big conglomerates, but millions of individual members, each unique, precious, and indispensable (see 1 Cor. 12:12-26). Each member is designed in God’s image and not any caricature sketched by our culture or political bandwagon. All of these millions of members are designed with unique perspectives, personalities, and stories that shape their convictions.

If you take time to listen to people, you will find more anomalies than cookie-cutter shapes. I know many Christians who care about showing gospel love through social justice who also hold deep convictions about preaching the gospel with words. Many feel great compassion for the unborn and also for refugees. Some have great compassion for the LGBTQ community but hold strong commitment to traditional sexual values.

Christian values are not owned by “liberals” or “conservatives,” so Christians shouldn’t be either.

As those whom God has set apart, we can’t allow ourselves to be led and morally shaped by the broken social and political movements of our time. We aren’t to conform to the patterns of this world, but through honoring God’s Word and seeking God’s face, we

# Christian

are to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Rom. 12:2). And if we can maneuver ourselves back into a posture of humility and love, we will discover the Spirit’s power to move us toward a unity in diversity that is impossible from a worldly perspective but made possible through the blood of Christ, our great reconciler.

## **Be Reconciled**

“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).

God has reconciled us to himself in Christ, not counting our sins against us, and through the powerful work of his Spirit, God can dismantle our broken, polarized system and reconcile us to each other: “He himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14).

This “wall of hostility” between the Jews and Gentiles was even more firmly established in Paul’s time than the wall that divides us today. But seeing that the Holy Spirit had been poured out on both camps, the early church had to learn to overcome it. It couldn’t have been easy for them. When Jews looked at the practices and values of Gentiles, they must have felt

repulsed by how foreign, threatening, and polluting they seemed. And the Gentiles must have felt offended at times by the Jews’ exclusivity, judgmentalism, and obsession with rules and rituals. But as the Spirit began to help them see beyond the externals, no longer regarding others “according to the flesh” but as the “new creation” God had made of them, those old labels began to pass away, and they saw a new creation come (2 Cor. 5:16-18).

This ministry of reconciliation won’t be easy for us either, but the Spirit makes it possible. Here are some ways to get started:

Pray:

- » In humility, confess your own anxieties to God and ask him to cleanse your heart of judgment against others.
- » Ask God to help you discern the good impulses behind what you see as mistaken or wrong-headed beliefs.
- » Confess your alignment with worldly camps and resolve to realign your heart to God’s kingdom.

Listen:

- » When you find yourself triggered by someone’s words, take some time to calm any defensive feelings before you speak.


- » Ask questions with a true heart to understand a person’s individual beliefs and what experiences have shaped them.

- » Question someone’s policies or ideologies, but not their motives.

There is a big difference between saying “I think you are mistaken” and “I think you are evil.”

- » Don’t passively absorb information from leaders or media, but use the insight and intelligence God has given you to discern issues through prayer and diligent study.

Speak differently:

- » Determine to stop using the terms “conservative” and “liberal” when you are describing yourself or others, recognizing that while they might have once had some positive connotations, they now represent a set of hardened positions.
- » Never set up a straw man—exaggerating and misrepresenting another’s point of view just so you can easily knock it down.
- » Find areas of agreement with others and build relationship by expressing them. 

1. Have you felt the need or desire to affiliate with labels of “liberal” or “conservative”? Or have people labeled you? How do you feel about that?

2. What do the terms “conservative” and “liberal” mean to you?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

# Brown Baby Jesus

*Mary and Joseph made their way through the Egyptian marketplace with their brown baby Jesus in tow.*

*Jesus's eyes took in the traders from near and far.*

*His little nose filled with the scents of fruit, bread, and spices.*

*His face lit up at the sight of children threading colorful clay beads.*

*Just weeks before, Magi from the east had visited the family in Bethlehem, bringing gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor Jesus as the king of the Jews.*

**SO BEGINS *BROWN BABY JESUS***, a new children's picture book that celebrates the Nativity story with a melanated baby.

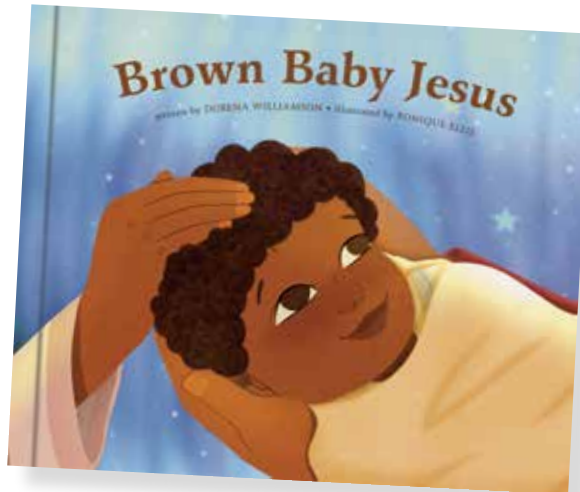
I watched as my 8-year-old Black daughter's eyes lit up to see that the "heroes" of the book—Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the Magi—looked like her. This is one of the best aspects of this book written by Dorena Williamson, author of *Crowned With Glory*.

