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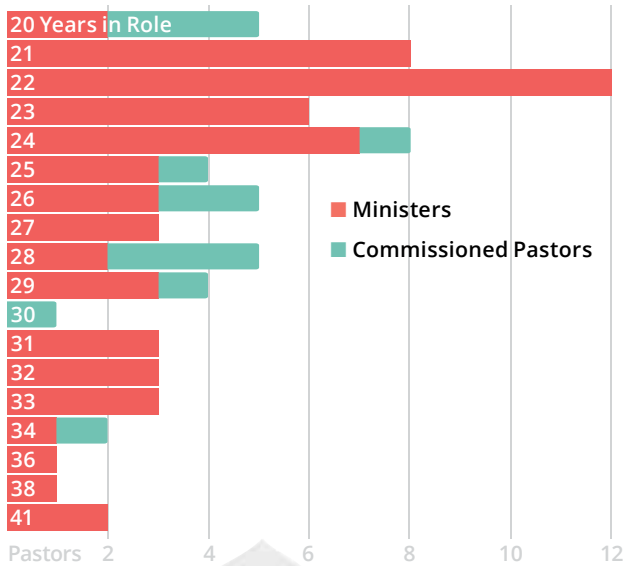


# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

We got a news tip about a British Columbia church celebrating its pastor's 20th anniversary with that congregation. How rare is serving in one role for 20 years? 63 active Christian Reformed ministers and 13 commissioned pastors have been serving in their current role for that long or longer. That's 5.3% of CRC ministers and 4.4% of commissioned pastors in active ministry.

### Persistent Pastorates



## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: CRC's Grand Rapids Building Up For Sale
- » Television: The Mandalorian Season 3
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**BANNER**

*The Banner* is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. Opinions expressed in *The Banner* are not necessarily those of the editor or the CRCNA.

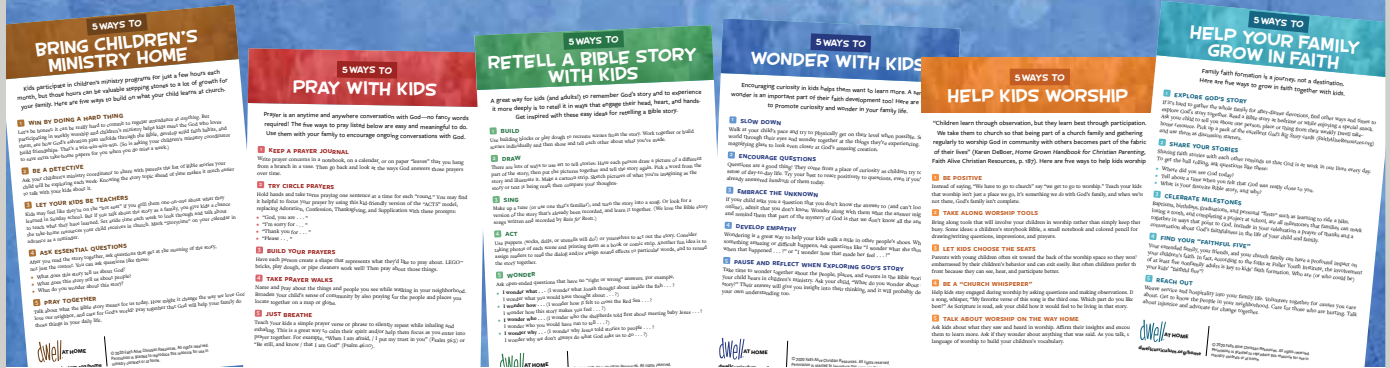
**Editor** Shiao Chong  
**Associate Editor** Sarah Heth Sundt  
**News Editor** Alissa Vernon  
**Mixed Media Editor** Lorilee Craker  
**Art Director** Dean R. Heetderks  
**Designer** Pete Euwema

**Contact Us** 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 [info@TheBanner.org](mailto:info@TheBanner.org)  
**Address Changes and Subscriptions** 800-777-7270 or visit [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org)  
**Classified Advertising** 616-224-0725 [classifieds@TheBanner.org](mailto:classifieds@TheBanner.org)  
**Display Advertising** 616-224-5882 [ads@TheBanner.org](mailto:ads@TheBanner.org)  
**Editorial** 616-224-0824 [editorial@TheBanner.org](mailto:editorial@TheBanner.org)  
**News** [news@TheBanner.org](mailto:news@TheBanner.org)

Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 1700 28th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49508-1407. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington, ON, L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2022, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. The Banner (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 158, No. 10, 2023.

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## Different Interpretations

While of course  
I could be wrong,  
I do have reasons  
for believing my  
view is still valid.



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

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

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

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

**IN OUR LAST ISSUE**, I wrote an article, “Misreading Scripture Cross-culturally,” (Oct. 2023) in which my overall point was that we need to be careful and humble in interpreting and applying Scripture given the historical, linguistic, and cultural gaps between us and the Bible’s original audience. One example I used of how some nuances might be lost in translation from Greek to English was Jesus and Peter’s dialogue in John 21. Citing the different Greek words for love used in the passage (*agape* and *philos*), I suggested that Jesus was “asking for a higher standard of love (*agape*) from Peter, but Peter was honest: at that point, he only had a friendly, brotherly love (*philos*) for Jesus.” I also suggested that Jesus condescended to Peter’s level of love when on his third ask of “Do you love me?” Jesus used *philos* rather than *agape*. However, some readers pointed out that I may have misled you. I knew there were different views of that passage. But apparently a majority of scholars now refute my interpretation. While of course I could be wrong, I do have reasons for believing my view is still valid.

Some scholars point out that the original conversation between Jesus and Peter would have been in Aramaic, not Greek, and because Aramaic has only one basic word for love, the distinction would not have occurred in the original dialogue. However, I would ask, “What theological insight was the gospel writer trying to convey to his Greek-reading audience by describing the conversation with this pattern and use of *agape* and *philos*?” Regardless of the Aramaic, the fact John presented it in Greek with such a pattern strongly implies that John was trying to convey *something*.

The scholarly majority also argue that there was no significant difference in meaning between *agape* and *philos*


and that the gospel of John generally uses the terms interchangeably.

I am not a linguist, and I am only conveying what I have been taught my entire Christian life about those Greek words. But here are some reasons why I think that John, at least in this specific passage, did have a nuance of meaning between them.

Jesus and Peter’s dialogue in John 21 is the conclusion of a narrative arc that began in John 13, where Jesus predicted Peter’s three-time denial. There, Jesus taught: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34) *Agape* was used for all instances of “love” here. Shortly after, Peter exclaimed that he would lay down his life for Jesus (v. 37), suggesting that Peter understood *agape*, in this context, to have some sacrificial element. Jesus questioned Peter’s sacrificial love by predicting Peter’s denial.

Later in this same address, Jesus said: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). All instances of “love” in this verse and its immediate context are also rendered as *agape*. Furthermore, when Jesus commissioned Peter in John 21 to feed and tend his sheep, he was alluding to the good shepherd who “lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

Therefore, I conclude from these passages that John uses *agape*, at least in this narrative arc, to mean sacrificial love. Much more can be said but I am running out of space.

This is just one example of how well-meaning Christians, all with valid reasons, all respecting Scriptural authority, can in good faith have different interpretations of the same passage. We must therefore hold our views with humility. 





## REPLY ALL

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

### Tough Love

Regarding “Tough Love” (March 2023), my experience is that tough love is never blunt, rude, nor abrupt. Bluntness, rudeness, and abruptness lack love. Tough love is loving.

» Janet Smit // Toronto, Ont.

### Culture War-ification

I joined the Christian Reformed Church when I was 19 years old, and I have been a faithful member of the CRC ever since. ... I read and hear with great alarm about “The Culture War-ification of the CRC” (June 2023) and wonder how this can happen in the CRC. I truly appreciated Brandon Haan’s article. I think like him when he says, “The fact is that, far from functioning as a countercultural critic of the forces militating against Christ and his kingdom, we’ve instead adopted the strategies of those forces and ... become pawns in the broader culture war instead of serving as the thoughtful, prophetic critics we are invited to be.” I want us to become a loving denomination that is hospitable to LGBTQ+ Christians who want to worship our Lord. Do we exclude others from our congregations?

» Pam Adams // Sioux Center, Iowa

### Cognitive Dissonance

I’ve spent much of my life in relative awe of the men and women who are certain they know the mind of God. I thank Jake Masselink for highlighting that perhaps my jealousy was ill-advised (“The Bible and Cognitive Dissonance,” May 2023). It might be time to consider 2 Timothy 4:3-4 and Matthew 18:6. God is love—that’s what we teach. Eternal judgment belongs to him, not you or me.

» Rob DeWit // Kalamazoo, Mich.

Is sin unknowable? Masselink called for moral agnosticism, stating, “Judgment of another person is God’s domain.” That is true as it applies to eternal life/condemnation. Yet we aren’t called to accept biblically defined sin. It’s sinful to allow murder, adultery, or racism without lovingly informing others (that) there is a better way to live according to the Bible. Masselink used a bloated definition of cognitive dissonance (CD). A more precise definition is discomfort triggered by the person’s knowledge/belief clashing with new information/experiences. It’s a place where prior knowledge is questioned, new knowledge is assimilated into old, and sense is made. It does not assume that a person ignores data, becoming more entrenched in their prior beliefs. We don’t “suffer” from CD. If Christians recognize their CD, allow questioning of beliefs, go to the Bible, and pray for truth/wisdom, God will help us make sense of his world and his plans. No one should claim to know exact knowledge of God’s will; however, God gave us the Bible as a guide. “What does it say?”, “What does it mean?”, and “How does it apply to our lives?” are questions we should ask to make sense of God’s Word. This is humble cognitive dissonance.

» Stacey Pylman // Caledonia, Mich.

### Mission Work

Resonate Global Mission’s new director, Kevin De Raaf, emphasizes the importance of listening to people’s stories and having our hearts broken for global issues (“Kevin DeRaaf Appointed as Director of Resonate,” July/August 2023). He believes this brokenness leads to prayer and discernment, questioning if we dare to let our hearts break for God’s mission. As a retired missionary, I’m curious about De Raaf’s statement. My heart breaks as I recall our time in Sierra Leone, where the church flourished amidst war and poverty. However, the current strategy change and budget cuts have left struggling village churches unable to support pastors. Church growth now seems focused on wealthier urban areas, and it saddens me deeply.

» Mary Kortenhoven // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Response from Resonate Global Mission: We share the concern of supporting mission work in both urban and rural areas. We are currently recruiting candidates for several positions in the West and Central Africa region and ask for your prayers and support.

### Unity

I, too, lament the fracturing of unity within the body of Christ (“Will We Ever Learn What Unity Means?”, May 2023). And I, too, stand ready to worship and serve with those who, like myself, fall short of living up to God’s expectations. But the issue is not whether failure to meet one specific expectation is worse than failure to meet another. The issue is whether we grieve and repent of our failures or excuse and even celebrate them; that’s why Scripture instructs us to practice self- and mutual discipline. Surely it is our shared grief and repentance over sin, and our intention to follow Christ whatever the cost, that must form the basis of our unity in Christ.

» Duane Nieuwsma // Byron Center, Mich.



## Tough Love or 'Tough Love'

This article hit home with me and meant more than I can say. For 65 years I've had a problem with some of the CRC's take on human sexuality. Mr. Polinder did an excellent job expressing the thinking I've always had: What makes a failure of the seventh commandment so much worse than the failure of any other commandment? Why had the CRC singled that out? Why continue to single out the seventh commandment again now by making it confessional? Why can't we think deeper and consider what effect our actions could have on a person long term? It's so reassuring to me to at last be able to read my feelings and thoughts in *The Banner*, no less.

» Evelyn Stoffer // East Lansing, Mich.

Ron (Polinder) asks why the seventh commandment takes precedence over others. It doesn't. No one is saying a person struggling with the sin of homosexuality is any worse than someone struggling with any other sin. What is being said is that a person cannot embrace that lifestyle unrepentantly and enter the kingdom of God, just like someone who embraces stealing or another vice unrepentantly cannot enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

» Peter Habegger // Tucson, Ariz.

**JAMES 5:20 SAYS**, "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins."

As a young man I witnessed our church elders try to turn one of my relatives from the error of his ways. The elders of our church confronted, visited, discussed, and, I am sure, (justly) tried to bring the man back into the fold, but it did not work. Within a year, my relative was excommunicated from the Christian Reformed Church and never stepped into the church again. Tough love!


Another story: Some years ago we had a pastor who engaged many on our town's streets. Through his witness, a woman to whom he spoke started coming to our church. This lady had been rejected by her family, cast out of communion in her church. She was crude, vulgar, and obnoxious, and she had experienced homelessness for a number of years. Some in our church wondered how we are to deal with people such as these coming into our doors.

Somehow, my wife was led to (literally) walk beside this person. I couldn't fathom it, but she traveled for some twenty years alongside the woman. My wife never condemned, but often coaxed. Through countless prayers, Bible study, and just talking gently, my wife guided this woman in the Christian way. As the miles added up, change could be seen. The Spirit's work was evident in many small, incremental ways.

My wife commented once on how tough the walk could be, yet she felt she got just as much out of the relationship as she put in. Walking together, they each moved forward on their roads toward sanctification.

Let us learn to  
take the often  
tough, long, and  
tiresome road.

When my wife passed on, she asked me to do what I could to help this person. A year later, I sat beside the woman on her deathbed. She still had some struggles with assurance of her salvation, and she wasn't perfect yet, but as she was passing away, she understood Jesus paid her way, and in him her salvation was guaranteed.

Tough love: how can we do it better? Let us learn to take the often tough, long, and tiresome road. Let us graciously open ourselves up to another way of turning a sinner from his evil ways. We will help them and, even more, help ourselves. 



Arie Vander Zouwen is a member of Third CRC of Lynden, Wash., and has recently retired from employment in civil engineering. He currently serves as a layman on various church and denominational boards and committees.

As I Was Saying

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» A Case for Self-Preservation

» Is VBS Still Relevant?



# The Work and Role of Pastors

By Anita Brinkman

**T**he work and role of a minister is in some ways very visible: leading worship services, preaching, and officiating weddings and funerals.

But what are some aspects of ministry work that church members might not see or know about? We asked nine pastors from around the Christian Reformed Church in North America to help us better understand the full scope of a life in ministry.

Article 11 of the Christian Reformed Church Order states, “The calling of a minister of the Word is to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and equip the members so that the church of Jesus Christ may be built up.” Part of this proclamation happens from the pulpit each week. Researching and writing a sermon takes an average of 10-15 hours each week.

“Even when not in my study, I work on my sermon,” said Ralph Wigboldus of Maranatha CRC in Woodstock, Ont. “Once a text is chosen, I will be thinking about it, even when doing other tasks, and I often make notes throughout the week, which I will incorporate into the sermon. Also, I am always on the lookout for illustrations and quotes that fit the message.”

Several pastors noted the importance of reading, both as part of preparing a sermon and more generally. Their reading includes theology books and commentaries, language resources (Hebrew and Greek), books and magazines related to ministry, news magazines, and good fiction.

## Flexibility Is Key

While ministers have some flexibility in choosing their regular office hours, the times of meetings, classes, and visits often need to work around the schedules of congregation members. In many churches, regular meetings take place with elders, church council and executives, church staff, the worship planning team, and other committees. Additionally, many ministers participate in or lead regular prayer meetings, Bible studies, profession of faith classes, premarital classes, and parenting classes. Retired pastor Ralph Koops of Brantford, Ont., reported that for much of his career, he was out four nights a week most of the year.

Classical and denominational work can be demanding, but it is another important part of ministry, several pastors agreed. There are numerous committees at classical and denominational levels doing important work in translation, ecumenism, advising,

governing, studying, and decision making.

