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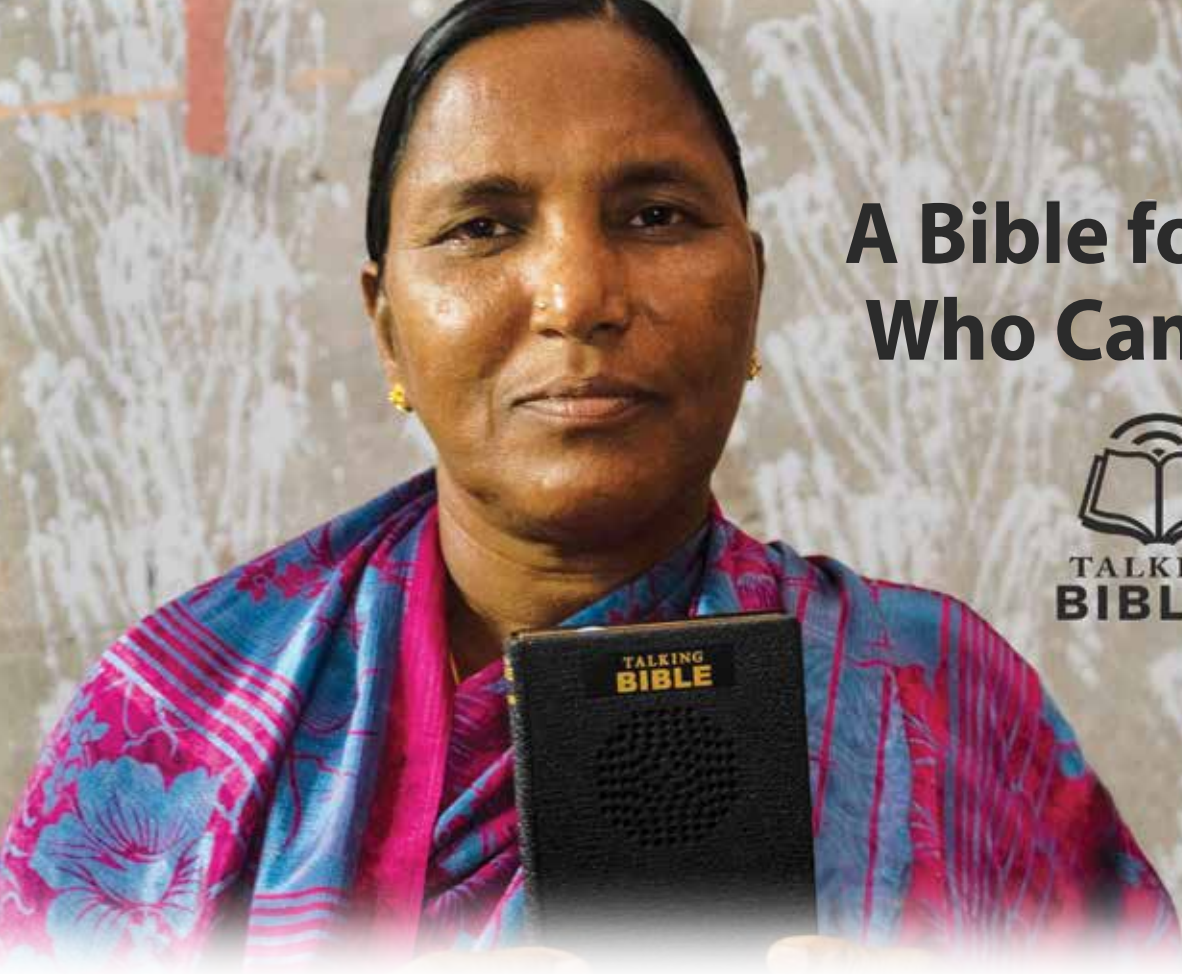
FEBRUARY 2023

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Meaning in
the Margins

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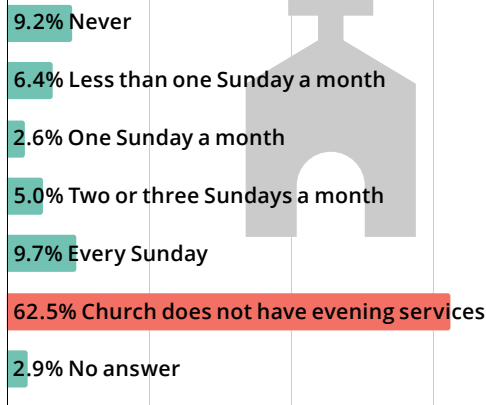
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BY THE NUMBERS

The 2022 Christian Reformed Church in North America congregational survey looked at how often parishioners attended Sunday evening worship services. About 1,535 congregants completed the survey. See what they said:

How often do you attend Sunday evening worship services?



The survey was conducted in the Spring of 2022 by DataWise Consulting. A total of 1,535 participants completed the survey.

WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: Alberta Pastor Called to Serve as Minister of Online Evangelism
- » News: Western Michigan Church Helps Moms in Need with Baby Pantry
- » Mixed Media: Eight Audiobooks: A Grab-Bag of Listens for Every Ear
- » Movie review: *The Mulligan*
- » Book review: *Bittersweet*

FEATURES



10

Meaning in the Margins

Sam Gutierrez // Christ became dust and died for us.



32

Understanding and Overcoming Today's Epidemic of Artificial Sex

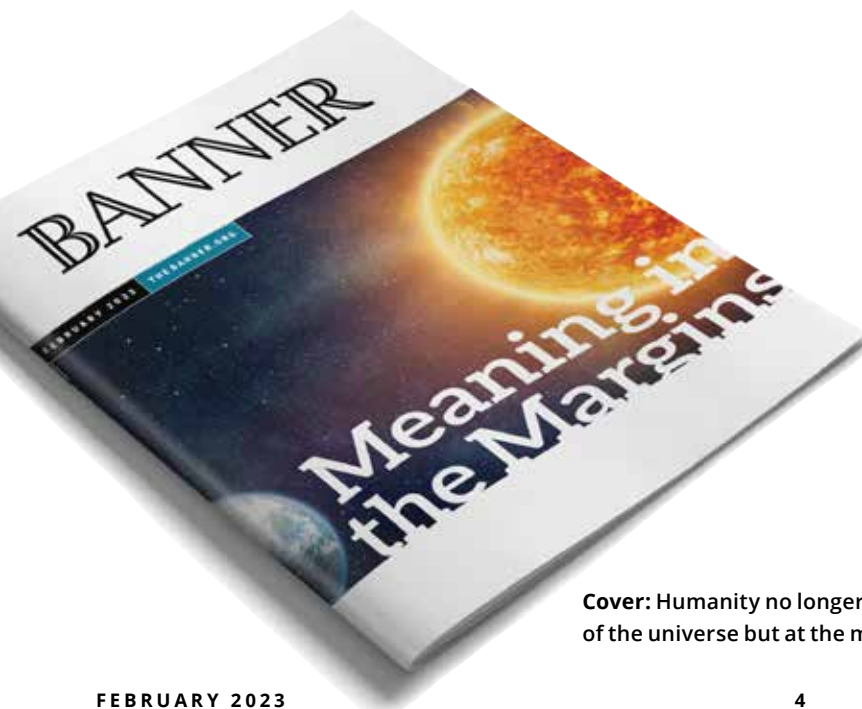
Mark Brouwer // What we're facing today is something different.



35

Faith Matters: Tell the Love of Jesus, Just As You Are

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema // God does the work.



Cover: Humanity no longer sees itself at the center of the universe but at the margins. Page 10

NEWS

15 Pastor’s Presence in Riverbank Encampments an ‘Absolute Miracle’

18 ‘The Garage’ Is Open for Community in Terrace, B.C.

20 Redeemer University Student’s Death Affects School, Community

COLUMNS

7 Editorial: Was Jesus Harsh?

Shiao Chong // And therefore, should we be harsh?

8 Reply All

9 Vantage Point: A View That Never Gets Old

Kerri Howard // Sometimes we find it easy to overlook God.

12 Big Questions

How can I communicate my views to synod?

31 Discover: Are You Staying Warm Enough?

Albert Kok // God created rules for heat to follow.

36 The Other Six: Surprised by Love—Again!

Ray Vander Weele // He never saw it coming.

38 Mixed Media: The Trailblazing History of Black Filmmaking

Reggie Smith // A documentary views the history of Black film-making in America.

40 Cross Examination: Is There Misogyny in the Bible?

Mary S. Hulst // The evidence seems to go one way.

41 Word Play

45 In My Shoes: Remembrance of Racism

Agnes Mastin // It happened more often than even she realized.

46 Still: Tea Bags

Gloria D. Kroeze // Let’s give God our best.

Correction:

The story “Classis Watch: Fall 2022” (December 2022, p. 19) should have said Hope Christian Reformed Church, which disbanded, was in Rapid City, S.D.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



Investing in Emerging Leaders

Megan Herrema, Matt Kucinski, and Amanda Greenhoe // Jesus prepared leaders to take over ministry after his ascension.

26 The View from Here: For the Love of Leaders

Zachary King // A scriptural model is one of mentorship.

BANNER

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Was Jesus Harsh?

Some think Jesus' example gives them license to be mean, insulting, and harsh.



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.

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Este artículo está disponible en español en TheBanner.org/spanish.

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Thanks to your gracious generosity, we raised over \$477,000 this past year. Thank You!

We would love to hear from our readers. Complete our survey at thebanner.org/survey.

IN MY PREVIOUS EDITORIAL

("Gentleness Is Not Optional," January 2023), I showed how gentleness is not optional for Christians, even when pursuing an urgent and noble goal such as ending abortions or ending racism. But some might think there should be exceptions.

Obviously, when confronted with immediate physical harm and violence, we might not have the luxury of being gentle and must defend ourselves and others. I am talking more about our verbal harshness in disagreement with our ideological opponents.

But, some might argue, Jesus was harsh with his opponents, denouncing the Pharisees as hypocrites and a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 23:33). They think Jesus' example gives them license to be mean, insulting, and harsh. But we need to understand Jesus' behavior in its context.

Jesus spoke harshly almost only to self-righteous religious leaders and politicians. He was kind to those classified as "sinners," such as prostitutes or tax collectors. The only exception, it seems, was the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30), whom Jesus lumped in, by analogy, with dogs. But if we understood the customs and social context of Jesus' time, we would realize Jesus was not only testing the Gentile woman's faith (a test she passed with flying colors), but also correcting his watching disciples' anti-Gentile prejudices.

When Jesus pronounced the infamous woes on the Pharisees in Matthew 23, it was not his first conflict with them. Jesus already had run-ins with them, beginning in Matthew 9, when he healed the man with paralysis, and followed by other encounters. He only started calling them a brood of vipers in Matthew 12, after the Pharisees plotted to kill him (Matt. 12:14) and

accused him (for the second time) of being Satan's servant (Matt. 12:24). Still, Jesus did give even the Pharisees and scribes respect and credit where it was due (Matt. 23:2-3; Mark 12:34). And to Pharisees like Nicodemus, who genuinely sought the truth, Jesus was not harsh (John 3).

Finally, those woes on the Pharisees ended with a heartfelt lament for Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-39). Jesus longed to gather them lovingly, like a mother hen with her chicks. The harsh words might have been Jesus' only (and final?) resort to break through their stubborn, self-righteous pride. Jesus, in his divine wisdom and knowledge, knew people's hearts in ways we could not. Hence, we really should not use these extraordinary examples of Jesus with the Pharisees to justify our sinful tendency to be hurtful and mean.

Many think Jesus' cleansing of the temple was a display of harsh anger and violence. However, Mark's account shows that Jesus actually went to the temple the day before and "looked around at everything" (Mark 11:11). He returned the next day to drive out the money changers and merchants (11:12-17). Jesus did not lose his temper in a moment of unbridled rage. Rather, he reflected overnight on what he saw in the temple and decided to mount a symbolic public protest against the temple's commercialization, among other things. Even though he made a whip out of cords (John 2:15), it was likely only to drive out the sheep and cattle and not used on any person. Otherwise, the religious leaders would have charged him with physical violence.

More can be said about all these events, but my point is that we cannot cherry-pick Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees to justify being harsh, rude, or even cruel in our treatment of those we disagree with. **B**



REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at thebanner.org/letters.

Spiritual Pride

Kudos to Shiao Chong and C.S. Lewis for exposing spiritual pride ("The Great Sin," November 2022). Zachary King also calls us to be "discerning culture-creators" (p. 27). Meanwhile, a recent Gallup poll notes declining institutional trust, with the church losing six percentage points, now resting in fifth place! We can either examine ourselves or proudly blame those distrusting "sinners" who refuse our "good news." Perhaps we have a shallow idea of depravity as simple "moral" failure. The Bible points to something deeper: pride, blindness, and self-delusion that leads to self-justification (Rom. 2; Gen. 4). A wise pastor friend once challenged a sermon critic for insisting on sermons focusing only on the sins the critic was not guilty of.

» Randy Zylstra // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Teaching Youth

Thank you to Ron Rupke for reporting on the findings of Pastor Ryan Farell about the training course BEYOND for persons trying to understand and reach Gen Z youth ("How a New Campus Pastor Trained to Reach Gen Z," October 2022). What a helpful course to assist anyone, even seniors like me, in trying to relate to teens and to persons in their early 20s. What a timely resource to work with Gen Z persons as they face their present and future issues.

» Vern VanderZee // San Jose, Calif.

First Nations

Mr. Stelter's fine article reminds us of the sad promises and treaties made to the First Nation peoples of North America ("Kisê-manitow," November 2022). Both sides in the War of 1812 made promises in order to get support for their side and soon forgot them when the fighting was over. But more importantly, the article reminds us to look at creation and see that God is the only trustworthy provider. Check out Genesis 22:14.

» Tom Posthumus // Sebringville, Ont.

Foster Care

I just wanted to send a quick thank-you email for such a wonderful article about foster care in your November issue. My husband and I are foster parents and members of Escalon Christian Reformed Church in California. We can often feel like the odd ones out by choosing to follow God's calling to foster. I especially appreciated the mentioning of how important it is to support the biological parents through reunification. That is a perspective I feel strongly the church needs to get better at. I also liked how Peter Raap stated that foster care is not a ministry; it is a command. Despite the challenges, we have been so blessed by our experience and have easily seen God working through our placements. Keep up the good work!

» Brittany Doornenbal // Escalon, Calif.

The Banner

Each time I get *The Banner* I rush to see what you have written. I am grateful that God called you to this post. He has gifted you with the ability to see us as we are and with the wordsmithing skills to help us realize it. You are a prophet for our time, and I pray that we are listening and responding appropriately.

» Nancy Tuit // Grand Rapids, Mich.

A View That Never Gets Old

The Rapture

For a number of years we would make our annual trip to see our family in South Dakota while we lived in Michigan. Those were the days before seat belts, so the four kids would sprawl out in the back of the station wagon and we would drive all night. At one point we had traveled over 100 miles on a South Dakota state highway and had not seen a moving vehicle. This was between 3 and 5 a.m. I said to my wife, who was sitting in the front seat with me, "Things are not looking good." She was kind of half asleep and said, "Oh, really? What is the problem?" I said, "I think the rapture has taken place and we are still here" ("What's Wrong with the Rapture?", September 2022). Her response was, "Oh, shoot." I said, "Check the kids. Are they still all there?" She said, "Yes, all four of them." I said, "I guess we are all in this mess together."

» Everett Vander Tuin // Ada, Mich.

"YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN the mountain today," my dad says. "I'm emailing you a picture."

I've seen the mountain thousands of times. I grew up with a living room window facing snow-capped Mount Baker. I've seen it at sunrise. I've seen it at sunset. I've seen it freshly whitened by new snow. I've seen it venting steam on frosty mornings. And yet my dad regularly sends me photos because for both of us it's a view that never gets old.

One particularly majestic morning my dad asked a neighbor if she had noticed the mountain. "I didn't," she replied. "I guess I didn't really look."

Sometimes we find it easy to overlook God too. We know God is there, majestic and holy. But some days we fail to look.

I think this is a particular pitfall for those of us who have grown up in church, who have been Christians as long as we can remember. Attending church becomes tradition. Prayer becomes routine. God becomes commonplace. We can fail to be awed by an awe-inspiring God when we don't open our eyes to see him.

What is the antidote for this apathy? How do we become people for whom the view never gets old? God warned the Ephesian church, which had lost its passion and love, to "repent and do the things you did at first" (Rev. 2:5). Go back to doing those things you did when you did see God, when you did notice his handiwork frequently, when there was passion. Do you remember that time? What fed it? Was it extended time in his Word? Was it service? Was it prayer and fasting? Was it a discipling relationship? Look for God in places you've found him before.