Williamson does two wonderful things: she outlines the solid, biblical history of Jesus' genealogy going back to Adam and Eve, Moses, Rahab, and David, and has Mary and Joseph narrate the story as they recount for young Jesus the story of his birth.

Ronique Ellis illustrates this gem with bold, deep colors, making our reading experience even more rewarding.

I recommend the book wholeheartedly for its Scripture-rich, historically accurate approach, but also because we do not see many portrayals of biblical characters as people of color even though that's what they were. When children see such people in their particular hue, it inspires confidence and gives them hope.

It means everything to me as a father when I can share that these Bible



stories aren't just stories of some people way back when. They are *our* stories. As we page through this book, my daughter and I can see that.

Set in Egypt, with flashbacks to Bethlehem and other biblical locations, *Brown Baby Jesus* warmly shows the closeness of the holy family and conveys a culture that shares stories along their journeys.

My daughter is just beginning her own journey, and I pray that at Christmas and all year long, she will see that Jesus is on the way with her as she lives her life. (Waterbrook) **B**



Rev. Darrell Delaney lives in Allegan, Mich., and is the director of spiritual formation at Campus Ministry at Grand Valley State University. He and his wife of 18 years have three children.



## The King of Christmas: All God's Children Search for Jesus

*By Todd R. Hains, illustrated by Natasha Kennedy*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

With a clever and playful touch, Todd Hains invites readers to come along on the Magi's journey in search of Jesus. Young children will enjoy looking for someone else, too. On each page, "FatCat" discreetly makes an appearance. Introductory notes explain FatCat's purpose: "FatCat is our way of making the catechism approachable. ... In this book, FatCat guides us through the truth we celebrate on the Holy Day of Christmas."

Illustrator Natasha Kennedy's dynamic artwork effectively portrays the narrative's link between the Magi's search for the King of the Jews, a title later mockingly posted on Jesus' cross, and Jesus' death and resurrection. This appealing devotional resource for young families includes a brief service of prayer designed to be prayed responsively. (Lexham Press)





## Halo

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

Even if you know nothing about the video game *Halo*, the sci-fi story in this nine-episode television series can stand on its own. Spaceships, aliens, enhanced human super-soldiers, and a galactic war are the raw ingredients of a well-scripted and well-acted futuristic space drama based in the year 2552.

At the heart of this series is an interspecies conflict over “the artifact”—an ancient and mysterious piece of technology that has the power to destroy the universe but also, when paired with a second artifact, can show the way to a mysterious destination called the Sacred Ring, or “the Halo.”

The first season sets up a second that many viewers hope will answer questions, further the plot line, deepen characters, and impart meaning and significance to the Halo Rings. (TV-MA for language and violence, Paramount)



## The Jesus Music

*By The Porter’s Gate*

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

*The Jesus Music* documentary explores the history of Contemporary Christian Music, from its countercultural roots in the hippie era to its current iteration with artists such as Lauren Daigle.

I thought of my straitlaced dad, who became a Christian bookseller only a few years after the birth of the “Jesus Music” many parents and pastors considered to be a tool of the devil. Yet my dad got behind all of it, including controversial artists such as Larry Norman, U2, Stryper, and Amy Grant.

Michael W. Smith, Kirk Franklin, Lecrae, Steven Curtis Chapman, Bill Gaither, TobyMac, and others also are interviewed.

I finished the film with renewed appreciation for some favorite artists and for my dad. For him, the message was the most important thing of all. (PG-13, Hulu)



## Count the Nights by Stars

*By Michelle Shocklee*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In 1961, Audrey Whitfield and her family live in Nashville’s historic Maxwell House Hotel, a residential hotel that’s only a shadow of its glorious past.

When a reclusive hotel guest named Priscilla Nichols suffers an incapacitating stroke and is institutionalized, Audrey discovers Priscilla’s scrapbook filled with mementos from the 1897 Tennessee Centennial Exposition.

Narrated from the alternating perspectives of Audrey and Priscilla, this suspenseful novel for adults skillfully develops what author Michelle Shocklee identifies in notes as her three-word theme: “I see you.” As Audrey begins to understand the ways Priscilla had “seen” marginalized people, the young woman grasps how her life with Emmett, her brother with special needs, has prepared her to pursue her nascent passion. (Tyndale)

## The Lowdown

### Why the Magi Still Fascinate:

*The Magi*, by Eric Vanden Eykel, explores the fascination the Magi story has elicited in ancient and modern readers and what the legacy of the Magi story tells us about its storytellers—and ourselves. (Fortress Press)

**Spirited:** *A Christmas Carol* is told from the perspective of the ghosts in this hilarious musical twist on the classic Dickens tale. Ryan Reynolds stars as Scrooge, with Will Ferrell as “Present.” (In theaters Nov. 11; streaming Nov. 18 on Apple TV+)

**Based on the Modern Classic:** *Kindred*, based on Octavia E. Butler’s 1979 time-travel novel, stars Mallori Johnson as Dana James, a Black woman who finds herself being violently pulled back and forth in time and emerging in an 19th-century plantation that is intimately linked with Dana and her family. (Hulu)

**A Novel of Little Women:** From Sarah Miller, the author of *Caroline*, comes a revealing retelling of Louisa May Alcott’s beloved *Little Women* from the perspective of Margaret “Marmee” March. (HarperCollins)

## Why Are There So Many 'Fake' Christians?

As Jesus draws me ever closer to his transforming presence, I'm becoming aware of the reality that every Christian is "fake."