Regular visits to congregants are a major element of ministry. “(Especially) in larger congregations, finding time for regular visits can be a challenge but should never be forgotten,” said retired minister Jack Kerkhof, who currently serves almost full time at Ebenezer CRC in Jarvis, Ont. “I am told regularly how much people appreciate pastors who walk alongside their parishioners.” Koops agrees, and he encourages pastors to visit church members regularly as a way to build connections and a sense of belonging that will ultimately benefit both individual members and the church as a whole.

Most of the pastors we spoke with keep regular office hours but acknowledged that a regular schedule is subject to the changing needs of a congregation. Willemina Zwart leads the South Coast Beach Project, an Ontario-based summer discipleship experience for young adults, but from her years in pastoral church ministry she recalled, “When I would have office hours somebody would pop by and knock on my door and very bashfully say, ‘I’m so sorry—I’m interrupting you.’ And I’d be like, ‘You’re not interrupting me; this is my job!’”

Interruptions do come with the job, though, most pastors agreed. William Koopmans of Hope CRC in Brantford, Ont., noted, “While trying to maintain some regularity to the weekly routine, as a pastor I am always on call for emergencies. ... I have had my share of late-night or early-morning calls to the hospital. Funerals and accompanying pastoral care commitments often come up unexpectedly and demand a reshuffling and reprioritization of the week’s anticipated schedule.”

Other pastors echoed this sense of being always on call and having blurred lines between life and relationships at work and outside of it. There can be tension between leading a community and being a member of it.

Outreach to the wider community around the church is another element of ministry. “Spending time getting to know our neighbors can look different, from hosting outdoor concerts to a Saturday jamboree,” said Kelsi Jones of Grace CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. “Event planning has been a valuable trait to have.”

### **Wearing Many Hats**

Ahnna Cho and her husband, Seonmok Park, are ordained ministers of the CRCNA and serve a specific part of their community as pastors on loan to a nondenominational Korean church in Denver, Colo.

“There are several thousand Korean churches in the United States alone, and most of them are not CRCNA churches,” Cho said. “Because of my husband’s and my cultural giftings, we knew from the very beginning that serving as ministers on loan was a very real possibility for us. Sure enough, we have been serving as pastors on loan ever since we were ordained in the CRCNA. ... For me, this is an opportunity to introduce young Korean American worshipers to

“Being a pastor requires the skills of juggling and multitasking while always staying ‘rooted and established in the love of Christ.’”

beliefs central to our Reformed tradition, which I believe to be sound and biblical teaching.”

Global Coffee Break program manager Juan Sierra started his ministry years as a church planter, a role in which community outreach is key. “You just wear so many hats when you’re a church planter,” he said. “Sometimes you have to do the bulletin, you have to help prepare the children’s class, as well as prepare your sermon, and also disciple someone. ... So it’s not for everybody. But it is for people who have an entrepreneurial spirit, who like to start things and see things through.”

Bonny Mulder-Behnia, in her role as a pastor of congregational life and ministry, helps to lead an ambitious summer outreach ministry at Rosewood CRC in Bellflower, Calif. She knows the struggles of “wearing a lot of hats”—a phrase that came up

in conversation with several pastors. While she would love to walk alongside people on the path to spiritual maturity, Mulder-Behnia says, she more often feels like she is putting out the fires of crisis: caring for someone grieving a loss or a cancer diagnosis, or helping to bring healing with a struggling relationship or a mental health issue.

“Being a pastor requires the skills of juggling and multitasking while always staying ‘rooted and established in the love of Christ,’” she said. “In order to pour into others, we need space to just be with God and be refilled with God’s Spirit. ... God is enough, even when we are not.”

Zwart encourages congregations to have grace with their pastors. With so many facets to the job—pastoring, leading meetings, vision casting, discipleship, crisis management, preaching, worship leading, and more—no one pastor can excel at all of them. “When you call a pastor,” Zwart said, “there’s going to be certain things they will be excellent at. Celebrate that with them and allow them to shine in those areas. And the areas they’re not so great at—you know, it’s OK. How do you walk alongside and support them in those areas they might be (just) OK at?” 



Anita Brinkman lives in Chatham, Ont., and serves on the communications team for the Christian Reformed Church in North America. She is a member of Grace CRC in Chatham.



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## BIG QUESTIONS

### Relationships

**My teen is always coming up with foolish ideas, and we end up arguing endlessly. Any thoughts on how to break the cycle?**

Teens naturally explore their areas of interests as they stretch into their adult identity. Your teen's ability to debate shows a growing ownership of self. Their ability to know and articulate their desires are actually good things, though communication patterns may need some fine tuning.

Be clear about the ground rules for disagreement in your home. Hold each other to the standard of treating one another with respect. Debate ideas, not people or character flaws. Teach your kids to use "I" statements, such as "I think (or feel) ..." rather than using "You" statements, which are easily tainted with accusation. Avoid generalizations like "You always ..." or "You never ...", which are rarely true and create further division.

Arguing can be difficult to navigate if the tone becomes disrespectful, but having a difference of opinion is not a bad thing. You are different people, and you can have differing perspectives.

Sometimes you just need to help them think their idea fully through. To avoid being put into a defensive posture, hand them the burden of proof. Say, "Tell me why I should say yes." This communicates that you are open to exploring ideas when thought thoroughly through. Let them articulate how their idea aligns with your family's faith and values. Have them clarify their plan for safety and supervision, how they will manage the costs, and how this choice brings honor to God and blesses others.



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

Don't start with no, but consider their ideas. Perhaps the idea could become better with the right supports in place. Maybe their idea is not bad; maybe it's just not a choice you would make. Don't be pressured into immediate reactions. Their bad planning does not make it an emergency. Taking time and being thoughtful can take the negative energy out of the disagreement. Perhaps with a chance to pray on it, you will discover that this opportunity could help them to learn and grow.

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

**Many young families have enrolled their children in various sports programs, which are healthy but often conflict with Sunday church services. Consequently, we don't see these families in church often. What can be done? How should the church handle this?**

There is a temptation to tell the families they should prioritize church attendance, but this response will likely drive some people away completely. And let's be clear: sports are not the only things that take people away from church. Participating in sports programs addresses a felt need, whether it is

preparation for future sports opportunities, companionship for both the players and the parents, or the excitement of being at the games. Many families have found a community with the other parents and children in these programs, and they are reluctant to miss out.

Consequently, people can find themselves in a quandary because of schedules they don't control. Continued absence, though, causes them to miss out on many things that affect their faith formation. They're missing worship, formational or educational opportunities that meet on Sundays, and being an active part in a community of faith. Even those casual conversations at church help build important relationships that can last a lifetime.

A good first step for the church is to have a nonconfrontational conversation with each family. Topics could include: Is this a short-term issue, or is it likely to be ongoing? Are there other times when they can gather with the church community? Are they open to gathering with some other families for worship, education, and fellowship at times that work for all their schedules? Are there things the church can do better so that the church community is as valued as the sports community?

Families should take some steps as well. They could, for example, work together through educational materials that the church provides and prioritize spiritual practices like Bible reading, prayer, devotions, and singing. With some thoughtful planning, the family can continue to stay in

touch with the church and grow their faith while they are absent.

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 is the primary role of the church in God's mission?

Calvin University philosophy professor James K.A. Smith suggests that the primary responsibility of the church is to live God's story for the world. If so, we must then ask: What does it look like to live God's story, and how do we do that more and better? Could we have learned the answer already in Sunday school? It looks like Jesus! Our role is to be disciples who are being formed more and more into the likeness of Jesus and thus discovering and participating in what Jesus, by the Spirit, is already doing in the world.

But how? God's very nature is love—unconditional, inclusive, eternal love (1 John 4). And love, as Jesus taught and lived it, is always about the other, always extending itself. In other words, love is missional! And to be missional is to love—to give like Jesus, to be like Jesus, and to do everything as God in Jesus did: for the sake of the other. In Mark 12:28-34 and Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus is asked, "Which is the greatest commandment?" One might rephrase that as "What is the most important thing that the people of God are to be about?" or "What is the primary role of the church in God's mission?" Jesus' answer, illustrated with the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, is to love our neighbors. Paul declares that "the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your

neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14). James calls it "the royal law" (James 2:8).

What a commandment! Jesus' answer is straightforward: Love your neighbor! What if this is our primary role, our primary challenge, calling, and commitment? But—thanks be to God—it is not up to us alone. Jesus has not only shown us the way, but made the way and is "the Way." God loves our neighbors more than we can or ever will. Yet I wonder what would happen—how our communities and perhaps the whole world might be changed—if we all joined Jesus in loving our neighbors Jesus' way?

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

## What is cultural appropriation? Why is it wrong? How do we avoid it?

Definitions vary, but cultural appropriation usually involves unbalanced power dynamics. It is understood as borrowing something distinctive from another cultural group in ways that either disrespect that cultural group, fail to give credit to it, or take without asking. Some define it as cultural borrowing from a less privileged group in ways that confer prestige or gain upon a more privileged group.

It's a complex topic not only because "culture" is complex, but also because what is or is not cultural appropriation can sometimes depend upon stereotypes about what makes different cultures distinctive and what practices or traditions "belong" to them. Cultural borrowing is constantly taking place and has been throughout human history. Incorporating elements of another culture into my life can be

a sign of appreciation. That's fairly obvious with things like language or food. If I learn the language of another culture or try some of their favorite dishes or even learn to cook some of those dishes, it's unlikely that I would be accused of cultural appropriation.

Recently I went to Indonesia, and on three different occasions I was given the very kind gift of a batik—an Indonesian shirt. It would be strange if I were committing the offense of cultural appropriation by wearing a shirt that some kind Indonesian friends and colleagues gave me. But it would probably be considered cultural appropriation if I took it upon myself to start a batik company here in Michigan. Similarly, if I wear the shirt for self-serving reasons or in ways that fail to honor the cultural beauty that produced it, we'd be in the realm of cultural appropriation.

There's no absolute law here, but Jesus provides us with a reliable rule of thumb: Treat other cultures and especially people from other cultures the way that we would like ourselves and our cultural gifts to be treated (see Matt. 7:12). As with so much in life, living with genuine appreciation, gratitude, and kindness will go a long way, as will a sense of curiosity about the beauty and uniqueness of the human world all around us. That human cultural world is a gift to be humbly explored and appreciated rather than raw material to be exploited.

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



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

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# Nebraska Church Creates Art Chapel as Gift to the Neighborhood

With the help of a design by students from the University of Nebraska College of Architecture and the work of a local contractor, F Street Neighborhood Church in Lincoln, Neb., is rebuilding a historic chapel into community art space.

The project, which broke ground July 12, will see the chapel host low-cost art and craft classes, open studio hours, crafting groups, and art shows. Jean Stryker, part-time creative arts director at the Christian Reformed congregation, was a big part of getting the Art Chapel project started.

“The building itself will be a beautiful public space,” Stryker said. She said the building, next door to F Street Church, was one of the first churches in Lincoln and once served as a parsonage, but it’s been unused for many years. The Art Chapel idea came out of vision-casting exercises F Street conducted in 2016.

The church sees this restoration project as a gift to the neighborhood. “We believe that creativity is essential to human thriving and can be a way to connect with God, especially for those who are reluctant to participate in traditional church,” Stryker said.

F Street member Willow Applegate is the Art Chapel’s director.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

## NEWS

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**Jared and Rachel Pettman, volunteer leaders accompanying Ontario teens on a Massachusetts SERVE trip, were married just a week beforehand.**

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## Newlyweds Honeymoon on Youth SERVE Trip

Jared and Rachel Pettman had been married only a week when they took five teenagers from a Christian Reformed congregation in St. Thomas, Ont., on a SERVE trip with ThereforeGo Ministries to Douglas, Mass., in August.

The teens, from The Junction Church in St. Thomas, joined young people from three other churches in a weeklong mission experience that included volunteering at several community worksites around Douglas and nearby Worcester.

“Those who are on SERVE, their lives are transformed and changed by participating, and those who host SERVE, our lives are touched as well, and then our community is also ministered to,” said Ann Roon, one of the host site organizers from River Community Church, a Christian Reformed church plant in Douglas.

Roon and other organizers surprised the Ontario couple with a 10-day wedding anniversary cake one evening.

Rachel Pettman said they had mixed reactions to the fanfare. “Jared stands up and starts fist-pumping, and I tried to slink down behind the table,” she said.

When the Pettmans registered for SERVE last September, they were not yet engaged. They were both leading the youth group at The Junction, where Rachel had been ministering for five years and Jared began helping after the couple started dating. They were engaged in early February and married July 28.

Overall they agreed that the time “completely surrounded by teenagers and fun and adventures” couldn’t have been “a better way to do our honeymoon,” Rachel Pettman said. They intend to include leading SERVE trips in their summer plans every year.

—Greg Chandler



## RE:Activate Still Active in B.C. After Almost 10 Years



**Teens at the 2023 RE:Activate Youth Convention enjoyed hiking and paddling as part of the weekend.**

The RE:Activate Reformed Youth Convention, hosted by a collection of Christian Reformed churches in and around Langley, B.C., gathered about 200 teens and 50 leaders Sept. 8 to 10.

According to its website, the event is designed “to unite and inspire Reformed youth to live out the call that God has placed.” The first RE:Activate conference was hosted in 2014.

Natasha Vedder, on staff at Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, B.C., has been on the planning team since the beginning. “The initial concept for the convention was to unite CRC churches across British Columbia, specifically through youth ministry and providing a Reformed convention for our teens as a way to connect them with each other and with God and help them to grow deeper in their faith,” she said.

Curtis Meliefste, another member of the five-person planning team, said the small size has helped them keep the conference relevant and ensure its continued impact. “We can contextualize it to whatever we want—to our own traditions,” Meliefste said.

RE:Activate 2023 was themed “Proclaim His Salvation Day After Day,” based on 1 Chronicles 16:23-24, and featured speakers Tim and Charity Johnson. Youth could choose two of eight breakout sessions with topics including sex, God’s plan for your life, talking about Jesus, and engaging media. There also were recreation activities including hiking and paddling trips.

The convention is open to teens in grades 8 to 12 from youth groups at CRC churches in British Columbia and Washington state. This year youth from 12 B.C. churches attended.

—Kristen Parker

## Colorado Church Member Shares Garden Beauty

Heather Storteboom, a member of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Fort Collins, Colo., began picking and delivering bouquets to a neighborhood assisted-living home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Noticing that this small act lifted people’s spirits, she saw an opportunity for a larger ministry. In 2022 she started Secret Garden, a nonprofit that delivers large floral arrangements to a local hospice care center all year and in the summer months offers smaller fresh arrangements to be shared with hospice patients, families, and long-term care patients.

“When people go through times like that—death, dying, grieving—I think sometimes we try to say too much,” Storteboom said. “Perhaps what we need to do is simply love others well.”

In the offseason Storteboom works alone with dried flowers, evergreens, driftwood, and succulents. When her garden is producing flowers, she welcomes volunteers from her church and community to help build bouquets Monday evenings at Immanuel CRC’s community garden. She’s had up to 15 people of all ages, from toddlers to over 80, making as many as 70 bouquets in cardboard cups.

“Flowers create a common bond for people from different walks of life and from different social circles,” Storteboom said. “I see that as one of the unexpected blessings from this work. This time of community (on Monday evenings) is becoming something beautiful on its own.”

Storteboom is thankful for how the bouquets have been received. “I hope the recipients of the flowers get glimpses of the perfect garden that was—and a reminder that one day that garden will be restored, and all this pain and brokenness will end,” she said.

—Maia VanderMeer



**Gardener Heather Storteboom and Dee Bordewyk, Heather’s gardening mentor, with a table full of arrangements to be donated.**

## Noteworthy

**First Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, S.D., celebrated 100 years of ministry** Sept. 9 and 10. Rev. Carl Zylstra, a retired CRC pastor who now calls First CRC home, headed the centennial planning committee. Among the committee's projects was a video series highlighting memories of the congregation's past century and its place in Sioux Falls. There are "no descendants of the (First CRC) founders that are part of the congregation today," Zylstra said, but lineage isn't the only place to find God's faithfulness. "It is clear that God's faithfulness at First CRC has not been, first of all, genetic, but rather a continuity of faithful ministry of God's Word," Zylstra said.