This isn't a "fake it till you make it" time. This is a time of passionate

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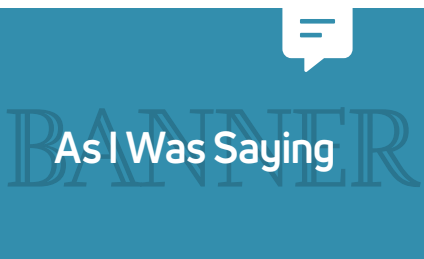
pursuit. In Psalm 119 the psalmist pleads nine times with God to revive him, and nine times the psalmist claims God's Word as a delight. The psalmist prays with passion to have passion and acts with passion even as it's prayed for. "Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me in Your righteousness" (Ps. 119:40, NKJV).

But passion isn't meant to be merely a warm, fuzzy feeling for our personal enjoyment. A heart that loves spills over. A heart that rejoices cannot be quieted. A heart that is fueled will not be kept still. Like my dad sending me pictures of a view I've seen a thousand times, may we remind and encourage each other in what we already know to be true: God is awesome in beauty and majesty!

Let's open our eyes expectantly. May we throw open the windows every morning delighting to see God, eager to notice what he is doing, and excited to worship him with our lives. I pray this view will never get old. **B**

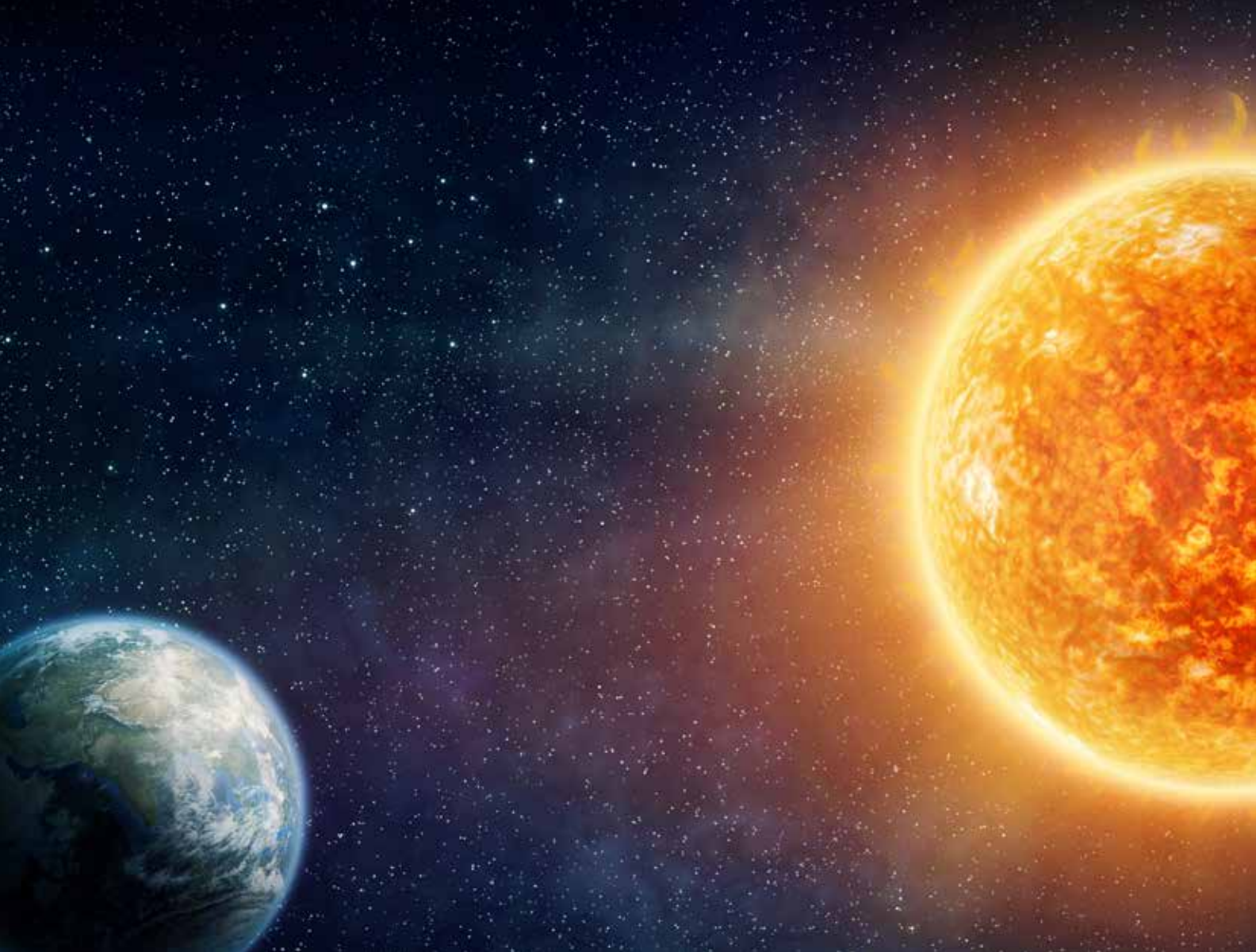


Kerri Howard and her husband, Wade, serve as home missionaries at Trail's End Ranch, a Bible camp near Ekalaka, Mont. They have been members of Christian Reformed churches in Lynden, Wash., and Lodgepole, S.D., and currently attend Ekalaka Bible Church.



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- » A Turn-of-the-Century Missionary Who Stood Up to a King
- » Seat 12A



Meaning in the Margins

Reflections on Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday

By Sam Gutierrez

In 1543, Nicolaus Copernicus articulated a radical theory: Earth revolves around the sun, not the other way around. His idea wasn't new, but breakthroughs in mathematics allowed him to prove without a doubt that Earth was not the center of the universe.

In 1924, Edwin Hubble peered into the darkness of space from a telescope at the Mount Wilson Observatory near Los Angeles. He focused his attention on a mysterious milky haze called a

nebula. He identified particular stars in the cloudy substance that helped him accurately measure their distance from Earth. To his surprise, they were at such a great distance that he was forced to conclude that the stars belonged to an entirely different galaxy. Because of his discovery, the Andromeda Nebula was reclassified and renamed to be the Andromeda Galaxy, and the total known galaxy count rose from one to two. Since then, the space telescope bearing Hubble's name has helped astronomers discover a staggering 100 billion galaxies.

In 1543, Copernicus knocked humanity off its pedestal at the center of the universe.

In 1924, Hubble relegated humanity to the margins.

In the past 100 years, the discoveries have come frequently and fast—one humbling revelation after another.

The writer of Ecclesiastes knew nothing about space telescopes or galaxies but seemed to also be wrestling with the meaning of a life lived in the margins:

Life is fleeting, like a passing mist. *It is like trying to catch hold of a breath*; all vanishes like a vapor; everything is a great vanity. What good does it do anyone to work so hard *again and again*, sun up to sundown? *All his labor to gain but a little*? One generation comes, another goes; but the earth continues to remain (Eccles. 1:1-4, *The Voice Bible*).

If the writer of Ecclesiastes wrestled with the meaning of a life that is like a vanishing vapor, how much more do we feel the crushing weight of living a vapor-like life against the backdrop of a universe that is 13.8 billion years old?

Denial and Despair

This month, many churches around the world will mark the beginning of Lent with an Ash Wednesday service. During this unique service, a mosaic of humanity will shuffle forward to receive the imposition of ashes on the forehead while these sobering words from Genesis 3:19 are spoken: “For dust you are and to dust you will return.”

These are hard words to swallow. The reality of our here-today, gone-tomorrow “dustness” can easily lead to despair. Knowing that everything we do and say will scatter and be forgotten can make us swing between two extremes: denial and despair.

In denial, we spend much of our lives unconsciously trying to overcome our “dustness” through work, academic success, the accumulation of things, or having children. In all of this and more, we attempt to do something that will endure, something “important” that will help us claw our way from obscurity in the margins to significance at the center. But it doesn’t work. No matter how hard we try, we simply don’t want to (or aren’t able to)

In 1543,
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knocked
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the universe.

believe the truth that we are beings made of dust.

Swinging the other way, we find ourselves waist-deep in despair. Rather than living with constant anxiety, we drift through life in a depressive state. Living our dust-filled lives in the margins makes us want to give up before we even begin. Nothing seems to matter. The words of Ecclesiastes sink deep into our bones: “Everything is a great vanity.” Sigh.

The Hope of Christ

But Scripture directs us toward an entirely different response. In fact, the secret to a meaningful and significant life lived in the margins of the universe can be deciphered in the dust of Ash Wednesday. The mark made on the forehead is not an ill-defined smudge, but an intersection of vertical and horizontal lines—a symbol of the power of the cross.

Christ descended into the margins, became dust, and died for us.

We are *beloved* dust.

That changes everything.

God’s love reaches to the furthest corners of the universe so that we might know that there is meaning in the margins. The dusty cross made on the forehead on Ash Wednesday gives way to an empty tomb on Easter Sunday, when Christ rose from the ground with a new, incorruptible body. God’s love and Earth’s dust mix in such a powerful way that Genesis 3:19 doesn’t get the final word on humanity’s place in the universe. Because of Jesus, “for dust you are and to dust you will return” gets an addendum:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

In 1543, Copernicus proved that the earth is not the center of the universe. After Hubble’s discovery in 1924, humanity has been wondering if Earth is the center of anywhere.

As science advances and more powerful technologies are deployed, the discoveries will continue. With every new discovery, humanity gets another dose of humility, which can easily lead to denial or despair. The good news of Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday points us to a place where we can find meaning in the margins and where Earth is and always has been firmly at the true center: God’s heart. **B**



Sam Gutierrez is the associate director of the Eugene Peterson Center for Christian Imagination at Western Theological Seminary. More of his creative work can be found at printandpoem.com.

BIG QUESTIONS

Church Life

I tried to send a message to synod, but was turned away. How can I communicate my views to synod?

Synod is an annual ecclesiastical assembly of officebearers that deliberates and decides matters for the Christian Reformed Church and seeks to discern how Christ is leading the denomination, so there are rules for how synod receives information and communications. No one can simply write a letter to synod unless they have standing to do so and have followed the prescribed procedures for submitting material for synod's agenda. Detailed rules for how its agenda is gathered are provided in *Rules for Synodical Procedure*, which can be found at crcna.org/synodresources.

Four categories of materials legally before synod include reports, communications and overtures, appeals, and gravamina.

Most of synod's agenda includes reports from the Council of Delegates on behalf of the agencies, educational institutions, and offices of the CRCNA. Reports also come from standing committees of synod (such as candidacy, historical, and ecumenical and interfaith relations), as well as from study committees appointed by synod for particular matters.

The next part of synod's agenda includes communications and overtures. Here's where you can contribute! Any CRCNA church member can submit a communication or overture, but it must first go to the member's council and then to that council's classis before going to synod. If the council or classis does not adopt the communication or overture, the individual can forward it



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

to synod, but only if they have already submitted it to their council and classis.

What's the difference between a communication and an overture? A communication gives information and opinions to synod, but does not seek an action by synod in response. An overture is a formal written proposal "requesting adoption or amendment of a policy or other legislative action by the assembly" (*Rules*, p. 9). Overtures require a response, so synod has to decide whether to accede to an overture's request or to do something else and declare that action its response to the overture.

Appeals and gravamina are less common but provide ways for individuals or councils to appeal decisions of their own councils and classes or for individuals to raise questions about the confessions and request revisions of those documents.

So you can send a message to synod—as long as you follow synod's rules!

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.

Bible/Doctrine

Assuming God did predestine only a select few to be saved, why would he bother creating people he did not elect for salvation?

"Only a select few" is not the doctrine of election. Scripture speaks of "a great

multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). The question of how many will be saved is not a question on our desk. Surely only God can be trusted with such questions (Luke 13:23-30).

But although it is unwise to speculate on the logistics of election, it can be valuable to think about the logic of election. The doctrine of election is not meant to provoke questions about who is chosen, how many will be chosen, or whether a particular person is chosen. It is to amaze us with the "depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Rom. 11:33).

Indeed, the testimony of Scripture humbles us because God's love is consistently surprising, reversing human patterns of exclusion. God passes over the powerful (Pharaoh was hardened) and gives preference to the poor (Israel was shown mercy). God chooses the youngest, the weakest, the far-off, the forgotten. Election should lead to amazement. As theologian Karl Barth once put it, it is the one thing no one can boast about.

In Deuteronomy, God tells Israel, "It was not because you were greater than all other people that the LORD loved you and chose you. ... No, it is because the LORD loved you" (Deut. 7:7-8, CEB). That's the doctrine of election: the Lord loved you because the Lord loved you. Your salvation—and with it your identity, your inclusion, your belonging—does not derive from your work or will, but from the free and faithful gift of God.

This means we are secure: nothing can ever come between us and the love

of God revealed for us in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:38-39). It also means we preach the gospel “without differentiation or discrimination” (Canons of Dort II.5), with great hope that what is impossible for us is possible for God (Matt. 19:26). For salvation is not a sealed envelope on Oscar night. It is something that has been brought into the open, made accessible in Jesus Christ: “Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life” (Rev. 22:17).

We are never promised complete understanding of the ways of God, but we can know enough of God—revealed in Jesus Christ—to trust him, in life and death, for time and eternity.

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

Digital Life

I know big technology companies keep track of our every move online, but what about privacy among family members and friends online?

I answered this question a couple of years ago with a caution to perhaps not share so much online—even with family and friends. I think I thought then that privacy is an inalienable right and that it was my job to remind you all of this fact.

Recently, though, I heard an interesting story on the *This American Life* podcast that made me think that perhaps what appear to be breaches of privacy might be something else entirely.

As I recall it, the true story went something like this: A numbers-guy father asked each of his adult children to email him their GPS coordinates every night (their work required them to travel quite a bit). He would take these coordinates from all but one son who

refused to play along, put them into a spreadsheet, average the coordinates, and report back to his children the specific location at the average coordinates. That’s it. The resulting location had no meaning or purpose.

But as the interview with the father and children continued, it was obvious the means were unrelated to the end. Like a loved one’s “Call me when you get there,” this dad wanted to know his children were OK and to fix in his mind a physical location where they might be. And in return, when he replied with the random location, he reminded them that he was paying attention. It was an act of love—perhaps a roundabout way of expressing that love, but love nonetheless.

So maybe when we share where we are via an app like Snapchat, we’re letting the people who love us know that we’re OK and where we were three hours ago—not quite a hug, but a mutual expression of love nonetheless.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. How do you use technology to express your love? Tell him at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

Vocation

Working in an animal hospital seemed like an obvious choice for my career, but a year into vet school, I feel I need to switch to something else. How do I tell friends and family I’ve been wrong?

Choosing to change course can be difficult, and it requires wisdom and courage. It can be hard to let go of your dreams and the career to which you believed God had called you. Your friends and family, because they love you and know your love for animals, might struggle to understand.

It’s helpful to be able to reassure others that you’ve explored different options. Before deciding to quit, it’s wise to talk with your peers and those leading your program. They might suggest taking a break from the program to get work experience or to spend time thinking through your decision. They also might help you determine whether there’s another area in the field that might be a better fit for you. As you have already invested a lot in training, it would be nice if you could use some of that training in a different position. Yet you shouldn’t continue your program simply because of the money you’ve already spent on tuition. It would not be wise to continue investing in a career to which you no longer believe God is calling you.

Those who care about you will want to understand why you’ve changed your mind. It will be hard to talk with them, as you’ll need to acknowledge that you were wrong, defend your decision, and/or share about your struggle and the heartbreaking aspects of this work. It helps if you approach the conversations with prayer. If you can, talk first to those who understand your situation better and then ask for their advice and prayers.

Hopefully you have a sense of where God is inviting you next, but it can be that it’s not yet clear what that is. Prayers for wisdom, continued conversations with friends and family, and trying out new things are all ways to discern what God is inviting you into next.

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



Got a Big Question for any of our panelists? Email it to editorial@thebanner.org with “Big Questions” in the subject line.

Generosity Challenge Leads to Housing Purchase, Well Development

NEWS

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Know of a noteworthy event or accomplishment in the life of a CRC member? Have details about an interesting ministry in a CRC congregation? Send your news tip to news@TheBanner.org.

A sermon series on generosity at Ivanrest Christian Reformed Church in Grandville, Mich., was the impetus for a church-wide giving campaign last fall.

The congregation raised almost \$83,000 between Sept. 1 and Nov. 30—far above the \$60,000 goal of its “Generosity Near and Far” campaign.

