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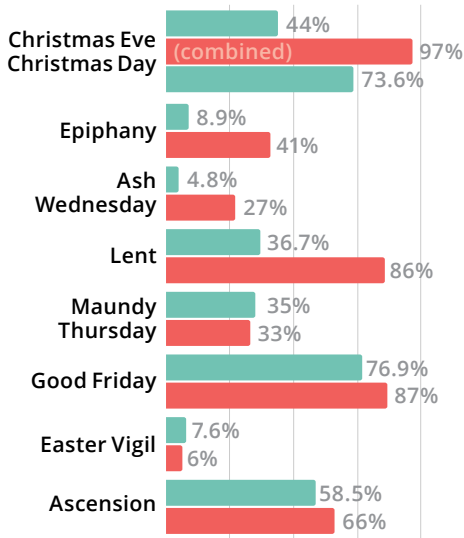

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BY THE NUMBERS

A Christian Reformed Church worship survey in 2018 found that many more CRC congregations were celebrating specific liturgical seasons/days than they did in a previous worship survey 19 years earlier. Perhaps in 2023 even more recognized Ash Wednesday, Feb. 22, or will observe the season of Lent, running until April 6.

Liturgical Observance 1999 2018



2018 Worship Survey, a collaboration between the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, CRC Worship Ministry, and the Reformed Church in America Commission on Worship. The survey had a response rate of 30% of CRC churches with a balanced representation of Canadian and U.S. churches.



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.)

- » Streaming review: *Cook at All Costs*
- » Music review: *Life After Death*, by TobyMac
- » Book review: *Extra Ordinary*, by Linda Lensink
- » Religion News: Theological Schools Report Continued Drop in Master of Divinity Degrees

Hey church and ministry workers in the CRC!

What do others not know about your ministry job?

Our *Banner* team is wondering about the work you do. Do you find fellow church members misunderstand what's involved in being nursery coordinator, youth pastor, summer camp director, hospitality lead, senior pastor, head cadet counselor, or any other church or ministry function? Drop us a line at info@thebanner.org to tell us what no one understands about your ministry job. Your response might be selected for an upcoming feature. Thanks for your help!

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BANNER

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Editor Shiao Chong

Associate Editor Sarah Heth Sundt

News Editor Alissa Vernon

Mixed Media Editor Lorilee Craker

Art Director Dean R. Heetderks

Designer Pete Euwema

Contact Us 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 info@TheBanner.org

Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org

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Tough Love

Too often in history the language of tough love has been abused to justify unloving ideas, actions, and systems.



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.

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

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

BUCK BRANNAMAN is a real-life horse whisperer. Typically, wild horses are tamed by harshly “breaking them in.” But Brannaman works with the horses’ natures to gently train them to accept and work with humans.

“Abused horses are like abused children,” Brannaman said. “They trust no one and expect the worst. But patience, leadership, compassion and firmness can help them overcome their pasts” (“Whispering Wisdom,” *Helena Independent Record*, Apr. 30, 2004). Brannaman’s compassionate, natural approach to horse training has revolutionized the equestrian world.

I used to believe strongly in the concept of “tough love.” But now I am much more cautious about it. It is often misunderstood, misapplied, and even exploited to cover abuse.

The common view of “tough love”—treating people sternly or harshly with the intent to help them in the long run—is incomplete and open to misuse and abuse. People might wrongfully think that being harsh or even mean can be “tough love” as long as you have good intentions. You need to be cruel to be kind, as the saying goes.

However, tough love is less about inflicting pain and punishment and more about maintaining boundaries and accountability. Tough love works only within a trusted relationship in specific contexts and often along with other methods. It is not a standalone, one-size-fits-all approach. Sports coaches, for example, can administer tough love because the athletes trust that it’s for improving their abilities and performance. Children might understand that their parent’s tough enforcement of rules is an act of love because they know through experience that their parents unconditionally love them. It is important that the recipient of tough love recognizes it as such for it to be effective.

Sean Schat’s article “Reconsidering How the Church Communicates Love” (p. 32) makes this point, among others, that when offering love or care, we often fail to consider the recipient’s perceptions and focus mostly on our own intentions. That means our attempts to love or care likely will fail.

Without the context of an established caring and trusting relationship, tough love can easily backfire. How many people actually change their minds about abortion because they were called “baby killers”? How many people permanently change their racist behaviors because they were shamed? Perhaps Jesus’ harsh words to the Pharisees did not change their minds, but might even have hardened their hearts to kill him. Was that Jesus’ plan all along to ensure a path to the cross?

Worse, the concept of tough love has often been used by domineering people to excuse and rationalize their harsh words and actions. There is a fine line between genuine tough love and abuse masquerading as tough love. This is why I am hesitant and cautious about “tough love” these days. I don’t want to cross the line from being “cruel to be kind” to simply being cruel. Too often in history the language of tough love has been abused to justify unloving ideas, actions, and systems. We need to be very careful.

There are other ways of fostering change in people’s lives. “Coddling” is not the only alternative to tough love. Scripture wisely counsels that “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1). Like Brannaman’s horse whispering, there are patient, compassionate, and gentle ways for us to help each other grow in Christ. The church needs to learn and do more “soul whispering,” so to speak, and use less coercive browbeating. **B**

REPLY ALL

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

The Banner

I just wanted to take the time to write an email of encouragement to editor-in-chief Shiao Chong. I have read a few articles that you have written and cannot express thoroughly in words my gratitude at the words you share. The honesty, struggle, prophetic naming of spiritual wrongness (and hopeful rightness) at tension within the Christian Reformed Church—these are all things I share, have noted, and through your articles do not feel alone in combating. Thank you for being “strong and courageous.” The power of words to influence and open up people to ponderings is so powerful. God is at work here, within the church that belongs to God, within the people that belong to God. I firmly believe that, despite our struggles and contentions, God’s sovereign plan for salvation will be done among us.

» Katelyn J. Van Hove // Surrey, B.C.

December Issue

We love the cover of December with the Christmas song. The colors are indicative of diversity, and we are grateful for that.

» Vern and Karen Steenwyk // Pelham, Ala.



Abortion

Regarding the article “Seeing the Trees for the Forest,” by Diana Zondag (January 2023): a very thoughtful, good read, focused on the mom and the support for her in the pregnancy. Now we need to look at the rights of the little one made in God’s image.

» Hans Visser // Taber, Alta.

I agree that our views on abortion should take a back seat in our ministry toward the abortion vulnerable, which is why I read your article with my head nodding—until I got to the part about both sides agreeing that it would be wonderful if terminating a pregnancy was never necessary or desired. The words we use when “going low” and speaking to those who are abortion vulnerable are very important and should be truthful. ... So your narrative about abortion being the termination of a pregnancy is hardly the whole story. See, all pregnancies are terminated. Your mom’s pregnancy with you was terminated at your live birth. An abortion is a premature termination of a pregnancy, causing the demise of a child. That’s what should be included in our life-affirming narrative. ... Our words matter. Yes, listen, but we also have to have the right narrative, as our audience is listening to us too.

» Emily DeKorte // Tempe, Ariz.

Big Questions

I’d like to push back a bit on the answer to a question in the December *Banner*. The issue was Church Order, Article 54-b, and the question was concerned about the loss of Reformed doctrine. The answer stated we need to teach from the confessions so that we have “preaching that covers the full counsel of God’s Word.”

I would suggest we only receive the “full counsel” when we read all of Scripture, not just the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed. I think it is clear from recent history that many believers know little of Isaiah, Amos, or Micah, or even the teachings of Jesus. It is because I want people to know the “full counsel” that I preach from Genesis through Revelation.

» Dan Walcott // Holland, Mich.

Healing

People would drive the nearly two hours to show up at the hospital to pray for faith to be increased, for the Devil to be bound, for sins to be confessed, and for physical healing to take place. This was our experience when my wife was in the hospital for three months after becoming paralyzed “overnight” by transverse myelitis. Healing did not take place as expected. Despite the possible implications of the article by Henry Wildeboer (“Just Do It,” January 2023), Scripture does not guarantee health and wellness in proportion to the faith we profess in Jesus as Savior and Lord. When we pray for healing we need to remember an important distinction: although God can heal us, we must never presume that he must.

» Ivan Mulder // Pella, Iowa

Unity in Christ

I'm in a congregation that has chosen to remain together out of love for each other and our mission, even though we don't all agree on contentious issues of the day. One of these is same-sex marriage. Most of us disagree with Synod 2022's decision to make one interpretation of unchastity confessional and would like to see that reversed. But there is variation in response to the human sexuality report among members. From what I've seen and experienced in my church, we want to hold fast to our unity in Christ and to discover his unique mission for us; this is more important than complete agreement on same-sex marriage or abortion or a Christian response to global climate change, etc. Are there other churches out there walking the same path? Would you be willing to speak out to help show us another way ahead? It might surprise us just how many CRC folk there are across the U.S. and Canada who do not desire to split along party lines (so to speak), but in fact see it as a strength that we can commit to staying together amidst our differences.

» Kathy DeMey // Grand Rapids, Mich.

As I Was Saying

Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at TheBanner.org.

» Connections

» The Chains of Hate and Evil

» Shine Like Stars

Rejoice in the Lord

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! —Phil. 4:4

"AHA!" YOU SAY, "That's easy," as you lie on a beach in the Bahamas and hoist another drink in a toast to the good life.

But the apostle Paul did not pen those words during his annual holidays, but from a prison cell in Rome, when he wrote to the Christians in Philippi around 62 A.D. My archaeology study Bible mentions that in Roman jails of the day, prisoners were chained to stocks (wooden devices with foot holes) and had to provide for their own meals and clothes. As a Roman citizen, Paul was eligible for daily food allowances, but he had chosen to depend on his friends for meals. Now, under these circumstances, how could he possibly have written this "rejoice always" command?

A recent email from a friend read in part, "I am deeply troubled by the power grabs, vilification, violence, hatred, threats, conspiracies, and misinformation in my country. Also, in my own life I lately encounter masses of pain-causing grief and misery that make it look like the Lord doesn't care about the world at all. A close friend is currently experiencing so many disappointments that he teeters on the brink of a deep depression. We sing 'The joy of the Lord is my strength,' but where is that joy?"

The sobering email resonated. We have the Russia-Ukraine war, China-Taiwan tensions, North Korean missile launchings, floods, fires, droughts, hurricanes, climate worries, thousands of children in camps worldwide without medical facilities, the

Paul wrote from a God-inspired perspective.

concerns many of us have about teenagers and younger adults who do not seem to walk with the Lord, and the deaths of loved ones. Isn't Paul's command just a bit much?

Paul wrote from a God-inspired perspective. He knew that rejoicing, sadness, and all our other feelings are part of the human condition—intrinsic, built-in. To see rejoicing outside of this wholeness would be reductionistic and should have no place in an integrated life.

Paul was fully aware that the ability to rejoice in the Lord was a special, divine gift also given to you and me by Jesus himself (John 15:11). Therefore Paul's words are not a command at all, but a reminder that inside all of us a jubilant "rejoicing in the Lord" is anxiously waiting to be let out to take flight!



Frank DeVries is the author of two short novels and has published many hymns and songs for children. He attends Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church in Surrey, B.C.



8 Signs of a Healthy Intergenerational Church

By Robert and Laura Keeley

Many of us grew up in multigenerational churches. Churches not only had children, teens, parents, and grandparents sitting in the same sanctuary, but had programming for each of them: church school for kids, youth group for teens, and Bible studies for adults. This model for church was adapted from schools, where children and teens are separated by age.

Fewer churches, however, are *intergenerational*. Intergenerational churches are those that are intentional about bringing different generations together in a mutual, influential relationship so that they can achieve common goals. The key words are *intentional* and *mutual*. Those differences seem subtle, but they are important.

In their book *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, Holly Allen and Christine Ross point to several reasons why striving for an intergenerational community is worth the effort. The first is a sense of belonging. They write, "Intergenerational faith communities provide experiences that foster (a) deep sense of belonging in children, teens, and adults; all feel welcome and received." When we look around on

a Sunday morning, we see people of all ages who expect us to be there and miss us when we're not.

Intergenerational congregations also can provide support for families or people who need additional help. When a church is intergenerational, the concept of a family beyond the nuclear family is expanded. The community is already prepared to help because everyone knows all the other people, regardless of age.

This year our daughter, who already had two children, gave birth to twins. Without needing to be asked, her church community brought food, offered babysitting, and even did her laundry. Now two young mothers sit with the twins in the back of church every Sunday morning, allowing our daughter and son-in-law to sit with their other children. Bringing the people of God from all ages together opens the members up to experience deeper relationships and the different ways God has been faithful in the lives of God's people.

We need a deep community in which we know each other. In her chapter in Cory Seibel's book *Engage All Generations*, Tammy Tolman describes intergenerational ministry as creating

spaces where generations collide. With more opportunities for this collision, people get to know each other well. Holly Allen expands this idea when she notes that as a child or a new believer participates in a relational community, doing "Christian" things with those further down the road in their faith, these newer members can begin to identify themselves with the Christian community.

So here, in no particular order, are our top eight signs of a church that is making strides toward being intergenerational:

» **Leadership buy-in:** The end goal is not for churches to do intergenerational things, but to actually become an actively intergenerational community. This shift requires that the council, pastors, and staff buy in to the value of intergenerational ministry and commit to changing the culture of the church. Unless the leadership is on board, efforts to become more intergenerational will be short-lived.

» **People of all ages involved in leading worship:** Activities could include Bible reading, offering prayers, leading music, or running the sound and video technology.

These opportunities reinforce belonging to a community that uses people's gifts. Research has shown that leading in worship is one of the indicators that kids will continue to be involved in churches as they grow older.