**The Canadian Council of Churches**, an ecumenical group to which the Christian Reformed Church in North America belongs, **reappointed CRC commissioned pastor Peter Noteboom to a second five-year term as its general secretary.** Noteboom was also

**reelected to a second three-year term as co-chair of the Canadian Interfaith Conversation.** His ecumenical work extends to the World Council of Churches, where he **serves on the 35-member Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.** The CRCNA is not itself a member of the World Council of Churches but belongs to both the Canadian Council of Churches and Christian Churches Together in the U.S. Those two ecumenical councils have membership in the WCC.

**Abby Vander Wal, a member of Elmhurst (Ill.) CRC,** was outside hitter for **gold-medal-winning Team USA in the International Volleyball Federation's Girls' Under-19 Volleyball World Championship** tournament held in Croatia and Hungary in August.

Vander Wal, 16, is a student at Timothy Christian Schools in Elmhurst. She was **designated the tournament's MVP**, an accomplishment she described as "a surreal and overwhelming moment, one I'll never forget." Vander Wal also competed for Team USA in the Under-21 world championships in Mexico. The U.S. finished sixth in that competition.



Photo by Volleyball World

## Bangladesh's Grace Bible Church Finds Michigan Bible Study Leader

"My spirit was provoked," said Marianne "Skip" VanTuinen when she heard Bangladesh native Nidhu Das tell Monroe Community Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., of the need for a Bible study leader for the recently established Grace Bible Church.

VanTuinen, 78, had led Coffee Break Bible studies many times over the past 40 years but thought she was too old to go to Bangladesh—and she doesn't speak Bangla. After praying about it, and speaking again to Das, she learned those things weren't such a barrier.



**From her home computer in Grand Rapids, Mich., Marianne "Skip" VanTuinen leads Bible study for a group in Bangladesh.**

All Bangladeshi students must learn English, she learned, so Bible study participants would have at least some understanding of the language. And on one of Das's frequent trips to Bangladesh to serve the nonprofit Medical Ambassadors of America, a visiting surgical ministry he had established, he had set up videoconferencing to connect the multipurpose Grace Bible Church building to Grand Rapids.

Soon seven men and five women were signed up to study the gospel of Mark. Monroe Community CRC sent English NIV Bibles and study materials and provided funds to hire transportation to help study members travel to the church, a journey sometimes endangered by elephants.

VanTuinen teaches the classes Saturday mornings with fellow Monroe Community church member Sharon Wiersum and the help of the church's technology team. VanTuinen said seeing participants attend every week despite experiencing unreliable electricity and struggling with two languages showed her their hunger for God's Word.



**Nidhu Das (standing) sometimes joins his fellow Bangladeshi Christians in person for a Bible study held via videoconferencing.**

"This is one of the most exciting groups in my experience," Van Tuinen said. "At times I feel I am standing on holy ground."

—Anita Ensing Beem



## Chinese Church of Iowa City Is 'Home' to Students and Beyond



Photo by Harry Zhao

**Members, guests, and visitors gathered for the Chinese Church of Iowa City's 30th anniversary.**

The Chinese Church of Iowa City, which began as a campus ministry Bible class in the 1970s and formally organized in 1993, is still ministering to Chinese students at the University of Iowa, serving both new students and the ethnic church's second and third generations and their multiethnic families.

Pastor John Xu said the vision the church aims to communicate is "This is your home; you're not a traveler."

The church recently celebrated its 30th anniversary. "So many people graduated from here with so many good memories that they wanted to come back as a family to have a reunion," Xu said. They welcomed former pastors and others to a celebration Sept. 1 to 3.

"This church has been steady and faithful," Xu said. "Many who were led here come back," including founding pastor Jason Chen, who recently reconnected with the church as recurring pulpit supply for the English service.

Chen's ministry in Iowa City started in 1967. Just after graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary, he took a job at the university with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In 1971, supported by Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Iowa City and by what was then called the Home Missions agency of the CRCNA and Classis Central

Plains (then called Classis Pella), Chen began Geneva Campus Ministry.

He retired from that work 18 years ago but still lives in the area with his wife, Donna. They're active in a small Presbyterian Church in America congregation, and Chen maintains relationships with some university department chairs and others in the community. "I try to be a friend to everyone I meet," he said, quoting a former InterVarsity mentor who emphasized one word in ministry: "Relate, relate, relate."

Chen said the Chinese Church of Iowa City was to have been a placeholder name, but it stuck, even after the congregation moved about 20 miles away from campus to North Liberty, Iowa.

In a reflection he wrote for the church's newsletter, Chen said, "I am fully convinced that it was our faithful God who called the nearly 200 students to himself (to) be baptized; the many more who became professors and heads of department in the colleges and universities in our nation; and the hundreds more who have returned to their home countries or scattered throughout these United States to serve God and his church in practically every sphere of society."

—Alissa Vernon

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Ronald R. Sprick*

1939-2023

Wise, predictable, direct, stubborn, and a fierce advocate, Ron Sprick put God first and was unabashed about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, even printing up his own gospel tract to distribute and share with others. "Dad, you leave a legacy of determination, faith, hope, grace, love for the simple things in life, responsibility, hard work, and integrity," his children said in a eulogy. Ron, 84, died July 21.

After graduation from Calvin Theological Seminary and ordination in 1967, Ron served for 18 years as a missionary in Puerto Rico with Christian Reformed World Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission). On return to the U.S. mainland he pastored West Olive (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church, Brooten (Minn.) Community Church, and Ireton (Iowa) CRC. He retired in 2004 and served Blythefield CRC in Rockford, Mich., as minister of visitation until 2018.

Ron sang solos and bass in the choir, played trombone and guitar, and could play some piano music by ear. He was inventive, even welding together his own walker. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, and gardening. He tapped his neighbors' maple trees, then shared the syrup.

Ron is survived by Judith, his wife of 57 years; five children and their spouses; 13 grandchildren; and a great-granddaughter.

—Janet A. Greidanus



## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. George Robert  
Mossel*

1945-2023

George Mossel was intense and strong willed, with a great sense of humor. He was focused on ministry and passionate about outreach, thought deeply about theology, and had a gift for communicating the gospel message of salvation in a clear and effective way. George, 78, died Aug. 21.

Raised in South Holland, Ill., George had many jobs before experiencing God's call to ministry, including factory worker, teacher, salesman, stockbroker, milkman, and dairy farmer. After graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Calvin Theological Seminary, George was ordained in 1980. He served Newman Chapel Christian Reformed Church in Hesperia, Mich., and then Hillside CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., where he served for 25 years until retiring in 2011. The Hillside church grew significantly under his leadership.

George spent the last 12 years of his life traveling and enjoying time with family and friends. He poured his characteristic passion and intensity into his many hobbies, including hunting, fishing, and watching University of Michigan football.

George is survived by Eunice, his wife of 58 years; three sons and their spouses; and nine grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## First Korean CRC in the State of Missouri Organizes

The Korean Christian Reformed Church of St. Louis (Mo.) installed its first slate of five elders and two deacons Oct. 1 after Classis Central Plains approved changing the church's status from emerging to organized at its Sept. 15 meeting.

Planted in April 2021 by bivocational pastor Jaebok Choi, it is Missouri's first Korean congregation of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Choi is an assistant professor in the oncology division at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. He was encouraged toward theological training by leaders in past Bible study groups who noticed his gift for teaching. He was drawn to Calvin Theological Seminary's distance learning program, through which he could complete a Master of Divinity degree over seven years of part-time study. Seeking then to be ordained in the CRC, Choi was connected through the denominational Candidacy Committee to Classis Central Plains. He was examined in February 2021 and ordained in April, starting the church soon after.

"From the earliest stage of church planting of Korean CRC of St. Louis, we have had a statement of faith that has guided and encouraged us over the years," Choi described in a letter to the classis requesting organized status for the church. "None of what we have done has happened without God's initiative, without God's empowerment, without God's wisdom, direction, and guidance. As Psalm 127 says, 'Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain.' We look to God to build the house, and we are grateful he has called us to join in the work."

Choi said the church, which includes 30 adult confessing members, one confessing member under 18, and a few others who have not yet made a profession of faith, meets Sundays at a restaurant owned by one of the members.

Because the church doesn't have any paid employees and the worship space is provided, Choi said, "we set aside 50% of our budget for people or organizations in need." It's one of the congregation's three focal points: worship services, Knowing God Bible studies, and Loving Neighbors commitments.

Choi said the church welcomes guest preachers about every five to six weeks, allowing him to be refreshed by other speakers and helping to prevent burnout.

At the Washington University School of Medicine, Choi's lab researches ways to improve outcomes in bone marrow transplants for treating leukemia by reducing the occurrence of graft versus host disease (when healthy donor immune cells react to recipient cells as foreign).



**The congregation of Korean CRC of St. Louis (Mo.) gathered at Peace Village in Robertsville, Mo., for its 2023 retreat. Pastor Jaebok Choi is in the back row, farthest to the right.**

—Alissa Vernon

## Nine Churches Form LGBTQ+ Hospitality Cohort

Eight churches from Classis Toronto and one church from Classis Central Plains launched a learning group in September designed to support the participating congregations in fostering hospitality for LGBTQ+ people in their churches.

Phyllis Alberts-Meijers, a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Barrie, Ont., is part of the hospitality cohort's leadership team. First CRC asked Classis Toronto for such a group after its deacons and elders studied the CRC's 2020 human sexuality report (HSR). "We considered the HSR carefully and raised some wonderings about how to provide care for LGBTQ+ people in our midst in light of the recommendations in the report," Alberts-Meijers said.

After Synod 2022 received the sexuality report, recommended it to the churches, and declared the prohibition on same-sex relationships as already having confessional status, Alberts-Meijers said First CRC's council sought "real and practical guidance" because they "felt compelled to do a better job for our LGBTQ+ members, family members, and allies, and we were perplexed as to how to do that meaningfully."

Syd Hielema, a member of Meadowlands CRC in Ancaster, Ont., is also part of the cohort's leadership team. He said Classis Toronto hosted a conversation in May with about 100 people attending. The learning cohort proposal came out of that conversation.

"This cohort will honor the parameters of the human sexuality report and seek to be profoundly welcoming and hospitable to the LGBTQ+ community," Hielema said.

"I believe the most important call of the human sexuality report is to learn to love and be hospitable," Hielema said. An opening prayer in the report confesses that we do not appropriately "show the love and hospitality of Jesus" (p. 10), and several of the report's sections include pastoral advice on showing and sharing



**Syd Hielema (left) and Phyllis Alberts-Meijers are part of the LGBTQ+ Hospitality Cohort leadership team.**

hospitality to LGBTQ+ people in specific situations.

Hielema calls the cohort an "anti-polarization project rooted in the heart of the gospel."

About 30 people from the nine churches met Sept. 23 at CrossPoint CRC in Brampton, Ont., to launch the cohort. Hielema said the day included worship, discussion, and establishing a plan for the cohort's work.

Over the next eight months, each church will work on its own hospitality project. One church plans to create a support system for grandparents of LGBTQ+ individuals, and another church, recognizing the potential for conflict and reactivity within its congregation, intended to "pursue an agenda of reconciliation," Hielema said.

"Our hope is that after a year of experiments, our nine participating churches will be able to demonstrate increased hospitality to all," Alberts-Meijers said.

Hielema said each church will be connected to a coach from the cohort who will encourage the churches in their chosen projects. The cohort has planned both video and in-person gatherings, with the final meeting in May 2024.

Gary Brouwers, pastor of Peace CRC in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and Henry Eygenraam, a member at Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ont., work with Hielema and Alberts-Meijers on the cohort's four-person leadership team. Hielema said the Iowa church heard about the cohort and asked if they could be part of it.

The other participating churches are Clearview CRC (Oakville, Ont.), Fellowship CRC (Toronto), All Nations Christian Fellowship (North York, Ont.), Georgetown (Ont.) CRC, and Heritage Fellowship CRC (Brampton).

—Kristen Parker

## News From the Pews

*The Banner* loves to hear about what member congregations of the Christian Reformed Church are up to. Here are some of the things we learned about recently and shared on *The Banner's* Facebook page. See more at [facebook.com/crcbanner](https://facebook.com/crcbanner).

Share your photos and news tips at [news@TheBanner.org](mailto:news@TheBanner.org).



**Shawnee Park Christian Reformed Church** in Grand Rapids, Mich., built a **free-use community park** on the church's property. The park features giant checkers, 9 Square in the Air, and other interactive games.



**Covenant Christian Reformed Church** in Sioux Center, Iowa, **blessees its children entering kindergarten with handmade quilts**. The tradition, which dates back more than 20 years, is championed by quilters Natalie Brummel, Pam De Jong, Rin Goedhart, and Laurey Zwart. **Several past recipients brought their personalized quilts to church Aug. 20 to show the Covenant Quilters how treasured they are.** The church also provides quilts for baptisms and marriages and gives table runners for members moving away. With the help of other contributing crafters, the Covenant Quilters have gifted 528 quilts since 2000.



About 80 volunteers at **Cedar Hill Christian Reformed Church's Rise Against Hunger event** in Wyckoff, N.J., raised their hands high before packaging 25,000 meals of dehydrated vegetables, soy, rice, and vitamin tablets to be shipped to people around the world experiencing hunger. Church member Ronald Steingiga said the gesture was "to remind all that today their hands were the hands of Jesus." The event was in honor of Jeff, 48, a church member who introduced the congregation to Rise Against Hunger who died last December.



**Faith Christian Reformed Church** in Tinley Park, Ill., **celebrates new babies and marriages with church-hosted showers** that it sees as an expression of the charge to elders to "promote fellowship and hospitality among believers" and "celebrate their joys with them."