“At the end of the series (Pastor Brandon Haan) challenged our members to submit ideas for ways to be generous,” said Lynn Vanoostveen, a deacon at Ivanrest. “He encouraged them to dream big, and they did.”

From the suggestions a team chose two projects supporting organizations that Ivanrest members were already close to: \$25,000 to purchase and outfit a modular home with Family Promise of Grand Rapids, and \$30,000 to drill a new well with Kenya Hope. The last \$5,000 of the campaign’s target amount was reserved for unforeseen project expenses. The fundraising team is deciding how to spend the additional funds raised, again seeking suggestions from the congregation. “It’s a good problem to have,” Haan said.

Both Family Promise and Kenya Hope “have a connection to Ivanrest’s heart,” Vanoostveen said. “We have been involved with Family Promise for many years (serving as temporary housing for Family Promise clients without permanent homes) and chose them as our ‘near’ organization. One of our (congregation’s) families has been involved with Kenya Hope, and we had done some smaller supportive things for them previously, so they became our ‘far’ organization. We



Photo courtesy Kenya Hope

About half of the funds gathered from Ivanrest CRC’s generosity project will support a well-drilling project with Kenya Hope.

brought in speakers from these organizations to share their hearts and to bring the congregation into our hopes and dreams.”

The funds raised include two separate matching donations of \$10,000 from members of the congregation for hitting certain fundraising goals.

“The congregation at Ivanrest has responded really positively to the challenge,” Haan said. “People have caught the vision for what we’re trying to do, and they’ve jumped on board.”

Among the fundraisers the congregation held included a trivia night, soup supper, coin war, pie sale, and can drive. “These were fun and got us in the spirit of giving, but the real blessing was the response of our congregation members,” Vanoostveen said. “They opened their hearts and gave so generously.”

—Greg Chandler

Pastor's Presence in Riverbank Encampments an 'Absolute Miracle'

On a chilly Tuesday afternoon in late November, Pastor Kevin Van Wyhe drove his vehicle down a rutted, muddy two-track road, hauling a trailer filled with items to pass out to people living in a camp near the Grand River in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Van Wyhe, youth pastor of Heritage Christian Reformed Church in suburban Byron Center, has been working with people living in several encampments scattered along the river since early summer.

To his surprise and delight, it has become a busy ministry.

"My goal is to build relationships and walk alongside people and share the gospel," said Van Wyhe, whose wife, Kristy, rode with him to the camp.

"When I first started coming to the camps," Van Wyhe said, "they thought I was an undercover cop. Then when I kept coming, they thought I might be an undercover social worker. But then when I took a couple people to church, they realized I was a pastor."

Van Wyhe's trailer is filled with tarps, bicycles, propane heaters, and other items he has found or that have been donated by people from across West Michigan after his story was aired on a local TV station.

As his ministry has grown, his repeat visits have not gone unnoticed.

Amanda, a slender blond woman who accepted a bicycle, gloves, and hand warmers from the Van Wyhes, said, "These people are amazing. They really care about us. We've had people who might show up once or twice to give us blankets, but they never come back."

The Van Wyhes are doing their best to sustain those often forgotten by mainstream society for the hard weather of winter. Kevin also spends time sitting with folks, listening to their stories, and slowly but surely offering them the hope



Photo by Kristy Van Wyhe

Pastor Kevin Van Wyhe has collected useful items such as blankets, tarps, and sleeping bags to share with his friends by the river.

of the gospel. About a half dozen of those he calls "my friends by the river" are now regular attendees at Heritage CRC.

One of them, a man called Dragon, climbed out of his tent, greeted the Van Wyhes, and came over to talk. He said he came to Grand Rapids a couple of years ago from a small town to enter a substance abuse program, but he couldn't get in and ultimately became homeless.

When he first met Kevin Van Wyhe, he was astounded that a pastor wanted to spend time talking to and getting to know him.

"He has been an absolute miracle in my life," said Dragon, a tall man with a rugged, wind-burned face. "He has come to understand us. He is willing to care and be here with us."

Dealing with mental illness, substance abuse, or other challenges, those without shelter so often feel forgotten by the

Lord, said Van Wyhe, who has spoken about homelessness to youth groups and taken them to visit shelters or even sleep outdoors over the years. But he has never gotten as personally involved as he is now.

"The Lord is surely transforming these people who truly are the 'least of these' (the hungry, stranger, sick, and imprisoned of whom Jesus speaks in Matt. 25:40)," he said. "They are my friends, and I love them."

Van Wyhe hopes more of his friends by the river will visit his church, where he already sees relationships growing. Invited by Van Wyhe, they feel welcomed by church members who in turn have the chance to open their hearts to those who, until now, might have seen but never known.

—Chris Meehan

Noteworthy



Facebook photo

Jenny McAlister (left) with Member of the Legislative Assembly Marlin Schmidt.

Three Christian Reformed Church members in western Canada received **Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee medals** in recognition of their contributions to their communities. Nominated by members of their provinces' legislative assemblies, **Jenny McAlister**, a registered psychologist in Edmonton, Alta., and a member of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church, and **Bert Adema**, a



Photo by Bert Adema/Facebook

From left, Member of the Legislative Assembly Meara Conway, Bert Adema, and Ruth Adema.

commissioned pastor in the CRC and the executive director of Indigenous Christian Fellowship in Regina, Sask., were presented with the honors in November and December. McAlister was recognized for her service to the Strathearn Community League and for founding the Strathearn Art Walk, a free, family-friendly art and music festival.

Adema was nominated for his service to the North Central and Regina community and his work toward truth and reconciliation. **Jerry Bouma**, a past governor on the board of The King's University in Edmonton, Alta., also received a medal



Jerry Bouma

in December. The founding partner of a specialized agri-food management consulting firm, and Honorary Consul, Kingdom of the Netherlands for northern Alberta, was nominated by Joan Currie, a business colleague. Currie cited Bouma's many worthy accomplishments as reasons for the honor, including "for a lifetime of distinguished commitment and service to the advancement of Alberta's agri-food sector."

Several **political candidates with ties to the Christian Reformed Church have begun serving in elected offices** after winning state and federal elections in November. **Hillary Scholten**, a CRC member from Grand Rapids, Mich., took **Michigan's 3rd Congressional District seat**. **Bill Huizenga**, from Zeeland, Mich., was re-elected for a seventh term **representing Michigan's 4th Congressional District**. **Randy Feenstra**, a CRC member in Hull, Iowa, was re-elected to a second term representing **Iowa's 4th Congressional District**. **Mark Huizenga**, a CRC member in Grand Rapids, Mich., and **Roger Victory** of Hudsonville, Mich., **were re-elected to the Michigan State Senate**—Huizenga to the 30th District seat, and Victory to the 31st District seat. (For more details on the candidates, see the story "CRC Members Elected to State and Federal Positions" online.)



Photo courtesy of DAKS Dominos

Competitors Derek Koops, Lyle Broughton, and Alex Koops were 2022 champions of the Fox network series *Domino Masters*.

Brothers **Alex and Derek Koops**, members of Faith CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, are **world-record holders in domino building** and became champions along with teammate Lyle Broughton of Massachusetts, of the Fox network show *Domino Masters* in 2022. On April 2, the brothers and seven other builders were recognized by Guinness World Records for constructing the longest domino wall—169 feet, 7 inches (51.7 meters).

CRC's Prayer Focus Continues, Seeking to Be a 'Praying Church'



Photo by Marty Clemens

Cindy Verbeek works in British Columbia's Upper Bulkley River as part of a restoration project.

Cindy Verbeek, Northern British Columbia project coordinator for A Rocha Canada, an international Christian organization that promotes environmental education and conservation, **accepted a \$105,000 grant for the Buck Creek Canfor Hatchery and Nature Centre** in Houston, B.C., in October. Verbeek is a member of the Telkwa (B.C.) Christian Reformed Church, where she serves as a deacon. "We have wonderful opportunities to partner beyond our community to do conservation and restoration research and work," Verbeek said. "At a time when many things might divide us in this world, our communities are able to speak a common language when it comes to the preservation of watersheds for our salmon. It really is a huge connection point."

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Leading up to Synod 2022, when the Christian Reformed Church expected a weighty agenda and uncertainty around the implications of recommendations in the human sexuality report, the denomination appointed Jon Hoekema to be a prayer shepherd and launched a year of focused prayer. Since Synod 2022, the prayer shepherd's role has expanded, and many of the prayer initiatives of last year continue.

Hoekema said the thrust of his work at the moment is continuing the regular times of prayer with denominational staff, senior denominational leadership, and representatives of three regional groups of churches (classes) and connecting with and encouraging people who are engaged in prayer and leading prayer circles or prayer ministries throughout the CRC. Hoekema described encouraging a culture of prayer that focuses "on being a praying church rather than a church that prays."

One of those people is Jolene DeHeer, classis prayer coordinator for Classis Grand Rapids South, who says she is "passionate about the gift I have been given" to serve in that role. DeHeer writes a monthly prayer blog for the classis website, *One Faith Many Faces*, whose installments have been reposted on *The Network*, the CRC's ministry resource-sharing platform. In encouraging the culture of a praying church, DeHeer sees "various areas where God is working through (the) gift of prayer." She hosts a monthly meeting for the prayer coordinators of the churches in her classis. "We begin by listening to God through his Word; we spend time in prayer for the churches, and (we learn) about new prayer practices, such as lectio divina (or) prayer of examen, and we then practice them together," DeHeer said. "The purpose is to help us to continue to grow in our prayer lives as we help our individual churches grow in theirs."

Mark Timmer, pastor of Third Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland, Mich., who also serves as a regional pastor in Classis Zeeland, said his own prayer life has been encouraged through coaching from Hoekema as well as learning from Daniel Henderson, a



Photo by Steven Herppich

Worship times at Synod 2022 sought to lead participants in Spirit-seeking prayer.

Michigan-based teaching pastor who equips other pastors through the ministry "Strategic Renewal." Timmer said Classis Zeeland is increasingly "learning to be marked by prayer." Borrowing Henderson's metaphor, Timmer described the change toward becoming a prayer-saturated church as "a crockpot, not a microwave oven," and he noted several things that have moved him and other pastors in the region toward that change.

He said little things have helped to make prayer part of the rhythm of life together in classis: including more of the Word and prayer, even within reports; five or six pastors gathering an hour before a classis meeting to pray; and making prayer intentional in weekly breakfast meetings of a handful of pastors. Timmer said prayer is slowly becoming "more of the fabric" in classis. During the pandemic, a group of almost all the classis pastors recorded two prayer services for their congregations to share in together, and in 2018, Timmer helped lead two classis-wide prayer gatherings at First CRC in Zeeland where 40-60 people sought God together in prayer with prompts and guidance from Scripture.

Those are the kind of denomination-wide prayer moments Hoekema is hoping to cultivate. He's planned a "prayer catalyst gathering" for this month, hosted by All Nations Church in Lake View Terrace, Calif., "with no other agenda than to seek the face of God together, to pray together, and to discern his calling."

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

A Church that Loves, Celebrating 10 Years in Arizona

The Loving Church has an aura that's not easy to categorize. It's certainly not calm or quiet. But it wouldn't be accurate to call it frantic, either. It's almost comparable to a nice, smooth cup of coffee: it soothes and energizes all at the same time. The Loving Church is a Korean-American church in Tucson, Ariz., with a sizable unhoused population (roughly 40-60% of the church). Pastor Rebecca Insuk Dunne embraces this. She sees that demographic as an opportunity rather than a burden.

Nov. 13 was a big day for Dunne and The Loving Church. They celebrated 10 years of ministry as a church and Dunne's installation as a commissioned pastor in the Ko-Am Classis of the Christian Reformed Church. Pastor Edward Yoon of Phoenix (Ariz.) Korean Presbyterian Church joined the service to preach and to lead the installation. As he ascended to the pulpit, he stirred the congregation with a loud "God is good!" that provoked an electric response of "All the time!"

After a brief sermon about giving gratitude to God in all circumstances, Yoon led the ceremony for Dunne. She affirmed her commitment to faithful teaching and pure doctrine, and she pledged to care for the church. In response, the congregation spoke in unison as they affirmed their pastor.

At the close of the service, a time of fellowship began in the church courtyard. People from another Korean-American



Photo by John Simon

Classis Ko-Am stated clerk Rev. Edward Yoon (at podium) conducts the installation ceremony for Pastor Rebecca Insuk Dunne (standing).

church, Church of the Cross from nearby Chandler, Ariz., were visiting to make dinner for everyone. They do so monthly, making a massive spread of fried rice, Korean dumplings, marinated beef, and noodles.

On the opposite end of the courtyard, a church member had a barber's chair set up and was giving free haircuts. A man stood nearby with a broom and dustpan, ready to sweep up the fallen clippings.

The sense of community, friendship, and compassion were evident in warm greetings, loud proclamations, and tight embraces. The sermon was interspersed with shouts of "Amen!" and "Yes!" And everyone sang loudly, with hands raised. At dinner, everyone—Korean, white, young, old, well-off, unhoused—sat together.

It's an atmosphere the church has nurtured since it formed in 2011 under

the care of its former pastor Amos Joung, his wife, and Dunne, then an assistant pastor. They would venture out daily to several parks around the city, meeting people living without homes, speaking with them, and providing for some of their needs. Now the church owns its own building in a midtown Tucson neighborhood. It opens several times throughout the week to distribute food and supplies and to offer showers.

The church first affiliated with the CRC in 2018. Pastor Dunne functioned as the interim pastor for several years while the previous pastor was on a long-term sabbatical. The transition was rocky at times and not without adversity. Yet she believes God has been faithful to her and her community, and she is excited to rekindle the church's connection to Classis Ko-Am. Dunne has struggled with the stories of how some faith communities have treated those without homes. Her mission is to give them a place to "come, relax, and meet the Lord"—to truly belong.

—John Simon

'The Garage' Is Open for Community in Terrace, B.C.



Sharon Bandstra at The Garage, a new community hub in Terrace, B.C.

On a Monday morning The Garage, just on the edge of Terrace, B.C., is open for its weekly food bank distribution. Folks are coming and going, catching up with each other—exactly like the community hub that members of the Terrace Christian Reformed Church envisioned it could be more than a year ago, when The Garage was still an empty, shuttered building near a low-income housing complex.

Sharon Bandstra is the community relations facilitator at Terrace CRC. In June 2021 she was among a group of women who had been meeting to wonder together how they might expand their ministry in the community. A month later the city hosted an online town hall meeting to discuss the growing number of people experiencing homelessness and the subsequent frustrations this was causing for local businesses. Bandstra and her husband, Sid, felt convicted to become part of the solution. The next three months were a journey of prayer, disappointment, frustration, and overcoming fears as they along with others identified a property that might serve the community's need.

Seeing in the garage bays and former convenience store the potential for their dreams to come true, the Bandstras purchased the building at 3504 Kalum St. in October 2021, and the Garage Team was formed—Bandstra and six others from Terrace CRC. They renovated the space, received legal approval to operate as the nonprofit The Garage Community Space Society, and are working on mission and vision statements.

Now brightly painted and well-lit, the multi-functional Garage has become home to the

Terrace churches' food bank and expanded program, Outreach Thursdays. Most recently The Garage was the dropoff for the city's Winter Warmth Drive, and it serves as an ongoing distribution site for blankets, sleeping bags, coats, and other winter items for those in need.

Debbie Shaw, a volunteer with the Terrace food bank, which has operated for more than 30 years, helped move the service to its new home at The Garage. She's also on the Garage team and has dreams for a commercial kitchen that could offer food preparation education for those using the food bank.

Joel Ringma, pastor of Terrace CRC, also serves on the Garage team. He's grateful for the church's decision to hire a community relations facilitator, seeing how Bandstra was able to point out deficits in community infrastructure and invite the church to "stand in the gap."

"This has been a powerful witness to the community but also to the organizations and on-the-ground community workers, some of whom have been wowed by the church's participation in this way," Ringma said.

Debbie Kroeker, also involved from the early planning stages, said, "At The Garage we are working to reduce the barriers that might prevent people from walking through our doors and experiencing the goodness of God through a cup of coffee. Who knows what The Garage might become, but we are trusting God to lead us to be a beacon of joy, hope, and recovery for our neighbors."

—Jenny deGroot

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Calvin Rickers

1926-2022

"A kind and humble pastor with a servant heart, John Rickers had a deep love for Jesus and for people, particularly unbelievers in our community," said a former parishioner who knew him for over 50 years. John, 96, died Dec. 1, 2022.