- » **Multi-age conversations:** Look at who is talking. Are adults and kids talking to each other before and after worship? Debra Reinstra wrote that "teenagers are the canaries in the coal mine of community." Do they hang out in the same area as the adults? Do people other than their parents engage them in conversation? The teenagers are an early indicator that the community is not siloed by age.
- » **Community first:** Service to other members of the church community comes before individual needs. People are willing to give up something so that other members of the community can flourish. Are people who are not parents of young children willing to serve in the nursery? Are seniors willing to teach Sunday school? Do congregation members attend programs where someone from their church is performing? These are all places where intergenerational community can be built.
- » **Accessible worship:** Work to make sure the worship service speaks to all ages and situations whenever possible. There is a lot more to a worship than preaching, but sermons take a lot of the time in a typical worship service. As they're making their sermons, preachers should recognize the different ages of people in the pews. Sermon series about marriage aimed at young adults, for example, can cause singles and seniors to feel like the only important people are married with kids. Work on using liturgical elements that children might

When we look around on a Sunday morning, we see people of all ages who expect us to be there and miss us when we're not.

already be familiar with, such as songs and Bible passages that children know from Sunday school.

- » **Church whisperers:** Become a congregation that encourages parents and other adults to be "church whisperers," a term coined by Robbie Castleman. Kids learn what worship means when they experience it and when it is explained to them. That means that sometimes parents or caregivers need to be talking to their children during worship about what is happening. People sitting in front or behind them need to be affirming about the additional noise this makes and be pleased that the next generation is learning.
- » **Faith storytelling for all ages:** Stories told by members of your congregation will demonstrate how our lives speak to God's faithfulness and how God has been at work in

our lives. Find times and places for people to share their stories. The Faith Storytelling Toolkit (crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits) has a number of resources to help you help members of your community tell their stories.

- » **Mentoring:** There are dozens of ways that mentoring can take place in a church. Older couples can mentor young married couples. Adults can mentor teens in running the church audiovisual equipment or in playing musical instruments. Teens can mentor children in building pinewood derby cars. The point is that people take care of each other and share their gifts with younger people.

Becoming an intergenerational church is a process that will not happen immediately. People can start building relationships with people of other ages simply by working on learning each other's names. By introducing places where people of all ages collide and are encouraged to talk to each other, an intergenerational community begins to form. Soon, committees and programs will see this as a built-in value and discuss how other parts of the church can also include generations of all ages. 



Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children's ministries at 14th Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich.



Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.

BIG QUESTIONS

Relationships

My mom is refusing to follow the medical treatment the doctor recommends. She knows this will likely shorten her life. How can I get her to see her life's value to us and her grandkids?

As image bearers of God, our lives have significant value. We should treasure the gift of life for as long as God gives us breath. We are called to be good stewards of all of creation, including our own bodies. Our bodies are even a temple in which God's presence dwells (1 Cor. 6:19). So yes, our lives matter. We are also each free to choose, making a deeply personal decision on how best to glorify God and being accountable to God for our choices.

Medical decisions are best made with clarity of thought using the best information available. There are always pros and cons. If your mom is capable of making decisions and has the necessary information to choose with discernment, then the choice is hers to make, hopefully in prayer and conversation with her loved ones. Discuss the potential benefits, risks, and options with your mom. Seek to understand why she made her choices without trying to change her mind. Your mom gets to decide if and how she pursues medical care. You might not like it, but it is not your decision.

Relationships should not be a means of asserting pressure or leverage. Be careful not to use the grandchildren to force your mom into changing a decision that she discerned in the Spirit's leading. Although your mom might desire to have more time in the



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

grandkids' lives, she also knows about living with her condition.

It might be painfully hard to support your mom as she makes decisions with which you are uncomfortable. If you have expressed your concerns about her choice, let the discussion rest. Decide to make the best of the time you have with your mom by honoring her and accepting the decisions she has made.

Rev. Deb Koster leads the Christian Reformed Church's family and marriage ministry, *FamilyFire.com*, at ReFrame Ministries. She and her husband, Steven, worship at Grace Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Faith Formation

Our family has gotten into the habit of streaming worship rather than attending in person. As adults, we meet regularly with our small group, but what is the downside for our kids?

Streaming worship services are a blessing to many church members, such as shut-ins and those who are ill, etc. Many churches added online worship services to their ministries during the pandemic, making us consider both the benefits and limitations of remote worship.

Your question specifically asks about children, but let's first consider the adults. There is no indication in your question that your recent pattern is anything other than a choice based on your preference. It's great that you attend a small group, but it is not a substitute for the rest of the church. Meeting in person only with your

small group has a significant effect on who you view as being in your church community. Whether you realize it or not, your physical absence has made you no longer part of the larger church community.

Community is not just a nice bonus of church. It is an important part of who we are. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul stresses the importance of each member of the community: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12), and it is important for children to be there too. Paul goes on to write, "Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (12:22).

Your children are also missing out on the church community as well as church education, children's worship, youth group, and all the other activities that make a church community a blessing.

Finally, your family's current habits are training you and your children to think of worship as something you observe rather than something we gather as a community to do. We participate in worship; we don't merely watch. We praise God together, and we share each other's joys and sorrows. It is hard to do that if we don't know each other. Just hearing God's Word preached isn't enough. We strongly encourage you to get back in the habit of weekly in-person attendance.

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

Missional Living**What real-life examples are there of God already at work outside of the church?**

As in Jesus' day, it seems that discovering "real-life examples" and joining in is primarily about having eyes to see and being attentive and present to the Spirit at work "outside the church." But what are we looking for? What might be signs of the kingdom of God at work?

One way to begin to think about that question is to imagine God's dream for your neighborhood (your workplace, your city, etc.). I imagine that God longs for everyone in my neighborhood to be welcomed and included, to be fed, safe, and cared for; for kindness, generosity, and beauty to flourish; and for shalom and abundance to be shared by all.

So when I know that every good gift comes from the Father (James 1:17), I can see God at work in all that goodness, in all that reflects God's dream, such as when my neighbors support a household that has experienced significant loss, bring meals to a new mom, decorate a front yard with well-wishes before a dad heads to the hospital for surgery, or provide childcare when a parent has cancer. I experience God at work at our neighborhood leadership meetings, where the discussion focuses on how we can make our community a better place to live for everyone, and when our "Talking Gardens" group works hard to create a food forest that will bear much and benefit many for decades to come. I recognize Jesus' way when neighbors gather to share life with one another around tables and campfires, with good food and wine, laughter and lament. I realize the Spirit is up to something when our book club conversation becomes about making things right in our broken world. I feel the welcome of God's kingdom when new neighbors are embraced, those with developmental

disabilities are included, and prejudices are dismantled as we listen to and learn from one another.

There are many more stories of God at work—not only in my neighborhood, but in yours. Perhaps it's time to "look carefully and listen closely and pay attention" and set our minds on all that God wants to show us (Ezek. 40:4).

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

Ethics**If a loved one invites me to their same-sex wedding, can I show love by attending the wedding, or would attending communicate that I agree with same-sex marriage?**

The 2016 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church addressed your question directly, stating in its pastoral guidance to the churches that it was acceptable for CRCNA members and officebearers to attend a same-sex wedding. Attendance doesn't indicate agreement with same-sex marriage. Of course, some people may assume that attendance indicates agreement. But we can easily think of parallel scenarios where attending a ceremony doesn't necessarily indicate full agreement with what is happening. Many a parent has attended a wedding where one of their children was marrying someone of the opposite sex of whom the parent strongly disapproved, perhaps even to the point of being convinced that the marriage was doomed. Attending is a way to show support and love for one's child, not necessarily agreement with the marriage.

However, Synod 2016 also stated that playing a more formal role in the wedding likely would be taken to indicate support for a marriage that the denomination regards as unbiblical. Its advice was that church members should be aware of this risk when they play a role in a same-sex wedding, and officebearers should avoid playing a role because they would be seen as operating out of their ordained office.

Two distinct (though related) senses of "support" are involved in your question. There's support in the ethical sense—whether I agree or disagree on a moral issue. And there's support in the interpersonal sense—showing love to a person I care about. The view of Synod 2016 is that support in the interpersonal sense at a same-sex marriage is acceptable, but support in the ethical sense is not.

If you disagree with same-sex marriage but you support (in the interpersonal sense) one or both of the partners in a specific same-sex marriage, you would have to discern how much you want to go out of your way to indicate that you don't actually support it (in the ethical sense). With all of this, you may find yourself in the complex position of praying for and supporting the partners in a marriage you don't support.

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



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

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The GEMS girls club at East Side CRC in Cleveland, Ohio.

East Side Christian Reformed Church in Cleveland, Ohio, marked 150 years of ministry in 2022. Founded April 9, 1872, as The True Holland Reformed Congregation at Cleveland, Ohio, it became East Side CRC in 1880 when part of the congregation split to form West Side CRC. Still in the same location, the congregation now has fewer than 50 members but continues to run a GEMS girls club ministering to a group of eight girls, seven of whom are from the church’s surrounding community.

Calvin University student Emily Steen and her faculty adviser, Mark Mulder, Ph.D., are one of three student-faculty pairs to **have been awarded the 2023 Hatfield Prize for social research by the Center for Public Justice.** Steen said

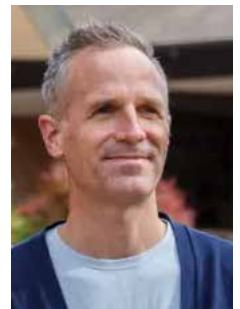
her research will focus on “formerly incarcerated returning Calvin Prison Initiative students and graduates as they face systematic barriers” in public re-entry. “The goal is ultimately about how we better love returning citizens in a manner that nurtures opportunities for them to flourish,” Mulder said.

The prize includes a \$5,000 award for the student and \$1,500 for the adviser to pursue

the work. Steen’s final report, along with those from fellow recipients from LeTourneau University in Longview, Texas, and Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., will be published in September 2023.



Emily Steen



Mark Mulder

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Ministry to Women Leaving Domestic Abuse Focuses on Housing



Sandy Vander Ziel (left) receives her medal from Miranda Rosin, a Member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, Jan. 23.

At the end of January two more **Christian Reformed church members in Alberta were honored with Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medals** in recognition of their service to their communities.

Sandy Vander Ziel, a member of River Park CRC in Calgary, Alta., was presented the medal for her work on several volunteer boards and for sharing her professional expertise as a family lawyer with Sonshine Community Services, an organization serving families affected by family



Hans Huizinga, Jan. 24.

violence. **Hans Huizinga**, a member of Bethel CRC in Edmonton, Alta., received his medal in recognition of his work to preserve a part of Alberta's provincial history. Huizinga has spent almost 50 years with the Alberta Pioneer Railway Association, volunteers at the Alberta Railway Museum, and in 2001 became a founding member of the Alberta Grain Elevator Society.

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Daffodil Ministries, a resourcing group for women leaving domestic violence in Wyoming, Mich., saw a dramatic increase last year in the number of women referred to its services. Over the previous three years Daffodil served 20 families, but referrals jumped to 35 in 2022 alone. That's why the group, formed by members of Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, is focusing on the biggest need these women have to help them recover and care for their children: stable, safe housing.

Since 2017, Daffodil has helped clients pay the first month's rent and deposit on safer housing, a cost averaging \$1,500 per lease. This was often all that was needed for these intelligent, resourceful women to continue in their jobs, care for their children, and begin the healing process, said Calvary CRC pastor Mark Van Drunen. Yet the ministry felt called to do even more, including contributing to the supply of rental housing at below-market rates for those with lower incomes. It has already acquired one duplex, and Daffodil, now a separate nonprofit organization, hopes to purchase additional property.

Daffodil's board president, Art Opperwall, said 75% of donations for the duplex were in-kind donations from local businesses, including a kitchen renovation, new windows, and landscaping. Most of Daffodil's funding comes from Calvary's congregation with additional support from local businesses, foundations, and individuals in the community.

Stable housing is a critical need for families fleeing abusive situations. Most shelters limit occupancy to 60 to 90 days, after which women and families must find other housing. Sometimes



Daffodil Ministries chose its name to represent hope, renewal, and a new beginning.

this means living in a car, couch surfing, or even returning to an abusive partner. Long-term housing offers not only security, Daffodil's website says, but space and time for emotional and spiritual well-being to blossom.

Daffodil Ministries includes survivors of domestic abuse on its volunteer board to help the ministry avoid making decisions that may resemble the actions or role of an abuser. This is why Daffodil offers spiritual support but never makes it a condition for receiving help with housing.

"These women are extremely strong and have an incredible drive to survive and take care of their children," Van Drunen said. The organization chose the name Daffodil to represent hope, renewal, and a new beginning.

—Sarah DeGraff

Grand Rapids East Thanks Synod's Committee, Disagrees With Its Report

Classis Grand Rapids East, a regional group of congregations of the Christian Reformed Church that has been working with a committee of synod related to decisions of Synod 2022 made last June, discussed that committee's report at its Jan. 19 meeting. Minutes for the meeting note that classis "receives the work and the report of the committee with gratitude and in particular acknowledges the admonition in the report" and that Grand Rapids East "will wait for the adjudication of Neland (Avenue CRC)'s appeal by Synod 2023 before discerning any further action to take about Neland."

Synod is the broadest assembly of the CRC, the annual gathering of delegates from each of the 49 classes. At the 2022 synod, delegates voted to instruct Neland Avenue CRC, a congregation within Grand Rapids East, to remove from office a deacon it had appointed in 2020. The deacon is a woman who is married to a woman. Officebearers are meant to uphold and live by the confessions and teachings of the church. Since

1973 the CRC's position on homosexuality has been that homosexual sex, though not the orientation, is incompatible with God's will as revealed in Scripture. The category of that synodical report is pastoral advice. Synod 2022 upheld that teaching and, by formally interpreting "unchastity" in the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 to include homosexual sex, synod declared this definition an interpretation of a confession, and that therefore "this interpretation has confessional status" (*Acts of Synod 2022*, p. 922). That action has generated questions from members, councils, and classes about what status those who disagree with synod's interpretation now have in the denomination.