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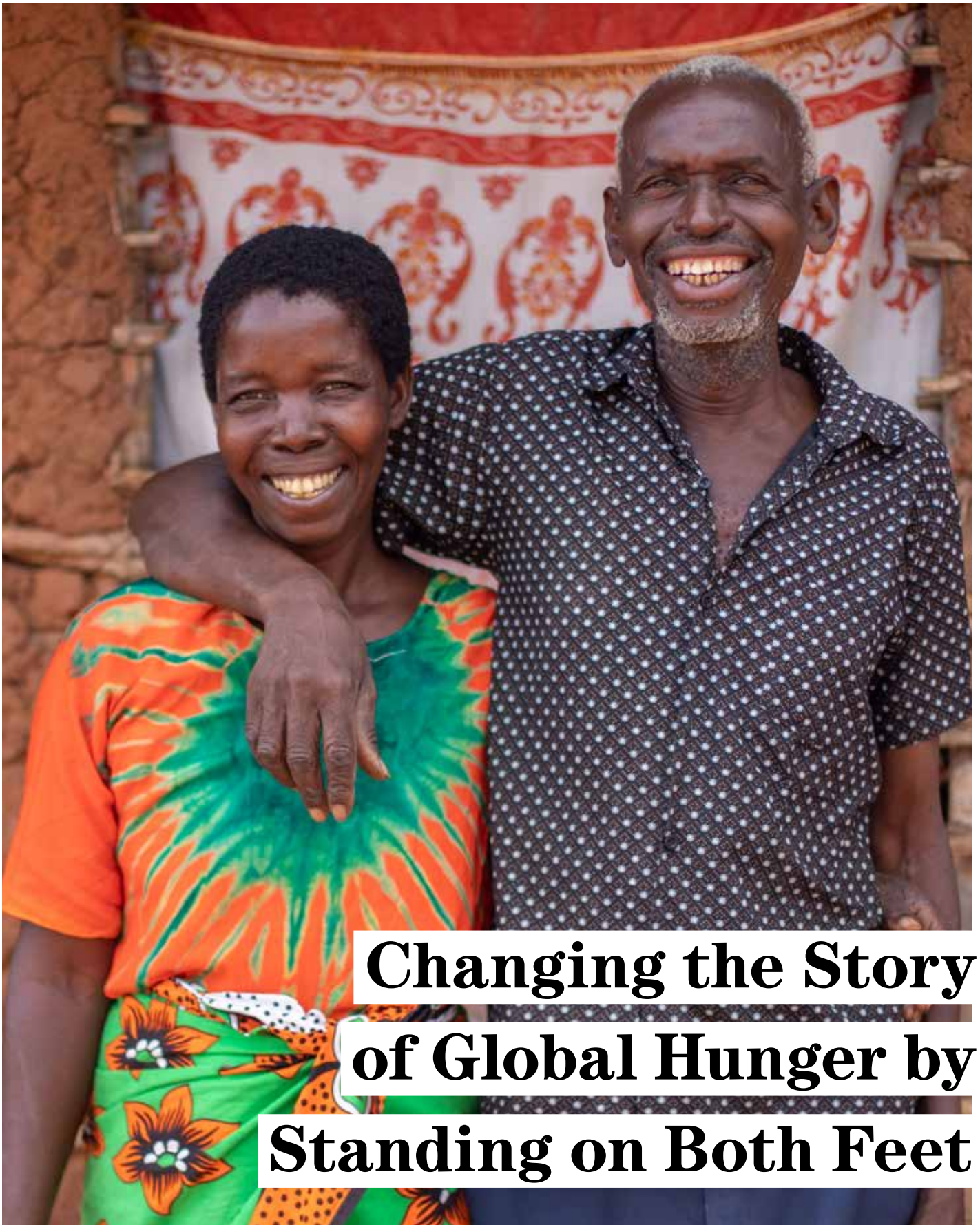
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**Changing the Story  
of Global Hunger by  
Standing on Both Feet**



By Sarah Lahn, World Renew

**Global food security is an ongoing issue that has become more complex with climate instability and COVID-19. World Renew offers hungry people opportunities to meet their needs sustainably. By addressing chronic hunger with climate-adaptive training in agriculture, kitchen gardening for family nutrition, and animal husbandry for additional income, increasing global food security is not only possible, but within reach.**

**F**ood is a basic human need. But when families and communities struggle with hunger, meeting that need can be anything but basic. Food security for subsistence farmers is a complex issue influenced by local circumstances, such as access to education and land ownership, as well as global concerns, such as climate variations and the COVID-19 pandemic.

World Renew, the disaster response and community development ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, is a faith-based organization that thinks globally and acts locally in 19 countries to equip women, men, and youth through training and community development programs to combat hunger and poverty.

Together with local partner organizations, World Renew works to increase family and community economic stability and sustainable agricultural practices.

World Renew focuses on strategies that promote sustainable change in local communities. Those strategies include training subsistence farmers in conservation agriculture, crop production and system diversification, irrigation, and integrated pest management. They also include creating local farming cooperatives, creating value-added items from produce, and improving relationships with local markets.

These specific strategies advance four main goals: conservation agriculture; leading farmers who train others in their communities; improving access to land, resources, and agricultural inputs such as soil improvers and animal feed; and empowering women and girls through access to and control of resources and shared decision making.

The training techniques are contextualized for and integrated into the larger socioeconomic systems in communities. This means, for example, that World Renew offers

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Kazitu and Alfred, who live in Kenya, benefited from training to improve farming techniques and financial opportunities.

agriculture programs alongside savings and loan components that create more holistic development practices. It also means that leadership and development training is emphasized so that communities can advocate for themselves after the programs have ended.

Finally, this work includes peacebuilding and justice programs so that farmers can control their own seed supplies and so that their land rights are justly distributed to marginalized populations. To that end, World Renew works with Thrive to develop advocacy and mobilizing strategies to increase awareness of food security issues and encourage policy shifts.

#### **Wansiewdor's Story – India**

In Patarkamh, India, World Renew partners with the North East India Commission on Relief and Development (NEICORD) in programs centered on health, income generation, and agriculture. The projects focus on forming savings groups and training constituents in revolving loans, financial management, bookkeeping, and improved rice and vegetable production.

Families in Patarkamh often struggle with lack of access to education, widespread poverty, and limited employment opportunities. Wansiewdor is a wife and mother whose family struggled but found hope through World Renew's programs.

"In 2019, my husband was unable to earn enough income to support us," Wansiewdor said. "I was trying to provide for my family when NEICORD started to offer classes in bookkeeping and agriculture." She felt confident in the knowledge she gained in the training sessions, and she began to grow wheat, maize, pumpkin, and bananas to feed her family.

Wansiewdor found that growing produce at home instead of buying it at market saved the family money. She then took out a loan through the program and opened a tea stall and snack shop. With her earnings, she was able to purchase three piglets and hopes to expand her hog farm.



**Helinsha Nongkhaw feeds pigs in India on her family's farm, a business she hopes to grow.**



But Wansiewdor has even bigger goals. “Ultimately, my aim is to provide a quality education for my son and daughter because I did not have the chance to attend school,” she said.

With World Renew’s help, Wansiewdor is using her training, persistence, and dedication to end the cycle of hunger and poverty for herself and her children.

### Kazitu’s Story - Kenya

In Kenya, climate variations and population growth have increased the country’s vulnerability to frequent and severe droughts. To help families adapt, World Renew is working with the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) to promote training for women throughout the country.

The programs that World Renew and ACK offer Kenyans in poor communities include food security, economic opportunities, community health, peace and justice, and disaster response.

Kazitu and her husband, Alfred, live in rural Kenya and are affected by drought and lack of economic opportunities. The family lives in a small village where they, like many of their neighbors, struggled to raise enough food and earn enough money to live despite their efforts at farming.



Alfred, who lives in Kenya, feeds chickens acquired to diversify the family’s income and diet.

Through a World Renew cash-for-work program, Kazitu began to contribute to development projects in her community while earning income. When she joined the program, she chose to be paid in goats instead of cash.

Today, Kazitu and Alfred have a thriving goat herd that provides a stable income stream for their household. The couple has also learned to implement climate adaptation techniques on their farm to

increase crop production so their family can benefit from a more nutritious and diverse diet. They have added chickens to their farm, and Kazitu is a member of a local savings and loan program where she has learned to manage and save their income.

“We are thankful for the opportunities we have had,” Kazitu said, “and we know the importance of using our opportunities to make a better life for our family.” Through World Renew’s programs, she added, they are being supported “until we stand up with both feet.”

### Alvaro’s Story - Nicaragua

World Renew works in more than 80 communities in Nicaragua to change stories through programs such as

agriculture and food storage, human trafficking prevention, human rights promotion, and domestic violence prevention.

In Nicaragua’s Dry Corridor, World Renew partners with the Center for Inter-Ecclesial Theological and Social Studies. Together the organizations offer learning opportunities to local men and women in sustainable agricultural methods. The training helps participants adapt their farming practices to changing rainfall patterns so that their livelihoods and families can thrive.


Alvaro José Chávez Cruz lives in El Jabillo, one of the communities that traditionally lacks adequate rainfall and more recently has been hit hard by climate variations. With long droughts and reduced rainfall, subsistence farmers like Alvaro are even more vulnerable to hunger and poverty.

By improving their food security, access to clean water, and health through World Renew’s farmer field schools, Alvaro is transforming from struggling to prospering in the face of climate change. “I joined a farmer field school in my community through World Renew,” Alvaro said. “I learned ways to adapt to the changing rainy seasons using conservation agriculture methods. After getting good harvests for two years, I realized that I could consistently grow produce in raised beds to feed my family adequately.”

Alvaro has seen positive and abundant results from his efforts. He mixes manure from his farm animals directly into the soil before he transplants his crops. He also built a microirrigation system that uses a reservoir he fills himself from a nearby river.

With help from World Renew, Alvaro is increasing his family’s food security, improving their access to clean water, and improving their diet for better health and nutrition.

In the past 10 years World Renew has helped more than 630,000 people improve their food security worldwide. In the face of the devastating effects of climate change around the globe, individuals affected by drought, famine, and increasingly intense and frequent tropical storms are being empowered to change their stories from distress to hope and from poverty to strength.

By engaging in training in sustainable agricultural practices, more and more families and communities around the world are changing their stories of hunger. They are learning “to stand up with both feet.” 



World Renew’s agricultural training helped Alvaro to improve his farming methods in Nicaragua with abundant results.

# Take Action Against Hunger

**HOW CAN YOU HELP** alleviate poverty in your community and around the world? Explore these resources available through World Renew, Thrive, and their partners.

Host a **Dinner for Good** for your friends and family by downloading World Renew's World Hunger Campaign resources from [worldrenew.net/worldhunger](http://worldrenew.net/worldhunger) in the U.S. and [worldrenew.ca/worldhunger](http://worldrenew.ca/worldhunger) in Canada.

Join the Christian Reformed Church's annual **Day of Justice** every August by using resources from [www.crcna.org/DayofJustice](http://www.crcna.org/DayofJustice) that focus on biblical justice in global and local food insecurity. Offered by Diaconal Ministries Canada, Thrive, and World Renew.

Explore the **Hunting Park Study Series** from the CRC's Climate Witness Project at [crcna.org/hunting-park](http://crcna.org/hunting-park). The study explores the biblical call to care for creation and provides action steps toward policy change and building resilience in daily living in your local community.

Churches in the U.S. can investigate World Renew's **Community Flourishing Cohort** at [worldrenew.net/events](http://worldrenew.net/events) to learn more about becoming a strengths-based, community-focused congregation. Register by January 18, 2024. Churches in Canada can also go to [worldrenew.ca/events](http://worldrenew.ca/events) to explore new opportunities.

Peruse justice resources for churches and individuals on the "Recommended Reading list for Food Insecurity and Poverty" from Diaconal Ministries Canada at [diaconalministries.com/mercy-justice/#food-insecurity-poverty](http://diaconalministries.com/mercy-justice/#food-insecurity-poverty).

Request World Renew's recordings of the "Food Insecurity, Access, and Disparity" webinar series at [worldrenew.net/events](http://worldrenew.net/events). These five webinars for those in the U.S. and Canada focus on innovative and respectful approaches to food insecurity and how to move from charity to dignity and justice.

"If you're hungry for more good on a regular basis, sign up for World Renew enews in your email inbox at [worldrenew.net/signup](http://worldrenew.net/signup) (US) or [worldrenew.ca/signup](http://worldrenew.ca/signup) (CA)."

—Sarah Lahn,  
World Renew



## The View From Here

# Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

**JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY**, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). It can be hard to grasp the depth of that prayer, however, when you’ve got enough food in your pantry and refrigerator(s) to last a month. In our modern world, many of us are insulated from the precariousness of life. Our greatest frustration may be when our favorite brand of granola is unexpectedly missing from the supermarket shelves. But this is not the case for the 1 billion people in our world who live in extreme poverty, subsisting on less than \$1 per day. For them, “Give us this day our daily bread” is prayed with more urgency.


Jesus and his disciples probably would have easily identified with such people. Life in ancient Palestine was often harsh. As in some places today, water was an extremely scarce resource. Jerusalem and the province of Judea were nestled on the northern border of the harsh and unforgiving Negev Desert. On the east side of the Jordan River, the vast expanse of the Arabian Desert constantly encroached with its withering winds. Though there was enough runoff from the mountains to sustain a freshwater lake (the Sea of Galilee), Jesus’ own village of Nazareth and the surrounding province of Galilee were subject to frequent droughts and crop failure as throughout Old Testament times. Life was precarious, and “daily bread” was by no means assured.

This fall,  
may we all  
be blessed  
through the  
discipline of  
appreciation.

I was confronted with my own distressing lack of appreciation for God’s provision during my ministry in Haiti. I vividly remember arriving at a pastor’s house famished and sore after a grueling day of travel that included several flat tires and getting stuck in the mud. Much to my delight, a mountain of rice, beans, grilled goat meat, beet salad, mangos, fried plantains, and other local delicacies had been lovingly prepared for our delegation. I noticed that our host and his family didn’t join in, but smiled approvingly as we devoured copious quantities of food. With my appetite finally satiated, I asked when the pastor and his large family would eat. Beaming with joy, he informed me that he, his wife, and their six children would eat what remained after we finished (which, to the shame of me and my delegation, was not much). I will never forget the look of satisfaction on the faces of those brothers and sisters whose supper we had just scarfed. They rejoiced in hospitality and gave thanks for what remained.

This fall, as we celebrate our national Thanksgiving holidays (a few weeks ago in Canada and a few weeks from now in the U.S.), may we all be blessed

through the discipline of appreciation for the “small things” God provides for our physical life. Warm houses, electricity, water in the tap, and food on the shelf are not inconsequential. Our Lord is a good and gracious God. He faithfully answers the prayer “Give us this day our daily bread.” He “satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things” (Ps. 107:9). Appreciation for God’s abundance is a helpful corrective to our tendency to become absorbed by our disappointments and unmet expectations for our churches, our careers, and our families.

Let me suggest one more opportunity to demonstrate our thanks for God’s abundance. Our ministry agencies, Thrive and World Renew, provide opportunities for us to advocate for hunger justice and to support at-risk communities in North America and around the world. Take a look at the stories in this month’s Our Shared Ministry section to see how you can join in these important ministries. 



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

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

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

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



## Waste Not, Want Not: The Food Recovery Network Program

**KATARINA WOLDT FEELS** a bit sad when she sees a half-eaten plate of food on the Calvin University dining hall conveyor belt, heading for the garbage can. She knows that if that student had just taken less food, it might have made its way to a local ministry or homeless shelter instead of ending up in the trash. The tragedy of food waste is what motivated Woldt to join and help lead the university's local chapter of the Food Recovery Network several years ago.

"You can always go back for seconds," the Calvin senior reflected. "Energy went into making that food, and it pains me to see it wasted."

Woldt is one of about 20 students involved in the Food Recovery Network, a national organization of college students across 190 campuses in 48 states devoted to reducing food waste and ensuring all people have access to nutritious food. The student-led operation, which began at Calvin in 2014, partners with various ministries around Grand Rapids to deliver unused food otherwise slated for a landfill to local food banks and homeless shelters. The student volunteers collaborate with the head chefs from the university's dining halls to collect leftover food and distribute it to those in need.

All food collected is high quality; it just didn't get served that day or couldn't be incorporated into another meal. Leftover food is temperature-checked to make sure it's safe, then packaged into smaller containers and taken to partner organizations.

"The food we're giving away is great food that any student would eat," Woldt said.

To Woldt, the Bible is clear that food is important to God. Woven into the pages of Scripture are metaphors of food and drink. Jesus calls himself "the



Students in the Calvin University chapter of the Food Recovery Network load a car with food to deliver to local shelters and ministry partners.

bread of life" in John 6:35 and talks about "living water" in John 7:37. David admonishes readers to "taste and see" that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). And across the gospels Jesus actively feeds people. He breaks bread with his disciples, turns water into wine, and performs the miracle of the fish and the loaves, an act that provided food for thousands of hungry men and women.

"Practically speaking, Jesus gave food to people," Woldt said, "and that's what we're trying to do." Because food is important to God, it's become important to the students at Calvin.

In the U.S. alone, more than 119 billion pounds (almost 54 billion kilograms) of food are wasted each year, according to the Food Recovery Network. These staggering statistics mean that nearly 40 percent of all food is thrown away, piling up in landfills and taking years, sometimes even decades, to decompose.

"One in eight people struggle with food insecurity," Woldt noted. "That's a huge number. It's great to see how much good, nutritious food we're giving away from the Calvin kitchens to try to help here in Grand Rapids."

Effects of this ministry have been felt across campus. Since the group's inception, many students have become more intentional about stewarding all resources well for the glory of God.