After finishing 11th grade in 1944, John joined the U.S. Navy during World War II. He always carried and read from the Bible, a habit that earned him the nickname "Deacon." After an honorable discharge in 1946, John studied at Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, graduating in 1955.

After ordination he pastored Noordeloos Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., then accepted a call to serve a hospitality house for service members in Norfolk, Va. Under his leadership it became a church plant and was established as Ocean View CRC in 1975. John pastored there until his retirement in 1991 and then served as an interim pastor for many churches from New York to Alaska.

John enjoyed traveling and participating in Bible study and choir. The Rickers lived in Kill Devil Hills, N.C., from 1992 to 2020 and then returned to Virginia and Ocean View CRC.

John is survived by his wife, Mildred, three children and their spouses, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Redeemer University Student's Death Affects School, Community

On Nov. 23, 2022, student Bekett Noble died on the Ancaster, Ont., campus of Redeemer University. Media reports and an email sent posthumously identify the death as a suicide. The fourth-year psychology student had just turned 34.

Noble co-founded the Genesis club, an on-campus group created in 2021 to provide support and be a nonjudgmental space for people who identify as two-spirited (an Indigenous expression for transgender), lesbian, gay, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, or allies, and other identifications related to sexual orientation and gender.

The Genesis club started after a group of students within the Christian Reformed Church community prepared an overture for the CRC synod (Overture 20 from the *Deferred Agenda for Synods 2020-2021*) responding to the denomination's human sexuality report, which Synod 2022 ultimately recommended to the churches.

"Bekett was an inspiring example of how to have meaningful, respectful and gracious relationships across differences, in ways that help to solve challenges and move forward with hope," said a Dec. 10 memorial posted on the Redeemer website.

Shannon McBride, Redeemer's communications manager, said the Redeemer community is "saddened by the tremendous loss" and that Redeemer is "focused on supporting students, faculty, and staff and has provided mental health supports." The school intends to conduct a review to understand the circumstances around Noble's death.

Noble scheduled an email to send to the board and faculty of Redeemer the morning after their death, referencing,

among other things, recent changes in Redeemer's mental health support delivery that they said left "an already struggling and helpless feeling community with nothing." McBride said Redeemer had two external providers supporting student mental health needs during the pandemic and, "as a step toward a further investment in mental health support that would see a more stable, affordable, in-house presence, Redeemer moved from partnering with two organizations to a single provider for students. Both existing providers submitted proposals on how they might support this effort. For students, the proposed model that met these goals best was Christian Counselling Centre."

In the weeks after Noble's death, Redeemer announced it was "fast-tracking mental health support initiatives and investments that were already planned or underway." The announcement included establishing a "Mental Health Task Force (that) will review the best ways to meet the growing need for mental health services and supports among university students." That includes a student advisory group to provide input to the task force, ensuring that "recommendations meet the needs of Redeemer students." The announcement said the advisory group will "include representation from a variety of students, including student government, as well as members of underrepresented groups on campus such as LGBTQ+, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color), and international students." The announcement said "gathering meaningful information from the student advisory group will be an important component" of Redeemer's plans for future action.

Megg Markettos, one of Noble's close friends, provided *The Banner* with a copy of Noble's Nov. 24 email. It includes suggestions for how Redeemer could become a more welcoming place, including providing "training for staff and faculty around trauma-informed care of

marginalized populations" and listening to queer students when they speak up.

Markettos remembers Noble as a Vancouver Canucks fan, keeper of foster kittens, and someone who was fascinated by the human body and brain. "Bekett did everything with love," Markettos said, and "was the most Christlike person I have ever had the pleasure of knowing."

In a public statement, members of the Genesis group wrote that they have been consistently meeting with university administrators and that "Redeemer's actions have acknowledged that the voices of Genesis members are important."

They concluded the statement by writing, "As a reminder, Genesis' vision, as led by Bekett, was and is to work with the university to make Redeemer a caring and compassionate Christian community."

Free Mom Hugs Southern Ontario, a group of "parents, friends, allies, and LGBTQ2S+ members who offer unconditional love and support," held a vigil Dec. 18 at Hamilton City Hall in honor of Noble, who was a member. About 200 people attended.

—Kristen Parker

Help for Suicidal Thoughts

Here are two resources:

CANADA

Call Talk Suicide Canada at 1-833-456-4566 (24/7) or text 45645 (4 p.m. to midnight ET). Residents of Québec can call 1-866-277-3553 (24/7) or visit suicide.ca.

USA

Call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988. You can also contact the Crisis Text Line (text HELLO to 741741) or visit 988lifeline.org.

Ecumenical Group's Listening Workshop Helps 'Seek a Unity That Goes Beyond Uniformity'

This article, republished under license, is a shortened version of a Dec. 15, 2022, Religion News Service article by Adelle M. Banks titled "In these polarized times, even a prayer could be up for debate."

At a workshop hosted by Christian Churches Together in November, a few dozen group members and observers devoted four and a half hours over two days to learn and practice listening exercises designed to reduce polarization. The nonprofit Resetting the Table facilitated the workshop on behalf of the ecumenical group, which includes 34 communions and Christian organizations representing 57 million American Christians. The Christian Reformed Church in North America is a member.

"The million-dollar question is how can we shift ourselves and others from the usual rigidity of how we listen across differences and how we listen in general," facilitator Eyal Rabinovitch said at the start of the second online session after a get-to-know-you gathering two days earlier. "Can we support people to move beyond their confirmation bias so that they can actually take in information, take in views and people that they might otherwise dismiss out of hand?"

In one instance, two men who had different responses to a hypothetical statement about voting—"We should automatically register all eligible citizens to vote"—spent time, in a video conferencing small group, coming to understand the side each was on.

Anthony Elenbaas, pastor of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ont., was all in, seeing the increasing barriers to voting across the U.S. as "antithetical to the founding principles of the country." (While Elenbaas pastors a church in Canada, he is an American and formerly served on the CRCNA's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee.)

Dana Wisser, a participant from an Anabaptist background, opposed the



Christian Churches Together participant group members attend a workshop conducted by Resetting the Table in November 2022.

Photo by Resetting the Table

statement, recalling how his father was interned in work camps for his conscientious objection to the draft during World War II.

They achieved what Rabinovitch called "getting to bull's-eye"—or gaining an understanding of each other's views—by stating not just what each said to the other but what they were communicating—which could be different.

Wisser told the overall group afterward that though he and Elenbaas started out on opposite extremes of the discussion question they found similarities in their overall views and "also discovered nuances of our positions that we would have completely missed if we had rushed to judgment."

Added Elenbaas in a later discussion: "It kind of sharpens both your ability to speak but also to hear."

The workshop was offered about a month after CCT's annual forum, where coming to consensus on how to word a public prayer proved difficult. Religion scholar J. Gordon Melton, who recently retired from Baylor University, was not surprised to hear of the challenges CCT has faced in determining what its representatives could agree to say jointly.

"All Christians want to fellowship with as broad a body as they can, but their lines in the sand are drawn on different issues, so as long as you don't talk about the issue I draw my line in the sand on, we're great," he said in an interview. "For different groups the issue that breaks the agreement is different. And ecumenical groups have to learn to do that."

Monica Schaap Pierce, CCT's executive director, said the workshop gave her and other leaders effective means to continue their consensus methods "in ways that are maybe not as heated and emotionally charged as they have been in the past" even as they consider using the lessons gained in personal as well as professional circles.

"Our faith leaders within CCT who were at the workshop talked about bringing these tools back to their own denominations to share either at the denominational staff level or with a church board," she said, "or just even with their family members in order to better understand one another. And to really seek a unity that goes beyond uniformity."

—Religion News Service



Investing in Emerging Leaders

By Megan Herrema, Matt Kucinski, and Amanda Greenhoe

The Bible has a lot to teach us about leadership development. While Jesus could have carried out his ministry on his own, he chose to gather people around him and pour himself into them as he did his ministry. In this way, he prepared leaders to take over ministry after his ascension. In the same way, Christians are called to nurture and prepare the way for the next generation of leaders.

Our Journey 2025, the Christian Reformed Church's ministry plan, includes four key goals (or "milestones"). Two of these are to "listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together" and to "grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome."

Together, these are an opportunity for all of us to think about leadership development among all races, ethnicities, ages, and generations. Here are two stories of how the CRCNA is working to do that.

Generation Spark Holds First Binational Gathering

Generation Spark is a joint initiative of the CRCNA and the Reformed Church in America focused on helping churches build intergenerational relationships between 16- to 24-year-olds and spiritual mentors.

Churches in the U.S. and Canada have been participating in the program since its launch in the spring of 2021. However, due to the pandemic and related border restrictions, participants in the early phases were unable to gather in person.

In October 2022, participants representing more than 15 CRC and RCA churches across North America finally had the opportunity to gather in Minneapolis, Minn., to learn and share about their experiences. Some had participated with their churches while Generation Spark was in its early development. Others had joined the most recent cohort of the program. Still others hoped to bring Generation Spark to their churches in the future. Together they learned a common language around intergenerational mentoring and explored research on young adults' engagement with faith.

A core component of the gathering was a panel of adults aged 30 and younger who shared their mentoring experiences.

"(Intergenerational mentoring) has been a huge part of me feeling like I belong in a church," said Kylie Kalmbach, a university student from Covenant CRC in Edmonton, Alta.

Emily Vander Weide is the administrative assistant in Calvin University's world languages department.

"It's meant that I know someone there, I know someone who will talk to me, I know someone I can ask questions to and help me feel that I *can* ask questions most of the time, and that I'm an adult who's allowed to be at church and have opinions about our church and our whole belief system."

Participants also addressed assumptions about mentoring that limit people from participating. "There's this language of 'a mentor does this and this and this,'" said Ruth Langkamp, the RCA's Next Generation Program Specialist who works with Generation Spark. But there's no checklist of "super-spiritual" attributes people need to be a mentor. Langkamp said the best mentors sometimes don't even know they are mentoring.

"I've been blessed to have really great mentors," Langkamp said, "but my favorite didn't know she was my mentor until I told her! I think that was one of the first times where she was like 'Oh, I'm capable of this? I've been walking alongside this young person for a couple years now; I can be a mentor.'"

Cruz Menchaca, an intern focused on outreach at Mission Church in Tucson, Ariz., said he is a huge proponent of mentoring.

"I get called a plethora of names back home because of how zealous I am about mentorship," he said. "I think I have maybe 10 to 12 mentors in my life that I see on a rotating basis. While I'm really only held accountable at my home church, being able to go out and experience a variety of people of different backgrounds and different worldviews really helps me navigate my life. I think I would just be so lost without them."

Research shows that these kinds of mentoring relationships have long-lasting effects. Young adults are three times more likely to connect with new churches after moving out of their parents' home if they have a mentor in their home church (*Renegotiating Faith*, 2019).

To help churches develop and strengthen mentoring relationships, Generation Spark offers different experiences to match each church's familiarity with mentoring. Because it's funded by a grant from Lilly Endowment, there is no cost for churches to participate. These provisions allow churches to focus on what young adults are saying: mentoring can be as simple as showing up and listening well.

"We have these questions that we're wrestling with constantly: How do we apply our faith to these questions? How do these questions live out in our lives?" Menchaca said. "And when we have people in our lives who can at least walk



Shaquille Anthony is the director of strategic partnerships at Calvin University.

with us and make us feel less lonely within ourselves with these questions, it goes such a long way.”

Calvin University Launches Leadership Development Program

“I’ve been in college 10 years straight, no break,” Shaquille Anthony recently shared in a video message for his social media followers after receiving a doctorate of education in organizational development and leadership. He then went on to encourage others to discover, develop, and share their gifts.

Serving Calvin University as director of strategic partnerships since summer 2022, Anthony still refuses to take a break from education and professional development. This academic year, he joined the inaugural cohort of a new professional development program specifically designed for underrepresented members of Calvin’s staff and faculty.

“If we could have retained (more people of color) who have ever worked at Calvin we would have a more diverse workforce today,” said Michelle Loyd-Paige, executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion and founder of the program.

This cohort opportunity, known as the Leadership Development Program for Under-represented Faculty and Staff (LDPU), launched in October 2022. Designed as a year-long program for early- to mid-career faculty and staff of color, the LDPU is intended to increase staff engagement and visibility as well as increase confidence, knowledge, and skills appropriate for current roles and other leadership opportunities.

Anthony is hopeful about the program. “I joined the cohort because I want to further develop as a leader and also connect with other diverse leaders across the institution,” he said. “I support the university’s efforts regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion with specific focus on diverse leadership. I think that this is the beginning of something that will change the landscape at Calvin for the better.”

For Emily Vander Weide, administrative assistant in the world languages department, the cohort was a natural fit. “I joined the cohort because it is an excellent opportunity to improve my leadership skills,” Vander Weide said. “Being a leader is more than a position. It is about connecting with your team and fostering an atmosphere of respect. This year, I supervise 31 student workers and work with 18 full-time and part-time faculty.”

Vander Weide brings to the cohort a breadth of education and professional development. Before she became a Calvin staff member in 2020, she graduated from a six-year law school program at San Pablo University in Arequipa, Peru, where she received certification in public management. Vander Weide’s career changed course when she and her husband started their married life together in the United States.

“I had to start from zero in a new country with a new language,” she shared. “I worked simultaneously at a medical factory and a restaurant while beginning to learn English and receiving a certificate as a community interpreter. After spending a well-deserved month-long vacation in lower South America, I applied to Calvin and accepted the position of administrative assistant shortly after.”

Vander Weide’s background is important to her role, she said, and improves her connections to those with whom she works. “Many of my student workers and faculty members are international, (and) understanding and respecting their cultures is integral to my role,” she explained. “Being able to speak Spanish has helped me to connect with people on a deeper level. That is why I think having people of different backgrounds can make an institution better.”

Through this new cohort program, which involves reading, assessment, reflection, writing, and guided conversation, participants such as Vander Weide and Anthony are supported and challenged as they grow their leadership capacity. Participants also have individual mentors who work with them to create strategic career development plans.

“The experience has been amazing so far,” Anthony said. “The talent in the room and the different perspectives show just how important it is to have diverse leadership and to amplify the voices of the next generation of leaders. I expect this program to enhance my leadership abilities but also keep me connected to diverse leadership throughout the institution.” **B**

Becoming a More Welcoming Church for First Nations People

EDMONTON, ALTA., has the second-largest Indigenous population in Canada. It also has a high concentration of Christian Reformed churches and individuals. Yet there aren't many Indigenous Christians who are part of those congregations. In fact, few Indigenous believers are part of CRC churches in North America.

Agnes Mastin, founder and director of *IndigenousChristian.org*, and Jeremiah Basuric, a pastor of mosaicHouse Church in Edmonton, say that Indigenous believers don't often attend CRCs because they don't feel welcomed. Mastin and Basuric want to change that.

With the support of a Resonate Global Mission Innovation Experiment Grant, they're working to help Canadian churches be more welcoming for First Nations individuals by creating short videos for churches to use in worship.

"A growing challenge for faith communities in our gospel witness is how to engage well in the practice of barrier-crossing friendships," said Claudia Williams, program manager of Resonate's Innovation Experiment Grant Program. "We felt this experiment could really help congregations raise their level of awareness and engagement with Indigenous neighbors."

The 24 videos (tinyurl.com/58acxwz5) teach Christians about First Nations culture and how Indigenous traditions and practices relate to the gospel. Using Indigenous narrators such as Harold Roscher, director and chaplain of the Edmonton Native Healing Center, the videos cover topics such as "Mother Earth," playing a drum in worship, and more.

"Because of colonization," Basuric said, "Western Christianity has often associated its own cultural preferences, values, and ways of being in



Harold Roscher, director and chaplain of the Edmonton Native Healing Center, explains the importance of drumming in Cree culture as part of a video series intended to educate believers so that First Nations individuals feel more welcome in churches.

and seeing the world with the gospel. They've also associated other cultures with paganism or things that are anti-gospel."

But cultures are diverse, Mastin said. There are diverse ways to worship and walk with God. One way the CRC can be more welcoming to First Nations people is to avoid associating only Western traditional values and beliefs with the gospel.


"We have to make sure that we are worshiping God, living in ceremony with the Creator, within the context of our culture, but also within the context of the teachings of Jesus," said Mastin, who is Indigenous and a member of Tse'khene Nation. "I want

to make this world a better place for First Nations people to live. I want to make Christianity a better religion, a better way of following Jesus. I want it to be more open. I want to see more of my people turn their face toward Jesus."

Any CRC church can participate in creating a more welcoming space for Indigenous neighbors by using these free video resources. The videos have been tested at mosaicHouse Church as well as other churches in the Edmonton area that have participated in the CRC ministry Hearts Exchanged.