Neland has not deposed its deacon and intends to appeal Synod 2022's decision. Grand Rapids East's decision to wait for the results of that appeal before acting further "is consistent with both accountability and due process for Neland under the Church Order and prior decisions of synod," the classis said in its communication to synod, and "the report of the *in loco* committee did not show that Classis GRE must respond again about Neland before Synod 2023 hears Neland's appeal." The communication also suggests that the committee "read more into" statements "of affirmation and gratitude towards Neland" from Classis GRE than was intended. The communication says "Classis has responded sincerely

and faithfully about Neland" all along, from correspondence with the Council of Delegates (the interim committee of synod), formal communications with synod, and participation with the *in loco* committee. Grand Rapids East's communication also cites *Acts of Synod 2015* (p. 674), noting, "Synod cannot instruct a classis or a council to exercise discipline, except upon appeal (one consistory cannot ask another consistory to act as its proxy in matters of discipline, as indicated in decisions of Synod 1988, *Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 613). The discipline of church members is the responsibility of the local council (see Church Order Articles 37, 78-81, 85)." And, the communication says, "the Church Order contains no provision for a classis to intervene to prevent a local church from appealing its discipline by synod."

In loco committee's report

The report of the committee appointed by Synod 2022 to oversee Neland Avenue CRC's compliance with synod's rulings was part of the agenda for the Jan. 19 meeting of Classis Grand Rapids East and will be included in the *Agenda for Synod 2023*.

The committee reports that in its work since August 2022, "we have always been together as brothers and sisters in Christ," and "in all of our meetings we have been greeted with Christ-like love and an openness to our presence and communication. There have been times of disappointment, frustration, and perhaps even anger, but these emotions have always been mutually expressed and received in the bonds of Christian fellowship."

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Raymond Jay
Steigenga*

1945-2023

Compassionate, sincere, and hard-working, Ray Steigenga was a gifted theologian, history buff, and life-long learner. He believed that being a child of God was his greatest calling, and he treasured God's unconditional love. Ray, 77, died Jan. 7.

Ray grew up on the family farm in Zeeland, Mich. After high school he wanted to operate heavy equipment and eventually worked in the coal supply unit at Consumers Power Company.

Once he experienced God's call to ministry, Ray studied part time to get a degree from Grand Valley State University, then graduated from Western Theological Seminary in 1979. He served the non-denominational Fairfield Community Church in Lancaster, Ohio, then Newton-Zion Reformed Church in Erie, Ill., and Casnovia (Mich.) Reformed Church. In 2005 he was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church and pastored Northern Heights CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Ray retired in 2010 and for a few years drove a semi truck for various businesses around West Michigan. He loved gardening, antique shopping, traveling, and using his mechanical knowledge to fabricate useful items. He blessed many with his notes, cards, and pie baking.

Ray is survived by Joyce, his wife of 57 years; three children and their spouses; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Sidney C.J. DeWaal

1935-2023

Sidney DeWaal is remembered as a great and memorable preacher, inspirational leader, wise counselor, mentor, and blessing to many. Sidney, 87, died Jan. 1 in Laredo, Texas, after living for several years with Alzheimer's disease.

A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Sidney also obtained a Master of Education degree from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, and a doctorate in religion from Chicago Theological Seminary. Ordained in 1963, he served New Hope Community Church in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., before serving as a missionary in Mexico and as a professor of theology at the Seminario Juan Calvino (John Calvin Seminary). Sidney also taught psychology at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill.; was campus pastor at the University of Alberta; became the first president of what is now The King's University in Edmonton, Alta.; pastored Inglewood Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton; served as vice-president of academics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass.; and was president of Jerusalem University College in Israel. In 2007, after pastoring Edmonton's West End CRC for two years, he retired but then served as an interim pastor for several congregations.

Sidney is survived by Janet, his wife of 62 years; two children; and five grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Recognizing that both Neland Avenue CRC and Classis Grand Rapids East plus various synods and their study committees have "carefully deliberated, studied, and pastorally cared for one another as they have discussed LGBTQ+ issues through the years" but have reached different conclusions, the committee states, "The issue here is how do we keep covenant with one another when there is sharp disagreement."

The committee said it was faithful to its mandate from synod. "We have not been authorized to negotiate or in some way to mitigate the decisions of synod," the report says. "While it is true that, to date, no one from Neland Avenue CRC has appealed its decision to ordain a same-sex married person as a deacon to classis (or synod), Classis Grand Rapids East has a responsibility to promote accountability to our synodical and confessional decisions on this and all other matters as part of our shared covenant as congregations, classes, and as a denomination. ... We admonish Classis Grand Rapids East for failing to hold Neland Ave CRC accountable to the larger body, and for failing to adhere to our shared covenants and procedures in how to bring change within the CRCNA."

The report recommended that Classis Grand Rapids East "establish an oversight committee to guide the Neland Avenue congregation and leadership into alignment with the Biblical guidelines affirmed by Synod 2022 regarding same-sex sexual relationships." Grand Rapids East is not acting on that recommendation.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Canadian CRC Members Continue Talking, Listening

About 55 participants joined a three-hour video conversation Jan. 28 between Canadian Christian Reformed Church classes, board members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America Canada Corporation, and CRC ministry staff. It was the last of three such meetings in the past year. Each was to connect CRC leaders with members of Canadian churches as the congregations face denominational restructuring and sort through consequences that Synod 2022's confessional decisions have had on a population that has varying understandings surrounding human sexuality.

Sean Baker, a ministry consultant with the CRC's Pastor Church Resources (now part of Congregational Ministries), shared some of what that group has heard from churches since the September 2022 Canadian conversation about synod's decisions and how the group has been helping churches discern their next faithful steps in cases of sharp disagreement.

Baker said three Canadian classes (regional groups of churches) and about 25 Canadian congregations have been using Pastor Church Resources' *Challenging Conversations: Next Steps Discernment* toolkit. Baker shared three common things they've been learning from churches who are engaging in this process: "that this takes time and that not everybody feels like they have time;" that more conservative voices are missing from the conversations and that their absence is felt, making it more difficult for congregations to discern together; and that the decisions of Synod 2022 accelerated the need for conversations that congregations might have been avoiding, such as "What exactly do we believe? And how do we believe it? And how much agreement do we expect with what we believe?"

'How' Can Be as Important as 'What'

To help with all of this, the Next Steps Discernment process "is premised on *how*



Pastor Sean Baker of Pastor Church Resources suggests that congregations frame their discernment around the idea of vocation and calling.

we discern and decide, which can be as important as *what* we decide," Baker said. "The big thing we heard in September from so many of you is that a lot of you want a better 'how.'" That includes a "good, clear, transparent process so that even if people don't like or agree with what you decide, they'll feel like you respected them and even loved them by taking them seriously and not avoiding them or ignoring them or dismissing them." It also includes spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, fasting, and studying the Word, as "practical ways to demonstrate our dependence on Christ" and the concept of holy indifference—honestly praying, "Not my will, but yours be done." Baker suggested congregations frame their conversations in terms of calling, for themselves and for individual members: "How is God calling you to live out your faith right now?"

Milestone Highlights

Al Postma, the transitional executive director for the CRC in Canada, reviewed ministry milestones and shared ways that congregations and ministries in Canada are realizing the goals of cultivating spiritual disciplines, listening to the voices of every generation, growing in diversity, and sharing the gospel and living it missionally. He included the examples of Pastor Phil Reinders'

Habitus Community, an expansion of the Generation Spark crossgenerational mentoring program, the development of Canada's decolonization and anti-racism collective, and discerning and exploring online communities in church planting.

Listening circles—where participants shared with each other, according to the agenda, "about such things as ministry that is happening in our contexts, our denominational relationships, our sense of calling at this time, and the sort of support that can be most helpful"—took up about half of the meeting and were closed to observers.

Patience in Urgency?

Just before a break that ended the first part of the meeting, Baker and Postma took some questions from participants. Paul Verhoef, a university chaplain in Calgary, Alta., asked, "What tools are being developed to help churches share their discernment results 'out loud'?" Some churches are feeling a little alone in their calling, and finding others who are pursuing similar callings may be a good gift." Baker said that participants in the Next Steps Discernment process are connected to one another in a network, but to date they've focused on local contexts and haven't broadened that—"but I share your sense of that being a need," Baker said.

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Berton
VanAntwerpen*

1937-2023

Bert VanAntwerpen was joyful and tenderhearted, with a ready smile, a love of music, and a deep and loud voice that served him well in the pulpit and in the choir. Bert, 85, died Jan. 10 following a recent hospitalization for heart and respiratory failure. A Christian Reformed pastor who had known Bert since her youth said, "His calm wisdom has always inspired me, and his rare mix of genuine compassion and deep-hearted humor taught me to lighten up and love well. I will always be thankful for his life and ministry."

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Bert was ordained in 1962, then served Emden Christian Reformed Church, Renville, Minn.; First CRC, Sheldon, Iowa; Immanuel CRC, Hudsonville, Mich.; Cadillac (Mich.) CRC; Avery Street CRC, South Windsor, Conn.; Napa Valley (Calif.) Community Church; and Princeton CRC, Kentwood, Mich.

After retirement from full-time ministry in 2002, the VanAntwerpens moved to a home at the edge of the Clam River outside Cadillac, Mich. Bert's continued ministry as an interim pastor took them from rural Michigan to Alaska, California, Connecticut, Florida, Montana, and Washington.

Bert is survived by Marie, his wife of 47 years; five children and their spouses; nine grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Lester W. Van Essen

1935-2023

A humble but confident preacher with a dry wit that often diffused tense situations, Les Van Essen loved singing hymns and roused many a congregation to give glory to God through song. He loved preaching, which he did until turning 84 and still had the desire to do until his death, Jan. 15, at age 87. Although he lived with cancer for 30 years, his family says he never focused on that or complained.

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1961, Les served for 20 years as a missionary in Nigeria with Christian Reformed World Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission). He then pastored two Christian Reformed congregations in Illinois, Immanuel in Burbank and New Hope Church in Lansing.

After retirement in 2002, Les served as an interim pastor in churches throughout the U.S. He dared to attempt anything—from becoming a ham radio operator to making his own darkroom for developing photographs to helping provide clean water for a mission compound. He enjoyed every kind of game and considered no gathering complete without one.

Les is survived by Elaine, his wife of 61 years; five children and their spouses; 17 grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Everett Vander Horst from Classis Hamilton pressed a sense of urgency, noting that talk of a "holy indifference" can sound tone deaf after decisions at Synod 2022 effectively "said to thousands of Canadian members, 'If you don't change your beliefs, you're not welcome in the CRC.'"

"Indifference, or even sort of patient, long conversations, are a pretty hard call," Vander Horst said.

Postma said he appreciated that expression and shared a personal understanding of how to respond when a longstanding spiritual practice, such as prayers of holy indifference, feels out of step. "How do you find a space to live within it in a way that's contextually and time-ly appropriate?" Postma asked. In his classis renewal work "and even just in my own pastoring elder work in our local church," he said, "I've grown more convinced that one of the base spiritual disciplines for community to exist is the discipline of submission—the ability to say, 'Not my way, but I'm still here.' I just can't think of any relationship or community that can exist without people who are willing to say 'Not my way.'" He added, "One of the hardest parts about the discipline of submission is we only ever practice it when we don't want to."

The Jan. 28 conversation was prepared on behalf of the CRCNA Canada corporation board by an ad hoc group that includes Postma, Baker, and board members Wendy de Jong (Classis Niagara), Henry Eygenraam (Classis Toronto), and Daniel Meinema (Classis Eastern Canada).

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Deaf Choir in Kenya Changes Minds About ‘Burdens’ of Disabilities

The Banner has a subscription to republish articles from Religion News Service. This story by Fredrick Nzwilli was published on religionnews.com Jan. 31. It has been edited for length.

On a recent afternoon on the grounds of St. Andrew’s Church in Nairobi, Kenya, young men and women danced in a semi-circle, swinging to the beat of drums. The group’s leader gestured intently as she marched, signing to the dancers, all silent but for a few muted sounds as they rehearsed the hymn “O How He Loves Me.”

The group belongs to the St. Andrew’s deaf choir, known as the Zion Praise Team. The choir learns hymns and worship songs in American Sign Language to lead congregations in worship services in the Presbyterian church and other Christian churches around the East African country.

“The group knows its strength is in the music,” said Judy Kihumba, 32, a hearing disability ministry coordinator at the church. “When practicing on this ground, they find more space to move freely.”

The deaf singers are freed spiritually as well. “When they sing, it’s a soul-edifying activity, it’s therapy for them, and it’s also a way of worship. They feel closer to God through this,” said Kihumba.

Kihumba, who was named to the BBC’s list of 100 top inspiring and influential women in the world last year, is the founder of Talking Hands, Listening Eyes on Postpartum Depression, an organization that helps deaf women navigate motherhood, advocating for their maternal and mental health.

Participation in the choir is also an avenue of religious education for its members. Being deaf, Kihumba explained, “means they don’t interact (with) and understand the Bible at a young age because their family members don’t know sign language.”

It’s also liberating simply having the stage to themselves. “The deaf love singing



RNS photo by Fredrick Nzwilli

Members of the Zion Praise Team, a deaf choir, rehearse outside of St. Andrew’s Church in Nairobi, Kenya.

since it’s the only way they don’t get interruptions. It also comes from the deepest point of their hearts,” she added.

Among the group’s most popular songs, according to choir members, is “Amazing Grace,” which they say shows how God always cares for them.

Priscah Odongo, an information technology specialist who has been the choir’s leader for the last five years, said her tasks include ensuring that the singers’ signs stay in sync with the chords being played. Odongo joined the choir in 2015, she said, to worship through singing.

“I also wanted to prove to the world that people with hearing impairment have talents and can do things just like the hearing,” said Odongo, 36. “I feel good when leading the choir during Sunday worship services or any other place we are called to.”

