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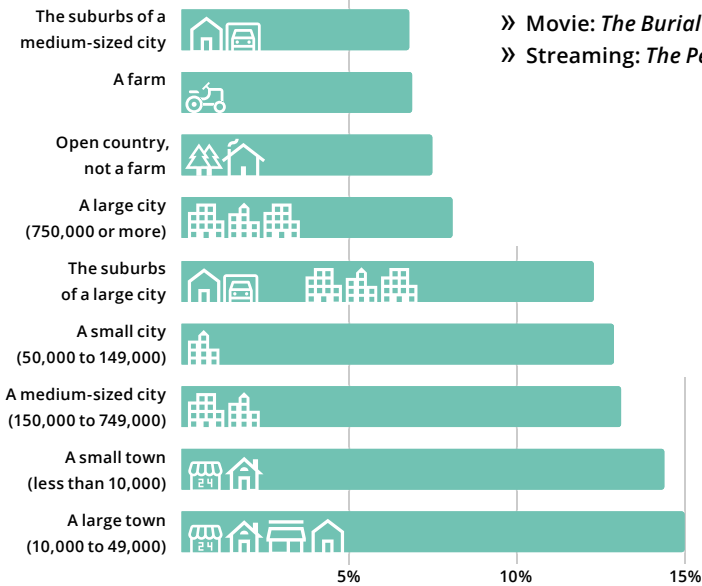


# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

The 2023 Christian Reformed congregational survey asked participants to describe the area in which they live. From nine choices, here's the percentage of respondents for each type of setting.

### Diverse Dwellings



The 2023 denominational survey was conducted by DataWise Consulting LLC with 1,530 respondents. Find the full survey at [bit.ly/CRCNA2023survey](http://bit.ly/CRCNA2023survey).

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » Church Worldwide: Open Doors 2024 Persecution Watch List
- » Podcast: *The Worship Nerds*
- » Movie: *The Burial*
- » Streaming: *The Pez Outlaw*

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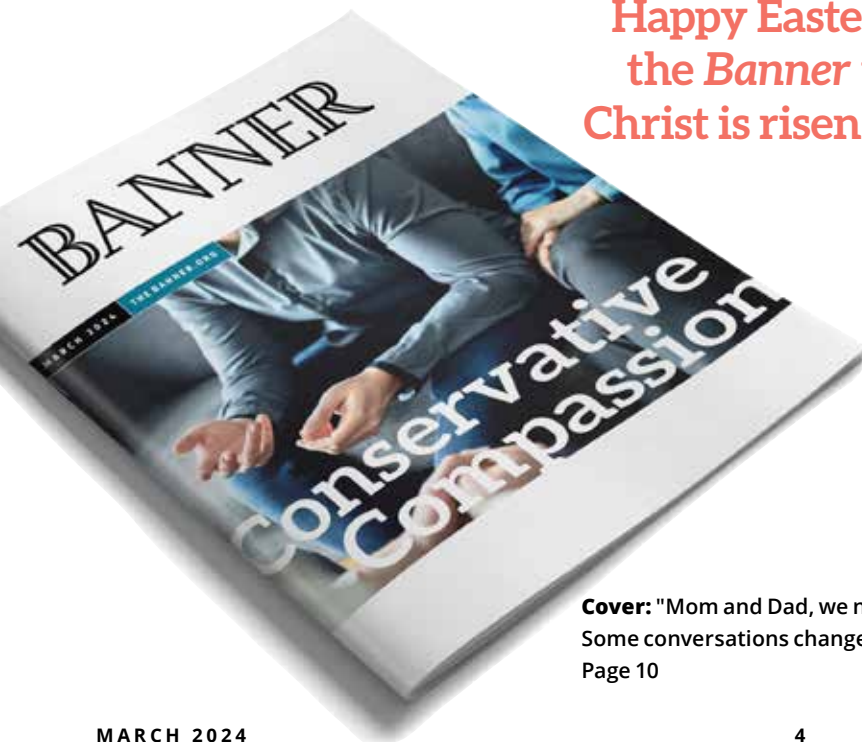
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Christ is risen indeed!