Michael Wagenman is campus minister at Western University in London, Ont. He is a member at Sarnia Redeemer Christian Reformed Church.

**WHY ARE THERE SO MANY** "fake" Christians? Unfortunately, I don't have an answer that covers every situation, but I can tell what I've learned while reflecting on this question in the context of my own life for the past decade.

I'm now in the second half of life. I look back on the previous years and decades and marvel at how "fake" I have been as a Christian. It is dishearteningly easy to drift from a focused, dynamic, and trusting posture toward the God revealed in Jesus Christ that opens me up to the entire creation. Instead, I see how much of my life, work, relationships, and even ministry flowed out of shabby substitutes: fear, peer pressure, insecurity, and even anger and envy.

I have worked too much at building and maintaining a facade. I have become adept at going through the motions to earn acceptance. I have put too little effort into being honest with myself about my complex and nuanced feelings. I have not yet learned how to accept the gift of grace (in whatever shape it takes) with authentic gratitude.

I've learned that my personal history and our competitive culture make vulnerability seem worse to me than death. I notice more clearly how our dualistic culture has infected me, producing parallel versions of myself: a public self that is pious and compliant and a private self that is power- and influence-hungry. I am still too tied to national or ethnic identities. I am still so immature that I can label others as "fake" Christians simply for thinking or voting differently than I do.

As Jesus draws me ever closer to his transforming presence, I'm becoming aware of the reality that every Christian is "fake." It takes bravery to honestly recognize that I am not

perfect. I am a fallen, broken, disordered, and rebellious creature in my own spectacular way. (This is the theological meaning of "sin.") In fact, the only person who has ever lived who wasn't a "fake" Christian is someone who wasn't even a Christian himself: Jesus of Nazareth. He was the only fully authentic, truly human person—what the New Testament means by calling Jesus the second Adam.

I used to think that being a Christian magically made me a perfect person. I understood forgiveness as the reason I didn't think I had to put much intentional effort into maturing out of my follies and foibles, my vices and vacillations. But Christians aren't perfect people. They're people in the process of being made whole again (the deeper Hebrew meaning of the Greek concept of perfection). It's when I refuse or fail to recognize and admit my fallenness that I become "fake."

This is why so many students I interact with are uninterested in religious labels that have become almost meaningless. The concern is not what box I check on a survey of religious affiliation, but whether my life conforms to the life-giving pattern set by Jesus or not.

When I look in the mirror, I'm learning to recognize two truths. On the one hand, I see a powerfully loved child of God. But I also see the many ways in which I run from that identity. It is only in and through Jesus' radical embrace that I am being transformed by God's unrelenting love. So rather than spending time looking around and judging other Christians to determine for my own self-satisfaction whether they're "fake" or not, my energies are better spent reflecting on the specific ways in which I myself continue to think and believe and behave as if my "fake" self is my true self. **B**

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

**Down**

1. A church building project earned the firm behind the work an \_\_\_\_\_ prize
3. We celebrate this at Christmas
4. "Liberal, Conservative, or \_\_\_\_\_?"
5. To bridge conflict, assume \_\_\_\_\_ intent
7. This month's Our Shared Ministry feature focuses on these
8. Controversial heavy metal band profiled in *The Jesus Music* documentary
10. Nine CRC ministries are now merged as \_\_\_\_\_ Ministries
13. Catechism that asks "What is your only comfort in life and in death?"
16. A regional group of Christian Reformed churches

**Across**

2. The incarnation is also a sign of God's \_\_\_\_\_
6. Faith \_\_\_\_\_ Project
9. California churches stage a telling of the Nativity in living \_\_\_\_\_
11. Calvin University has a board of \_\_\_\_\_
12. God can speak through \_\_\_\_\_
14. Trees that keep their needles all year
15. New series based on Octavia E. Butler's 1979 time-travel novel
17. Linda Hanstra's family sings the \_\_\_\_\_ chorus at Christmas
18. \_\_\_\_\_ *Baby Jesus*, a new children's picture book for Christmas