The deaf choir’s success is clarifying widely held misconceptions that people with disabilities are a burden to society.

“The ministry of Zion Choir debunks the myth that persons with disabilities are there to receive without giving back to the community,” said Sudan Nderitu, a long-serving hearing member of the choir who works with people with disabilities professionally.

She explains that the choir members have a variety of talents and skills—they

are electrical technicians, carpentry workers, and IT experts, as well as dress-makers and tailors. “We wear uniforms made by one of us,” said Nderitu.

The choir was started in 1992 by Kum Hee Moon, a Korean missionary who had founded Young Nak Church of the Deaf in Nairobi. Five years later, that congregation moved to St. Andrew’s and the choir was integrated into St. Andrew’s music ministry.

Lucy Kahaki has been singing with the choir since its founding, when she was barely in her 40s. Now 71, Kahaki finds peace singing with people half her age. Age doesn’t count, she said, as her energy when singing matches that of youthful members.

“Singing is my passion. I sing to praise God. I joined the choir so that other young deaf persons can get the courage to sing for the Lord,” she told Religion News Service.

The Rev. George Obonyo, a choir member and special minister for the deaf in the Nairobi Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, said the choir’s example has helped convince Kenyan churches to embrace deaf culture.

“I am grateful to churches in Kenya ... for practicing inclusion,” he said. “I know this will do more in future regarding the inclusion (of those with disabilities).”

—Religion News Service



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A Fuller Witness to the Gospel

By Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission

As people move throughout the world, communities across Canada and the United States are becoming more ethnically diverse. Within the span of a few miles or kilometers, you might hear different languages spoken or see different styles of clothing representing dozens of cultures. In our North American neighborhoods it's beginning to look a little like the portrait painted in Revelation 7:9: "There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

"There's a fullness to our witness to the gospel that's only possible as a diverse people," explained Tim Sheridan, Resonate Global Mission's church-planting leader.

This is something to celebrate, but it also poses unique challenges for reaching people with the gospel and seeking justice in our communities.

That's one reason the Christian Reformed Church in North America selected as one of its Our Journey 2025 ministry plan priorities to "grow in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers."

One of the ways the denomination is growing in diversity is through planting churches.

"As communities become more diverse," Sheridan said, "there is a need for different expressions of church. We need churches with different models and ways of praying, reading Scripture, and worshiping God, churches who mentor young people or connect with campus ministries."

The CRCNA has been doing just that with a growing number of emerging churches that reflect the beautiful diversity of God's family.

"These new diaspora churches were planted by local leaders," said Reggie Smith, the CRNCA's ministry consultant for diversity. "What they discovered was a tremendous love for the Reformed world-and-life view that resonated with them. ... I am convinced diverse groups are coming to the CRC because they want to belong. And they are expanding the fabric of what God is doing in our midst."

Higher Calling Church was planted to reach out to the Black population in Smithfield, N.C. Historically, the city was one of the most segregated in the southern United States.

Here's a glimpse at a few of the denomination's newer churches and how they reflect that diversity in culture and ways of approaching ministry:

A New Expression of Church

New Jersey is one of the most ethnically and racially diverse states in the United States.

"There are not enough churches of various sizes and expressions that can reach every person," said Timothy Joo, pastor of King's Covenant Church in Bridgewater Township. "New Jersey is too diverse ethnically, culturally, socioeconomically, and spiritually to have one 'expression of the church.' New church plants with various expressions give us the broadest ability to reach people."

King's Covenant Church is reaching the increasing population of Korean American and Chinese American people who live in and near Bridgewater Township. The church plant has also connected with local campus ministries. It supports these ministries financially and in prayer and hosts Bible studies at Rutgers University and Princeton University.

"What excites me about our church community is witnessing God's faithful provision through the sacrificial generosity of each of the members of our church," Joo said.

Healing a Historically Segregated City

Smithfield, N.C., was one of the most segregated cities in the southern United States. In the past 50 years that has changed as the city works to become more inclusive. Higher Calling Church, a new church plant, has become an important part of that work.

"We feel that God has called us to come alongside him in his work in Smithfield," said Pastor Danta Covington. He and his wife, Shonda, planted Higher Calling Church to intentionally reach out to the Black population in their city.

And it's not only a church.

Working toward justice and caring for people in their community is important. "(We) reach out and impact those who have fallen through the cracks by mentoring youth, providing help as we can, partnering with existing programs in the area, (and) being a bridge for all who need it," Covington said.

While Higher Calling Church doesn't always have the resources to help directly, Covington said it can point people in the right direction.

“When you see an ex-drug user get saved and begin to become a productive citizen on fire for Christ, or a young boy excited that he got a chance to make some money working around the church, it’s worth it all,” Covington said.

Providing for the Latino Community

As Sunlight Community Church in Florida grew, they saw a need to reach the growing Latino community in Port St. Lucie. They planted Iglesia Sunlight Español, a church where people get to worship and hear a message in the language they know best.



Hosting community events is an important part of ministry for Iglesia Sunlight Español in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

Hosting community events and gatherings is also a key aspect of ministry for this church plant. They’ve started hosting events twice a year, once around Easter and once in the fall.

“Our neighborhood community lacks a central event or location to gather people together for community and relationship building,” Pastor John Granada said. These church-sponsored events have provided ways for church members to get to know neighbors while also providing unique opportunities to give to families, such as giving gift cards to help with expenses around the holidays.

A Diverse Church Reflecting a Diverse City

Several churches in the CRC are beginning to reflect many cultures and ethnicities. One such congregation is mosaicHouse in Edmonton, Alta.

“Edmonton is a diverse city because God has brought the four corners of the world into our city—and that’s why God has sent us to Edmonton,” said Pastor Victor Ko.

Ko said people in the city are drawn to mosaicHouse because it reflects the diversity of the city where they live. Longtime residents, immigrants, and refugees have all found a church home at mosaicHouse.



Edmonton, Alta., is a diverse city. Many people there feel welcome at mosaicHouse and feel comfortable inviting friends and family because the church reflects Edmonton’s diversity.

“We are a multicultural community living out the great commandment and carrying out the great commission,” Ko said. “We celebrate and go after a multiethnic diversity. ... Think of a mosaic tile—different shapes, different contours, different colors all coming together toward Jesus.”

One member said she was drawn to mosaicHouse because she felt safe being herself in conversations. She said she would feel comfortable inviting friends from different cultures to mosaicHouse.


“There are people from all over the world,” she said. “Here in mosaicHouse, we’re able to feel some unity.”

A Fuller Gospel Witness

Church planting is a denominational effort. Each plant is supported by an established congregation and its local classis. Resonate Global Mission also plays a role in supporting church plant leaders. These partnerships help reach groups of people who might not otherwise have a church home. These diverse church plants play a unique role in reaching out to people, discipling seekers and believers, and working toward justice in their communities.

And the denomination is growing because of these new churches.

“We are growing in terms of having a presence in cities and regions where we historically haven’t had a presence. We’re growing in terms of ethnic diversity. We’re growing in terms of really seeing the unique and diverse ways of engaging local communities with the gospel,” Sheridan said.

“Church planting is giving us opportunities to embody and witness to the gospel with integrity. ... The body is not complete without that diversity. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 3, it will only be together with all of the Lord’s people that we are able to grasp ‘how wide and long and high and deep’ God’s love for the world truly is.” 

Polishing the Covenant Chain

IN THE FALL OF 2022, Adrian Jacobs joined the Christian Reformed Church in North America as the new senior leader for Indigenous justice and reconciliation in Canada. Jacobs himself is Indigenous—part of the Turtle Clan, Cayuga Nation of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee Confederacy at Grand River Territory in southern Ontario.

Jacobs has worked with churches for many years, educating members on Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues. What brings him to the CRCNA, he said, is the two-row wampum treaty.

This treaty was made between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch traders in 1613. To commemorate this treaty, the Haudenosaunee made a belt with purple and white wampum beads. Belts like this were used in Indigenous cultures to tell stories and aid the memory of the history, traditions, and laws that the belts had been associated with.

The two-row wampum treaty belt is mostly white, with two parallel purple lines. Jacobs explained that the white represents both the common river of life and the Hudson River, where the two people groups met. The two parallel purple lines represent the two nations traveling life in their vessels of state with their various technologies, leaders, language, and ways. Neither of these vessels was to interfere with the operation of the other.

Three rows of beads separate the two vessels. These rows represent the desire for the peace of friendship, the respect at the heart of true peace, and the good mind that establishes peaceful relations and results in a strong relationship.

Over the years, Jacobs continued, there was a sense that this treaty was good and that the relationship between



Adrian Jacobs talks about the two-row wampum treaty belt at Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ont.


the two people groups also was good, but that their agreement was easy to forget. To strengthen and remind each covenant partner of the original two-row wampum, a silver covenant chain was created between the same peoples. The chain features three silver links reminiscent of the treaty belt's three rows of beads and further represents a connection between the Dutch vessel and the Onondaga Nation capital (part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy).

Left untended, silver will tarnish, so someone must regularly come to polish each link. In the same way, Jacobs said, the relationship between the people of this wampum treaty needs attention. He feels that "polishing the covenant chain" is his purpose

in joining the CRCNA, a denomination that began with primarily Dutch immigrants to the United States and Canada.

"Over 400 years ago the Dutch and Haudenosaunee people were very different, and yet we were able to establish a good relationship that lasted for some time," Jacobs said. "Today we are much closer in language, lifestyle, and technology; surely we can have an even better relationship than we had at the beginning."

Cultivating better relationships between settlers and Canadian Indigenous people (not just the Haudenosaunee) is a key priority for the CRCNA in Canada. Over the past few years, more than 400 people have participated in a program called Hearts Exchanged to learn about Indigenous people and take action to restore right relationships with them. In addition, the denomination supports three urban Indigenous centers across the country.

Jacobs will support healing and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. This will include activities such as KAIROS Blanket Exercises, Hearts Exchanged program development, and meeting with churches and pastors. More information about Jacobs and other resources are available at crcna.org/Indigenous. 

—Victoria Veenstra,
Canadian Indigenous
Ministry Committee

The View from Here

Catching Up to Genesis 12

GOD DID SOMETHING amazing in Genesis 12:1-4, and the church has been racing to keep up ever since.

I remember when I first got a sense of it. My wife and I were sitting in the small sanctuary of Iglesia Cristiana Reformada de Bayamón (Puerto Rico). The joyful smiles and the camaraderie of the Sunday gathering started to build. And then worship started.

There were guitars, maracas, tambourines, and my personal favorite, the guiro, a notched gourd that is scratched to the musical beat. It was loud, it was hot, it was in Spanish, and it was a window into the beating heart of God's diverse church. I loved it!

I will never forget dancing down the aisles of our church in Donga, Nigeria, with an offering of mangos, or grabbing paper towels and joining the congregation of a Reformed Church of Japan as it reverently cleaned its small church immediately after worship (I'd expected to be sipping coffee while the children spilled their red fruit punch on the carpet). I still remember sharing in the lament of an all-night vigil for a recently deceased church leader in Belladaira, Haiti.

The diversity of the church is a window into God's soul.

The diversity of the church is a window into God's soul. And we've been trying to catch up since Genesis.

When God first called Abram in Genesis 12:1-4, God promised to make him into a great nation through which God would *bless all peoples*. A few chapters later, God made a covenant with Abram and Sarai to make them the parents of *many nations* (Genesis 17:4-5). Israel existed to invite the nations to join its people in covenant relationship with the Lord (Isaiah 60).

It took a visit by God's own self as the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to convince a group of confused Jews that God's vision for the church was a body made up of every nation, tribe, and tongue. Even Peter had a hard time catching up with that vision—Paul had to correct him for insisting on a church characterized by Jewish customs (Gal. 2:11-14).

Perhaps the greatest question we face as a denomination is whether we want to catch up to God's vision for the church first articulated in Genesis 12. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that the most racially segregated hour of the week is 11 o'clock on Sunday

morning. While he was speaking of churches in the United States, my experience is that the same is likely true of just about every country where Christians are numerous.

The Christian Reformed Church has identified "growing in diversity and unity by seeking justice, reconciliation and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships which honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers" as one of its four ministry plan "milestones." The most exciting aspect of this vision is the way it has already grown the denomination.

In fact, the vast majority of the CRC's growth in the past decade has come from church planting and affiliation among ethnic minority groups. Today almost 10 percent of our denomination members are Korean, and Latin Americans are joining apace. What a blessing and an opportunity to catch up with the Holy Spirit in God's vision for our churches!

I hope that you will appreciate the inspiring stories of ethnic diversity in this month's Our Shared Ministry. Living, worshiping, and serving in ethnically diverse contexts can be intimidating. We've made mistakes (and continue to make them). But it's God's call for our denomination—and it's wonderful! **B**



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.

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

Football Comes to Calvin University

FOOTBALL IS COMING to Calvin University, and Trent Figg, formerly the senior offensive analyst for the University of Oregon football program, will be the team's first head coach.

The decision to add a football team came in October 2022, when Calvin University's Board of Trustees approved an athletics strategic plan, which included adding women's acrobatics and tumbling, men's volleyball, and men's American football to its portfolio of NCAA Division III athletic offerings.

"We are one of the premier athletics programs in all of Division III, and so why not add more offerings that meet the needs of our students?" said Dr. Wiebe Boer, president of Calvin University. "By adding these sports, we are providing students who have competed throughout high school the opportunity to get the best Christian liberal arts education around and continue in the sport they love. It's a win-win."

Leading and guiding these student athletes will require men and women of Christian integrity who understand a Reformed worldview and can help students see how their athletic pursuits fit into the big picture of God's plan for them. For Calvin football players, Figg was a great choice.