"Although mosaicHouse has many cultures," Mastin and Basuric wrote in their grant application, "Indigenous peoples who attend comment on how they still feel excluded." They found the videos have helped.

"In increasing awareness we have heard people say things (like) 'I never knew that. I was not well aware of that, and it makes it less scary,'" Basuric and Mastin wrote.

"We were blown away by the result of this experiment and are excited to see how God will continue to use the resources being created," Williams said. 

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

The View from Here

For the Love of Leaders

I LOVE PEOPLE who start things. They are courageous, visionary, self-motivated, resilient, and entrepreneurial. These are lauded attributes in leadership books, and many of us wish we had them in greater measure. But there is a shadow side to these innovative people. Sometimes those who form (or reform) churches and institutions have a hard time sharing them with others or giving them up when the time comes to move on. That's called "founder's syndrome," and it is one of the most persistent and unhealthy dynamics in ministry.

A version of founder's syndrome lies behind our reluctance to invest in emerging leaders. Whether it's a large corporation or a small group, those of us currently in charge want to make sure it continues to be done the "right" way. And all too often, the "right" way translates into doing things *our* way.

Yet Scripture offers us a very different model of leadership: one that pushes leaders to identify, mentor, and make way for the next leader. Abraham had Isaac, Moses had Joshua, David had Solomon, Elijah had Elisha, John the Baptist had Jesus, Barnabas had Paul, and Paul had Timothy. This model also is why Moses required parents to impress the Law on their children (Deut. 6:7, 20-25). It is why Solomon communicated his proverbs to his son (Prov. 1:8). It's why Jesus chose 12 disciples to teach about his kingdom (Matt. 4:18-21).


There is no greater blessing than to have cooperated with the Spirit for the flourishing of emerging leaders.

Supporting and advocating for emerging leaders isn't easy. Sometimes the broader community pushes back against the emerging leader. Remember how Paul had to encourage Timothy to not let anyone look down on him just because he was young (1 Tim. 4:12)? Sometimes emerging leaders lack conviction and character—take, for example, the sons of Samuel, who proved unworthy to succeed their father. However, my experience has been that the single biggest roadblock to emerging leaders is when "senior leaders" resist investing time and energy in future leaders or fail to take necessary risks to help them or allow emerging leaders to arise.

Yet when we invest this time and take those risks, the payoff is usually worth it. There is no greater blessing than to have cooperated with the Spirit for the flourishing of emerging leaders. During my time in Haiti, nothing gave me more pleasure than mentoring new pastors, church planters, and missionaries.

The Christian Reformed Church has also made commitments to doing leadership well. One goal (or milestone) of our five-year denominational ministry plan is to become churches and communities who "listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together." What an exciting calling!

I, for one, look forward to seeing whom God is preparing for leadership in our congregations, classes, and denomination. And I want to point out that these emerging leaders are not just from younger generations. Throughout the CRC we have seen leadership and growth in churches and membership from ethnic minority groups. Striving to listen to the voices of new generations of CRC members will require us to make way for Latino, Korean, Southeast Asian, Black, and Indigenous leaders and leadership styles.

If we do so—if we repent of our founder's syndrome and recommit to nurturing leaders of all ages and ethnicities—we have an opportunity to become a Revelation 7:9 church made up of "every nation, tribe, people and language" as God intended. 



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

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are available at TheBanner.org.

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en TheBanner.org/spanish.

New Seminary Initiative Brings Tuition Parity for Canadians

CANADIANS PREPARING for ministry through Calvin Theological Seminary no longer face the decades-long hurdle of the exchange rate between the U.S. and Canadian dollar. At its October 2022 meeting, the CTS Board of Trustees approved a new initiative that will enable the seminary to accept tuition dollars paid by Canadian M.Div. and M.A. students in Canadian funds “at par”—a clear indication of the seminary’s commitment to the church in Canada.

CTS president Jul Medenblik called the news “an answer to prayer.” Annually, CTS awards over \$1.4 million in scholarship support to students, but Medenblik said this initiative now makes it even more affordable for Canadian students to attend CTS. Moreover, he said, “it shows the strong linkage and support we want to maintain and even grow between Calvin Theological Seminary and the church in Canada.”

Over the past five years, the exchange rate has sometimes been as high as 45% but has averaged about 30%. In recent months the rate has hovered around 35%. Such rates created a significant financial burden for Canadian students. Rachel DeJong, an M.Div. student at Calvin from Dunnville, Ont., considers parity as yet one more way she has seen the Lord provide during her ministry preparation journey.

“I think this will make a massive difference for future Canadian students,” she said.

David Vandokkumburg, an M.Div. student from Hamilton, Ont., agreed. “For my wife and me, this feels like a significant burden lifted,” he said. “Each of our careers requires masters-level studies, and so to create a solution that will reduce the total amount of debt we face is a huge relief.”



Rachel DeJong, an M.Div. student at Calvin from Dunnville, Ont., said that CTS accepting the Canadian dollar at parity with the U.S. dollar is one way God is providing for her ministry preparation journey.

Two charitable foundations in Canada financially supported the seminary board’s decision to offer parity. A previous gift from the Leder Charitable Foundation, as well as one of the final gifts to be given from the Bill Voortman Foundation, have been combined to bridge the gap between the Canadian and American currencies.

“I want especially to thank our Canadian donors who were deeply involved in developing this initiative,” Medenblik said. “It will mean so much for generations to come.”

— Shawn Brix,
Canadian Church Relations Liaison for
Calvin Theological Seminary

Take the Survey!

Have you heard? The annual CRCNA denominational survey is now open. Visit crcna.org/survey to learn more or to take the survey.

SURVEY

CRCNA

Investing in Leaders in India: Manoj's Story

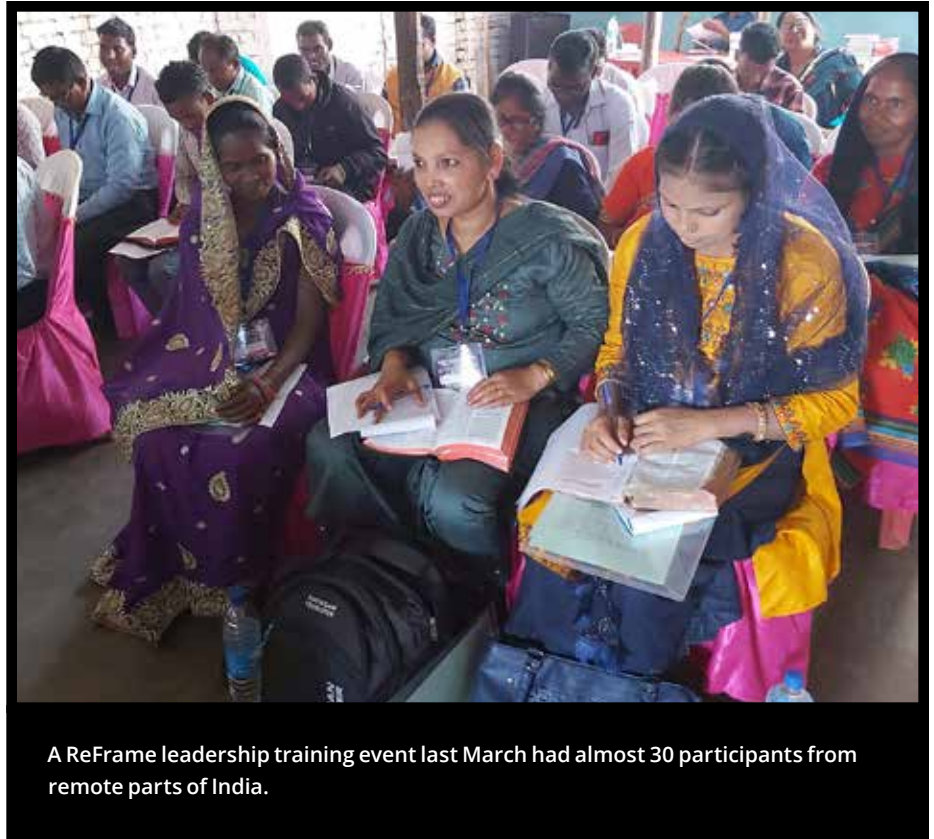
MANOJ AND HIS FAMILY were some of the only Christians in their village in India. Despite there not being a large faith community around him, ReFrame's staff in India knew that Manoj's faith was strong. Then his faith was put to the test.

Manoj has been listening to audio programs from ReFrame's Hindi ministry partners on his smartphone for years. When he heard about a leadership training event led by ReFrame's partners in March 2022 near his village, he was eager to attend.

The event was a new way for ReFrame to connect with listeners in person, focusing especially on leaders and lay pastors in remote settings.

"Manoj's village is surrounded by forest and mountains. It takes hours to reach it from the nearest city," ReFrame's partners shared. "Still, almost 30 participants from remote places such as this attended the training. All the pastors and leaders were originally from other faith traditions and had never attended this type of training before."

At the event, Manoj came away with new tools for sharing his faith, including devotionals and other literature from ReFrame's team. He was eager to share the good news with others back home. That proved to be more difficult than he expected.



A ReFrame leadership training event last March had almost 30 participants from remote parts of India.

A few weeks later, ReFrame's partner received this message from Manoj:

"Please pray for the people of my village, because they object to me sharing the Word of God and your devotionals with others," Manoj shared. "Whenever I talk to anyone in my village, people look at me with suspicion. They stop me from talking and persecute me. They do not allow my family to take water from the village hand pump. Please pray for them."

For the next several months, ReFrame's partners and Manoj continued to pray for the situation. They asked God to soften the hearts of those in his village and for the safety of Manoj's family. In July, Manoj sent another message.

"The people in my village are no longer creating problems," Manoj said. "For this, I thank God the Father and all of you too. Please keep praying for us."

Although Manoj's plans didn't go exactly as expected, he hopes to attend more events led by ReFrame in the future. He said the audio programs and encouraging messages from ReFrame's partners helped him through the difficult time that he and his family experienced. Please pray for young leaders like Manoj as they minister in difficult places.

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

Historical Tour Reboots for Racial Reconciliation

A GROUP OF 37 PEOPLE representing congregations from California, Iowa, New Mexico, and parts of Canada traveled Oct. 19-25, 2022, to the southern United States to explore racial reconciliation by visiting key sites in American civil rights history. The trip, called Sankofa, was sponsored by World Renew and supported by the office of Race Relations of the Christian Reformed Church. It paired Black Americans with non-Black travelers to learn and talk about racial injustice in community. The inaugural Sankofa happened three years ago, but COVID restrictions prevented another trip until 2022. The itinerary was slightly different, but the vision remained the same.

The diverse group visited museums and churches, listened to stories of pain and injustice, and walked through Southern streets that were the backdrop to the terror and courage of the early Civil Rights movement.

Their first stop was at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati near the Ohio River, a great physical barrier that separated the slave states of the South from the free states of the North. Next the group traveled to the National Museum of African American Music in Nashville, Tenn. It's the only museum dedicated to preserving and celebrating the many musical genres created, influenced, and inspired by Black Americans, and its collections demonstrate how music has been a means of expression and even survival for Black Americans.

Other museums and memorials the group visited included the Civil Rights Memorial of the Southern Law Poverty Center, the National Civil Rights Museum, and the Legacy Museum of the Equal Justice Initiative. They also walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala., a National



Sankofa trip participants walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Ala.

Historic Landmark that was the site of the brutal Bloody Sunday beatings of civil rights marchers during the first march for voting rights.

The group also heard from a man who participated in that Bloody Sunday march. "His descriptive story about the experience—the screams, the tear gas, and the running—that was very painful to hear," said Viviana Cornejo, a race relations educator for the CRCNA who traveled on this Sankofa journey.

The group attended a worship service at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., where in 1963 four known Ku Klux Klan members planted sticks of dynamite and set them off during a Sunday morning service. The explosion killed four girls and injured many others. This terrorist bombing marked a turning point in the Civil Rights movement and also contributed to support for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The final day of the journey, the group visited the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn., where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968. The motel was saved from foreclosure in 1982 and became America's first civil rights museum.

Those who went on the 2022 Sankofa tour said it was an incredibly rewarding, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for many to experience Black American history and explore key civil rights moments in U.S. history. Helen Powell, one of the trip organizers from World Renew, said that the trip was life-changing. "It showed me that people from various ethnicities and backgrounds are willing to do the journey (of racial reconciliation) together, to learn the truth, to reconcile, and to move forward," she said.

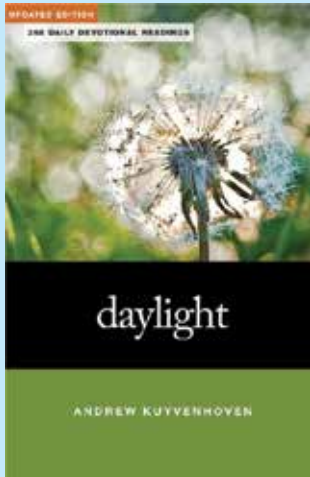
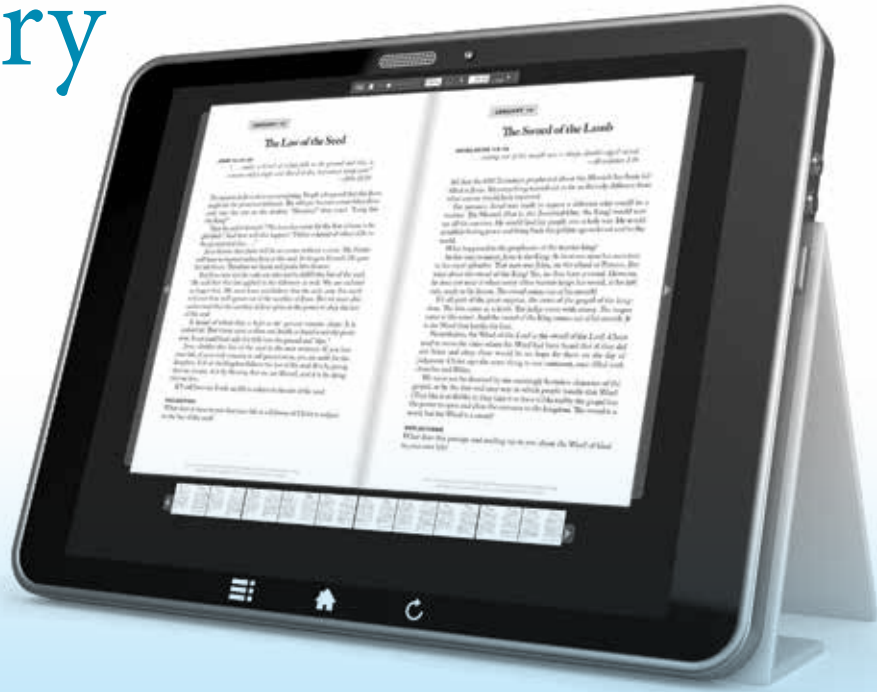
—Kevin Hoeksema

Free Devotions in the Digital Library

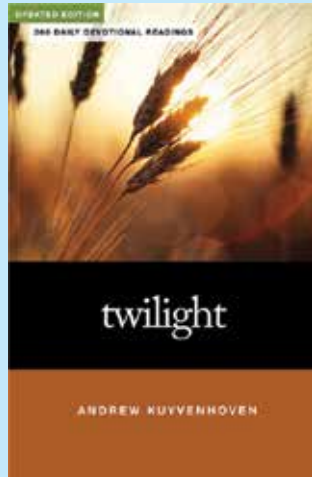
The new CRC Digital Library gives churches and members free, online access to hundreds of Faith Alive titles, including these devotional resources.

Visit crcna.org/Library

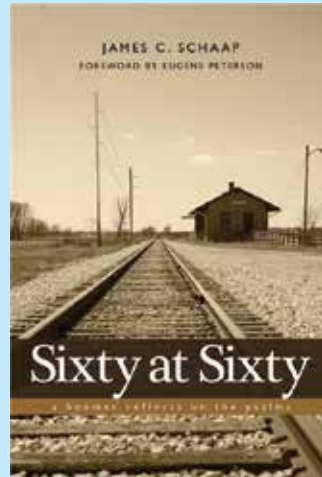
Plus, CRCs now save 15% on print editions.



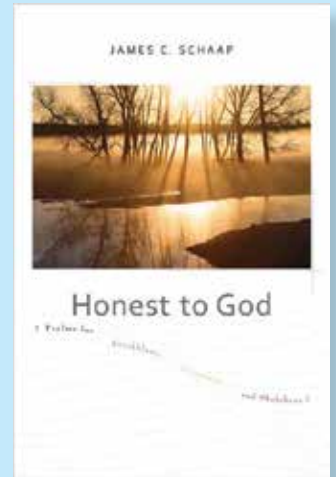
In this classic devotional book, updated with contemporary examples and questions for reflection, Kuyvenhoven uses Scripture to shed light on what it means to live in the presence and promises of God.