Answers to the November 2022 puzzle

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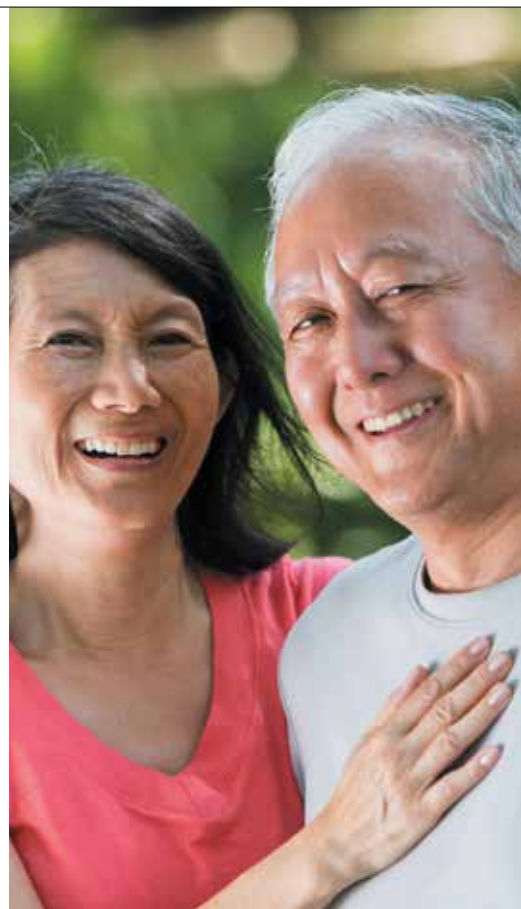
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**Congregational Announcements**

**BRADENTON CRC WELCOMES WINTER VISITORS AND VACATIONERS!** Our Florida church is diverse in ages and interests but united in passionate service to our Savior. Sunday services at 10 A.M. and 5 P.M. Weekly bible studies are available. We also offer various other events and gatherings.

**Financial Aid**

**FINANCIAL AID** Students preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church from Classis Heartland may apply for aid to assist them in their study for the 2023-2024 academic year by contacting Rev. Garry Nyenhuis at Living Water Community Church; (712)-707-1005; [pastorgarry@livingwatercrc.org](mailto:pastorgarry@livingwatercrc.org). The deadline is January 31, 2023.

**Birthdays**

**BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS**

**ELSA PRINCE BROEKHUIZEN** December 13th, Elsa will be celebrating her 90th birthday! Her family and friends are grateful for her exam-

ple of Christian living and her heart of humble giving. Birthday blessings can be mailed to: Elsa Prince Broekhuizen, 190 S River Ave, Ste. 300, Holland, MI 49423

**MARILYN (TER MOLEN) VANDER WEIDE** will celebrate 90 years of God's faithfulness on December 17. Birthday greetings can be sent to her at 2105 Raybrook SE, Unit 3021, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

**Anniversary**

**ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS**



**JOHN & SYLVIA REITSMA** of Strathroy ON, formerly London, Essex & Woodstock, will celebrate their 60th anniversary on December 15. We are thankful to the Lord for the blessing they have been to their family. May God sustain them and grant them more wonderful years together.

**Obituaries**

**BAKKER**, Mary Ann (VanderLugt) went to be with Jesus on Oct 12th, 2022. She is survived by her husband Bob of 68 years, and her children Keith and Debbie Bakker, Bob and Lynda Bakker, Patti and Gin Wallinga, 8 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren. She was predeceased by her granddaughter Kimberly Eling. We praise God for a wonderful wife, mother and grandmother.

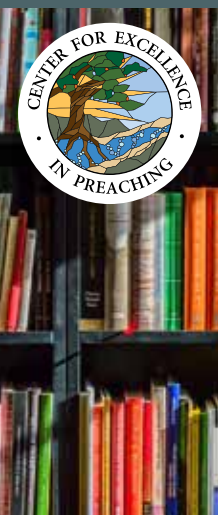
**BRUMMEL**, Connie Northouse, 84, peacefully transitioned from this life to the next on July 19. She is survived by her husband Roger; children Brenda (Paul) Katerberg, Sari (Jon) Swets, Jean (Paul) Nelson; ten grandchildren and three great-grandchildren; siblings Sally de Vries, Pat (Terry) Hammink, Peter (Laurel) Northouse; sister-in-law Ruth Ann Barber. We are thankful for her exemplary, servant-like, generous, and Godly life.

**DE BOER**, Lillian, age 104, went home to her Lord on October 18. Preceded in death by her husband, Martin and son, Marty. Survived by daughters Karen (Gerald) Rozema and Susan (Roger) Levering, 8 grandchildren, 14 great grandchildren, 11 great great grandchildren.

**GRAVES**, Fredrick W., age 92 of Grayson, passed away Saturday, October 8, 2022. He was preceded in death by his wife, Wilmyna B. Graves. He is survived by his children, Lois and Dennis Ostermann, MaryBeth and Roy

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Dockum, Calvin and Maria Graves, Jeff Graves and Lisa Eldana, Delores and Jeff Gold, David Graves; 12 grandchildren; 19 great-grandchildren; and sister, Shirley Kruger. Funeral Services were October 22, 2022 at 2 p.m. at Scot Ward's Green Meadow Chapel with Pastor Joe Hughes officiating; interment followed at Green Meadow Memorial Gardens. Condolences may be submitted on-line at [www.scotward.com](http://www.scotward.com). Scot Ward Funeral Services, 699 American Legion Road, Conyers, GA 30012, 770-483-7216.