"In starting a new program of this magnitude at Calvin, we know how important it is to have a coach who is first and foremost committed to creating a culture focused on developing the character of student athletes and to helping them holistically thrive here," said Noah Toly, Calvin's provost and a co-chair of the search committee that hired Figg. "Those who recommended Trent to us originally and those who have given references to his character, skills, and



Trent Figg will be Calvin University's inaugural football coach.

abilities throughout this process have confirmed Trent to be the ideal candidate."

A native of Chillicothe, Mo., Figg is a 2008 graduate of William Jewell College (Mo.). He was a four-year member of the William Jewell football team as a defensive back. He graduated with degrees in secondary education and physical education and earned a master's degree in educational leadership from Northwest Missouri State in 2013.

Over the years, Figg has worked as a football coach at Southern Arkansas University, William Jewell College, Missouri State, the University of Hawaii, and most recently at the University of Oregon under head coach Dan Lanning. This past year, Oregon

completed a 10-3 season that included a 28-27 win over the University of North Carolina in the Holiday Bowl.

"I feel extremely blessed and honored to receive this position, and I do not take it lightly," Figg said about joining Calvin's community. "Adding football to its athletics offerings is a significant step for Calvin University. It's an opportunity that my family and I are extremely excited about."

— Matt Kucinski,
Calvin University

My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Concerns' Book of the Year

"WE NEED TO CHANGE the way we treat disabled people in church spaces," said Amy Kenny, a disabled (as she prefer to identify) scholar, Shakespeare lecturer, and author. Her book *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request* has been named the book of the year by the Disability Concerns Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America.

"I wanted to focus on the church because I think it stings in a really tender place when it is the church (perpetuating ableism)," Kenny said. "As Christians, we talk about how everyone is made in the image of God and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, we are to welcome the stranger and befriend the outcast, and yet that hasn't really held true for me in my experience of churches."

Instead, those with disabilities are often overlooked, underutilized, and treated as something in need of fixing instead of as equal members of the community. The title of Kenny's book illustrates this; she said she has frequently been approached by well-meaning Christians who ask if they can pray for her healing.

"They have been disciplined into ableism and only see my disabled body as a 'lack' in need of a 'fix' or a cure," Kenny said. "The title of my book is a declaration that my body is not a prayer request. It was made in the image of



From left, Lindsay Wieland Capel (CRCNA Disability Concerns), Terry De Young (RCA Disability Concerns), and Amy Kenny, author of *Disability Concerns'* book of the year.

the divine, and it radiates that to the world. It is just that the church hasn't caught up enough yet to see her shine."

Disability Concerns is encouraging all CRC members to read Kenny's book and discuss how we can come together to fight ableism in our churches and instead engage in disability justice. The ministry has put together book discussion questions and, with support from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, offers up to 10 free copies of Kenny's book to churches that host a book club. So far 22 book clubs have formed, with more joining every week.

While book clubs in local congregations have been encouraged, Disability Concerns also offered a four-week online book club in January for people across North America that included a live Q&A event with Kenny via Zoom.

"For some, reading Kenny's book is an 'aha' moment of what disabled people often experience in the church and what they can do about it," said Lindsay Wieland Capel, content manager for Disability Concerns. "For others, it is a validation of their own painful experiences of ableism at church. Kenny's prophetic voice is a call to action for the church."

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
CRC Communications

'I Couldn't Imagine'

Ukrainian Voices and the Christian Reformed Church

LIKA ROMAN'S COURAGE and commitment to sharing her faith with others have brought a silver lining to the crisis in Ukraine.

Roman, who partners with ReFrame Ministries' Russian-language outreach, was living in Kyiv, Ukraine's capital city, when it was attacked by Russian troops in February 2021.

As Roman fled Kyiv, she said that one thought kept popping into her mind: "I couldn't imagine what it would be like to go through this without knowing God."

That thought has helped Roman with each of her moves since that initial attack. After fleeing to Poland, she watched as young families, elderly women, and lone children arrived in the refugee camp where she was staying. Though she did not have much to offer them physically, Roman knew she had something else she could give.

Roman used most of her time and her love for people to share her own faith story, both in person and to her large following on social media.

Three Generations

When a family of three generations—a grandmother, her two daughters, and four young children—arrived at the refugee camp, they carried a familiar expression of fear and uncertainty.

"They didn't know anyone, so they were especially vulnerable to being harmed and even to sex trafficking," Roman said. "They needed everything, but the thing they needed most was Jesus."

The family accepted Roman's offer of prayer, and they shared that they would soon be leaving by bus to Finland. After Roman prayed with them, the family decided to commit their lives to Jesus—right at that moment, while sitting on their temporary mattresses at the refugee camp.



Lika Roman (top left) has shared her faith with many fellow Ukrainian refugees since fleeing her home in Kyiv last February.

A few days later, Roman received a call from one of the women in that family. Their bus had gotten into a terrible accident on the way to Finland, but because she knew God was with her, the woman could sense God's protection.

Now in a hospital in a part of the world they didn't know, the family felt scared. But Roman was able to send a pastor to pray with them again.

"It's amazing how big the family of believers we have around the globe is," Roman said. "It's amazing to see

how God is working through all these believers—through each and every one of us."

That Large Body of Believers Includes the CRC

While Roman cherishes her opportunities to meet with people face to face, she knows she can also share her gospel messages online and reach many more people who need to hear them.

Through ministry shares, church offerings, and individual support for ReFrame's Russian-language ministry, Roman's messages have reached people caught in the crosshairs of war—those in Ukrainian bomb shelters or in their homes during raids as well as those who have fled to nearby countries.

"Praise God that these people still have their internet and their phones," Roman said. "I've been able to have personal meetings, livestreams on Facebook, and opportunities to reach people who need our support, prayers, and words of hope."

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries



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The Fish Run

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what makes some kinds of fish swim back up the streams and tributaries to where they were spawned and hatched? The technical term for fish that do that is “adfluvial.”

You can find adfluvial fish no matter where you live. Many species run from the oceans into fresh water to spawn. Probably the most famous are the salmon species—those fish that make spectacular leaps over rapids and dams as they make their way back to their spawning waters. This might be news to some, but the salmon we find in the Midwest, including the Great Lakes, are not native. They all come from Atlantic or Pacific Ocean stock fish that were brought to inland waters. Though native to the oceans, salmon are famous for their powerful runs up rivers, streams, and tributaries so they can lay eggs in the same waters where they were hatched. These are the fish you probably think of when you see grizzly bears and brown bears along streams and tributaries waiting to catch fish during the fall salmon run.


Adfluvial fish don't run only in the fall, though; many species of adfluvial fish also run in the spring. Northern pike, walleye, and steelhead trout are some species of adfluvial fish that spawn in the spring. In West Michigan, where I grew up, one of the great adfluvial runs my friends and I always

looked forward to was the run of the white suckers up our local rivers and streams. We would fish them in the bigger rivers, and we would hunt for them in streams at night with lanterns and spears, hoping to come back with dozens of them in the feed bags we had modified to carry over our shoulders. We would often then salt them and smoke them the next day before eating them.

People have wondered for a long time how adfluvial fish know how to return to the same streams where they were hatched. Most scientists believe it has to do with the scents in the streams—subtle clues that remind a fish of where they came from and where they are going. Each stream has a uniqueness to it based on the trees, plants, rocks, and soil where it lies. Each stream has unique flavors and telltale signs that let the fish know where they belong.

This can be much like our walk of faith. God speaks to us in many ways, and, in my experience, often subtle ones. In my 53 years, I have never specifically heard God's voice (I think that would be rather shocking!), but God has spoken to me regularly.

The trick is to develop the spiritual habit of listening—to look for those telltale cues from God, to begin to hear God's voice through people, events, and, yes, even thoughts we have when we focus on God. The more we spend time focusing on God and God's Word, the more God directs us in our streams of life.

Be adfluvial—follow God! 



Clayton Lubbers teaches science at Byron Center Christian School and has been teaching for over 25 years. He loves the outdoors and commonly meets and sees God while hunting, fishing, and exploring creation.



Reconsidering How the Church Communicates Love

By Sean Schat

One clear outcome of the pandemic is that many have entrenched themselves firmly in their beliefs, often in opposition to the beliefs firmly held by others. This does not bode well for our society, because people who are entrenched don't listen well and are more likely to see others and their beliefs as a threat. Some who have firmly entrenched themselves are Christians, and this entrenchment sometimes emerged in opposition to other believers. This does not bode well for the kingdom of God or for the body of Christ. The church is called to be united in representing Christ in the world. In our actions and words, supported by the work of the Spirit, we are the way others will meet Christ, hear his call, and come to know they are God's dearly loved children.

One of my students recently wrote, "We are recovering from the biggest isolation and breakdown of community that everyone in our lifetime has experienced." In the context of this isolation and division, we can show the world a different way. This is an unprecedented opportunity for the church to demonstrate the reconciling and transforming power of God's love.

The Love Command

Christ, the head of the body, is very clear about our obligation to love others. Indeed, God commands us to love each other (John 13:34-35). This is how others will know we follow him. The apostle John reminds us to love one another (1 John 4:7-8). Anyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. Others will come to know God through the love we communicate.

Many Christians intend to offer love and care to those around them. Their intentions are often recognized, and the love and care they offer is often recognized, received, and experienced. History clearly testifies to the immense good done by Christians acting in the name of Christ. However, history also has shown that there have been times when loving intentions backfired, and the people we sought to love and care for experienced harm as a result of our good intentions and our intention-rooted actions.

Many outside of the church hold a deeply rooted suspicion of Christians. They believe the church has a legacy of harming the marginalized and that the church has deservedly lost power and influence. In fact, many believe the church has forfeited the right to

speak and lead in Western culture because Christians have been at the forefront of most significant marginalizations in the West (e.g., gender bias, withholding women's rights, slavery, apartheid, abusive residential schools for First Nations children, LGBTQ discrimination).

To many both inside and outside the church, Christians do not appear to be very loving. This is a problem of epic proportions. Has the church failed the love command?

Studying Care

I began my Ph.D. program by exploring the communication of care in education literature. I discovered that educational care was part of a larger body of literature described as "care theory," which I reviewed over two years, and I recognized that care theory had a lot to teach Christians about communicating love. The testimony of history and the perceptions of those outside the church clearly demonstrate that good-hearted, well-intentioned Christians have caused harm to others. There is often a disconnect between our intentions and our impact. Care theory has a lot to offer the church as a result.

Contested Conceptualizations: The literature recognizes that care is a contested concept: it means different

things to different people. And how one defines care significantly affects how one practices care. Are caring intentions and caring actions enough? Or does care need to be recognized and responded to?

Two Care Needs: At the heart of the care theory literature is the recognition that all human beings have two care needs: the need to care for others and the need to be cared for by others. This was a very important foundation for my research because this is part of what it means to image God: we were created for love—to love others and to be loved by others.

Care Is a Relationship: Care is not just a virtue, nor is it simply a behavior. Care is a relationship between people. Offering care and receiving care are each part of the process of communicating care. When we offer care, we enter into a relationship.

Care Requires Completion: It is not enough to simply intend care or to act in ways intended to communicate care. Care must be completed. It must be recognized and responded to by the person we are seeking to care for. Without completion, there is no care. Caring intentions and caring actions are necessary, but insufficient. This distinction might help explain the church's frequent failure to obey the love command. It is not enough to intend to love or to do things that are meant to communicate our love and care for others. The other person, in most cases, must recognize we are trying to offer love. If they do not recognize and respond, then we have not yet successfully communicated love. We must pay attention to their perceptions and responses. If our intentions are authentic, we must find ways to re-communicate our love.

Defining Care: Because care is a contested concept, it is important to

If the person you
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be clear about how we define care. We often experience tension when it comes to caring for or loving others. Do we love them for who they are, or for who they could become? Loving them for who they are might imply we support and endorse everything they are and believe. Yet who they become is not up to us. We can influence others, of course. But we can't control or change them. If a change emerges, it will come through the work of the Spirit. I define care as "a relationship where the one caring supports the well-being, flourishing, and autonomy of the cared-for, and where both relationship partners recognize and assent to what is happening." The final line of the definition might be the most important: the relationship is not established until both participants recognize that care was offered, and the cared-for responds. I believe this definition has significant value for the modern church. Love seeks the well-being and flourishing of the other. But it can only happen in the context of relationship.

Establishing a caring relationship changes everything. Care theory clearly shows that once care has been successfully communicated, a caring relationship forms. And once a caring relationship has formed, the nature of the relationship changes. The cared-for now trusts the one caring and believes that they have their best interest at heart. This allows them to receive criticism and to be asked tough questions. A caring teacher can challenge and critique. A caring parent can discipline. A caring friend or colleague can speak the truth in love. It is only after Jesus has gained the trust of the woman caught in adultery by saving her from stoning that he can tell her what she needed to hear: go and sin no more (John 8). How the cared-for perceives the one caring makes all the difference. If the person you are offering care to recognizes and trusts your intentions, they are likely to receive and respond. If the person you are offering care to does not recognize your caring intentions, and does not accept your actions as caring, the care you offer will not be successfully communicated. This is an essential distinction for the church. Often our intentions are good, and our actions are well-intended. But because we are not focused sufficiently on how others perceive our intentions and actions, we might believe we are being caring when the other person is not experiencing care.

Some Considerations

So what should we—both corporately as the church and individually—consider when we wish to offer love and care to people? Here's what my research shows:

Intent vs. Impact: When we consider our own actions, we tend to overfocus on our intentions. We believe our intentions are good, so we assume our impact also will be positive. When we respond to the actions of others,

however, we tend to overlook and mistrust intent and focus on impact.

Perception vs. Behavior: Every behavior makes sense to the behavior in the moment of behaving. Behavior is a symptom of perception. In order to understand where others are coming from, we need to look past their words and actions to discern their underlying beliefs and perceptions. We can't change their behavior. But we might be able to influence their perceptions, which might cause them to change their own behavior.