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**BANNER**

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## Costly Love

I suspect you  
cannot properly  
love God without  
loving your  
neighbor nor  
properly love your  
neighbor without  
loving God.



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).

**I BELIEVE LOVING GOD** and loving neighbor are intrinsically connected. I believe this is why Jesus mentioned both in the same breath as the greatest commandments (Matt. 22:37-40). I suspect you cannot properly love God without loving your neighbor nor properly love your neighbor without loving God. One possible insight from the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is that showing mercy to those in need is one way of loving God.

Sometimes altruism or kindness to others can be self-love in disguise. We might love others only to ultimately derive benefit for ourselves, whether that be self-promotion or deludedly expecting to gain brownie points from God. This might even occur unconsciously or subconsciously. A test of whether our love is genuine is if it costs us to love.

For the Good Samaritan, it was costly indeed. First, it cost him time and a change of plans as he stopped his travels to help the wounded man on the road. He used care and his own resources to bandage the man's wounds, pouring on oil and wine. He put the wounded man on his donkey and walked instead. He took the man to an inn and took care of him for the day. The next day, he paid the innkeeper two denarii, or two days' wages, enough for a three-and-a-half-week stay (*IVP New Testament Commentary*). Then he promised the innkeeper to reimburse him any additional expenses. This is a lot of money.


I do not think we modern folks fully appreciate the great risk here. In those days a debtor could be sold into slavery or imprisoned if he could not repay his debts (see Matt. 18:22-35).

Furthermore, we must not forget that the Samaritan was traveling through enemy territory, where the inhabitants

likely despised him. Just one chapter before Jesus tells this story, Jesus' own disciples were quick to offer to call fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56). The Samaritan risked his life—or at least injury—by bringing a half-dead Jewish man into a Jewish town. Would the Jews think he was responsible for the man's wounds? Imagine if a Black man during the Jim Crow era were to carry a half-dead white man into a white town in the rural U.S. South. Black men have been lynched for far less.

Jesus held up this story of costly love as a model of what it means to be a neighbor. Genuine love is willing to pay the cost of love.

Can an act without cost, sacrifice, or risk be love? For example, telling people online to repent or correcting their theology while remaining safely anonymous is not love. Much better examples of love are in the article "Conservative Compassion" (p. 10). I respect and admire those who have been hurt, even traumatized, by fellow Christians but still seek to love in return. That is costly love. I confess I often fall short.

Jesus' love for us is costly. It cost him death on a cross. This Easter, thank God for his costly love by striving to imitate Christ's sacrificial love for each other. 





## REPLY ALL

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

### Disagreement

I am grateful that the members of Committee 7 at Synod 2023 disagreed well (“They Disagreed Well,” January 2024). That is what church should be. But where is that for me as an LGBTQ person? Synod 2023 voted to kick me out because of this committee’s majority recommendation on confessional status. I no longer belong in the denomination I grew up in. But at least they kicked me out politely? Using good manners behind closed doors is not nearly enough for the thousands of LGBTQ children growing up in our pews.  
» Ryan Struyk // Washington, D.C.

### Helping the Homeless

Although I agree that idolatry of possessions is a real issue in our modern society, I don’t see a strong connection between the idolatry of possessions and homelessness (“The Tent City of God,” July/August 2023). Before retiring a year ago,

I spent 20 years working with homeless persons in Edmonton, Alta. The vast majority of the people I came into contact with were struggling with addictions and mental illness. The government continues to cut back services to these people and sometimes justifies the lack of support by claiming that homelessness and addictions are “choices.” I never met a person for whom living in a tent in the Canadian winter was their first “choice.” More resources are needed for helping the mentally ill and addicts.  
» Beatrix Kalf // Edmonton, Alta.

### Israel and Palestine

Hamas does not speak for most Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank (“War in Israel and the Words of Christ,” Nov. 2023, online). I am writing as a retired biblical archaeologist who lived and worked off and on in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between 1972 and 2012. Readers of *The Banner* need to know that the Gaza Strip is now basically a prison with over 2 million residents living in a 125-square-mile strip of land. Included in that number are perhaps 2,000 Christians worshipping in what remains of three churches. They

too have suffered injury and death with (Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu’s recent assaults. Both Hamas’ actions and the Palestinian lives lost due to the relentless bombings and ground actions by Netanyahu’s orders will no doubt give birth to more hatred by Gaza’s youth toward their neighbors to the north.  
» Neal Bierling // Ada, Mich.