**HUBERS**, Bernice Hubers (Faber), age 87, DeMotte, IN, passed away peacefully on October 1, 2022 after a full life and an 11 year journey with Alzheimers. Bernice is survived by her husband of 66 years, Sylvan (Bud); sons Steve (Deb), Mark (Thriessa), Jon (Laura), David (Kim), 15 grandchildren, and 38 great-grandchildren. Her love for the Lord was expressed in enthusiastic love for family and friends and in service to others at Community CRC of Rose-lawn and DeMotte Christian School. Bernice and Bud served as volunteers on 30 CRWRC disaster relief trips and as winter workers for 20 winters at Rio Grande Bible Ministries.



**KORRINGA**, Angenette M. "Ang", nee Gorter, age 98, beloved wife of the late Edward (1990). Loving mother of Jim (Beth) Korringa and Judi (Don) Ipema. Cherished grandmother of Dale (Kelly) Ipema, Connie (Pete) Bandstra, Jon (Eileen) Ipema, Jay (Jessica) Ipema; Scott Korringa, Jonathan (Angela) Korringa, and David (Lexie) Korringa. Cherished great-grandmother of Owen, Elise, Samantha, Shaun, Sophie, Tyler, Logan, Ethan, Felicity, Parker, and Calvin. Dear sister of the late Marian (late Robert) Boersma and the late John (late Eleanor) Gorter. Dearest aunt of many nieces and nephews.



**VAN DUYN**, David Lee, 85, of Zeeland, formerly of South Holland, Illinois, died unexpectedly on February 18, 2022, in Harlingen, Texas. Born on December 24, 1936, in Austinville, Iowa, to Cornelius and Grace (Limburg) Van Duyn. He graduated from Illiana Christian High School and Calvin College. After graduation he enlisted in the Navy and was commissioned as an officer, completing his training as an aircraft navigator. He achieved the rank of Commander at retirement. Married Jennie De Vries on February 28, 1959, and was a devoted husband for 62 years. He is survived by his wife, Jennie, three children: Mary (Jerry) Zandstra of Big Rapids, Mich., Jim (Gretchen) Van Duyn of Wheaton, Ill., Rachel Vandebroek of Grand Rapids, Mich.; 10 grandsons: James (Laura) Zandstra, Thomas (Beth) Zandstra, Jacob Zandstra, Andrew Van Duyn, John Van

Duyn, Joseph Van Duyn, Matthew Van Duyn, Caleb Vandebroek, Samuel Vandebroek, Simon Vandebroek; great-granddaughter Delphine Zandstra, his in-laws: Susie Kravig, Tom (Mary) De Vries, Ken (Denise) Bootsma, and many extended family members.

**VANDER AA**, Grace (DeRuiter) of Pantego, NC, passed away on October 10, 2022, at age 92. She was preceded in death by her husband of 63 years, Art, her son Art Jr., daughter in law Terry and all 10 of her siblings. She is survived by her daughters Cyndie Van Dyke (Alan), Jenny Febus (Dave) and Pam Kirkman (Barry), 9 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. Her family thanks God for her long life of faithful service to Him.

**VER SCHURE**, Robert, 89, of Phoenix (formerly Denver) passed away July 22, 2022. He is survived by wife Jean, children: Lauri Ver Schure (Michael Cordova), Diann (Paul) Jeplawy, Dave (Suzie) Ver Schure. Grandchildren: Katie (Brad) Breuker, Liz Jeplawy, Craig Jeplawy, Joann Jeplawy (Ryan Smith) & Ineke Cordova.



**ZEILSTRA**, Evelyn, nee Wichers, age 97 of Elmhurst. Beloved wife of the late John H. Zeilstra; loving mother of the late Barbara (Jim (Martha)) Brouwer, Janice (Dale) Holtrop, John T. Zeilstra (Janice and the late Terry) Zeilstra, William (Karla) Zeilstra, Mary (John) Cook, and Evelyn (Brad) Wieringa; devoted grandmother of 17; great-grandmother of 38; great-great grandmother of 1; fond sister of 3 brothers and 5 sisters; sister in law of 2; dear friend of Jeong and Misook Gho; aunt of many nieces and nephews. She was devoted to her Lord, committed to His Church, and cherished her family. Memorials to Faith Christian Reformed Church, Timothy Christian Schools, Providence Life Services, or Resonate Global Mission (Gho, WM 802052). Funeral and memorial information: [www.knollcrest.net](http://www.knollcrest.net) or 630-932-1500.

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The annual survey for the CRCNA is now open. One survey respondent shares his experience.