Receptive vs. Projective Empathy: Projective empathy occurs when we assume we know how someone else feels because we have considered how we would feel if we were in their situation. As a result, we believe we know where they are coming from. Receptive empathy recognizes the only way we can truly understand how someone feels is to watch them and ask them directly—to hear their words and truly be able to stand in their shoes.

Offering Love vs. Successfully Communicating Love: Loving intentions and loving actions are necessary for successfully communicating love, but they are insufficient. It is not enough to intend to love, or to act in ways that are loving. Love must be recognized, accepted, and responded to in order for it to transition from offered love to successfully communicated love.

The Issue vs. the Person: When we disagree with others, we tend to equate the issue with the relationship. If we disagree with what they believe, we often dislike the person. Sometimes this is temporary, in the heat of the moment. Sometimes it is permanent. We need to find a way to keep the two separate. Even if we disagree with someone else, we may not overlook their humanity or the fact

that they are an image bearer and a sibling in Christ.

Posture vs. Position: When we disagree with someone, it is helpful to distinguish between our position (what we believe) and our posture (how we act toward them). If our posture is inappropriate, our position is unlikely to be heard or to have influence. It is possible to maintain one's own position while authentically demonstrating a posture of authentic listening and hospitality. This is not easy, but it is necessary.

The Bystanders and the Next Generation: When we are involved in a disagreement, we tend to focus on the participants. We often forget there are others around. The way we behave might affect the bystanders in ways that far exceed the significance of the issue itself. This is particularly important for the church. Having worked with adolescents and young adults in Christian communities for most of my life, it is clear to me that one of the main reasons for the decline of the church is how the next generation perceives the way the previous generation has handled conflict and treated people.


Remembering Who Our Enemies Are: Far too often we act as if the people with whom we disagree are our enemies. They are not. Our enemies are not flesh and blood, but Satan and the powers of darkness (Eph. 6:12). Human beings are not our enemies. They might be victims in need of help. They might be patients in need of healing. They might be allies in a spiritual war. But they are never our enemy, even when it feels as if they are.

Recognizing Relational Reciprocity: If we are going to communicate love successfully, we can only do so by entering into relationship, even when we disagree. Our love will not be

recognized and responded to if there is no relationship. If there is no relationship, we will not be able to influence. We need a relationship in order to offer critique and ask tough questions that will actually be received. But relationships are reciprocal. We need to be able to receive criticism and face tough questions from others, too. And reciprocity carries with it a key risk: it is quite possible that we also might be changed by the process.

Seeking to Influence Through Love

Most faith traditions have some variation of the golden rule: do unto others as you would have others do unto you. If we want to love others, we should act in ways that offer love. Care theorist Nel Noddings, drawing on receptive empathy, suggests we should take it one step further: to "Do unto others as they would have done unto them." Communicating care is not about the perceptions of the one caring, but the cared-for, and those perceptions are profoundly shaped by the nature of the shared relationship.

Our ability to love others comes from God, not from us. We are commanded to love others, reflecting God's love to others. We don't need to judge. That is for God to do. We don't need to save people. Jesus already did so. We don't need to change others. That is the work of the Spirit. We can, however, be part of the process of growth in change, influencing others by caring for them as dearly loved brothers and sisters, beloved children of God. 



Sean Schat (sschat@redeemer.ca) is an assistant professor of education at Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ont. His research focuses on the communication of educational care. He and his family attend Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont.

The Wise Woman

The wise woman
did not mock,
embarrass, or
belittle the man.



Rev. John Groen is a retired Christian Reformed Church minister who served congregations in Trenton and Richmond Hill, Ont., and Ann Arbor, Mich. He currently resides in Pinckney, Mich.

ANOTHER PASTORAL VISIT, another life lesson. I paid a visit to Mrs. Wise*, a widow. The Saturday prior she had invited friends over, and in our conversation she related an incident that had occurred that evening.

As so often happens, church, religion, and faith came up in the conversation. But the exchange Mrs. Wise described has stayed with me all these years.

She told me that one of her guests said something off the mark, and his remarks jarred the other guests. They didn't know how to respond. So none of them did. The man was left thinking quite highly of himself, the wise woman told me.

But he was off the mark, she said. And she was upset with the man. His remarks left her other guests uneasy. They didn't want to challenge him, so they kept their thoughts to themselves, as did she.

Eventually, following this bump in the road, conversation resumed.

The wise woman went into her kitchen to bring out the refreshments she had prepared. The man followed her, looking for a refill of coffee.

"You were wrong," the wise woman said. "What you said was wrong, and you hurt some of your friends. You should never have said it." She was straight to the point.

For more than a minute there was silence in the kitchen.

"I'm sorry I said it," said the man. "You're right. What do I do now?"

"Tell our friends what you just told me."

The wise woman did not mock, embarrass, or belittle the man. She waited for the right time to express her opinion to him. She disagreed with him, believing his words were foolish, but she also did not want him to be regarded as foolish.


Proverbs 26:4-5 ("Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes") has been with me ever since I studied Proverbs with Prof. Ray Van Leeuwen at Calvin Seminary. His commentary on Proverbs is my go-to when I study it.

What I learned then and through life experience since is that to know when to respond to a fool or not takes wisdom—the kind of wisdom the book of Proverbs is soaked in. It's about what fits in what situation. To know what fits takes wisdom.

"A proverb's wisdom is useless unless it is used at the right time, in the right way, with regard to persons and circumstances that correspond to the saying," Van Leeuwen writes. "When this happens, a situation or problem is suddenly illuminated. The wise have a sense of appropriate context."

The wise woman knew when and when not to answer. She wisely kept silent until she could speak to the man in private. When she spoke, her words reached the heart of the man at the right time, moving him to admit and then address his foolishness. She didn't shame the man, but helped restore his standing among friends.

A wise woman led a man from foolishness to wisdom. Mastering life entails listening to the wise.

I left the woman's home with much to ponder, grateful God had brought me there. 

*Name has been changed.

Rebuilding the Romans Road

To appear before
 God barren of
 the transforming
 works of the Holy
 Spirit is a daunting
 prospect.

THE “ROMANS ROAD” I’m talking about here is not the amazing system of roads throughout the Roman Empire that providentially enabled Paul to bring the gospel throughout the empire. Instead I’m talking about the popular and misleading presentation of the gospel that has been promoted for many years. In simple form it goes like this:

- » “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).
- » The punishment for sin is eternal death (hell), but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23).
- » God showed his love for us by sending Jesus to die for our sins and saving us from God’s wrath (Rom. 5:9).
- » Whoever believes in Jesus will be forgiven of their sins (Rom. 8:1) and enjoy peace with God (Rom. 5:1).
- » Those who believe in Jesus will be saved and go to heaven when they die (Rom. 10:9).

This is believed to be the essence of the gospel according to Paul.

In the past 30 years there has been a tremendous resurgence of Pauline studies led by such reliable scholars as N.T. Wright, John Barclay, and E.P. Sanders, all of them deeply committed Christian believers who together have challenged this traditional understanding of Paul’s gospel and invited us to do some fundamental rebuilding of the “Romans Road.”

1. Sin is slavery to spiritual powers.

No one, of course, disputes the basic fact that we are all sinners. But Paul sees this sin problem as much deeper than the tendency toward sinfulness we all experience. All through his epistles, Paul describes sin as a fundamental captivity to the spiritual

principalities and powers of darkness that are in control of the world and human life in this age. (See Eph. 6:21-22.)

This also means that our deliverance from sin involves far more than a simple transaction by which Christ died for our sin and grants us forgiveness. It means being freed from slavery to the powers of darkness and placed under a new power. This is exactly how Paul describes it in Colossians 1:13-14: “He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Paul then explains this further: “God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins; ... he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col. 2:13-15). Our forgiveness is part of a much bigger cosmic victory over the evil powers that enslave us.

2. Faith means transformation. We typically understand faith in Christ to mean simply believing in him—that is, believing as a fact that Jesus died for our sins. However, recent biblical scholarship challenges the idea that faith means simple belief. Intensive study of the use of the Greek word for faith shows that it means believing in Jesus in such a way we offer him our total allegiance and obedience. He is our Lord as well as our Savior.

Faith means more than accepting Christ’s forgiveness. It involves the complete transformation of our lives by the Holy Spirit. By faith, through baptism we enter a whole new identity by truly becoming disciples of Jesus, following his commandments and imitating his way of life. This deeper meaning of faith is contained in the



Len Vander Zee is a retired CRC pastor now serving as interim minister of preaching at Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

title of my old catechism booklet for teens, “Saved to Serve.”

3. Faith and works, not faith or works.

A truncated understanding of faith leads to another problem with the typical “Romans Road” gospel. It tends to promote the idea that we are saved by believing in Jesus *rather than* by good works. Of course, Paul does talk about the uselessness of certain kinds of works—the works of the law. “We ... have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

By “law” Paul means obedience to the statutes of the Old Covenant of the Torah, such as circumcision. For Paul, there is no fundamental opposition between faith and works, but only between faith and the kind of works that rely on external religious rites. For him, faith is an allegiance to Christ leading to a transformation exhibited in the kinds of good works that demonstrate a person is truly his disciple.

It might come as a surprise to many of us that every single text that speaks of the final judgment in the New Testament clearly states that it is based on works rather than bare faith in Christ. Just two examples can represent all of them: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21) and “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). To appear before God barren of the transforming works of the Holy Spirit is a daunting prospect.


Perhaps the fullest statement of the gospel’s transforming power

occurs right in the middle of Romans: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ... And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4). Authentic faith shows itself in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to fulfill God’s fundamental law, the law of love.

The “Romans Road” gospel implies that if I only believe that Jesus died for my sins and pray the “sinner’s prayer” I will go to heaven. We sometimes talk as though justification and sanctification are two separate departments of which the first is necessary and the second is optional. The sad result is a church bloated with “believers” but thin of transformed disciples. Jesus doesn’t just assure us he died for our sins; he invites us to take up our cross and follow him.

Of course, none of us fully lives up to what Paul calls the “measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, NRSV). But to have faith in Jesus means that we constantly renounce the works of darkness and open our hearts to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian Reformed Church’s own contemporary testimony, *Our World Belongs to God*, proclaims a cosmic gospel that exposes the inadequacy of the “Romans Road”:

We rejoice in the goodness of God, renounce the works of darkness, and dedicate ourselves to holy living. As covenant partners, set free for joyful obedience, we offer our hearts and lives to do God’s work in the world. With tempered impatience, eager to see injustice ended, we expect the Day of the Lord. We are confident that the light which shines in the present darkness will fill the earth when Christ appears. Come, Lord Jesus. Our world belongs to you (Art. 6). 

Suggested Reading

Matthew Bates, *Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ* (Brazos, 2019)

David deSilva, *Transformation: The Heart of Paul’s Gospel* (Lexham Press, 2014)

N.T. Wright, *Romans: N.T. Wright For Everyone Bible Study Guides* (IVP Connect, 2009)

1. What did you previously know of the “Romans Road”? In what context?
2. What do you think of the difference between faith as simply belief and faith as total allegiance to Christ?

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

Telling the Hidden Stories of Phoebe, Junia, Prisca, and More

THE MORE I READ about women in the early church, the more transfixed I am by their stories. Phoebe. Priscilla. Junia. Lydia. And more. I also look forward to meeting them in heaven someday and hearing them fill in the missing pieces of their lives—lives dedicated to furthering God’s redemptive work on this earth.

That’s why I loved the new book *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* (IVP), by New Testament scholar and professor Nijay Gupta. By painting an in-depth and realistic portrait of life in the first-century world, Gupta is able to fill in some of the blanks as he explores the lives of these courageous women who engaged in the earliest churches.

Those churches were hosted in homes, or households, with believers gathering to pray and break bread together. They had no main pastor; instead there were leaders including Paul, Timothy, Silas, and “householders” such as Lydia and Nympha, who hosted a church in her house (Col. 4:15) and was the only Christian from first-century Laodicea named in Scripture. Gupta says that in some areas of the Roman world, “women may have comprised up to 25% of total householders.”

Because my daughter’s name is Phoebe, I relished reading an entire chapter about this early church leader whose status as a ministry provider has been greatly diminished over the centuries. She was a big deal. The word for “benefactor,” which Paul uses to commend Phoebe to the Roman church, was *prostatis*, which, in the first-century Roman context, Gupta says, was “terminology used for someone of power and status serving as a guardian or protector of a person or group.” The common translation “helper” makes it sound as if she was

making sandwiches for people (not that there is anything wrong with that; it’s just not what Phoebe’s role was).

Another woman who fascinated me was Priscilla. As a name enthusiast, I was intrigued to learn that Priscilla’s real name was actually Prisca, and that Priscilla was simply an affectionate nickname meaning “little Prisca.” Prisca and her husband, Aquila, were tentmakers alongside Paul, crafting “sun awnings of linen” to protect customers from the hot Roman sun.

For more than 600 years, Bible translators referred to Junia (Rom. 16:7), as Junius, an unheard-of male name in those days. Junia, meanwhile, was as common as Amy or Michelle; it was everywhere. Now most scholars believe that Junia and Andronicus were husband and wife, an intrepid ministry pair who wound up in prison shackles at least once. It was so rare for a woman to be imprisoned, says Gupta, that Junia must have been thought of as “a threat to public order.”

By excavating such rich, historical detail from two millennia ago, Gupta reveals these heroines as expert, strategic, and dauntless. Women who used to be merely names on a list to me are now so much more. Yet I know their stories—once untold and even hidden—only partly; someday I will hear their whole stories for myself—no details missing, no translations broken. 📖



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Manitoba, lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., in a 1924 house full of teenagers, pets, exchange students, and houseplants. The author of 15 books, including *Anne of Green Gables*, *My Daughter and Me*, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her on Instagram @thebooksellersdaughter or on her podcast *Eat Like a Heroine*.



All Will Be Well: Learning to Trust God’s Love

By Lacy Finn Borgo, illustrated by Rebecca Evans

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Julian asks Mima to tell her again about the person she was named after, Julian of Norwich. The young girl, sad about her grandmother’s illness, is comforted by the story she’s heard so many times before about the selfless woman who relentlessly cared for sick people during a plague.