This updated companion to the bestselling *Daylight* devotional guide leads readers through an entire year of meaningful moments with God. Each month's meditations follow a book of the Bible or a biblical theme.



At his storytelling best, James Schaap presents a collection of 60 devotional readings based on the psalms. Written especially for his fellow "baby boomers," Schaap's meditations are a blessing for anyone looking for the hand of God in everyday life.



In this devotional guide, James C. Schaap delves deeply into the psalms, leaving space for readers to respond by journaling or drawing. *Honest to God* is an inspiring daily faith exercise—and a thoughtful gift for the creative people in your life.



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Are You Staying Warm Enough?

HAVE YOU EVER felt too hot or too cold? Either way, it's uncomfortable. But when God created heat, he also created rules for heat to follow. Without those rules, you'd be too hot or too cold all the time! So what are God's rules for heat?

First, God said heat could travel through solids. This is why when you touch the end of a spoon that has been in hot soup, it feels hot. Second, God said heat could travel upwards through the air. This is why when you hold your hand over a candle you feel the heat. Third, God said heat could travel through nothing! This is why the sun warms you up even though there is literally a whole lot of nothing—a vacuum—between the sun and the earth. And then God said the rules for heat were good!

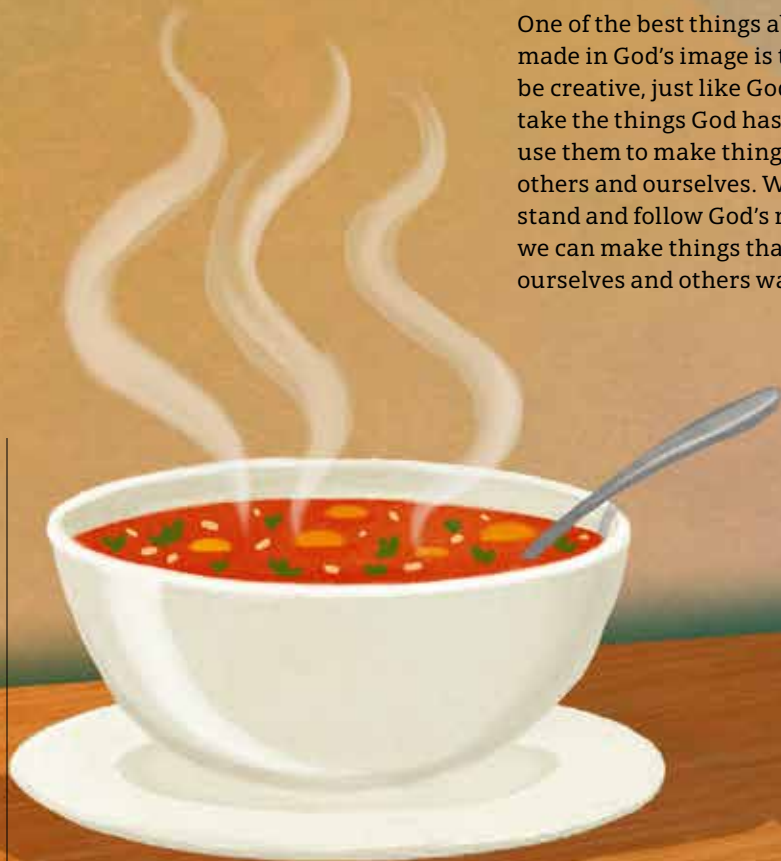
So how does knowing God's rules about heat keep you warm even on a cold day? People have used God's rules to keep themselves warm in all kinds of ways. Here are just a few examples:

- » We have created big, puffy jackets, sleeping bags, and home insulation in our walls that trap warm air and keep heat from moving away from our bodies or out of our houses.
- » People used to put heated rocks in their beds to keep them warm at night.
- » We have created furnaces that allow heat to travel upward, just as God intended, through our vents or radiators.
- » The big windows in our houses allow heat from the sun God created to travel into our homes.

One of the best things about being made in God's image is that we get to be creative, just like God! We get to take the things God has created and use them to make things that help others and ourselves. When we understand and follow God's rules for heat, we can make things that help keep ourselves and others warm. **B**



Albert Kok teaches eighth grade at Beacon Christian School in St. Catharines, Ont. He loves teaching science and exploring God's order in creation as he hikes the Bruce Trail with his family.





Understanding and Overcoming Today's Epidemic of Artificial Sex

By Mark Brouwer

“Sensuality is easily the biggest obstacle to godliness among men today, and it is wreaking havoc in the church.” Written in 2006 in the book *The Disciplines of a Godly Man*, Kent Hughes’ words turned out to be both accurate and prophetic. He wrote them before the widespread availability of smartphones and high-speed internet facilitated an explosion of pornography use and a proliferation of erotic content on social media, the internet, and TV. The challenges of the pandemic made things even worse. If sensuality was an obstacle in 2006, it’s a crisis now—and not just for men. This also is an issue for women.

Here are some 2019 statistics from the Barna Research Group and the Covenant Eyes software company:

- » Sixty-eight percent of church-going men and over 50% of pastors view porn regularly.
- » Of Christian adults 18-24 years old, 76% actively search for porn.
- » Fifty-five percent of married men and 25% of married women say they watch porn at least once a month.
- » Fifty-seven percent of pastors say porn addiction is “the most damaging issue” in their congregation.
- » There is virtually no difference in the monthly porn use of

non-Christian men versus Christian men (reported usage statistics for Christian men come in about 1% lower).

- » The largest porn site on the internet reports that 32% of its visitors worldwide in 2019 were women, according to its own analysis using Google Analytics. By 2021 that percentage had risen to 35%.
- » Sexting has become common for young people today. Researchers say at least 20% of teens and perhaps as many as 60% participate in sexting.
- » In 2019, the anti-pornography organization Freedom Fight conducted a survey of more than 1,300 Christian college students from over 30 different campuses across the country. The men and women surveyed were involved in some form of campus ministry, and they considered their faith in Christ to be very important to them. Still, 89% of the Christian men surveyed watch porn at least occasionally. Sixty-one percent view it at least weekly, and 24% percent watch porn daily or multiple times a day. More than half of these men—51%—said they were “addicted to porn.”

Note that these are pre-pandemic statistics. Just as alcohol and drug use have escalated in the past two years, so have pornography and other online

sexual compulsions. We’re still not sure exactly how much.

Also note that most of the above statistics represent self-reported porn consumption. What happens when actual computer usage data is analyzed? In 2020, Ingrid Solano, Nicholas R. Eaton, and K. Daniel O’Leary published the results of research they did using data collected by Amazon. They tracked computer usage from a randomized sample of 1,392 people in the U.S. ranging in age from 18 to 73 and noted any use of pornographic websites—written stories, pictures, or videos. They found that a staggering 91% of men and 60% of women had visited porn sites during the month-long period they analyzed.

Understanding the Unique Situation We’re In

Before we can talk about what to do about this problem, we need to be sure we really understand it. The current explosion of online and smartphone sexual activity is certainly a product of the sexual revolution, which was in turn the consequence of (a) how widespread availability of birth control transformed the role of sex in peoples’ lives and (b) the continued turning away from Christian commitment and morality in the West.

These changes can be understood to have led to an increase in

person-to-person sexual immorality, but what we're facing today is something different. Of course it is related to godlessness and immorality, but there are new factors at play that make online, artificial sex a unique issue for us to deal with.

First, today's technology facilitates the use of pornography as an artificial sex experience, a substitute for person-to-person intimacy. Sexual arousal and gratification are now available without any involvement with or connection to a real person. This is unprecedented. Some people might say that there's nothing new under the sun—that pornography and sexual material have been around since the dawn of civilization.

But they are wrong.

Today's high-definition video and audio create an immersive experience that activates the brain's mirror neurons in a way that was not possible for our ancestors looking at still paintings or cave drawings. In other words, the "technology" of drawing, painting, and sculpture were enough to stimulate sexual fantasy, but not enough to create their own artificial, substitute sexual experience. That's what our current technology now facilitates. And make no mistake, pornographers are working hard to find ways of making these artificial experiences even more immersive and multisensory.

It was one thing when birth control allowed people to have a sexual experience without the risk of pregnancy. Now our technology allows people to have sexual experiences without the "risk" of involving another person! No need to seek out a partner. No need to develop a relationship. Just take care of your own needs.

We are just beginning to understand how these artificial substitutes hijack

There are new factors at play that make online, artificial sex a unique issue for us to deal with.

our sex drive and become addictive. Pornography exposes people to near-infinite levels of sexual novelty, flooding the brain with dopamine and creating a craving for more.

Second, artificial sex is also part of a larger trend away from active engagement and toward passive consumption. We are becoming a society of spectators. In 1938, Jay Nash coined the term "spectatoritis" to describe the trend he saw of people becoming consumers and spectators rather than participants. He wrote, "The average man who has time on his hands turns out to be a spectator, a watcher of somebody else, merely because that is the easiest thing. He becomes a victim of spectatoritis—a blanket description to cover all kinds of passive amusement, an entering into the handiest activity merely to escape boredom."

In the digital era, this trend has exploded exponentially in ways even Nash couldn't have imagined. Instead of playing sports, we now watch other people play them. In fact, forget the hassle of going to games and sitting in uncomfortable stands: we can

watch sports on TV while we sit on the couch! This has led to leisure habits our ancestors would have found baffling. We now sit and watch other people bake cakes on TV. We now sit and watch people play cards on TV. And I'm not making this up: we now even watch people play tag on TV as a competitive spectator sport.

And along with everything else, now, instead of having sex with a person, we increasingly watch other people have sex on our screens.

Why Is Artificial Sex So Bad?

Artificial sex is much more damaging than people realize. It fundamentally pulls us in the wrong direction. Lust kills love. Love pulls people together, while lust keeps them apart. Lust is about fulfilling the needs of the self, devoid of personal connection.

The spiritual arrangement of sex is about bringing us together. Sex is designed by God to create life and facilitate deep intimacy between people in a marriage relationship. It's about union: uniting two people as deeply and intimately as humanly possible. In the Bible it is described as "the two becoming one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Mark 10:8). This union is so powerful and spiritual that it is used to describe the union of Christ and the church and the union of God in us through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:31).

Far from facilitating intimacy, pornography and other forms of artificial sex do the exact opposite: they train people to engage their sexuality in ways that have nothing to do with actual intimacy. In fact, the practice of artificial sex actually keeps people away from real, in-person intimacy.

This leads to a striking irony: pornography doesn't make people want real sex with a real person. It just makes them want more pornography. The

research is pretty clear—and damning—about this. Porn doesn't lead to more sex. It leads to less sex and decreasing intimacy.

Researchers in a number of developing countries are raising the alarm about the widespread decline of actual, in-person sex. This trend has become such a thing that it now has its own label: “the great sex recession.” Not only does this lead to population decline, but it signals a trend toward isolation and lack of intimacy.

But even among couples in sexual relationships, rather than bringing them together, pornography becomes a screen of fantasy and imagery that gets between them. Pornography trains people to be turned on by watching sex rather than actually having sex. Over time this has destructive consequences for pornography users and their partners. In fact, in the ultimate manifestation of porn's destructive tendency, excessive porn use leads to a syndrome known as porn-induced erectile dysfunction. Heavy porn users not only find themselves less interested in actual sex, but also may find themselves unable to do it.

What Can We Do?

Here are some ways we must address this problem.

» We must talk more openly about this elephant in the room (or in this case, in the church). We've got to stop being so squeamish about dealing with this delicate issue. No one else in our society is squeamish about it, and it's being forced into our awareness (and our kids' awareness). Yes, it can be uncomfortable to talk about something as deeply personal as sex or as shameful as sexual struggles. But the struggle with artificial sex is real, and it's everywhere in our churches.

» We must stop being ashamed of our sexual desires. We are sexual beings, we are aroused by human bodies, and we need to acknowledge that this is how God created us. Erotic material is appealing because it plays to our God-given sexual instincts. There's no need to be ashamed of this or apologize for it. What matters is the decisions we make and the steps we take to focus and control our sexual urges. It's our commitment to follow Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:12 to not let ourselves “be mastered by anything.” Shame doesn't help us in this process. It just causes us to hide, to keep our desires and actions in the dark when they need to be brought out into the light of awareness and exposure to God's grace (1 John 1:7).

» We must understand pornography as a social justice issue. In this article I haven't yet touched on the devastating way that pornography abuses people—both performers and consumers. Performers in this industry are subject to degradation, sometimes being trafficked and given drugs in order to perform. But the widespread availability of pornography is also a form of sexual abuse for the children who encounter it before they are developmentally ready.

The Human Sexuality Report adopted by Synod 2022 states that the average age that kids are exposed to pornography is 13. Keep in mind this is the average; many are being exposed at ages much younger than this. I recently interacted with a boy who reached out on an internet forum I'm a part of. Here's what he posted: “Somebody please help me! I can't stop looking at porn. I'm only 10.” He had discovered hardcore porn and now felt unable to stop, and he was fearful of talking to adults about it. His story is tragic—and tragically common.

» We must give people resources that help them learn to refocus and control their sex drives, because our culture is constantly trying to use those drives for commercial purposes. The teaching and resources we offer need to be informed by the current research about how artificial sex hijacks the reward centers of the brain to create an addiction and about how it damages our intimate relationships. We need teaching that is clear about why artificial sex is so dangerous for people's mental health, relationships, and spiritual well-being. There is plenty of research that contradicts the narrative that pornography is not that problematic and it's just that some people are hung up on their conservative views about lust. The recent crop of anti-porn thinkers and writers are not approaching the subject from a religious viewpoint at all. They are sociologists, psychologists, and neuroscientists who are pointing out how destructive it is.

We should listen to these experts and let their arguments clarify why biblical authors warned us so consistently about the dangers of our sex drive getting out of control. As Jesus said, “The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Artificial sex is stealing, killing, and destroying people and families in our churches. Let's bring gospel power and grace to bear on this issue.



Mark Brouwer (markbrouwer.com) is pastor of Bethel CRC in Princeton, Minn., where he lives with his wife, Charlene. He also leads the Renewed Man Community (renewedman.me), which focuses on intimacy, vitality, and sexual

integrity in today's artificial world. He is author of *Leaving Your Mark Without Losing Your Mind* and *Rise Above: Overcoming Discouragement in a Challenging World*.

Tell the Love of Jesus, Just as You Are

Through the decades, I have had to unlearn what was taught to me that night.



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ont.

“ARE YOU SAVED?”

I wasn't sure how to answer my friend Clare's* question. I was about 9 years old, a child raised in Ontario, Canada, then living in Seoul, Korea, where my dad worked as a missionary for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (now World Renew).

In Ontario, I had been blissfully unaware of different denominational loyalties, theologies, terminologies, and strategies for witnessing. I knew my parents were Christians and that I was God's child. On Sundays, my family joined our CRC congregation to worship the Lord and sing songs from the blue *Psalter Hymnal*—“Just as I Am, Without One Plea,” “I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace,” “I Sought the Lord, and Afterward I Knew,” and many more songs of grace, mercy, and power that permeated my heart.

But “saved” wasn't a word my parents bandied around, at least not in the way I thought Clare meant it. I “saved” coins in my piggy bank. I “saved” a seat for my friend on the bus. My mom “saved” butter wrappers to grease cookie sheets. But, me? Saved? I'm not sure, but I think I answered yes because it seemed to be the response Clare expected. Whatever my response, Clare and I became friends.

I was invited to Clare's home. That sounded like fun to me! But I couldn't have been more mistaken. Another guest, a man whom I now assume was an evangelist, started to talk about witnessing for Christ. There was an urgency to his presentation, but looking back, I understand that his speech wasn't framed in reliance on the power of the triune God, but depended on manipulation, fearmongering, and self-reliance. He asked us to think about the vast number of people who hadn't yet heard the gospel: “Just imagine if all the people in China were to walk through this living room and

you were to tell them about Jesus. You would never reach all of them in your lifetime because there are so many people who still need to hear.”

When I remember that scene, I think: Really? Really! *That's* how you teach a child to share the joy of Jesus?

Afterward, fear took root in me; I thought it was up to me to make people Christians—that I was responsible for their salvation. And I was only a kid!

Through the decades, I have had to unlearn what was taught to me that night: the fear, the responsibility that is not mine to claim, and the sense that I need to fix things that are beyond my control.