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### WORSHIP A Catch of Fish

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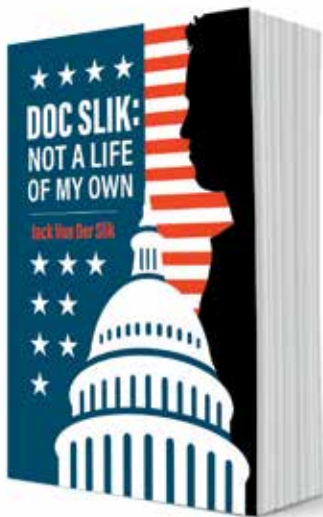
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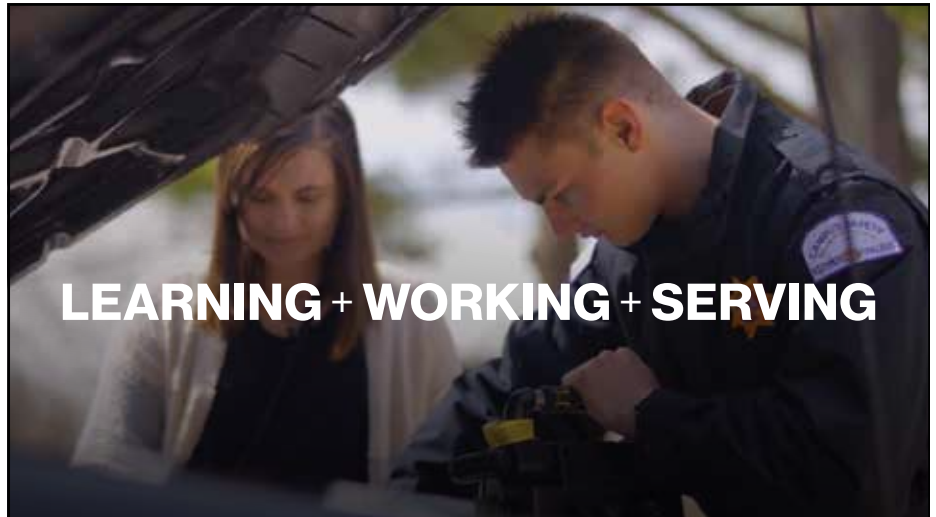
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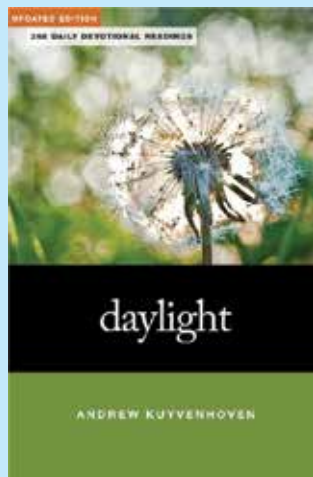
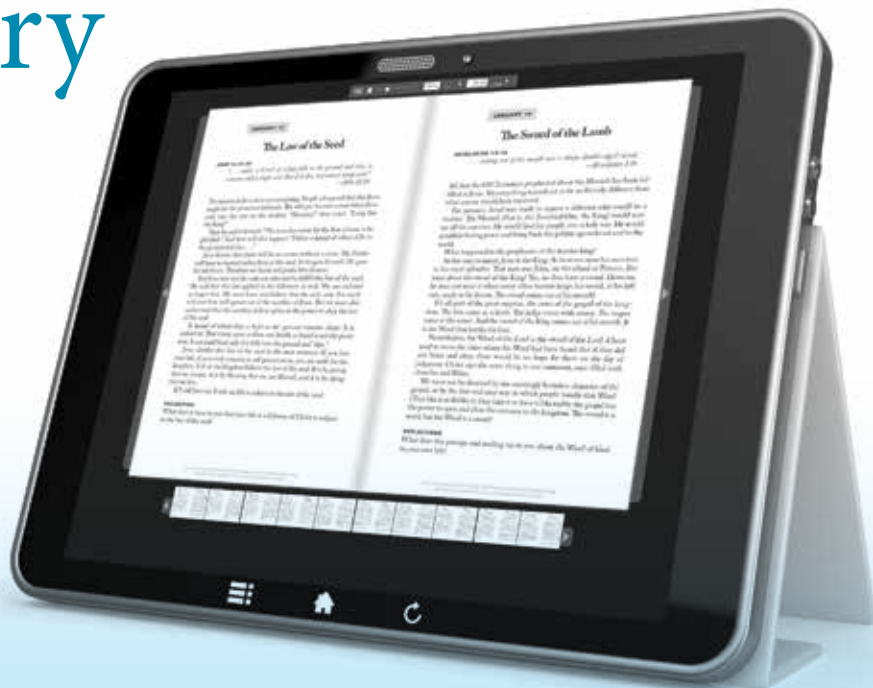