"From conserving food to conserving energy," Woldt said, "students at Calvin are trying to be mindful of what we consume, making a difference where we can."

—Calvin University Communications

## Fear and Hope in India

**TENSIONS AND FEARS** in India have been growing for many years now.

ReFrame's ministry partners there have been fearful of new laws passed by the national government. At times, they've even feared for their lives.

In 2022, a Hindi-language radio producer named Vidyut was invited to a prayer meeting with a neighbor, Swati. Swati knew that Vidyut was a leader in a Christian ministry, and she hoped that Vidyut would pray for her.

One day, as Vidyut was praying with Swati and other members of her extended family, a group gathered outside. At first eight to 10 people were there, but soon over 50 had gathered. The group was angry about the prayer meeting.

"Thankfully," ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader\* said, "a police officer took Vidyut into custody. Although he was treated unfairly during his short stay at the police station, it felt like a small price to pay for protection."

### Unsettling Trends

One recent study from groups that included the Association for the Protection of Civil Rights found more than 400 incidents of violence against Christians in India in 23 different states in the first half of 2023, up from 274 incidents during the same time period in 2022. These unsettling trends mean it's even harder for ReFrame's partners to share the gospel using media.



"Our producers and other partners often face danger in their own communities. We can try to contact them safely, but we also know that they have family members watching them closely or friends who don't want them to be part of the Christian faith." —ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader.

"In the past few years," ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader said, "I've seen many more Dabangis, or lawbreakers, protected by government officials who turn a blind eye to the violence against and mistreatment of Christians here."

### Amar's Support

While police and other authority figures have primarily been siding with the anti-Christian groups, one police officer has been enthusiastically supporting Christian ministry in his own way.

Amar\* is a police officer who first discovered ReFrame's audio programs after a long shift at work.

"Every day, I face a lot of dangerous situations at work, and I grow very tense," Amar wrote to ReFrame's

partner ministry staff. "But after my shift, I've been returning home and listening to your Hindi radio program every day. This fills me with peace and joy."

On November 5, Christians around the world recognize a day of prayer for the persecuted church. Thank you, Christian Reformed Church, for praying for your partners in India and around the world during this time.

"As your partner in gospel ministry, I hope you'll pray for us as well as for our enemies," ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader added.

*\*Names changed or withheld for security reasons.*

—Brian Clark,  
ReFrame Ministries



## Students Learn New Growing Techniques

**GROWING CROPS** and feeding communities is becoming more difficult in Uganda. That's why Resonate Global Mission missionary Sara Sytsma took a group of young people to visit a farm and learn new growing techniques.

Sytsma works in agricultural development in Uganda, helping churches and communities come alongside farmers to better care for their land, produce more food, save money, and connect the Christian faith to everyday life through Bible study and skills training.

"The majority of Ugandans are farmers," Sytsma said. "With a growing population, land degradation, and increasingly irregular rainy seasons, there is a need to adjust traditional methods of growing crops."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Sytsma helped start Bible study groups for students in her community while schools were closed. The students' parents have jobs in town, but they grow food to supplement their income.

A few of Sytsma's students wanted to attend a one-day training on tree propagation at Uwepo, a farm that grows and sells seedlings of many different trees, herbs, forage plants, and more. But Uwepo was too far away for the students to go on their own.

Knowing how important new farming techniques could be for the students, Sytsma worked with Uwepo to organize a tour of the farm for her students. Resonate's work sharing the gospel throughout the world is focused not only on the spiritual well-being of individuals, families, and communities, but also on meeting their physical needs.

"This was a chance to let [the students] get some education, which will be useful in their lives," Sytsma said.

"Many of the plants Uwepo sells



Students took an opportunity to visit Uwepo, a farm that grows and sells seedlings of many different trees, herbs, forage plants, and more.

and the techniques they teach on their farms are not widely practiced in Uganda."

Sytsma drove the students from Soroti to Uwepo in Jinja, about a three-hour drive, and Uwepo staff led the students on a tour of the farm. The students learned about new techniques and new plants their families could grow.

After learning that there's a good market for macadamia nuts, which are easy to grow and produce a lot of seeds each season, one student bought a seedling and took it home to plant. Students were also excited to learn that after a fruit tree grows to a certain height, farmers can cut off the tip of the main stem so it grows outward rather than taller, making harvesting fruit easier.

Providing training is one way Resonate missionaries like Sytsma work to equip people. While the tour was only one day, this training could help these students better navigate the changes their families and communities are facing while growing food.

"Agriculture is vital for feeding people, but is often looked down upon in Uganda as not being a very well respected job since it is viewed as not being profitable," Sytsma said. "This was an opportunity for the youth to learn how agriculture can be profitable and an exciting profession."

—Cassie Westrate,  
Resonate Global Mission



# How Can We Help?

**You and your church now have three options for easier access to CRC ministries and resources.**



## Click

Search hundreds of resources from CRC ministries and churches.

Try it out at  
[crcna.org/Resources](http://crcna.org/Resources)



## Call

Got a ministry question but not sure who to call? We can help.

Give us a shout at  
[800-272-5125](tel:800-272-5125)



## Chat

Oh yeah, we chat too. Type and we'll type back.

Chat from any page at  
[crcna.org](http://crcna.org)

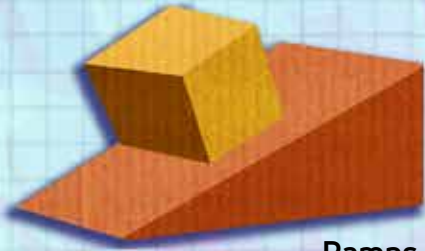
If you have a ministry need and wonder if your denomination can help, just click, call, or chat.

**We're here to serve.**

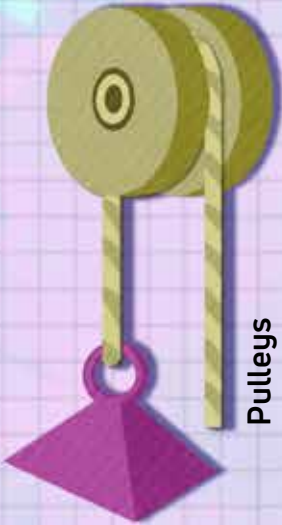


**Christian  
Reformed  
Church**

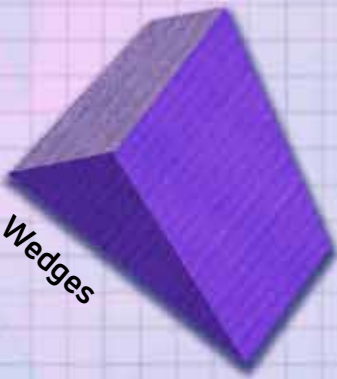
# Simple Machines



Ramps



Pulleys



Wedges



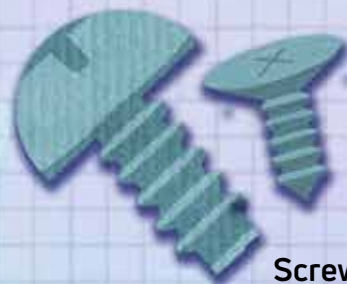
Albert Kok teaches eighth grade at Beacon Christian School in St. Catharines, Ont. He loves teaching science and exploring God's order in creation as he hikes the Bruce Trail with his family.

There are six simple machines that help us do work: wheels and axles, pulleys, levers, wedges, screws, and inclined planes (ramps). Simple machines help us by following the simple rule God made for them: When you increase the distance over which force is applied, you decrease the force needed.

Here are some experiments to try around your house. See if you can figure out what they have in common:

- » Try to open a door in your house by pushing (or pulling) the middle of the door rather than the side with the doorknob.
- » Try jumping up your stairs two at a time with both feet instead of one at a time.
- » Try turning a bike wheel near the axle and then near the rim.
- » Try pressing a stapler near the hinge instead of at the stapling end.


What do you notice? In each case, you should have felt that it was harder when you did it “wrong” than when you did it the way you usually do. It should have been harder to open the door from the middle, to press the stapler near the hinge, to jump up two stairs with both feet, and to spin the wheel near the axle. When you use a machine—the hinge, the stairs, the wheel—as you’re meant to, the job becomes easier. If you increase the distance over which you’re applying force, you’ll need less force.



Screws

Here are some more examples:

- » Try taping a ruler to a faucet handle to make it longer. The tap will be easier to open and close.
- » Maybe you’ve seen a delivery person pushing a refrigerator on a wheeled cart up a long ramp into a truck. That’s a lot easier than lifting it the shorter distance from the ground to the truck!
- » A wheelbarrow works well because the long handles put the lifter far away from what’s being lifted. The longer the handles are, the easier the load is to lift.
- » Why do we screw lids onto jars instead of hammering them on? It’s not just to keep the jar from breaking. It’s because it takes less force.
- » It’s much easier on a car’s engine to go up a mountain using curvy switchbacks instead of a straighter but steeper road.

All these simple machines increase the distance of the effort but decrease the force needed. Let’s thank God for this amazing rule God created to make our work easier! 



Levers

Wheels and Axles





# Belonging in New Ways

By William Katerberg

*Editor's Note: This is the third in a three-part series about what enduring values have helped hold us together in the Christian Reformed Church and what might continue to hold us together going forward. You can read the first and second articles online at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org) or in print in the September and October issues.*

**T**ight bonds between ethnicity and religion had fostered belonging in the Christian Reformed Church in its first century, as had isolation. But this isolation declined after World War II as CRC folk participated ever more in non-CRC American and Canadian religious and cultural networks. People from diverse ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds also joined the denomination in modest numbers. CRC folk went out into the wider world—and the world came in.

These changes could be disorienting, but they also offered opportunities. CRC folk, like other North Americans, joined and loved more varied communities, institutions, and networks, often moving fluidly among them. Belonging to any one of them mattered less; belonging became layered, liquid, and leaky rather than solid and singular. We had choices.

But especially since the 1980s, the “culture wars” have divided Americans in new ways (Canadians, too, to a lesser degree). Belonging has also become something we fight about as both citizens and church members.

Can we find new ways of belonging in this context that might offer a compelling mission rooted in our shared Reformed tradition?

## **Growing Diversity**

Since the 1970s, the CRC has become steadily more diverse. I remember a First Nations classmate in my CRC-affiliated Christian school. A Dutch immigrant family had adopted him. In the 1970s and 1980s, the CRC sponsored refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Some of those families joined CRC congregations. I remember playing with a Vietnamese boy at school. The son of a German Lutheran pastor was in my classes in middle school, and occasionally CRC folk married Canadians who were not Christian Reformed.

These examples of “diversity” stood out for me as exceptions in the church communities of my childhood that otherwise were Dutch and Reformed. Growing up in small towns also shaped my childhood experiences. Diversity was already more common for CRC communities in cities like Halifax, Toronto, and Edmonton.

Dutch Reformed youth like me who came to Calvin College (now University) from Canada had a distinct experience of identity too. My non-CRC friends often described Calvin as a “weird Dutch place.” I remember laughing and saying that it didn’t seem Dutch to me. It was weird, all right, but it was to me a weird *American* place. I realized that I was not just Dutch and Reformed, but also very Canadian.

Diversity is not new to the CRC. Navajo Christians have been part of the denomination since the 1890s, with their numbers growing over the decades. The CRC had Jewish missions in the first half of the twentieth century, a Chinese mission and congregation in New York in the 1950s, and missions and congregations in Black communities in several cities. Calvin College and Seminary attracted students from the Middle East, China, and Korea in the decades before 1950. But diversity in the CRC grew significantly only in recent decades.

In 1996, only five percent of CRC folk were from ethnic minority groups. That grew to eight percent in 2011 and more than 20 percent in 2023. Roughly 25 percent of the 1,000 congregations in the CRC today are in Canada. More than 180 congregations or missions use a language other than English. They include 111 using Korean, 52 Spanish, 10 Navajo, two Swahili, three Hmong, and eight Chinese. There are predominantly Korean, Black, African, Latino, Navajo, Chinese, and Vietnamese CRC congregations. Of the 19 new ministries recorded in the CRC’s 2023 *Yearbook*, six are Spanish speaking and five Korean speaking. Net growth in the CRC since 2010 has been in non-white churches, notably in California, on the East Coast, and in Florida. Various CRC leadership networks support these ministries—Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander, Black and Reformed, Consejo Latino, East Meets West (Chinese), Native American/First Nations, and Korean. About 30 percent of students at Calvin



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University and almost half at the Seminary are North American or international students of color.

Finally, the CRC also has become more diverse religiously. We have members whose roots are Mennonite, Catholic, Baptist, nondenominational evangelical, Pentecostal, and more, and pastors whose training was at various Presbyterian, Reformed, and evangelical seminaries. And cradle CRC folk have been influenced by other Christian traditions. It is not just ethnicity that has changed in the CRC; “Christian” and “Reformed” have expanded too.

We might be tempted to look back with nostalgia to times that seemed simpler when the CRC was more homogenous. But it is essential to focus on the opportunities diversity brings. Yes, belonging has become more complicated, but the CRC has also been enriched. Remember that the early church in Acts both rejoiced and struggled when its members became increasingly diverse.

A few years ago, I helped a congregation in Sioux Falls, S.D., think about how to tell their story in an anniversary book. They decided to use migration as their theme, but that did not mean a story about Dutch immigrants. Even their first members a century ago—Dutch and Reformed—came from other parts of the United States, not the Netherlands. Most of the current members have joined in the past 15 years. Sioux Falls has growing Indigenous and refugee communities and attracts immigrants and native-born Americans alike with its vibrant economy. Over 60 languages are spoken in local public schools.

This is the world in which the CRC as a whole is evolving today.

### **Fragmentation**

In addition to ethno-religious diversity and U.S.-Canadian differences, two other factors have transformed belonging in the CRC: a general decline

in community life and hyperpartisan cultural politics.

Journalists and scholars began describing the decline in community life in North America long before smartphones and social media. In 1995, political scientist Robert Putnam called the phenomenon “bowling alone.” People today participate less than previous generations in everything from bowling leagues, lodges, churches, and women’s clubs to PTAs, unions, volunteerism, and voting. They have fewer close friendships (men especially) and see each other face-to-face less often. They marry less, divorce more often, and have fewer intergenerational and extended family ties. Individuals and families increasingly live in isolation. Our circles are shrinking and thinning.

In 2023, the U.S. surgeon general declared isolation and loneliness a public health crisis. Social media, geographic sprawl, segmented marketing, and more lie behind this atomization. So too does the hyperpartisan politics of the “culture wars.”

Ours is not just an age of loneliness, but one of fracture. I won’t summarize the culture wars here; you need only to read your newspaper or social media feeds to know what I’m referencing. Instead, I’ll describe what the culture wars have meant for religious life.

The first effect is realignment. The place of denominations in North American society and how they work has changed significantly since the nineteenth century. Into the 1960s, denominational lines defined religious life. People’s Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, or Reformed religious identities typically mattered more than whether they agreed or disagreed with each other politically.

Today, whether people are “conservative” or “progressive” matters more than sharing a denominational membership. People care less about theological and liturgical traditions that date back to the Reformation. Religious loyalties align with social,

cultural, and political loyalties rather than cut across them. Political partisanship has colonized religious identities.

Secondly, people care less about the institutions, values, and habits that sustain traditions and communities, whether religious or civic. We also trust them less. Winning control politically and “controlling the narrative” matter more than caring for the institutions that make it possible to balance competition and conflict among us. It is not just people on the “other side” who are targets today, but also people on one’s own side who are too sympathetic to the other side, too nuanced in their views, or too willing to seek common ground.

I am reminded of what a soldier allegedly told a reporter in Vietnam in 1968 when asked about bombing a town to force out communist forces: “It became necessary to destroy the town to save it.” Although the goal may not be to undermine institutions, traditions, or communities, whether political or religious, the culture wars can still effectively do so.

The Christian Reformed Church is no exception to these trends, as articles in *The Banner* have discussed in recent years.