The songs of my childhood proved a reliable framework for the unlearning I engaged in. The truths I found in “Just as I Am, Without One Plea,” “I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace,” and “I Sought the Lord, and Afterward I Knew” continue to put my focus on the gospel's invitation to grace and restoration for me and others. I was dead in my sins; Christ made me alive. Others are dead in their sins; only Christ can make them alive. I can't do it for them. You can't do it for them.

But there is something we can do. The African American spiritual “There Is a Balm in Gilead” speaks truth: “If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus and say, ‘He died for all!’” (*Lift Up Your Hearts*, # 706). Tell the love of Jesus—just as you are without one plea, not knowing why God's wondrous grace was made known to you, and comforted in the knowledge that when you sought the Lord, it was God who moved you to seek him. B

*Clare is a fictional name for purposes of confidentiality.

Surprised by Love—Again!

There are almost
no words for
that gift of
companionship.



Ray Vander Weele, Ph.D., of Grand Rapids, Mich., is a retired professor, business consultant, author, and financial adviser. He is a member of Shawnee Park CRC.

SOME OF YOU MIGHT remember the 1970 movie *Love Story* and its famous line “Love means never having to say you’re sorry.” But here’s another meaning of love: bending down on a wobbly knee at the age of 80 and asking for a woman’s hand in marriage—and then trying to get back up again!

What I’m describing is a moment I never could see coming. When I married my first wife, the former Phyllis Ten Pas, I couldn’t imagine ever being betrothed to another, let alone someone with the first name of Phyllis whose middle initial also was “M.” Yet nobody but God knows the future. When I married my first wife in the spring of 1957, I had eyes only for her, of course. That continued until her death only two months short of 60 years later, in February 2017, when I lost her after a decade-long fight with the unspeakable ravages of Alzheimer’s disease. We had an incredible life together, and then for 10 years, in ways both tender and horrible, I watched her slip away until our Lord finally, mercifully took her into the palm of his hand.

This story is about second chances. Phyllis Palazzolo helped me understand that my own life wasn’t over and that my once-hardened heart could be reversed. For that and so much more, I’ll always thank God. And it’s with that mindset that I went to one knee while on a European river cruise during the summer of 2017.

She’d been a widow nearly two years when I saw her out walking one evening and invited her in for some leftovers. She agreed, and immediately I got nervous. I started to wonder—had I just asked her out on a date? (This is the time I’m sure lots of widows and widowers become reluctant to “start something.”)

We started out talking about things connected to our condo association, but the conversation moved to my asking how she was handling her husband’s death. She said she couldn’t sleep at night. Then she asked me questions as well, and they were the right kinds of questions. I wasn’t used to talking about myself or my feelings.

I distinctly remember that both of us were feeling somewhat guilty about this. We’d both had successful marriages and had collectively enjoyed nearly 120 years of togetherness with our first partners. But for me, it had been only a few months since my wife died, and I felt like I had to hide the fact that Phyllis Palazzolo and I eventually saw more of each other.

In the beginning, we were afraid of what people—especially our children—would think, so we largely hid our relationship from public view. What they didn’t realize was that I had begun grieving for my wife nearly 10 years earlier, and the grief grew more and more oppressive as time wore on.

Over time, we introduced one another to our children, a situation I will say was tougher on my children than on hers. For mine, it was too soon for me to be involved with someone else, and while I respected their position, with prayer I chose to proceed. I’m convinced that we were able to resolve that because my love for them never wavered and never will. They just didn’t understand my emotional needs at the time. On the surface I’m sure I exuded strength, and they’d seen that facade when I was going through other tough times in life. Isn’t that the face the older generation portrays?

In 2017, Phyllis and I went on that cruise on the Rhine and Danube rivers, and on Aug. 1, I proposed even though I didn’t have a ring to present to her. I did arrange for some flowers,



Photo by Vidar Nordli Mathisen/Unsplash

though. I knew the whole time that we would be breaking a lot of taboos. Not only was I acting too swiftly in some people's eyes, but here we were, a Protestant and a Catholic, a Polish-Italian and a Dutchman, intent on making the best of it.


We were married Nov. 25, 2017, in a ceremony co-celebrated by a minister and a priest. Both reminded us that we had just celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, and that our Lord intended us to be able to work together even if we came from different faith walks. So even as we stood there, both of us 80 years old, we felt as if we were breaking new ground. It was a very special day.

Our theme for the day and since then has been from Paul's letter to the Galatians: "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). We try to hold each other accountable for each of these from time to time. It works, and we're better mates for it.

Our worship includes the best of our religious traditions, and we have no issues with that. She has made me a better, more loving Christian, and I'm confident it works the other way too. We speak of our faiths and traditions more than most people our age likely do. We attend Mass on Saturdays and Shawnee Park Christian Reformed Church on Sundays. My congregation has warmly embraced her as well.

What's interesting to both of us is how we can freely and lovingly talk with each other about our families and the relationships we had with our former spouses and still have with God. Widows and widowers we know tell us they don't get to do this, for no one else seems interested in talking about deceased spouses. We seem to be an inspiration to many for a variety of reasons—or so they tell us!

Once a commitment to each other is made, the rest is easy. The finances, the legal work, the housing, and other seemingly insurmountable issues seem to fall into place. It is likely fear that inhibits many from looking for companionship and love again. But we know God put us together for a reason. Comfort replaces fear.

We were both active after losing our spouses, for grief has a way of filling our lives in other ways. I believe neither of us comprehended in the moment how important it could be to embrace another again and not feel guilty about it. There are almost no words for that gift of companionship. And studies are beginning to illustrate that while diet, exercise, and genetics go a long way toward telegraphing how long and how well you'll live, belonging to another is emerging as just as important. We think our children now understand just how vital it is to be connected to other human beings, no matter how old you are or where your journey has taken you. I now have a wonderful caregiver, one with experience, compassion, and love. And she has me. This bond is much needed as our health begins to fade, operations happen, and companions are included in discussions with doctors. We've been blessed! 

Note: A version of this story appears in the author's book, Stones That Speak.

The Trailblazing History of Black Filmmaking

DID YOU KNOW the Black action film *Shaft* saved the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio from bankruptcy? Or that Black films were the first to release soundtracks as a promotional tease? Or that the white producers of *The Wiz* went broke despite the star power of Diana Ross and Michael Jackson? I didn't know any of that until I watched the Netflix documentary *Is That Black Enough for You?!?*, a film produced by Academy Award-winning directors Steven Soderbergh and David Flincher and directed by Black film critic Elvis Mitchell.

Mitchell takes the viewer on a historical tour of Black filmmaking, starting with the works of Oscar Micheaux, who began making Black films in the early 20th century. Micheaux produced and directed 44 films that showcased Black life and actors in the post-Civil War era when Black emancipation was perceived as a threat.

The other early defining film about Black life was David O. Selznick's 1939 Best Picture winner *Gone with the Wind*, which centered white Americans in its narrative of the Civil War.

Even during that epoch of the late 1930s, however, Black filmmakers were toiling in their craft to bring to the big screen the complex and nuanced lives of Black people who lived with dignity, lament, and joy. For me, it was important to note that Black filmmaking started long before I was born.

In the 1970s, Mitchell said, "for the first time I got to see films of assured Blackness, from *Friday Foster* to *Five on the Black Hand Side*, as a burst of freedom." Black filmmakers in the 1970s sought to tell Black stories from Black experiences without the majority

culture's critique or approval. I am thankful they took that risk.

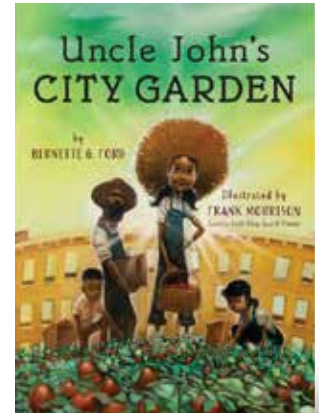
The documentary held some surprises for me. Award-winning actor Sidney Poitier, I learned, chose to direct westerns and comedies to expand Black possibilities in Hollywood. Harry Belafonte, trained at the prestigious Dramatic Workshop of The New School in New York City alongside Marlon Brando, Tony Curtis, and Walter Matthau, stopped acting in America for 12 years before coming back and producing and directing his own films. (According to Belafonte, traditional directors didn't believe white audiences were interested in complex Black life.) And I found out that 1972 was the breakthrough year for Black movies, including *Southern* and *Lady Sings the Blues*, that were prophetic box-office hits.

There would not be Spike Lee, Jordan Peele, Ava DuVernay, or Attica Locke without these trailblazing films and their directors, producers, and actors who stopped waiting for white Hollywood to knock on their doors.

This film has some nudity and profanity, but it's a substantial, polished documentary that sees American filmmaking through a Black lens. *Is That Black Enough for You?!?* is worth a look. **B**



Reginald Smith is the director of diversity for the Christian Reformed Church. He attends Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Uncle John's City Garden

By Bernette G. Ford, illustrated by Frank Morrison

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Li'l Sissy, the youngest child in her family, is bursting with enthusiasm and curiosity as she and Brother and Sister help Uncle John in his unique garden. Situated on an excavated city lot between tall buildings in the projects in Brooklyn, N.Y., it's dubbed "the garden" by the community before any garden even exists. But that changes when Uncle John's hard work combines with the efforts of the three children—digging, raking, planting, watering, and weeding—to patiently nurture seedlings into mature plants. In this playful children's picture book, illustrator Frank Morrison's delightful pictures combine with author Bernette Ford's buoyant narrative to celebrate the wonder of nurturing a garden in an unlikely place and the life-giving outcomes of sharing, caring, and community. (Holiday House)



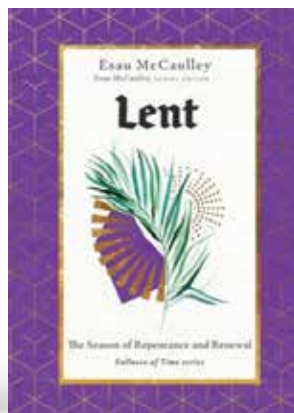
MKBHD (YouTube)

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

When Marques Keith Brownlee—High Definition (MKBHD) posted his first YouTube video in 2009, he was 14 years old.

Thirteen years later, Brownlee is one of the most popular technology reviewers on YouTube, with an astounding 16 million subscribers. Major tech executives, including Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and the CEOs of Google, Apple, and Microsoft, tap into Brownlee's channel so they can speak to his audience about their latest gadgets and innovations.

YouTube is a place where many creative young people carve out niches for themselves. MKBHD is one of them, a trusted expert on anything having to do with the technology industry and its culture-shaping products.



Lent: The Season of Repentance and Renewal

By *Esau McCaulley*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Biblical scholar Esau McCaulley's accessible guide to the season of Lent is the first book in the *Fullness of Time* series—six short books on the seasons and key events of the church year, including Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.

Raised in the Primitive Baptist Church, McCaulley didn't encounter the liturgical practices associated with church seasons until he was a young adult. He effectively combines anecdotes about his spiritual growth through embracing Lenten disciplines with explanations about the history of Lent and how it is practiced today. He repeatedly shows that the season of Lent is not about burdensome rules or ways to earn God's merit—an impossibility!—but “a gift of the collected wisdom of the church universal.” (IVP)



Alaska Daily

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Alaska Daily boasts a setting wildly different from the big-city streets usually featured in films about newspaper reporters and manages to make Anchorage seem like a remote village. Here local journalists pursue stories as small as who won the biggest cabbage at the state fair, but they also chronicle issues as massive as the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The show, starring Hilary Swank, was created by Tom McCarthy, who directed and cowrote the now-classic journalism movie *Spotlight* (2015). He was inspired by investigative articles in the real-life *Anchorage Daily News*.

The show underscores the importance of local journalism as it highlights the systemic injustice of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The show has little offensive language and only mild content in terms of violence and sex. (Rated TV-14, ABC, Hulu)

The Lowdown

These Songs We Sing:

Carla Klassen, a piano teacher, accompanist, professional chorister, and church musician, explores why timeless hymns resonate so deeply in our individual and collective souls. (Pandora Press)

An Influential Voice for Democracy:

In the documentary *Becoming Frederick Douglass*, Oscar-nominated filmmaker Stanley Nelson explores the role Douglass played in securing the right to freedom for Black Americans. (Amazon Prime)

Don't Watch on an

Airplane: Based on the poignant book by Ann Napolitano, *Dear Edward* tells the story of Edward Adler, a 12-year-old boy who is the lone survivor of a devastating commercial plane crash. Starring Connie Britton and Taylor Schilling, with newcomer Colin O'Brien as Edward. (Apple TV+)

Read by Ruby Dee: The audiobook version of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston, narrates the story of Janie Crawford, a Southern Black woman in the 1930s, and her journey from a free-spirited girl to a woman of independence and substance. (Audible)

Is There Misogyny in the Bible?

The most compelling witness against biblically endorsed misogyny is Jesus.

“MISOGYNY” refers to an ingrained prejudice against women. Does the Bible have this? It seems to, starting with the first woman. Eve is deceived by the serpent, and while both Adam and Eve are punished, Paul names Eve as the responsible party: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Tim. 2:13-14). Paul uses this connection to caution Timothy about women in leadership.

Other passages that could be seen as misogynous include Levitical laws regarding menstruation and childbirth, a law that allows a man to “test” his wife for infidelity by having her drink a potion prepared by a priest (Num. 5:11-31), Abraham’s exploitation of Sarai/Sarah by passing her off as his sister, David’s abuse of power with Bathsheba, Solomon’s use of women as political pawns, Pauline directives for women to be silent, Peter’s household code, and even Jesus’ exchange with the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7).

The evidence seems to tip in favor of biblically endorsed misogyny.

That’s why we Reformed Christians need to look more deeply at these texts in particular and at Scripture as a whole. We are readers who have been trained to look at passages and ask, “Who wrote this? To whom? When? In what language? In what genre? What did these words mean to the people who first heard them?” Reformed Christians must be willing to wrestle with individual texts within the larger narrative of Scripture.

What we’ll discover is that Eve is addressed as an equal to Adam in Genesis 3 and is punished just as he is. The Levitical laws honor the role of women as life-bringers to the community and help with postpartum care and hygiene. Abraham, David, and

Solomon are all punished for their treatment of the women mentioned above, and much ink has been spilled over Paul’s and Peter’s advice about women.

But the most compelling witness against biblically endorsed misogyny is Jesus. Jesus welcomes women, empowers women, is funded by women, and teaches women. Even the awkward passage in which Jesus seems to insult the Syrophenician woman is radical because Jesus the Jewish rabbi not only permits a Gentile woman to speak to him, but gives her the last word.

Women are drawn to Jesus. They anoint him and wash his feet. They are last to leave the cross and first at the tomb. What women see in Jesus is what they have longed to see in the world around them but haven’t.

Women were drawn to Christianity because they were valued there. They joined the early church in strong numbers (and were praised by Paul for their leadership in Romans 16). Celsus was a second-century Greek writer who attacked the church for its welcome of women: “(Christians) show they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable, and stupid; only slaves, women, and little children” (Cels. 3.44). While the general population at the time was two-thirds men and one-third women, Christian communities were two-thirds women and one-third men.

Women were drawn to the church as a community in which they mattered and their gifts were celebrated. In a world that still wrestles with misogyny, the Bible calls us to live differently.

What an amazing community to be part of. **B**



Mary Hulst is university pastor for Calvin University and teaches at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.