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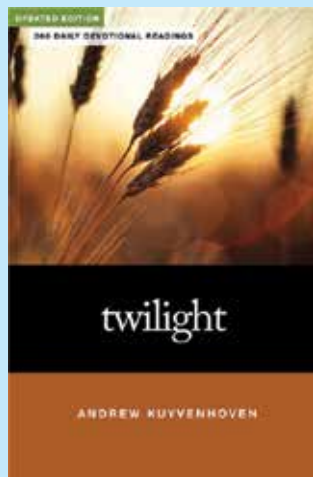
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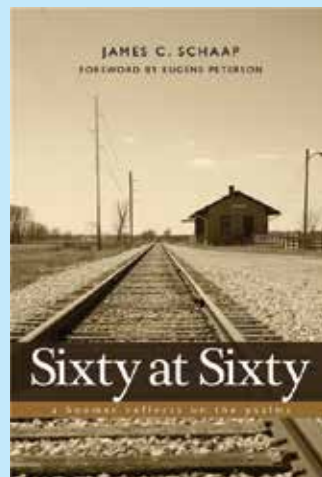
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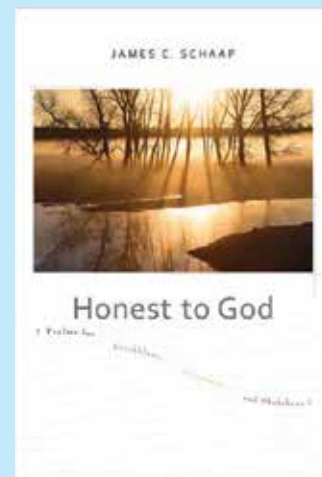
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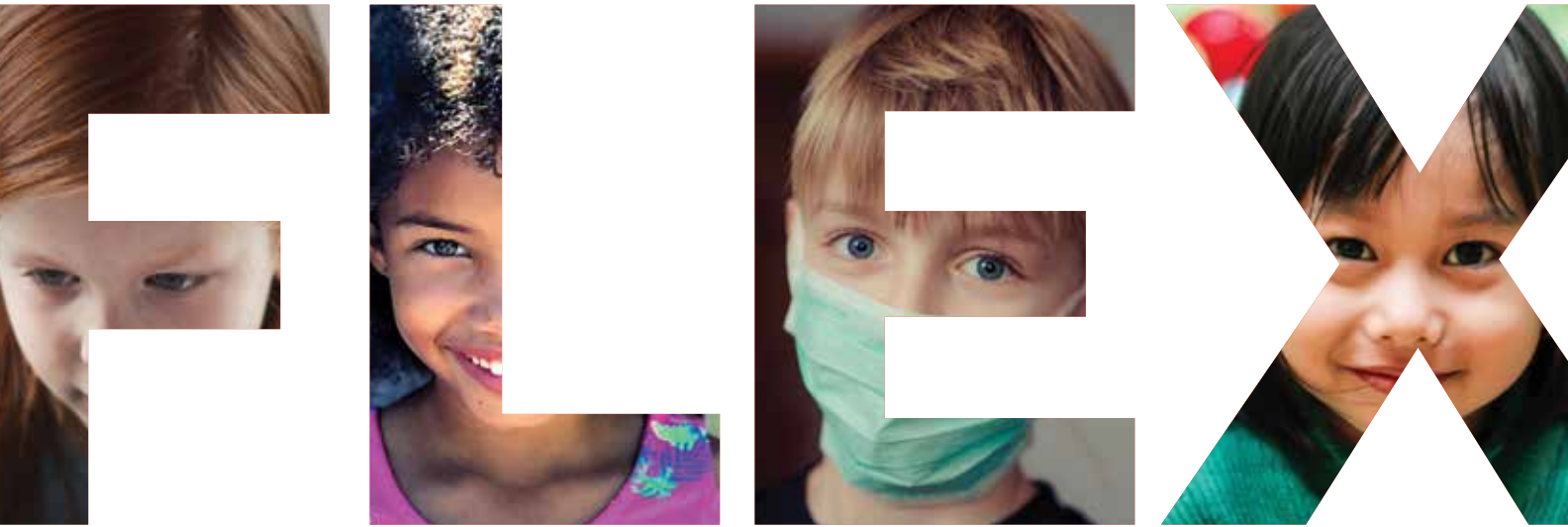


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# New Media for New Christians

"Please pray for the people of my village, because they object to me sharing the Word of God with others. Whenever I talk to any person in my village, people of other faiths look at me with suspicion. They stop me from talking to people and persecute me. They behave very rudely and do not allow my family to take water from the village hand pump. They threaten me to ostracize me and my family from the village. It is very difficult to share the Good News of Jesus Christ here."

—Manoj

Your prayers, along with those of your partners in India helped Manoj and his family get through this painful time. About one month later, Manoj called our Hindi ministry partners to share that people in his village were no longer harassing him, and that their hearts were softening. Praise God!

You can reach people like Manoj!  
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## ReFrame Ministries

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

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## Love as the Story of Our Lives

People can be excellent at hiding intense pain while silently crying out for compassion, friendship, and love.



Jenna C. Hoff is a freelance writer and editor in Edmonton, Alta. She is a member of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church.

**FOR MANY YEARS**, Sunday mornings were the most difficult time of the week in our home.

The second our kids reached the age that it was their decision to make, they stopped attending church, turning away from God and the Christian faith.

My family isn't alone. Research shows that about 66% of Canadian and American youth who attend church will leave as young adults.

While every person leaves for their own reasons, I believe a key one for my young adults was the difficulty in fitting into the norms of the church structure while living with invisible disabilities. This resulted in deep feelings of not belonging.