### **A New Vision?**

What kind of belonging might the CRC aspire to in this context? How might we shape a denominational vision for our time?

Because of its isolation, the CRC was passively countercultural in its first century of existence. CRC leaders looked smugly at both sides of the modernist/fundamentalist conflicts of the 1920s. Internal CRC debates over common grace and worldly amusements only loosely paralleled those conflicts. The Protestant Reformed secession was a small division compared to splits in Presbyterian and Baptist denominations.

Today, CRC folks are both participating in and being shaped by the culture

wars. Similar conflicts are threatening to tear apart other denominations. But what if, instead of being caught up in hyperpartisanship, the CRC tried to provide an alternative to polarization and fragmentation in the church, society, and politics?

Although an institution's mission should not essentially change, its vision, or strategic focus, often will change to reflect the needs of an era. That focus might be church growth in one decade, but reinvigorating liturgy and church education in another.

In its origins, the CRC's strategic focus was to defend Reformed orthodoxy by separating—in the 1830s in the Netherlands and in the 1850s in the United States. Splitting is part of our DNA. But in a time of fragmentation, loneliness, political partisanship, and religious conflicts, our sectarian genes have become part of the problem.

I'm not suggesting that we ignore the issues of our time, whether it's sexuality or race relations or something else. They matter in principle and in practice, and they affect what church membership and national citizenship mean. My suggestion is that we make belonging together a priority. There is little value in winning denominational "culture wars" if in the process we fracture our institutions, communities, and traditions.

Calvin University provides a modest example. Its Vision 2030 is to be a Reformed learning community of faithful Christians that "promotes the welfare of the city and the healing of the world." Christians from around the world and across the political spectrum learn, work, and live together at Calvin rather than apart. Being faithfully Reformed and intellectually engaged does not mean identifying the school as either conservative or progressive. Being countercultural in this way can be a hard sell. It requires building trust. Calvin may not always succeed. But it is a mission-driven vision, one that reflects the school's historic place in the CRC and the wider religious and academic world.

Moving quickly toward separation in the CRC, even graciously, would reinforce the hyperpartisan habits of our time. It would mean grieving apart rather than together, without considering new ways of belonging together. We would stop short of exploring what the denomination and its traditions and communities might look like going forward.

Belonging has become liquid, layered, and leaky, I said earlier in this article. Church shopping is not new, of course, but the religious marketplace has become more turbulent in recent decades. People often ignore denominational borders. A person might be raised Baptist, go to an Evangelical Fellowship congregation while in college, join a CRC congregation in a new town after graduating, and later end up in a Reformed-tinged, charismatic Bible church with great children's programs, all the while participating in nondenominational organizations—"the circulation of the saints," as pundits sometimes call it. Solid, singular, and individually sovereign denominations—the ideal behind separation—may no longer be possible or even ideal.

What if we reimagine denominations? What if we reimagined how the CRC works internally and how it collaborates with other denominations, independent churches, and transdenominational institutions?

I've seen ideas like this discussed by CRC and other Reformed folks in various places. Here are a few suggestions to stretch how we think about ourselves, our institutions, and our vision.

» The CRC might become more fluid institutionally. We would continue to value the Reformed "borderlines" that distinguish us, but we would prioritize cultivating "borderlands"—the places where people, traditions, and institutions meet. We could be Reformed oases for people in parched cultural landscapes. We would not ignore controversial issues (they matter), but would not let any one of them determine our

relationships. Mission fields, including CRC missions, have long worked like this both at home and abroad.

- » Our ecclesiology and institutional structures might change. A reimagined CRC would have new kinds of looser, layered ties internally and new kinds of collaboration with other denominations, whether more conservative or more progressive. More of our congregations would be affiliated with more than one denomination.
- » Our Reformed emphasis on covenant would continue. Covenantal belonging would be more vital, even if more fluid, layered, and collaborative as we envision and practice it in new ways.

Reinforcing the fractured culture of our time, as separation would do, does not seem wise or prudent to me. The harder, more uncharted, and admittedly riskier calling—but also the more hopeful one—is to try for something new, and to do it together.

This path will require more than simply trusting each other. It depends on trusting our faithful Savior and the working of the Holy Spirit. Such trust carried us in the past, when we separated from other churches. The same trust can carry us today as we reimagine belonging. **B**



Will Katerberg is a professor of history and curator of Heritage Hall at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. He is a member of Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids.

1. What changes in the Christian Reformed denomination or even in your local church have you noticed over the years?
2. What are some ministry opportunities available now that weren't before?

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

## Living with Regrets

We must live  
the life we  
have, not the  
one we think  
we deserve.



Ken Nydam is a retired Christian Reformed minister now working as a licensed mental health counselor in his agency, Hope Way Counseling Services ([hopewaycounseling-services.com](http://hopewaycounseling-services.com)), which has offices in Byron Center and Allegan, Mich. He is a member of Cadillac CRC.

**IF I COULD** do my life over again, is there anything that I would change, leave out, or add? Am I happy with how my life took shape? Or do I wonder how it could have been shaped had I chosen a different path?

In Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken," the protagonist is confronted with such a choice. He comes to a fork in the road, and he must decide which path to take. He concludes that one of the paths is "less traveled by," but why? Frost also tells us that which road was eventually chosen "made all the difference."

That haunting report sounds inviting even though that path could have looked bumpier or narrower or darker. Yet "difference" stirs our curiosity. If we knew where that path would lead us, we might have chosen a different one, and it could have "made all the difference."


In the last decades of one's life, when it is too late to do it over, people do wonder about these things and sometimes feel regrets. Can one still find complete contentment and satisfaction in life while still desiring what could or should have been had one made different choices at forks in the road?

Are you living with regrets? Do they haunt you? Or have you grown old gracefully, becoming generally content with how it all turned out no matter what mistakes you made, hurts you caused, or joys you missed? Are you able to let go of what could have been in order to better celebrate whatever did become of your life?

We must live the life we have, not the one we think we deserve. If we insist on the life we think we deserve, we will miss out on the one we have. The life we think we deserve might be imagined by our experiences of injustice, unexpected sickness, financial

loss, or pleasant dreams that never materialized. But wisdom says it is folly to deny the realities of our lives in order to fantasize about what could have or should have been. A fulfilled life is realized by adjusting to the path we chose and making the most of the situation we have.

Yet I can think of three reasons why a latter-life review can still be beneficial. First, by asking such existential questions I indicate a desire to learn important lessons about the life I chose. It forces me to dig deep for every gem of understanding about myself and my environment. I particularly want to understand the mistakes I made. Secondly, it can lead to epiphanies about whatever I can or must now fix to improve or heal my life in the time I have left. Finally, it is a celebration of the grace that enabled me to live the life I did live despite the good or bad, right or wrong, crooked or straight paths I chose.

As for the haunting regrets I don't want to think about because they fill me with shame and make me shudder at the memory of them, I can pray: "Lord, have mercy!" And God does have mercy. In our regrets, the same wisdom applies: Live the life you have (received by grace) rather than the one you think you deserve (from judgment). If you insist on the life you think you deserve (by carrying around your regret, guilt, and shame), you will miss the one you have been given (by grace and forgiveness from God and from people). 



## Mirrors and Binoculars

There are two ways we can read the Bible: as if it's a mirror or as if it's a pair of binoculars.

**BESIDES HAVING** an uncountable number of books to borrow, our local library has started to loan STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) kits. One of these kits is a backpack filled with all the equipment needed for a budding ornithologist: a map of local parks and waterways, a bird identification book, and of course a pair of high-powered binoculars. My animal-loving middle daughter was the first in our family to borrow this bird-watching kit. When she got home, it did not take her long to start looking out the windows toward the backyard.

"Dad, I see a robin!" she announced.

"These binoculars make it so clear it's like it's in our house with us!"

Glad that there were still some panes of glass between the birds and my living room, I watched as my daughter gazed in delight as other birds soon joined the robin at the bird feeder. Soon the commotion drew my son's attention. His constant curiosity fits right into the engineering part of STEM. Instead of asking to look at the birds, he engaged me in his usual style: a game of 20 Questions: "How do binoculars work, Dad? How come things are so big? Why don't glasses make things look so big? Why do binoculars have two eye holes, but a pirate scope only has one?"



Dan Veeneman works in the dairy industry as a ventilation specialist. He lives in Abbotsford, B.C., with his wife and three children. He is a member of Gateway Community Church.

I gave my 7-year-old son a brief explanation of lenses, mirrors, and light, which seemed to satisfy his curiosity—until his brain finished processing and he hit me with another round of questions: "Why do mirrors show things backward? Why don't mirrors make things bigger or smaller? Why do binoculars only make things bigger?" Away we went again.

All this talk of mirrors and binoculars reminded me of a saying that our pastor uses from the pulpit on occasion: "When you come to church next

week, we are going to be looking at [insert passage here]. Please make sure to pack your 'mirror Bibles', and leave your 'binocular Bibles' at home."

Huh? Who has Bibles made of mirrors, or of convex and concave lenses and glass? Seems dangerous to me! But my son's impromptu game of 20 Questions and the spur-of-the-moment physics lesson helped me begin to truly appreciate what our pastor was wishing for the congregation to understand.

There are two ways we can read the Bible: as if it's a mirror or as if it's a pair of binoculars. When our pastor encourages us to bring our "mirror Bibles," what he's really telling us is to turn our eyes inward. Let the words of Scripture illuminate the shadows in our lives, and let them bring us to a better understanding of who we truly are and how God sees us. One definition of a mirror is "something that gives a true representation" (Merriam-Webster). Just as a mirror reflects one's true physical appearance, the Bible, when read thoughtfully and meditatively, will lead people into self-reflection and self-discovery—an introspective view that helps us develop humility, empathy, and a deeper understanding of our faith, our spirituality, and our individual relationships with Jesus.

My pastor also asked us to leave behind our "binocular Bibles." What are those? While "mirror Bibles" lead to introspection, "binocular Bibles" are focused on the external and limit our view of ourselves. "Binocular Bibles" allow us to see faults and problems with others while ignoring our own. If we use the Bible in this manner, it becomes easy to read a passage and think about all the people in our life who could benefit from its message instead of asking how it applies to ourselves. "Binocular Bibles" easily lead to places of judgment and binary



Photo by Diane Helentjaris/Unsplash

1. When you honestly examine your own habits in responding to sermons, do you notice a tendency to use a “mirror Bible” or a “binocular Bible”?
2. Why do you think some people’s default is a “binocular Bible”?
3. Can you think of any biblical passages or stories that may support or illustrate the “mirror Bible” approach?
4. Can you think of other metaphors or ways to enhance the “mirror Bible” approach to Scripture that can foster our spiritual growth?

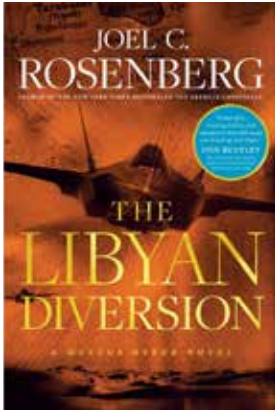
thinking. Using the Bible solely as binoculars might lead to a lack of personal growth and transformation because the focus remains on the perceived flaws of others rather than on our own.

Let’s look at Luke 6:41-42 and imagine how the same passage would be read differently with a “mirror Bible” versus a “binocular Bible.” Someone reading a “mirror Bible” will read the text and become aware of things in their life that need to change. The reflection they see in the Bible will clearly show them the plank that needs to be removed from their own eye. Yet someone using a “binocular Bible” to read the same passage will look outward, see everyone else with planks and specks in their eyes, and feel vindicated in their judgments of others.

Mirrors are a tool to help us build our understanding of ourselves. Without mirrors, we would be unable to see one of the biggest parts of our identity: our own faces. Generally, we can see other faces using just our eyes, but for us to see our own faces, to see our own identities, we must use a mirror.

So the next time you see your reflection in the mirror or use binoculars to watch birds or other animals, be reminded and encouraged to use your “mirror Bibles” and to leave your “binocular Bibles” at home. 📖

# Falling for Books as 'Sweater Weather' Arrives



## The Libyan Diversion

By Joel C. Rosenberg

Reviewed by Trevor Denning

*The Libyan Diversion* is replete with cloak-and-dagger White House meetings that fans of political espionage crave. While Rosenberg's writing is as good as anything on the market, his voice is also Christian.

Former U.S. Marine Marcus Ryker has barely recovered from his last covert mission for the CIA when he's called back into action. His team believes they've identified the headquarters of Abu Nakba, the "Father of Disaster," in the Libyan desert. Nakba is the most wanted terrorist in the world and, if Ryker is right, they can cripple his network. But what if he's wrong?

Though this is the only book I've read in the five-book Ryker series, I had no problem following along. I did have trouble putting it down long enough to sleep. (Tyndale)



## An American Immigrant

By Johanna Rojas Vann

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Melanie Carvajal, a 25-year-old second-generation immigrant from Colombia and the stubborn, industrious protagonist of *An American Immigrant*, works as a journalist for *The Miami Herald*. When Melanie is given an opportunity to win back her editor's favor by covering an assignment in Bogota, she visits with her grandmother and extended family and discovers an old journal in a bedside cupboard that turns her world upside down.

What Melanie learns from the journal and her few days in Cali convince her that she can't fulfill the assignment her editor expects. As she discovers her voice as a writer, Melanie finds the courage to forge a new path for herself and honor her heritage like never before. (WaterBrook)



## The Creative Act: A Way of Being (Audiobook)

By Rick Rubin

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

Some believe Rick Rubin is a genius. Others say he's a fraud. Most people don't know what to think about the legendary music producer who doesn't play an instrument, doesn't know how to work a soundboard, and admits he knows nothing about music.

The only task he sets for himself is to unlock the creative spirit of the musical artists he's working with, including the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Adele, U2, Jay-Z, and The Avett Brothers, to name just a few.

*The Creative Act* pulls together all that he's learned about the creative process over the past 40 years while working with some of culture's most important and successful artists, musicians, and creators. Rubin himself reads the audio version, but a print version is also available. Both are worth savoring. (Penguin Random House/Audible)



## Hope in the Valley

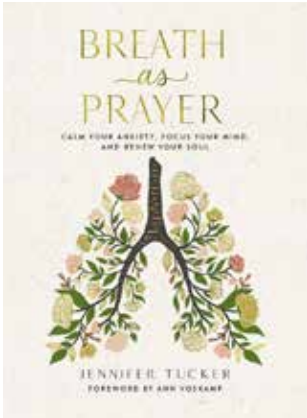
By Mitali Perkins

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Pandita Paul is nearly a teenager, but all she wants to do is stay in the past. She's worried that she's beginning to forget Ma, who died a few years ago when the family was in India visiting the village Ma grew up in. To counteract her fear, Pandita sets a big goal, dubbing it Operation Remember Ma (ORM). But there's a problem: Pandita and her sisters have formed a pact not to mention Ma because when they do, their father, whom they call Baba, is overcome with sadness. And while Pandita wants to linger in the past, events in the 1980s Silicon Valley community in California where she lives catapult her into change.

Author Mitali Perkins has skillfully and subtly woven biblical truths into her engaging, emotionally satisfying novel for middle grade readers. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)





**Breath as Prayer:  
Calm Your Anxiety,  
Focus Your Mind, and  
Renew Your Soul**

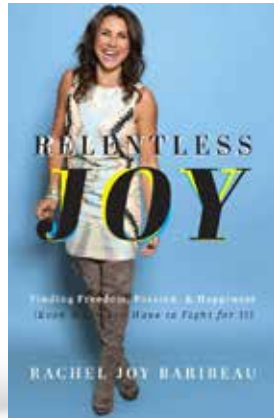
*By Jennifer Tucker*

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

In times of intense stress and anxiety, you may lose your words, even in prayer. If all you can offer God is your breath, that is enough. In this devotional, Jennifer Tucker introduces the technique of breath prayer, which integrates scriptural meditations with mindfulness.