The next day, when Julian tells her grandmother she doesn’t want her to die, Mima assures her granddaughter that she will be with God when she dies, and she repeats a version of Julian of Norwich’s oft-quoted words: “Because God loves you and God loves me, all will be well, all will be well, everything will be well.”

Author Lacy Finn Borgo’s compassionate narrative and illustrator Rebecca Evans’ endearing pictures capture a sense of hope, love, and encouragement in sad circumstances. (IVP Kids)



Colin and Samir (YouTube)

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

With over 2 billion monthly users, YouTube has become a cultural force that cannot be ignored. What started in 2005 as an online place where anyone (the “You” in YouTube) could post a video, the online search engine has grown into a platform on which some are building brands, careers, and in some cases entire companies.

If all of this makes you feel like you’re lost in a strange and disorienting jungle of technology and jargon, then fear not—you have help in the form of faithful guides named Colin and Samir.

Using a video-podcast format, they interview YouTube’s most successful creators and have seen their own subscriber count steadily increase. Recently, Colin and Samir posted a video of the exact moment their channel reached 1 million subscribers.



The Daily Poem (Podcast)

By Goldberry Studios

Reviewed by Kayleigh Van Wyk

The Daily Poem offers one essential poem each weekday morning, from Shakespeare and John Donne to Robert Frost and Langston Hughes.

The poems are read aloud by David Kern and other contributors with some light commentary to provide some context for the poet and the poem’s form and language. It’s an easily accessible way to engage with poetry.

One thing that’s easy to appreciate about this podcast is the way Kern reads the poems. His ability to alter his pace and tone—speaking whimsically for some of Lewis Carroll’s works or almost whispering for Emily Dickinson’s “I heard a Fly buzz—when I died”—is engaging and refreshing. (Acast)



Rembrandt Is in the Wind

By Russ Ramsey

Reviewed by Sara Kyoungah White

Russ Ramsey is not an art historian or scholar. He’s a pastor who has loved art for many decades, and his recent book shows a writer’s ear for a compelling story, an enthusiast’s sweeping eye for history, and a pastor’s heart that conveys and inspires love not only for art but for humanity.

Rembrandt Is in the Wind is for Christians who want to better appreciate art. It opens windows into the historical contexts, fascinating life stories, and theological underpinnings of some of the world’s most well-known artists and their works, from Michelangelo and Johannes Vermeer to Vincent van Gogh and Henry O. Tanner.

In learning about the world’s great masterpieces, we are handed a key to rekindle our own loving imaginations for the very real people in our midst. (Zondervan)

The Lowdown

An Indigenous Vision for Wholeness: In an era in which “resistance” has become tokenized, popular Indigenous author Kaitlin Curtice (*Native*) reclaims it as a basic human calling in *Living Resistance*. (Brazos Press, March 7)

Based on a True Story: Starring Sally Hawkins and Steve Coogan, *The Lost King* is inspired by the true story of finding British monarch King Richard III’s remains under a Leicester parking garage. (IFC Films, in theaters March 24)

Season 3 Finally Drops: After a nearly two-year wait, *The Mandalorian: Season 3*, will release on March 1. (Disney+)

Hello, Beautiful: From Ann Napolitano, the bestselling author of *Dear Edward*, comes a poignant and engrossing family story. An homage to *Little Women*’s Laurie, this book tells the story of a lonely young man who gets swept up in a loving family with four daughters. Will tragedy unravel their bonds?

The Fool

There is a wrong way to be a fool. But there is a right way for Christians to be fools.



Todd Statham is the Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of British Columbia (Okanagan Campus) and a research fellow at the Kirby Laing Centre for Public Theology in Cambridge, U.K.

I RECENTLY GAVE A TALK on campus to a group of Christian undergraduates. Afterward, an earnest young man spoke to me of his science class with a lecturer who boasted of atheism. “How can you be so stupid not to believe the evidence for God’s existence? But the Bible says that fools don’t believe in God, right?” The student laughed at his paraphrase of Psalm 14:1, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

But this isn’t really what the Bible means. Professors aren’t stupid. And there are many atheists and unbelievers more intelligent than you or me. When the Bible states, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God,’” it’s not insulting unbelievers’ intelligence. Did you notice the fool doesn’t say “there is no God” in her head, but rather in her heart? Scripture simply takes as a given the living God. The great question, then, isn’t whether God exists, but whether we commit to God. The fool doesn’t need more education or a greater IQ. He needs a change of heart.


This is why Jesus—who often calls people foolish (e.g., Matt. 25:2; Luke 11:40; Luke 12:20)—teaches that a person who encounters him but then turns away is like a fool “who built his house on sand” (Matt. 7:26). Similarly, Paul makes clear that what makes a fool is that they don’t care that God is (Rom. 1:21). Simply put, a fool is made in the heart, not the head.

So the Bible declares matter-of-factly that unbelievers are fools. Yet here’s where things get a little complicated: the Bible also declares that believers are fools!

There is a wrong way to be a fool. Yes, unbelievers are too proud to bow to the living God and too busy to follow the way of Jesus—but aren’t we also routinely guilty of such foolishness? “My people are fools,” complains God; “they do not know me” (Jer. 4:22).

Indeed, the prophets of the Old Testament are especially critical when God’s people live as if it doesn’t matter that God is. This is what sociologists of religion call *practical atheism*: our heads believe in God, but our lives don’t look like it. This “atheism” of the heart is a perpetual risk for those of us, who—of course!—go to church and profess the creeds yet don’t commit our full selves to Jesus’ rule.

But there is a right way for Christians to be fools. “A man who has faith must be prepared not only to be a martyr, but to be a fool,” argued G.K. Chesterton in his classic book *Heretics* (1905). This must be so for followers of the incarnate and crucified God. God appears in Jesus as all that is foolish in the eyes of the world: weakness, suffering, even a shameful death. And yet the life and death of Jesus reveal that “the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor. 1:25). A Scripture-shaped, Christ-like life will look foolish in our society.

So it seems there’s a wrong way to be a fool and a right way to be a fool. How foolish not to receive the gift of life offered to us in and through Jesus Christ! Yet to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord will have us—to cite Chesterton—playing “the court fool of the King of Paradise.” 

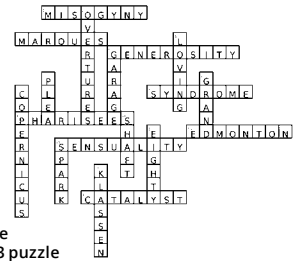
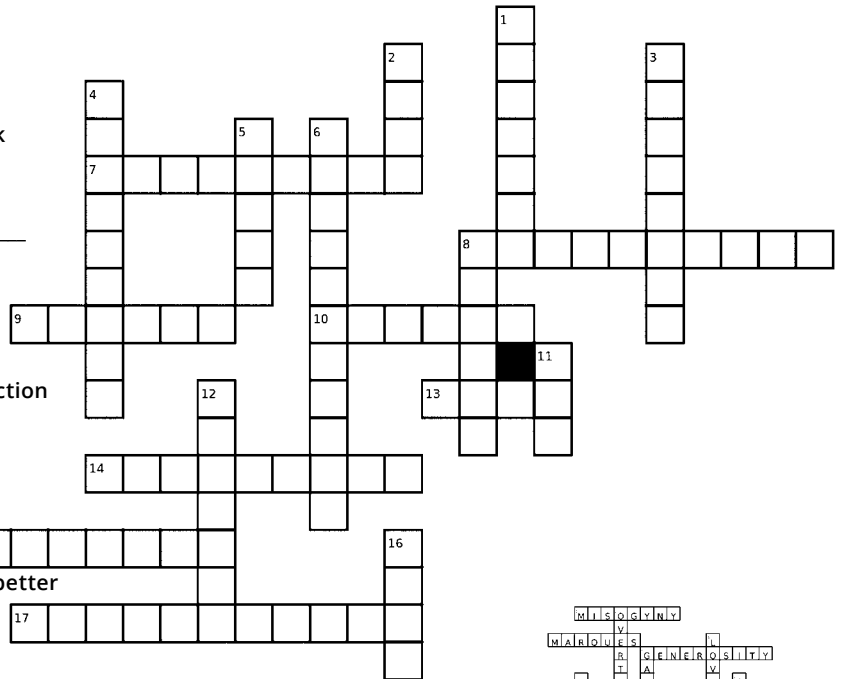
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

Down

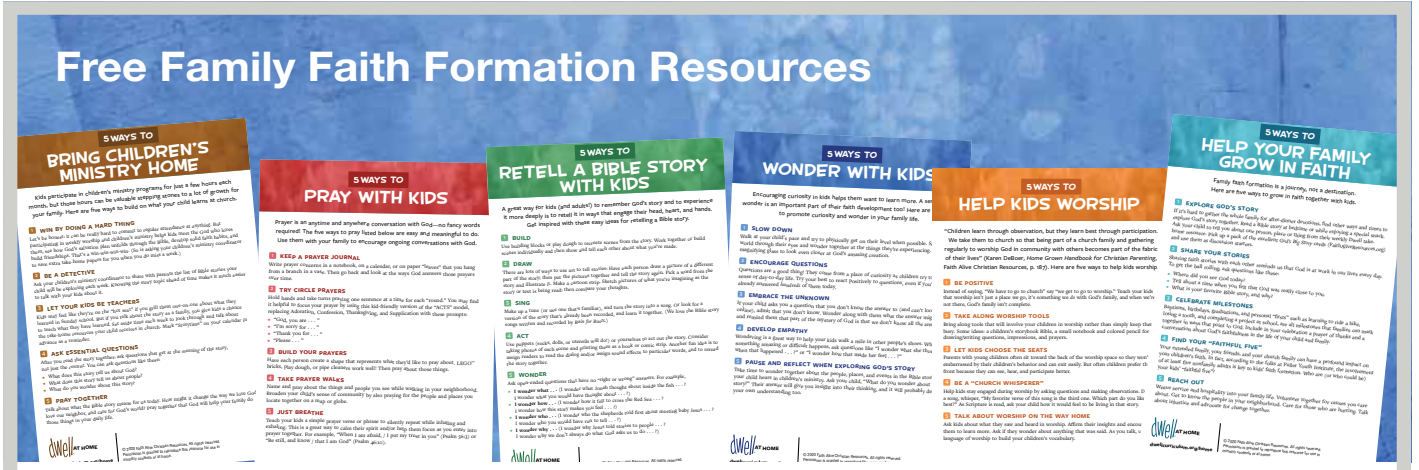
- Julian of _____ is the subject of a new children's book called *All Will Be Well*
- Psalm 14:1 speaks of this kind of person
- The Center for Public Justice presents an annual _____ Prize for social research
- A real-life horse whisperer
- For more than 600 years, Bible translators referred to _____ (Rom. 16:7) as Junius
- Next Steps _____ can help churches seek God's direction in cases of sharp disagreement
- The church's diversity is a _____ into God's soul
- "The _____ of the LORD is my strength."
- Medals marking Queen Elizabeth II's Platinum _____ honor community service
- Studying this might help us understand how to love better

Across

- Salmon are this type of fish
- Accepting church _____ is one mark of an intergenerational church
- The two-row treaty belt
- The _____ Road
- A committee *in* _____ works for synod according to a specific mandate of synod
- _____ is in the Wind is a new book by Russ Ramsey
- A ministry named for "hope, renewal, and a new beginning"
- King's Covenant Church is in this township



Answers to the February 2023 puzzle



Want to help families learn to pray together, explore God's Word together, and grow in faith? Check out *Dwell at Home's* "5 Ways" series at DwellCurriculum.org/Home.

These FREE one-page tip sheets give parents and caregivers practical, creative ideas for nurturing faith at home.

They're perfect for sharing with families via email, social media, and your church's website. Or download and print them to hand out.

For more ways to connect children's ministry and family faith formation check out DwellCurriculum.org/Home



DEADLINES: Ads for the April issue are due March 6, 2023; May issue: April 3, 2023. Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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

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

Congregational Announcements

URGENT NEED FOR ENGLISH BIBLES! In communities around the world, believers outnumber Bibles 300 to 1! You could be an answer to their prayer by donating Bibles today! We will accept any translation in any condition. English Bibles needed for English speaking believers. Please call/text Jess at Project Bible Runners: 217-273-9497 or email her at: projectbible.runners@gmail.com for more information.

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: lakealfredministry.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 KALAMAZOO will hold its spring meeting at Westwood CRC, Kalamazoo, MI on Tuesday, March 14 at 6:00 PM.

Available for Call

AVAILABLE FOR CALL The Council of Georgetown CRC in Hudsonville, MI is pleased to announce that after a mutual separation Reverend Marc Nelesen is eligible and available for a call as a minister of the Word.

Church Positions Available

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC/WORSHIP 15 to 30 hours/week, negotiable. Strong relational, musical and coordination abilities desired. Contact Mary Jelsema, Church Administrator, at 616-4533105 or Mary@westviewcrc.org

FLEETWOOD CRC in Surrey, British Columbia is seeking a full-time Lead Pastor. Our desire is to find a gifted preacher, caring shepherd, and someone with proven leadership abilities. Please contact in confidence John Bron at john@bron.biz or 778-246-2766. Visit our website www.fleetwoodcrc.org for a full job description and our Church Profile.

FULL TIME PASTOR Sully Christian Reformed Church, in Sully, IA, is seeking a full-time pastor, who is passionate about preaching the Word of God and engaging with a multi-generational congregation. Sully is located in South Central Iowa, a small community surrounded by a beautiful rural setting, within easy driving distance to many larger communities. If interested, please send an email to sullycsrcsearch@gmail.com.

HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH, Lowell, IN is looking for a dynamic pastor to lead a new thriving church in reaching our community with the gospel. Interested applicants please send resumes to: searchteam@hopechurchlowell.com

INTERIM DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP, HOPE FELLOWSHIP CRC, COURTICE, ONTARIO Our mission at Hope Fellowship CRC is to bring people into a living relationship with Christ by equipping them to BELIEVE in Jesus, BELONG to God's family, and BLESS every neighbour. One way we do this is by seeking to engage all worship service attenders in authentic, contemporary, reformed worship during our Sunday morning service. Hope is currently seeking an individual to be the lead staff person in ensuring quality worship, music, and visual arts. This contract position is part-time (20 hours per week) for 8 months from as early as May 15, 2023, to January 15, 2024.

Visit our website www.hopefellowship.ca/joinourteam for a full job description and our Church Profile. Closing: March 15, 2023

OUTREACH DIRECTOR: OPEN PART-TIME ROLE Emmanuel Christian Reformed Church in Sauk Village, IL is accepting applications for Church Outreach Director. The Outreach Director will work with and eventually lead a team of ministry volunteers to grow outreach opportunities, engage new families, and increase the multi-ethnic participation within our church family. The annual salary is \$27,000 plus paid vacation and professional development. To learn more and apply visit: www.emmanuel-church-outreach-director.info

PART TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR 24 to 30 hours, depending on applicant skills and availability. Middle and HS youth activities and spiritual formation. Please contact Mary Jelsema, Church Administrator at 616-4533105 or Mary@westviewcrc.org

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.

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

Financial Aid

ICP IS HELPING PLANT INTERCULTURAL CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BEYOND Do you have a burden for the Netherlands and its spiritual condition? We are looking for people who want to partner with us in prayer and financial support to plant more new churches.

Please connect theo@icpnetwork.eu.

More info <https://www.christiancourier.ca/kerkplanting>

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 105 YEARS

MISS CLARA TOGTMAN, of 12565 W. Renaissance Circle #307 Homer Glen, IL 60491 will celebrate her 105 th birthday on March 7. Celebrating with her are many nieces and nephews. She has outlived 7 siblings and continues in good health and clear mind. Praise be to God.

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

FLORENCE (FLOSS) VAN HOOK will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 9. Her life has been an inspiring example of showing God's love to everyone she meets. Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are all grateful for her unending love and generosity over the years and look forward to celebrating this milestone birthday with her. She currently resides at 935 Oak Crest Lane, Jenison, MI 49428.

Anniversary

Wedding Anniversary 75 Years



VISSER, Elias and Jeannette of Maurice IA, formerly of Orland Park IL, will, Lord willing, celebrate their 75th wedding anniversary on March 19. We thank God for the blessing they have been to their family and pray that He will bless and sustain them in the future. Please send notes of congratulation to 34450 C12, Maurice, IA 51036.

Obituaries

BOERMAN, Alida Lillian Boerman, nee Bronger, age 84, went to be with her Lord on January 14, 2023. 127 Acacia Circle, Unit 304, Indian Head Park, IL 60525. Beloved wife of Harry Boerman; loving mother of Janice (Scott) VanderKooy, Teri (David) Warners, and Daniel (Marjorie) Boerman; devoted grandmother of Jacob VanderKooy, Tatiana (Jonas) Chupp, Luke (Sarah) VanderKooy, Micah (Eryn Westerveld) Warners, Rachel Warners, and Ana Li Warners; great-grandmother of Ivy Lillian Chupp; fond sister of Willard (Bernice) Bronger, Lambert (Judy) Bronger, the late Clarissa Gates, and the late Tillie Clarissa Bronger; fond sister-in-law of James "Mouse" (the late Lillian) Boerman, and the late Gerald (Harriet) Boerman; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Elim Christian Services (13020 S. Central Avenue Crestwood, IL 60418), Timothy Christian Schools (188 W. Butterfield Road Elmhurst, IL 60126) or Tent Schools International (629 Ionia Ave. SW Grand Rapids, MI 49503) are appreciated.

BOUWMA, Mary Jane of Grand Rapids, Michigan died on Wednesday, January 18, 2023. She is survived by her husband Roger of 48 years; daughters and sons-in-law Heidi and Tom DeBlecourt, Amy and Pat Spelman, Jill Bouwma; grandchildren Ethan, Mollie, Will, Colin and Paige; siblings Barb Gates, Sharon and Ken Racke, Gracia Stob, Arley and Jo Bouwma, Sue and Phil Grefe; nieces and nephews; and many beloved friends. She was preceded in death by her parents, Jerry and Edith Stob, and brother, Ken Stob.

BUIKEMA, Andrew, age 101, went to be with his LORD on February 4, 2023. 20144 Crystal Lake Way, Frankfort, IL 60423. Beloved husband of 62 years to the late Margaret Buikema, nee Post; fond brother of Ralph (the late Florence) Buikema, Bill (Clara) Buikema, the late Peter (the late Minnie & the late Janet) Buikema, the late John (the late Evelyn & the late Betty) Buikema, and the late Marciana (the late Chuck) Schipma; brother-in-law of Richard Post, Harold (Joan) Post, the late Peter Post, the late Fred Post, the late Lena Van Dahm, the late Clarence Post, and the late Alice Post; dearly loved uncle of many nieces and nephews, and great nieces and nephews. Memorials to Providence Christian Services or Bible League are appreciated.

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FISHER, Ann (nee Van De Ree) age 94, died January 7, 2023, in Canadian Lakes, MI. Formerly of Wyckoff, NJ, Ann loved her Lord and enjoyed 68 years of marriage and family. She was preceded in death by her husband Charlie. She is survived by her children: John (Sherree) Fisher of Canadian Lakes, MI; Jim (Kerry) Fisher of Waldwick, NJ; and Patti Fisher of Grand Rapids, MI; her grandchildren: Kristen (Christopher) Groen, Joel Fisher, and Kara (Eric) Van Marion; and great-grandchildren: Carter, Ethan, and Zachary Groen; and Chase and Colette Van Marion; siblings: Laurina Vanderaa, Case (Helen) Van De Ree, and Doris (Bart) Houseman.

VAN ZANTEN, Janet (Kuiper) 98, of Garden Grove, CA, went home to her Lord on her birthday, January 2, 2023. Grateful for having shared her life are her brother, Fred "Fritz" Kuiper, many nieces and nephews and their families, and her Anaheim Christian Reformed church family. She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband, Mel, sister, Alice (Donald) Verduin, and sisters-in-law, Betty Kuiper, Jeanette Van Zanten, Al-

ice (Walt) Burgers, Nellie (John) Burgers and brothers-in-law, Dewey (Gladys), J.W. (Barb), and Pierre Van Zanten.

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A Faith-filled Campaign

One quality of Jesus that has always stood out to me is that he asked good questions, but I had never seen that in myself.



Chantal Huinink is a motivational speaker, author, and social justice advocate. She is coordinator of organizational and spiritual life for Christian Horizons and recently founded Faith and Wheelpower Ministries. Chantal is a Christian Reformed chaplain and a Waterloo Regional Counselor.

IT SEEMED RANDOM when a friend and former colleague invited me for coffee after being out of touch for a few years. I was overwhelmed when she asked me to run for the Waterloo (Ont.) Regional Council. Nonetheless, she struck a chord when she said, “I think you should run because you ask good questions.” One quality of Jesus that has always stood out to me is that he asked good questions, but I had never seen that in myself.

Years ago, my opa encouraged me to get involved in politics. I thought I might someday, but I assumed that day would come much later. Yet when I met with more experienced elected officials within days of my friend’s suggestion, I was surprised that they too encouraged me to run and offered to support my campaign.

For me to be faithful in this meant learning as much as I could about the region. I discovered that if I won, it could be an answer to my prayers: I could advocate for supportive housing, I could make the city that I live in more accessible, and I could apply my social work expertise in meaningful ways.


Within 48 hours of filing my candidacy, I contracted COVID-19. I thought this was God’s way of closing the door. But no sooner had I recovered than a retired colleague in communications called me and asked, “Can I help you?” She rallied another former colleague, and before long we had a website, contact cards, lawn signs, and newspaper articles. Infection-related immunity meant I could engage in all manner of campaigning.

Throughout the campaign, I prayed God would guard my heart. I had been warned I would face gender bias, ageism, and ableism. Many cautioned that I wouldn’t get many votes if I didn’t go door-to-door, but I couldn’t do that because many houses are not

wheelchair accessible. So we became creative. I made myself accessible at public locations and events. Members of my church and friends put up lawn signs and delivered my cards. Candidates running for other offices delivered my literature along with theirs. This transformed my notion that politics is cutthroat. If we could be this collaborative throughout a campaign, we could certainly collaborate around the regional table.

Oct. 24, 2022, was significant to me not just because it was Election Day, but because it was the 29th anniversary of Tracy Latimer’s death. Tracy was a 12-year-old girl with cerebral palsy whose father took her life because he believed she was in too much physical pain. This tragedy has shaped my life and my purpose in many ways. I am happy to show that everyone has a reason to live, and people can do surprising things when they have the support they need to thrive.

I knew that if I won the election it would change my life, but I had not considered that it would change others’ lives too. Shortly after the results were in, I received a note from a mother who touched my heart. She said, “Finally, my daughter who has disabilities has someone to look up to in the government.”

One of the reasons my relationship with Jesus is so valuable is because he knows me inside and out. I was thrilled to be elected because it shows that my community views me not only as a woman, as a person with disabilities, or as a young politician, but as a capable leader. 

What's in a Name?

As we stood in awe of the authority standing before us, he looked each of us over and began to pronounce our American names.



Agnes Fisher, a retired teacher of English and art, lives in Holland, Mich. She formerly lived in New Jersey.

PRINCIPAL PETTINGA lined us up on the day my siblings and I were registered for school. My parents trusted him because he could speak Dutch. As we stood in awe of the authority standing before us, he looked each of us over and began to pronounce our American names.

The oldest, Klaas, became Nicholas because the last part sounded like Klaas. He was subsequently called Nick.

Next came Jelle, who was dubbed Jerry. When Jerry went into the army he was still legally "Jelle." In boot camp, the sergeant delighted in calling out "JELLY" at each roll call. Humiliation set in, but later laughter.

When it was Gerard's turn, happily no change was necessary, but his friends later called him Gerry too. So whenever a phone call came asking for Gerry/Jerry, we would ask, "Which one?" Incredulously, the caller would ask, "How many do you have?" Explanation and laughter.

Next was me: Akke became Agnes. How? Why? No connection whatsoever, but it stuck, and I have endured it ever since. Why didn't I change it at some point? I tried, but it stuck like Gorilla Glue: scrape as you might, it won't come loose. I tried my middle name, Katherine, but alas, no glue.

Next, Alfred. His name is also the same in both languages. He was named after his paternal grandmother, Aafke, so his siblings would tease and call him Aafke a lot.

The final child, still an infant then, was and still is Cornelius. Same in both languages, and nothing to be embarrassed about.

What's in a name? Something very important, it seems. When Dr. Frankenstein is forced to confront his creature, the main issue is its name.

Frankenstein never named him, and the creature berates its maker by reminding him that even God named his creations, Adam and Eve. Without a name, it has no identity. It exists but does not exist.

Names are so important that God sometimes gave special names with special meanings to those designated for special tasks: Abram became Abraham; Sarai became Sarah; Jacob became Israel. Names matter. God's name was so sacred that the Israelites feared to say it. John the Baptist was named by God. Jesus was named by his Father, Saul became Paul, and Simon became Peter.

Names are so important that Jesus said in Luke 10:20, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." That makes me wonder: What names would those be? Akke? Agnes? Jelle? Jerry? I believe God has a name for each of us that far exceeds any name we carry on this earth—a name worthy of the price Jesus paid to make it reflect the glory to come. If God names you, you are named indeed.

Mr. Pettinga long ago received his new name. I hope he likes it better than the names he gave us. 

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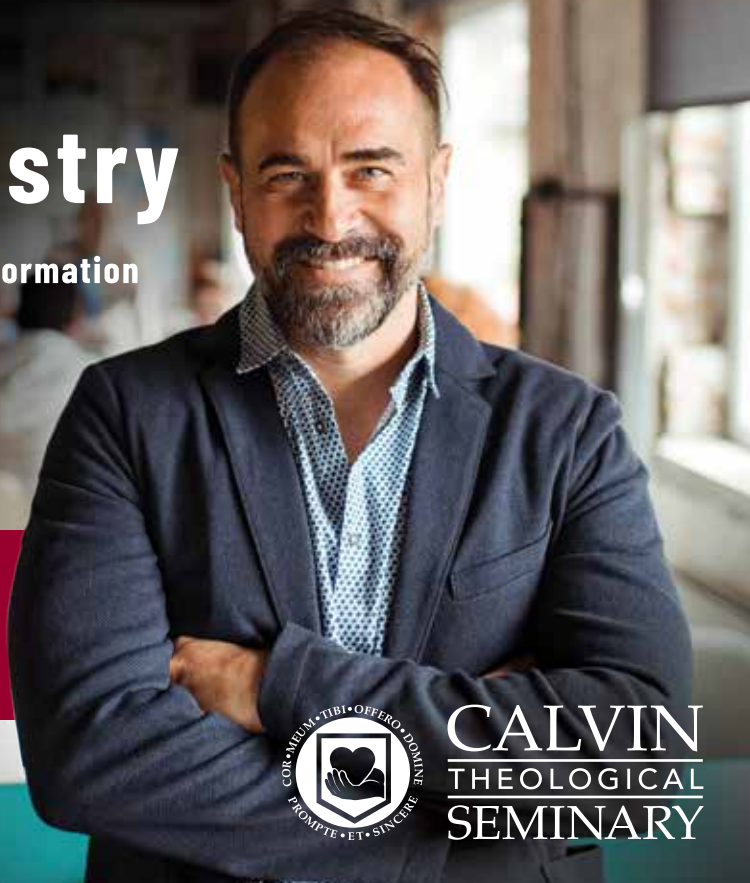
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