Invisible disabilities are conditions you can't see. They can be cognitive, physical, mental, or sensory—or simply chronic pain. A particular difficulty of living with an invisible disability might be that others are unaware of the challenges someone is facing. Sometimes this results in judgment, isolation, or rejection.

This was the case with my young adults. No one at church was ever mean or intentionally rejecting; however, they were passed by, over and over, for years. As my children aged, they became increasingly angry to be at church and held themselves apart.

Friendship rarely or never happened. People said the occasional hello, but genuine relationships where they were uniquely known eluded them. Their invisible disabilities seemed to make them invisible.

This had nothing to do with how caring our church is. It brims with truly kind people. Love flourishes in this special place.

I know this firsthand because, as a person with visible physical

disabilities, genuine friendship and warmth have been repeatedly extended to me. God's people have been very intentional in loving me.

In the case of my kids, though, there was nothing visible to cue caring people that perhaps a little extra love and understanding or an offer of friendship would go far.

Someone recently pointed out to me that invisible disabilities are, by nature, invisible. How are we supposed to go out of our way to love people living with challenges we are unaware of? Similarly, many struggle deeply with things unrelated to a disability. Often we have no idea that the brightly smiling person in the pew beside us is sobbing inside. We might not know that their marriage is in trouble, their work is in jeopardy, or their kids are being bullied, or that they're carrying some other enormous burden they feel no one would understand or care about.

People can be excellent at hiding intense pain while silently crying out for compassion, friendship, and love. A gentle hug, kind smile, or invitation for lunch after the service might mean everything.

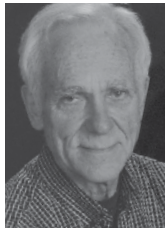
Fortunately, we don't need to wait until we know a person's story to extend love and friendship to those around us. When we make love our go-to, we intentionally treat with kindness every person God brings across our paths.

When we ask God to make our hearts sensitive to those who are alone, struggling, or hurting, we can trust the Holy Spirit to use us to share the Father's love with those who especially need it.

When we do so, we follow in the steps of Jesus, and love becomes the story of our lives. **B**

## Nearer, My God, to Thee

He nods and looks away, as if trying to recall those bittersweet moments.



Hank Ottens is a retired orthopedic surgeon and an active gardener, photographer, and singer. He attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich.

**I AM SITTING** on our living room couch, looking up at a patch of blue sky through a rectangle of skylight glass. A determined breeze sends the dead leaves of autumn somersaulting over its dome. Jack Armentrout installed it soon after we moved in many years ago. Jack was handy with tools and had a knack for finish carpentry. The skylight remains watertight, but the openings on either end of the long ceiling-to-roof bay do not quite line up. For once Jack's experienced eye had failed him. But only a little. It's a barely perceptible asymmetry, a slight distortion.

As I write this, Jack is dying in the hospice wing on the third floor of a nursing home in town. His body, like his skylight, no longer lines up either. Age has distorted his torso, and disease has warped his organs. He has only days to live. Maybe only hours. He knows that Jennie, his dead wife, reposes in a coffin at a funeral home down the road. I have just gotten back from there, from paying my respects to the grieving daughters. Jack is too far gone, too frail to join them, to greet the chattering mourners, to receive their murmured condolences. Tomorrow is the funeral. He will miss that, too.

Jack is lying immobile in a low recliner. His carpenter hands lie in limp repose on his robed lap. Tubed oxygen flows into his nose. His face is puffy, a mask no longer able to show emotion. I move where he can see me. He greets me by name. I kneel by his side, face to face, the living and the dying on a level playing field. He looks at me with old man's eyes overflowing with tears, the grimace of a smile on his dusky lips. We take turns mumbling words—mine of sorrow and comfort, his of impending death. He says that he, too, could go at any time now, what with his kidneys having failed him and all. I tell him I learned that, before she died, Jennie had been brought up to

his room, and they had been together for a few days. He nods and looks away, as if trying to recall those bittersweet moments.

I place my folded hands on his limp and swollen ones, hands that had once gripped a hammer and fitted and sealed a skylight on a slightly distorted bay. I do what one does when death stalks a child of God. I pray to a Father whose Son, too, had once died. But that death was short-lived. And the risen One would soon welcome Jack to be with him. Jack and Jeannie together again. What that would be like neither Jack nor I have much of an idea. I end my prayer and say goodbye. As I walk back to the car, I feel that I have just been nearer to heaven than I've ever been before—closer to the mystery of that which lies beyond death, of which no one knows very much at all. Having talked to a dying man moments away from crossing that inscrutable threshold, I am moved to tears. I have not seen the Lamb on his throne, but I have conversed with someone who was about to see for himself.

The mystery remains, but the feeble comfort I had offered Jack gave me comfort and assurance that all will be well—with Jeannie, with Jack, with me. **B**

**EVEN AS**

**CONFLICT**

**TEARS OUR WORLD &  
OUR CHURCHES APART...**



**HE SHALL BE CALLED THE  
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