Breath prayers work because breathing is the bridge between the brain and the body. Changing how we breathe can directly affect the signals sent from the nervous system to the brain and alter the mind-body state. Breath prayer is also an old spiritual practice for restoring wholeness to the body, mind, and soul, “a doorway into an even deeper prayer life.”

Each unit introduces some science about how the body responds in situations of anxiety and stress, followed by a Scripture verse and a breath prayer. (Thomas Nelson).



**Relentless Joy:  
Finding Freedom,  
Passion, and  
Happiness (Even  
When You Have to  
Fight for It)**

*By Rachel  
Joy Baribeau*

Reviewed by Paul Delger

Former national sportscaster Rachel Baribeau offers readers a raw, honest, encouraging, and hopeful book that is part memoir and part cheerleading.

Baribeau doesn't sugarcoat her wrenching past, which includes assault, a drug addiction, and child abuse. But she encourages readers to change their narrative as she did, to move on from pain and seek joy. “There is joy despite your circumstances,” she said in a telephone interview. At the end of each chapter is a “Joystart” section where readers find an action point to implement in their own lives. There is also space for journaling near the back of the book. This book provides encouragement, opportunities for self-reflection, and, of course, joy. Joy is Baribeau's middle name, and her goal in this book is to spread joy widely. (Revell)



**The First Ladies**  
*By Marie Benedict  
and Victoria  
Christopher Murray*

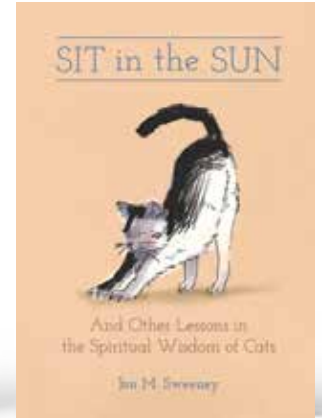
Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Mary Bethune, a Black woman, was the “first lady of the struggle,” fighting to achieve equality for Black people and other minorities. Eleanor Roosevelt was the first lady of the United States. Their unlikely real-life friendship changed the world, and that's not just back-cover copy hyperbole.

Though Mary is a staunch Republican—the party of Lincoln, who emancipated her enslaved parents—and Eleanor is a Democrat, the two forged a strong bond based on working toward justice for all disenfranchised Americans.

Both women inspire as they overcome tremendous challenges and entrenched racism to build together what would become the foundation of modern civil rights.

Mary and Eleanor's friendship—unshakable, tender, and enduring—is the heartbeat of their story and of this enthralling work of historical fiction. Highly recommended for book clubs. (Penguin Random House)



**Sit in the Sun and  
Other Lessons in the  
Spiritual Wisdom of  
Cats**

*By Jon M. Sweeney*

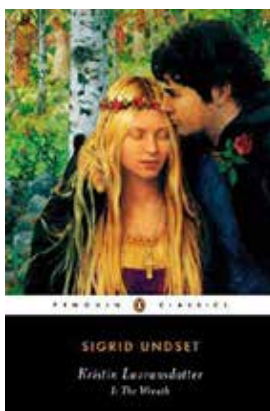
Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

This new book by the prolific Jon M. Sweeney is the cat's meow. Really.

Sweeney, known for studious explorations of St. Francis, has applied his intelligent noticing to the delightful world of cats. But what could my cat, Livvie, teach me about spirituality? Quite a lot, says Sweeney.

Thoughtful lessons fill the pages, from “Surrender to Relax” to “Pounce Frequently.” The former: We rarely are taught how to relax. As Sweeney laments this, he suggests how surrender may be synonymous with relaxation. The latter: Find your pounce—your internal prompt to action—and do it. There, Sweeney suggests, is our joy.

Cat anecdotes and thoughtful interfaith musings fill the chapters that end with spiritual practices. Spiritually minded cat-lovers will relish *Sit in the Sun*. (Broadleaf Books).



## The Kristin Lavransdatter Trilogy: The Wreath, The Wife, and The Cross

By Sigrid Undset

Reviewed by Sara Kyoungah White

Winter is the perfect time to step into medieval Norway to follow the tragic life of Kristin Lavransdatter. The trilogy's themes are strangely relevant for today, especially for Christians.

In *The Wreath*, a young Kristin defies her father's plans for betrothal, instead choosing an illicit relationship with Erlend Nikulaussøn. *The Wife* continues with Kristin's increased remorse over her sins and careless decisions. *The Cross* is full of catastrophe, from death to false accusations of adultery, and ends with the Black Death.

These are not feel-good reads. But those who choose to stay beside Kristin and witness the bleakness of life in her medieval Norway will be rewarded with an epic that has few peers in its clear-eyed wrestling with the great problem of sin and the true cost of redemption. (Penguin Classics)



## The Kingdom of Heaven: A Gardening Primer

By Danielle Hitchen, illustrated by Jessica Blanchard

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

The latest release in the Baby Believer Primers series is a joyful, vibrantly illustrated board book that helps children understand what Jesus meant when he talked about the kingdom of heaven. Including vivid text and Scripture passages, the book highlights the Garden of Eden, seeds, soil, planting and watering, roots, growth, weeds, flowers, fruit, pruning, and harvest.

Baby Believer Primers—including *Let There Be Light: An Opposites Primer*, *Jesus Heals: An Anatomy Primer*, *Psalms of Praise: A Movement Primer*, and more—help parents and caregivers “teach ... children the central tenets of the Christian faith that they may never know a day apart from the Lord.” Recommended as a meaningful and lovely gift for children at their baptism or at other significant occasions in their young lives. (Harvest Kids)



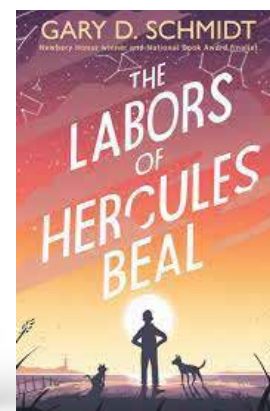
## Grieving Well: A Healing Journey Through the Season of Grief

By Terri DeBoer and Janet Jaymin

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

The authors of this easy-to-read resource for anyone grieving the death of a parent, spouse, child, friend, or someone else they love know the pain of grief and desire to help readers grieve well.

In the first section, the authors answer questions such as: Is there a “normal” grief journey? Is there a timeline for grief? What are the stages of grief? How can we help others who are grieving? The second section includes poignant personal essays by people describing their own grief journeys. The third section offers 30 devotions written by pastors and chaplains from various Christian denominations who open God's Word “to find the only true source of hope, comfort, and peace that comes during times of great loss.” (Morgan James Faith)



## The Labors of Hercules Beal

By Gary D. Schmidt

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Twelve-year-old Hercules Beal hates his name. After all, he's short, not like the physically imposing and heroic mythical Hercules. But there's one thing that Hercules (the boy) has in common with Hercules (the myth): his parents have died too.

At the beginning of the school year, Hercules' language arts instructor, Lt. Col. Hupfer, assigns Hercules to perform tasks analogous to the 12 labors of the mythical Hercules and write reports on what he has learned about the relevance of these labors in regard to his own experiences.

In this warm-hearted novel, Gary Schmidt masterfully employs a clever premise to describe for middle school readers the sorrow, confusion, and uncertainty encountered through tragic loss and to convey the surprising, transformative nature of love received from people and pets. (Clarion Books)

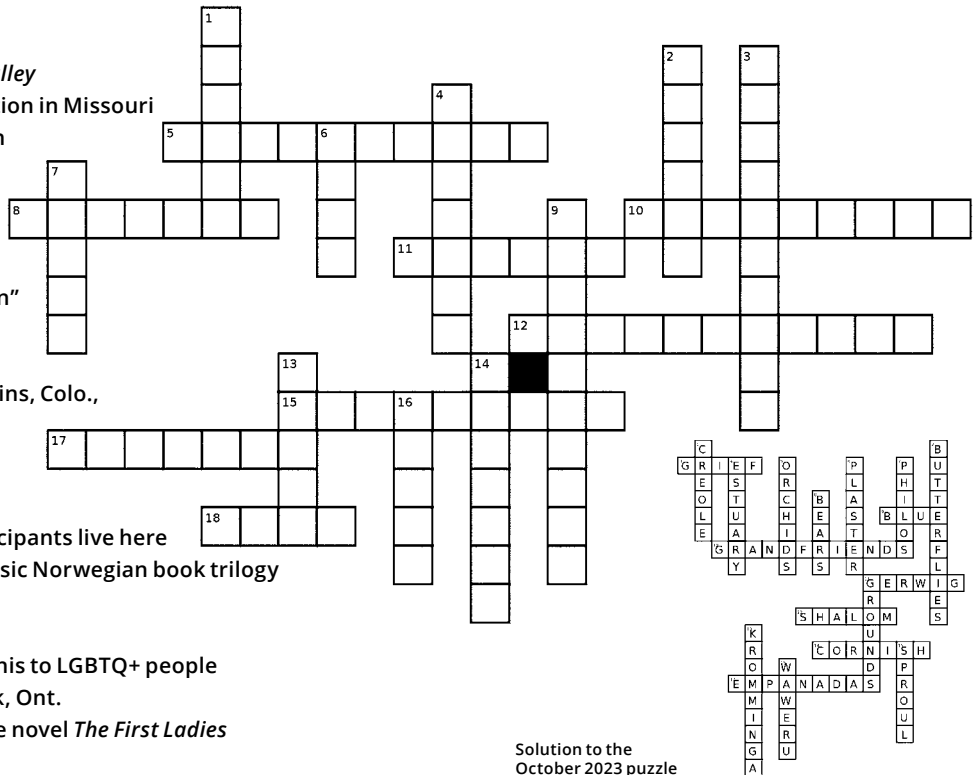
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!  
(Word Play appears monthly except for the July/August issue.)

**Down**

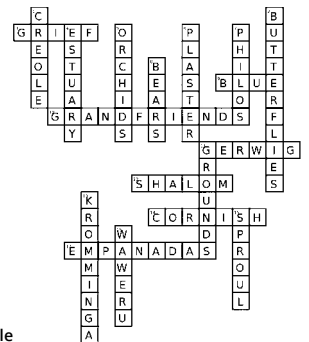
1. \_\_\_\_\_ Perkins, author of *Hope in the Valley*
2. Language of a new organized congregation in Missouri
3. Sport in which a CRC member earned an international gold medal
4. This CRC agency has ministry partners in India
6. Tough \_\_\_\_\_
7. Author of the poem "The Road Not Taken"
9. We use them to see afar
13. A farm in Uganda
14. Members of Immanuel CRC in Fort Collins, Colo., arrange \_\_\_\_\_
16. "Give us this day our daily \_\_\_\_\_"

**Across**

5. Marianne VanTuinen's Bible study participants live here
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Lavransdatter, heroine of a classic Norwegian book trilogy
10. Curator of Heritage Hall
11. A National Parks worker
12. A new learning cohort wants to show this to LGBTQ+ people
15. Pastor of Maranatha CRC in Woodstock, Ont.
17. Mary \_\_\_\_\_, one of the subjects of the novel *The First Ladies*
18. It's a basic human need



Solution to the October 2023 puzzle



# Great News!

A simple and tax-wise way to support CRC ministry.

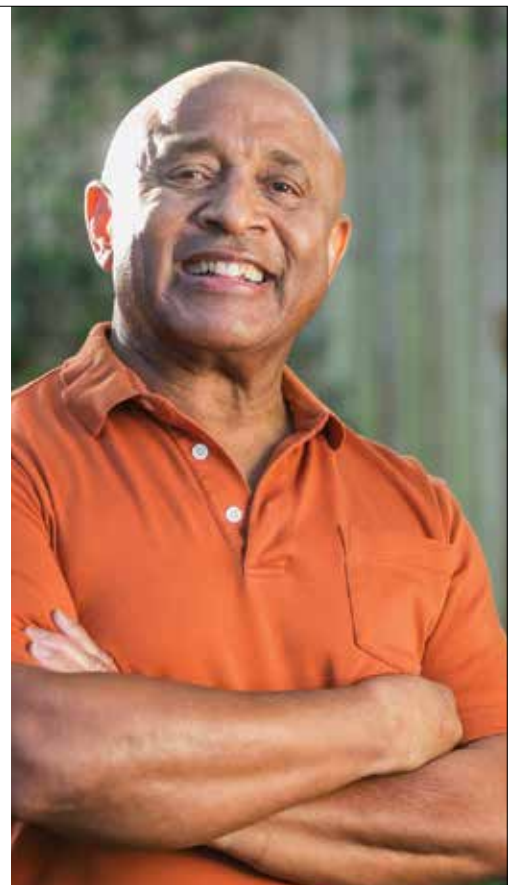
**Benefits to you. . .**

- It is an easy and tax-wise way to make a gift
- Charitable gifts from your IRA can fulfill your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)
- You benefit even if you don't itemize deductions on your tax returns since distributions made directly to the CRC and its ministries are not treated as taxable income
- IRA gifts can fulfill any charitable giving pledge you have already made

**IRA Charitable Gift conditions. . .**

- IRA holder must be age 70 1/2 or older
- Gifts must be made directly to a charity
- Gifts may be made from traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs
- You can give up to \$100,000 per year tax-free
- Your gift must be received before December 31 to qualify

Do you have questions about supporting the CRC ministries by giving from your IRA? We're here to help! Call 1-800-272-5125 or email [advancement@crcna.org](mailto:advancement@crcna.org)





**DEADLINES:** Ads for the December issue are due October 30, 2023; January issue: December 4, 2023. Subject to availability. Details online at [thebanner.org/classifieds](http://thebanner.org/classifieds), or for display ads see [thebanner.org/ads](http://thebanner.org/ads). Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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

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

**Congregational Announcements**

**MARANATHA CHURCH** welcomes winter visitors starting Dec 3. Place: Church of the Master, 6659 E University, Mesa, AZ 85205. Time: 10:45 am. More info: call 206-595-9852.

**Church Positions Available**

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR/MINISTRY FACILITATOR** Is God calling you to a new adventure serving Him in the spectacular foothills of the Rockies? First Christian Reformed Church in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta is searching for a full time Ministry Facilitator with a heart to serve. The successful candidate will work with the senior pastor, be a liaison and support person for church ministry leaders, facilitate small group development and outreach, and welcome and enfold newcomers. It is not essential that the successful candidate be ordained, but does require a strong grounding in Scripture with a Reformed perspective. Please check out our website at [firstcrocky.ca](http://firstcrocky.ca) and

contact us at [rockyfirstcrocky@gmail.com](mailto:rockyfirstcrocky@gmail.com).

**EVERGREEN CRC** in Fort McMurray, Alberta is seeking a full-time teaching and preaching pastor to lead our congregation in faithful obedience to God the Father by carefully and faithfully teaching the scriptures, in order to deepen our understanding of Christ's work of salvation and the Holy Spirit's continued work in our lives, so we are equipped to share the gospel in our community. For more information e-mail [board@eccrc.ca](mailto:board@eccrc.ca) or call (587) 646-8887.

**FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR** Modesto CRC, Modesto, California seeks an Associate Pastor to lead discipleship and discipling ministries within the church and the broader Modesto community. Contact in confidence [janiceviss@sbcglobal.net](mailto:janiceviss@sbcglobal.net)

**FULL-TIME PASTOR** Chandler Christian Reformed Church (MN) is seeking a full-time pastor. The ideal candidate would be passionate about preaching the Word of God. He

would be engaging with a multigenerational congregation while strengthening and revitalizing the community in a joyful celebration of faith. If you are interested in applying, please contact us at [searchccrcmn@gmail.com](mailto:searchccrcmn@gmail.com).