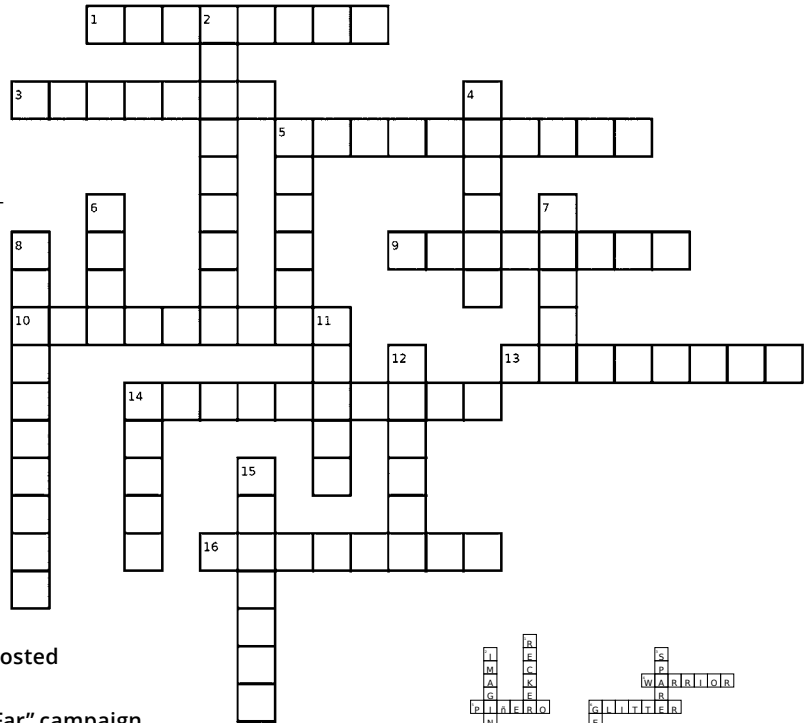
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

Down

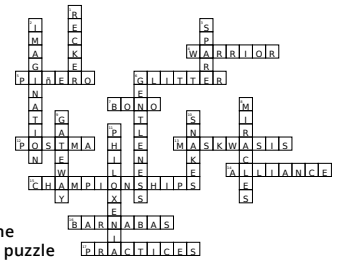
- 2. These require a response from synod
- 4. Just about half of this Arizona church is unhoused
- 5. A new community hub in Terrace, B.C., is a former _____
- 6. "Just as I am, without one _____"
- 7. A Michigan pastor is supporting friends without homes encamped by this river
- 8. He discovered that the Earth revolves around the sun
- 11. The Black action film that saved the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio from bankruptcy
- 12. Age of Ray Vander Weele when he found love again
- 14. Generation _____ is a joint initiative of the RCA and CRCNA
- 15. Carla _____, author of *These Songs We Sing*, a book about hymns

Across

- 1. An ingrained prejudice against women
- 3. When _____ Keith Brownlee-High Definition (MKBHD) posted his first YouTube video in 2009, he was 14 years old
- 5. A Michigan church encouraged _____ with a "Near and Far" campaign
- 9. Founder's _____ can lie behind a reluctance to invest in emerging leaders
- 10. Jesus called them hypocrites
- 13. This city has the second-largest Indigenous population in Canada
- 14. The biggest obstacle to godliness among men today, according to Kent Hughes
- 16. Prayer _____ gathering



Answers to the January 2023 puzzle



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SENIOR PASTOR REQUIRED Hebron CRC requires an experienced pastor to lead and encourage our members in fulfilling the great commission in the fast growing multi-ethnic community of Whitby, ON Canada. Please contact Phil Ralph at phil@woundedwarriors.ca for more information.

TEACHING PASTOR Bridge of Hope CRC in Sioux Center, IA, is prayerfully seeking our next pastor. This person will serve the congregation by preaching sermons while empowering others to lead. The primary function of this role is preaching/teaching and the position is designed to be half-time, flexible in nature, with potential for the candidate to be bi-vocational. We are searching for someone who can help us achieve our vision of becoming a church of joyful energy, a church of joyful order and accountability, and a church of joyful hospitality. Sioux Center is a growing community, home to Dordt University. Please contact in confidence employment@bridgecra.org and

visit our website for additional information (<https://www.bridgecra.org/employment>). We look forward to meeting you!

TORONTO CHURCH SEEKING PASTOR Our church of 200+ diverse members is seeking a fulltime senior pastor. For detailed information go to <https://network.crcna.org/job/senior-pastor>

Congregational Announcements

WORSHIP IN CENTRAL FLORIDA. YOU ARE INVITED TO WORSHIP WITH US AT LAKE ALFR Alfred Ministries, a church of Reformed persuasion in central Florida, meeting from Jan 1 to April 16. Services: 10am-4:50pm. Pastor: Rev. Ron Norman. Address: 140 Mallard, Lake Alfred, FL. Directions: lakealfred-ministry.org or call 616-403-5661

Denominational Announcements

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2023 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the Office of General Secretary of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda: a) Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15, and must first be processed through the local council and the classis. b) Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15. Materials judged legally before synod will be included in the Agenda for Synod if received before the synodically established deadlines (per Rules for Synodical Procedure, pp. 9-11). Zachary J. King, General Secretary of the CRCNA

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 8, 2023) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to take this opportunity to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations and communities, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. U.S. Councils, if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U.S.), you have the right to change the date of a special service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U.S.) is Thursday, May 4, 2023. Zachary J. King, General Secretary of the CRCNA

CLASSIS NORTH CASCADES SPRING MEETING DATE Classis North Cascades will meet on February 23, 2023 at 7 p.m. at Sumas CRC in Sumas, WA.

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

DOROTHY MOUW of Sioux Center, IA celebrated her 100th birthday on Jan. 8, 2023 with her 5 children & spouses, 18 grandchildren & 46 great-grandchildren.

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

BERNICE (DYKSTRA) VANDER POL of Lynden, WA, celebrates her 90th birthday on January 28, 2023. She was married for 55 years to the late William Vander Pol. Her children are the late Colleen (Peter) De Mann, Brenda (Carl) Asplund, Doug, DeeDee (Larry) Tjoelker, and the late James, seven grandchildren, and six great grandchildren. We praise God for His faithfulness and blessings in her life.

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS

WAYNE AND JUDY SMALLIGAN of Trinity CRC in Fremont, Michigan celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on December 22, 2022 with family and friends.

Obituaries

BAKKER, Marge, age 91, of Sioux Falls, SD, passed away peacefully on December 13. She was preceded in death by her husband, Rev. Paul, her son Doug, and her grandson Shane De Jong. She is survived by her children Arloa (Kurt) Harthoorn, Kathy Kroeze, Jan (Harlan) Dirksen, Beth (Leon) Wassenaar, and Lynne Bakker. She is also survived by 14 grandchildren and 43 great-grandchildren. We praise God for such a wonderful mom, grandma, and great-grandma.



ERFFMEYER, Gertrude (Trudy), nee Bolt, age 81, of Grand Rapids and formerly of Prinsburg, MN, passed away November 30, 2022. Trudy is survived by husband Phil, children: Ken (Dawn) Erffmeyer of Grand Rapids, Cheryl (Dale) Roels of Grand Rapids, and Steve (Jennifer Olson) Erffmeyer of Blaine, MN. She is also survived by eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren: Kyle (Stephanie) Erffmeyer and son Benjamin of Coppell, TX, Kimberly Erffmeyer of Chicago IL, Kayla (Nathan) Zuidema of Chicago, IL, Kristyn Erffmeyer of Grand Rapids, Amanda (John) De Long and daughters Everly and Gemma of Ada, MI, Daniel (fiancée Celia

Frattarelli) Roels of Philadelphia, PA, Nathan (Ana) Roels and son Samuel of Grand Rapids, and Alyssa Roels of Seminole, FL. Other survivors include her sister, Charlene Ter Haar, and in-laws Darlene Bolt, Russ (Judy) Erffmeyer, Drs. Marilyn (Bill) Dahms, Rev. Gerald (Carol) Erffmeyer, and Nancy (Erffmeyer) Vander Weide. She was preceded in death by her parents, infant son Kelvin (twin of Kenneth), brother Arvid Bolt, and two brothers -in-law, Kenneth Ter Haar and Harold Erffmeyer. Truly possessed the gifts of hospitality and generosity and was deeply loved by all her family members and friends.

HOVING, Elaine A., nee Hendrikse, age 96; 1050 Euclid Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126. Beloved wife of the late Richard Hoving Sr.; loving mother of Richard (Darlene) Hoving Jr., Jan (John) DeJonge, John (Beth) Hoving, Bill (Flory) Hoving, and the late Robert Hoving; devoted grandmother of 16; great-grandmother of 28; fond sister of Joy Lanenga, and the late Lois Miedema; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools are appreciated.



JOHNSON, Hugh Alan died at age 86 on Monday, November 14, 2022. He served as a Christian school teacher and principal for 35 years in Fremont, Grand Rapids, and Kalamazoo. He is survived by his wife Della (Plaisier) and children Jeff (Julie), Rashelle (Ken) Tamminga, Kristin (John) Niewoonder, 9 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandchild. Hugh was a member of Hillcrest CRC in Hudsonville, MI.

RONDA, James A. went to be with the Lord on Dec. 5, 2022. He is survived by his wife of 65 years, Marilyn, (Roeters) and his children, Jim, Dave and Kathy, Les and Patti Van Dyke and Dave and Shari Yff. 8 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren. His family thanks God for his life of faith.

TINKLENBERG, Lois (nee Gesink), 97, of Zeeland, MI, passed away December 28, 2022. Lois graduated from Western Christian High School in Hull, IA and from Calvin College. She taught elementary school in Orange City, IA and Grand Rapids, MI. She was a member of Haven Christian Reformed Church in Zeeland. Lois is survived by her daughters, Rachel (Paul) Spek and Nancy (Bruce) Lutke, both of Zeeland; 6 grandchildren; 1 great granddaughter; siblings, Connie Sterenberg of Holland, MI, Junior (Elinor) Gesink of Sheldon, Iowa; in-laws, Millie Haack of IL, Marlys (Jerry) Keen of IA, Shirley Tinklenberg of IN, and Rena Tinklenberg of MN. Funeral services were held and burial was in Zeeland Cemetery. Condolences may be left online at www.yntemafh.com

VAN ALTEN, Pierson J., 94, died March 16, 2022. A professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, College of Medicine for over 30

years, Pierce's research was at the forefront of developmental immunobiology. He is mourned by Lucille (Westendorp), his wife of 68 years; children Faith and Raymond Lee and Daniel J. and Karen Van Alten; 5 grandchildren; and 2 great-grandchildren.

VOS, Joanne K., nee Groenboom, age 88, went to be with her Lord peacefully on Christmas Day surrounded by her children. 13701 Lauerman St. #58, Cedar Lake, IN., 46303. Beloved wife of 67 years to the late Arthur J. Vos, Jr; loving mother of Loretta (Dennis Sr.) Keizer, Ruth (David Sr.) Buikema, Ardythe (Henry Jr.) Iwema, and the late Arthur (Kristen) Vos III; cherished grandma of 10; cherished great-grandmother to 19; dear sister of the late John (the late Doris) Groenboom; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to the Esophageal Cancer Action Network, ECAN, P.O. Box 243, Stevenson, MD 21153 or to Multiple Sclerosis Foundation National Headquarters, 6520 N. Andrews Ave. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309.

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Sara Visser & Cory Rettenmaier

ALASKA & DENALI

May 20 – Jun 1 | John & Rachel Witte

THE GOSPEL COMES TO ITALY

May 22 – Jun 2 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

MUSICAL TOUR OF AUSTRIA

with the Traverse Symphony Orchestra
Jun 12 – Jun 20 | Dick & Candice Wallace

BEST OF IRELAND

Sep 5 – Sep 14 | Nate & Debbie Barendse

CALL/CAA THE WONDERS OF UTAH

Sep 14 – Sep 23 | Ralph Stearley

ITALY'S GREEN HEART:

PERUGIA & UMBRIA

Sep 17 – Sep 25
Denise Iarossi Taylor & Mike Bellomo

CROATIA CRUISE

Sep 21 – Oct 1 | Mindy Miller & Eric Kuhn

BIKE & BARGE:

FROM BRUGES TO AMSTERDAM

Sep 21 – Sep 30 | Bruce & Judy Buursma

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN GREECE

Oct 6 – Oct 17 | Dr. Jeffrey A.D. Weima

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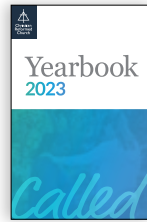
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Remembrance of Racism

Let us remember
the casualties of
those lives that
have been harmed
by racism.



Agnes Mastin was born to the Tse'khene Nation of British Columbia. She has made her home on Cree Territory in Edmonton, Alta. She is a graduate of King's University and attends mosaicHouse church.

MORE THAN TWO DECADES ago, when I was a new Christian, I attended a Bible study a few streets from my home in a neighborhood overrun with drugs and sex workers. On one occasion, the topic switched to racism, and the hostess asked if I, a Native woman, had ever personally experienced racism. I didn't know what to say. Until recently, I believed that any racism directed at me was well deserved. I silently asked Jesus to reveal any racism directed toward me so I could be more attuned to it.

After the study I stayed to visit until after dark, then took a shortcut home to avoid walking on the main drag, where I might be mistaken for a sex worker. I was less than 50 feet from my back gate when police stopped me. My Bible and I were searched for illegal substances and subsequently released when nothing was found. "This is racism," I thought.

On another occasion, my son's dog got out of the yard, and I went looking for her. I walked up and down the alleyways and streets, frantically calling her name and afraid she would get hit by a car. A car stopped, and a male voice asked if they could pray for me. I spun around to see who was talking to me. Confused, I stammered, "What? Why?"

"I pray for the wounded souls down here. Aren't you working?"


"What? I'm looking for my dog."

"Come now, we both know you're really looking for a john."

It struck me later that night that a frantic-looking Native woman in that neighborhood might appear to be out of her mind on drugs. There was nothing special about the way I dressed, but many of the women on the street purposely did not dress erotically so as to avoid detection by police. As a result,

police and johns often mistook Native women for "working girls."

Like other First Nations people, I am followed by security in shopping malls. Not long ago I was shopping in a high-end store, and after purchasing more than \$200 worth of product, the cashier informed me I was entitled to a free facial. Feeling like maybe something was going my way that day, I made my way to the makeup counter, where I was asked to set my bag behind the makeup technician for safekeeping. My suspicion was aroused because I was aware a plain-clothes resource protection worker was lurking nearby, but I conceded. As I received my facial, I could sense someone moving around me, so I opened my eyes to see the store detective opening my bag to peer inside. I immediately jumped up and demanded to see the manager. I am tired of being suspected of crimes simply because I am Native.

Let us remember the casualties of those lives that have been harmed by racism. The buck stops here. Jesus has called us to love our neighbors—*all* of our neighbors—regardless of skin color, language, culture, or ethnicity. Jesus healed the sick, sat with tax collectors and prostitutes, refused to accuse the adulteress, and was even called a drunkard and a glutton (Matt. 11:19). Let us stop trying to sit at the tables Jesus overturned. 

Tea Bags

We have shared
this story over
the years,
labeling it as the
most curious
gift ever sent to
missionaries.



Rev. Gloria D. Kroeze is a retired pediatric chaplain. In her free time, she enjoys walking, creating in the kitchen, adventuring with her husband, and learning about birds. She attends Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.


*“Bring the best of the firstfruits
of your soil
to the house of the LORD your God.”*

—Exodus 23:19

MY HUSBAND, NICK, and I were missionaries in Oaxaca, Mexico, a number of years ago. January was always very special because we would get Christmas cards from friends and family back home. It takes longer for the cards to get to another country, so we would get cards throughout the month. Sometimes we might even get a package! Missionary friends of ours once received a package. They went to the post office in their village to pick it up, paid the customs duty, eagerly took it home, and excitedly opened it. When they got the outside paper off, they found a large box of tea bags. When they opened the box, they found it was full of dried-up used tea bags. A note from the woman who sent the package accompanied the box. She explained that you could get two cups of tea from each tea bag (in her frugal estimation), and she wanted to share the second cup of tea with the missionaries.

We have shared this story over the years, labeling it as the most curious gift ever sent to missionaries. Some people agreed that it was a questionable gift and wondered if the tea bags might even have been moldy. Others thought it was a sweet, thoughtful, and well-intentioned gesture—she had lovingly saved the tea bags, dried them, packed them, and paid the postage to send them to Mexico—but one that was nevertheless inappropriate. Many wondered why she didn’t use half the box two times herself and send the unused tea bags to the missionaries. Who knows?

I’ve always considered the gift this anonymous woman gave to be somewhat absurd. Who would do that? Then one morning, as I pondered this story during my devotional time,

I realized that this woman is me! I don’t give my inappropriate gift to a missionary or to another person. I give my inappropriate gift to the God of the universe. Sometimes the gifts I give to God are no more than dried-up and crumpled tea bags. I give him leftover time and a dried-up spirit. I use the best for myself and then rationalize what I am going to give to God. I might even carefully package it before giving it to him. My heart was smitten with guilt, repentance, and a fresh resolve to give God my best. 

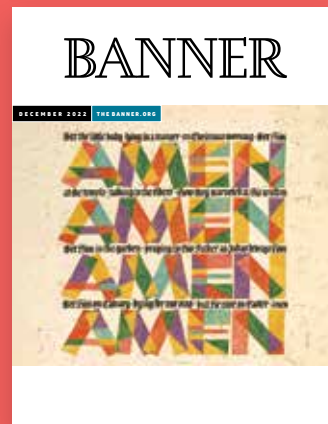
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