**FULL-TIME PASTOR POSITION** Bethel CRC in DeMotte, IN is seeking a Pastor who is dynamic and passionately led by the Holy Spirit in preaching God's word to a multi-generational congregation with emphasis on youth, shepherding and growing our church. Please contact us if interested by reaching out to Russ Vander Molen at: [vander5@embarqmail.com](mailto:vander5@embarqmail.com). Also visit [bethelcrcdemotte.org](http://bethelcrcdemotte.org) for job description and church profile.

**GGCRC** ([ggcrc.org](http://ggcrc.org)) is seeking a FT Sr. Pastor to provide leadership, direction and vision. Must be a committed Christ follower to serve Him and His people. Qual: M.Div. accredited theological seminary. Min 5 yrs church pastor exp. Proficient in English; fluent in Mandarin or Cantonese. Authorized to work in the US. Inquire at [srpastorsearch@ggcrc.org](mailto:srpastorsearch@ggcrc.org).

**PART-TIME LEAD PASTOR AT CITY LIFE CHURCH (SACRAMENTO, CA)** City Life Church seeks an ordained pastor. CLC is a small, 18-year-old, multi-generational community with a passion for social justice and creation care. Stipend: \$5,000/mo (.75 FTE). See job post on The CRC Network. Contact [office@sacramentocitylife.com](mailto:office@sacramentocitylife.com)

**Anniversary**

**WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS**



**FEENSTRA**, Lee and Eleanor were married 60 yrs on July 26, 2023. We rejoice and celebrate with our 3 children and 9 grandchildren: Jim and Sherilyn De Haan, Littleton, CO, Randy and Lynette Feenstra, Hull, IA, and Heidi Lynn Feenstra, Sanford, FL. We thank the Lord for 60 yrs. of His Special Blessings. 1410 Elm Street, Hull, Iowa 51239



**TANIS**, Merf and Carolyn (Vander Sys) celebrated their 60th anniversary on August 30. Children: Jim & Cindy, Dave & Tricia, John & Jana. 10 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren. Great is thy faithfulness! 6029 Pearce Ave. Lakewood, CA 90712

**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION**

(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Publication Title: The Banner; 2. Publication No. 0041-300; 3. Filing Date: Oct. 1, 2022; 4. Issue Frequency: Monthly except August; 5. No. of Issues Published Annually: 11; 6. Annual Subscription Price: \$28.00; 7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49508-1407; 8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher: 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49508-1407; 9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49508-1407; Editor: Shiao Chong, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49508-1407; Managing Editor: Sarah Delia Heth, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49508-1407. 10. Owner: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, Kent, MI 49508-1407; 11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None; 12. For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during preceding 12 months.

13. Publication Name: The Banner; 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: September 2023.

Each Issue During	Average No. Copies	No. Copies of
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Single Issue Published	Nearest to Filing Date
	Preceding 12 Months	
a. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run).....	64,806	63,410
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
(1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions		
Stated on Form 3541.....	46,360	45,883
(2) Paid In-County Subscriptions.....	0	0
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution.....	11,730	11,264
(4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS.....	0	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation.....	58,090	57,147
d. Free Distribution by Mail		
(1) Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541.....	0	0
(2) In-County as Stated on Form 3541.....	0	0
(3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS.....	7	2
(4) Free Distribution Outside the Mail.....	0	0
e. Total Free Distribution.....	7	2
f. Total Distribution.....	58,097	57,149
g. Copies Not Distributed.....	6,709	6,261
h. Total.....	64,806	63,410
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation.....	99.99%	100%

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

Lisa Peacock, Offices Services Manager

## Obituaries

**BUMA, Peter**, aged 92, went to be with his Lord on Tuesday, September 5, 2023. Peter was the husband of the late Milly Buma; father of Craig (Shari) Buma, Doug (Kathi) Buma and Jane (Mark) Haverkamp; Grandfather to Chris (Keri) Buma, Grant (Carolyn) Buma, Kelly (Matt) Styf, Jonathan (Gina) Buma, Seth (Audrey) Buma, Matthew (finance Susan Gould) Haverkamp, and Timothy Haverkamp; Great Grandfather to Clara, Emma, Sophia, Zoe, Kinsley, Boden, Noah, Leila, Callum, Benjamin, Harper, Josilyn and Bailey; sibling of Akke (the late Kees) Brouwer, Walter (Alice), the late Sam (Margaret) and Durk (Thea). Peter was born on the family farm in IJlst, in the Netherlands. At the age of 18, he immigrated to Canada. He came to Calvin College in the mid 1950's, met Milly, and they married in 1956. Pete got his bachelor's degree in education from Calvin College, and a master's degree in administration from Western Michigan University. From 1957 to 1991, Peter was an educator and principal for the Grand Rapids Christian Schools. Peter was a member at Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church. Ere zij God! (Glory to God!)



**HAAN, Charlene** Haan (-Mullen) went to be with her Lord on July 26, 2023. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband Lewis Haan (2002). Charlene was the loving mother of Sheryl Haan, Lewis (Pamela) Haan, Lynn (John) Brink, Gayle (Randy) Reinsma and Lorraine Haan, grandmother of 5 and great-grandmother of 4. Charlene served the Lord as a longtime Coffee Break leader and Stephen's minister at Bethel CRC in Lansing, IL. Following the passing of her husband Lewis, at the age of 80, she remarried, and spent her last 11 & ½ years married to George Mullen of North Barrington, IL.



**HARRISON, Roger R** (age 97) passed from this earth to his heavenly home on Sept. 3, 2023. He was a member of Brookside CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was predeceased by his wife of 39 years, Kathryn Pearl Meekma Holwerda Harrison, as well as many family members. He is survived by his sister Ruth Russell, in-laws Marge Stoub, Gayla Holwerda, Mildred Meekma and Dr. Harry and Joan Holwerda. Lovingly missed by his 10 children, 26 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren, 1 great-great-grandchild, and many nieces and nephews. We thank God for dad's long life of service to Him.

**LAPPINGA, Florence** (DeLange) age 99 of Ontario CA died September 8, 2023. Her residence was Inland Christian Home. Psalm 27:4

**MENNINGA, Irene** (Van Prooyen) went home to heaven September 3, 2023 at the age of 96. She is survived by her husband of 73 years, Clarence, her children John, Carol (Robert) Sunday, Craig (Pat), Dianne (Rick) Shapiro, David (Sandra), Richard (Tracy), 13 grandchildren, 12 great grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her son Douglas.

**VAN MERSBERGEN, Ronald J**, loving husband of Elizabeth (Liefbroer), Father of Roseann, David and Miriam, grandfather of Ameer and Jenny, great-grandfather of Savanna, brother of Jerry (deceased), Angeline Yazzie, Dennis, Michael, Kenneth, and Barry. Born in Lynden WA May 22, 1938; died in Grand Rapids April 25, 2023. Joined the Public Health Service in 1964. Was founding member of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency in 1970. Active as a Sunday School and Catechism teacher, Cadet Counselor, Elder and Steven's Minister. Lover of God's Creation; God's strong, faithful and gentle man.

**VERSEPUT, Rev. Theodore** (Ted), 96, went to be with his Heavenly Father on September 19, 2023. He was predeceased by his wife Arlene (Schemper), son Dennis, daughter Salli, grandson Benjamin and 2nd wife Ann (Crooks). He is survived by his children Kathy Doyle, David (Beth), Judy (Bob) Holmberg, Tim (Jan), Beth (Al) Breems, Sue McElheny and Lisa (Tim) Wilcox as well as 16 grandchildren & spouses and 29 great grandchildren. He served Christian Reformed churches in the Chicago area, Miami, Denver and Muskegon Mi. His last position was Director of Disability Concerns for the Christian Reformed Church, a position that meant so much to him because of his daughter Salli's disabilities. During these years he also served as a chaplain in the US Army Reserves. He felt that the last part of his life living in a care facility was a second calling to share his Faith and counsel to anyone who needed to talk. He will be missed by all who knew him but we can rejoice that because of this Faith he is with his Heavenly Father.

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**VISSCHER**, Sadie (Heeringa) 91 of Everett, WA passed away on August 21, 2023. She grew up in McBain and Grand Rapids, MI., married, and became a life-time member of the Everett First Christian Reformed Church. She enjoyed 62 years of marriage to Herman who preceded her to heaven in 2015. Their son Johnny also greeted her, along with her parents, three brothers and son-in-law Rick Bury. She is survived by many grateful family members who shared her life: Children: Carol Bury, Sharon (Paul) Westra, and Bryan (Memory) Visscher. Grandchildren: Becky (Kris) Johnson, Jeremy (Jenn) Westra, Daniel (Anna) Westra, Hannah Visscher, Braeden Visscher, and Samantha Visscher. Great-grandchildren:

Zachary, Damien, Emmanuel, and Eli Johnson, Wilder and Raleigh Westra, and Eleanor Westra. Memorials may be gifted in her name to Elim Christian Services, Illinois.

**WIEGERS**, Bernard "Bernie" Wiegiers, age 84, beloved husband for 60 years to Lynne Kay, nee Bandringa. Loving father of Brian, Craig (Deborah), Brett (Nancy), Tammy Marek, Trisha (Wayne) Boss and David (Torie). Cherished grandfather of Casey (Andrew) Kowitz, Abby (Alex) Freitag; Amanda (Nicolas) Novacek, Kadee (Simon) Summers, Nathan, Justin, Brandon, Daniel Wiegiers; Vincent and Joseph Marek; Liz (Derek) Boomsma, Brittany (Jeremy) Karr, Kylie (Zim) Rivas, Mickey (fiancé Colton DeJong) Boss and the late Zachary Boss. Proud great-grandfather of Zach, Maddie, Lily, Ivy, Levi and Daisy. Dearest brother Barbara (late John) Buursma, Theresa (late Robert) Wiltjer and the late Grace (late Art) Rosenwinkel, the late Dina (late Will) Wichers and the late Hilda (late Donald) Huisenga. Dear brother-in-law of Carol (late Dan) Beland and the late Raymond Bandringa Jr. Fond uncle of many nieces and nephews. For 35 years, Bernie served his community as co-owner of Beland & Wiegiers Auto Rebuilders.

**ZEILSTRA**, Verna Belle (nee Jabaay) passed away peacefully on September 29, 2023, at the age of 92 in Grand Rapids, MI. She is survived by her devoted husband of 73 years, Donald W Zeilstra; their loving children, Carol

Hamilton, Donald J Zeilstra, Steven Zeilstra; and her cherished grandchildren, Donald A Zeilstra, Jacob Zeilstra, Joel Hamilton, Katie Kelley, Andrew Zeilstra, and Jenna Dodson. She was also a beloved great-grandmother to seven and a dear aunt to many nieces and nephews. She was a member of LaGrave CRC.

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## The Life of a Parkie

The life of a parkie is interesting, to say the least.



Kelsey Bruinwood is a student at Calvin Theological Seminary pursuing her Master of Divinity degree. She attends Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

**EVEN THOUGH** national park workers are surrounded by the immense beauty of God's creation, the secular nature of the job does not make the parks obvious places for vocational formation in ministry. Still, I can hardly imagine my becoming a pastor without having experienced the life of a parkie for the past four seasons and befriending the beautiful and complex people who live in the parks.


My personal formation has been shaped by summers spent with God standing under towering pines in the rainforest, wandering through winding slot canyons in the desert, and breathing the alpine air in the mountains. My call to ministry, however, has been shaped by summers spent with other parkies working at the lodge front desk during closing shifts, scooping huckleberry ice cream in the park grocery store, and eating at the picnic tables outside the employee dining room. In these sacred spaces of secular life I learned more about pastoring than I have in all my years of Bible and theology classes in seminary.

I learned that the life of a parkie can be messy. It doesn't conform to the structured rhythms that come with hymnals and liturgies and stained-glass windows. The parkie experience is transient by nature, with people flitting in and out as the seasons come and go. Some are seeking adventure and newness, but some are running from pain and heartache. The life of a parkie includes both wild hikes and mundane opening shifts. It comes with both immense growth and intense challenges. The life of a parkie, as I have learned, may mean you have a roommate who asks you to pee in a cup to help her pass her drug test.

The life of a parkie is interesting, to say the least.

But the life of a parkie is also beautiful—and not just because we're surrounded by wildflowers and alpine lakes and moose and the Milky Way. The life of a parkie is beautiful because parkies themselves are beautiful people—interesting and messy, yes, but deeply beautiful. The beautiful parkies who have danced in and out of my life have shaped more of my pastoral identity than I ever would have imagined.

Conversations with parkie friends from across the spectrum of faith have taught me how to articulate my theology, how to speak the truth of the gospel not as one would to a professor in my oral exams, but to an 18-year-old facing a crisis of faith far from home. The experiences of my co-workers carrying religious trauma from their childhood have taught me to look critically at the church body I love so dearly and not to shy away from calling out the harm our faith leaders have caused while they used the name of Jesus. Living and working with those with worldviews so sharply contrasting with that of my Southwest Michigan, Christian Reformed roots has broadened my vision of what the kingdom of heaven will look like.

God has formed me through my life as a parkie through the mountains and canyons, the wind, the rivers, the sunsets, and the forests. God has shaped my ministry through the lives of other parkies, through co-workers who became friends and through friends who now feel like family. God makes himself known in the life of a parkie, in the sacred spaces of secular life where Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary" (Matt. 11:28). Come to Jesus, every messy, interesting, beautiful, wild, and beloved child of the King. 

# Jesus Holds the Key

“Oh, Lord,” I  
sobbed,  
“please help me”.

*“It is ours to remember the loving-kindness of the Lord, and to rehearse His deeds of grace. Let us open the volume of recollection that is so richly illuminated with memorials of mercy.”*

—C.H. Spurgeon,  
Evening by Evening (2005 ed., p.162)

**IN OCTOBER 1999**, cold and rainy days challenged those who longed for the warm, colorful days that fall often brings. Perhaps because grief weighed me down, every day seemed cold and rainy. A month prior, a massive heart attack had taken the life of my husband.

The third Sunday in October, I awoke to dark skies and rain hitting my window. The sound doused me with an overwhelming feeling of grief. The promise of comforting hymns and an uplifting message at church coaxed me out of bed. I recall neither the message nor the hymns sung that morning, but I well remember feeling crushing sorrow as I left the pew. Enticed by the smell of coffee, people flocked to the fellowship hall, which soon became a place of laughter mingled with animated conversation. I was not enticed. I just wanted to go home, so I did.

For more than 30 years, my husband and I entered our home by using a remote to open the overhead garage door, then opening a doorway leading from the garage into the back foyer. This door remained unlocked for years because the keys had been lost. Walking up to the door that Sunday, I turned the handle expectantly—but the door was locked! I was completely befuddled. “Oh, Lord,” I sobbed, “please help me!” Gathering my scattered thoughts, I ran frantically through the pouring rain to see if another door or

window was unlocked, but everything was locked tight.

Frustrated and upset, I sat in my car. I recall resting my head on the steering wheel, weeping and beseeching God to help me. Calming myself, I gazed through the windshield and spied my husband’s tackle box on the workbench. A silent prompting told me to look in the box. Obediently I went to the tackle box and opened the lid. Scattered in the bottom amid lures and hooks lay a familiar ring of keys! A memory flashed through my mind to a time in the office where I had worked with my husband for over 18 years. I was putting files away when I noticed a ring of keys on my husband’s desk. I held up the ring and asked him, “What are you doing with all these keys?” He held up his index finger and, smiling, said, “Di, you never know when you might need a key.” He hoarded keys for no apparent purpose—or so it seemed.

After the business was sold, I received a box of his personal possessions. Somehow and at some time, these keys had mysteriously landed in his tackle box. As I took the ring of keys with me to the locked door that morning I prayed, “Please, Lord, let one of these keys fit.” I anxiously tried each key. Finally, coming to the last one, the key miraculously turned the lock.

All through the years, Jesus was holding onto this key just for me. **B**



Diane Vroom is a member of Orangeville Christian Reformed Church in Orangeville, Ont.



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