### Never Give Up

I would like to comment on your suggested read *Never Give Up: A Prairie Family’s Story*, by Tom Brokaw (Mixed Media, Sept. 2023). I enjoyed this book immensely. My family could relate to the hardships of prairie life in South Dakota in the 1930s. I was born on the Rosebud Reservation in 1937. My father was a farmer and struggled through many drought years. A friend told him about the fertile farmland in Wisconsin and took him there. When they came back, he found his new cornfield completely ruined by grasshoppers. So, with a team of horses and a truck loaded with essentials, he moved his family to Wisconsin. There were many families, perhaps eight or 10, who also made that decision. They settled in the southern part of the state where there was a newly formed (1931) Christian Reformed Church—Delavan. Delavan CRC is today a thriving congregation (with a) Christian school.  
» Elfrieda Vriezen // Delavan, Wis.

### Correction

The January article “They Disagreed Well” should have said that Aaron Vriesman is from Hudsonville, Mich., and that Katelyn Van Hove is an elder.



## Bavinck's Biblical Balance

**MY FAVORITE DUTCH THEOLOGIAN,** Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), wrote in *Preaching and Preachers*, "The congregation will not be ungrateful as long as we, as their preachers, preach in search of God's honor and the salvation of their souls." In another book, *Saved by Grace*, Bavinck contrasts two different methods of preaching, which he calls "evangelistic" and "edifying or ethical." Evangelistic preaching aims at the conversion of sinners, while edifying or ethical preaching concentrates on doctrinal instruction of believers.

Bavinck discusses the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, then insists that they belong together in a balanced, biblical approach: "So in the life of the church, we must maintain both truths, namely that the church is a gathering of true Christ-believers and that, nonetheless, the appeal for faith and conversion must continually sound forth in her midst. ... The preacher's sermons should connect to the gifts and blessings (God) has bestowed in his covenant ... but then should also continue warning of the need for self-examination, so that people do not deceive themselves for eternity" (pp. 124-127). Imbalance on one side could lead to unhealthy subjectivism, Bavinck says, but over-emphasis on the other could lead to "dead orthodoxy" and religious nominalism.

In the introduction to a Dutch translation of the works of two Scottish Presbyterian brothers of the 18th century, Bavinck noted of their (and others') preaching, "On the one hand it descends into the depths of the human heart, unreservedly taking away all apologies and excuses behind which people hide away from the holiness of God, and it places them before the face of God in their poverty and emptiness. On the other hand, it also addresses

those of a broken spirit with the promises of the gospel, draws forth the riches of these promises, looks at them from all sides, and applies them to all of life's circumstances" ("Preface to *The Life and Works of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine*," tr. Henk van den Belt, 2012).

Bavinck clearly favored such preaching, the rationale for which is expressed in the 17th-century Westminster Shorter Catechism, which became part of the constitution of worldwide Presbyterianism. It states, "The Spirit of God makes ... the preaching of the word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation" (Q&A 89).

As a true ecumenist, Bavinck sought to preserve this biblical balance in his own context in the Netherlands. There has been considerable interest in recent years in his translated works, most notably his four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*, but also his studies of philosophy, psychology, politics, and worship. As a Scottish import to the Dutch Reformed tradition, I respectfully commend, along with these, Bavinck's biblically balanced approach to historically Reformed preaching. 



J. Cameron Fraser, D.Min., is a retired Christian Reformed pastor in Lethbridge, Alta., who now concentrates on writing as well as occasional preaching. His latest book is *Evangelicals and Abortion: Historical, Theological, Practical Perspectives*.

### As I Was Saying

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- » What Can I Do?
- » Burning Down Christmas
- » On Wings Like ... ?



# Conservative Compassion

By Ben deRegt

“**M**om and Dad, we need to talk.” Sensing the gravity of the conversation, Mom suggested they sit down. Then came the words their son had been holding back for five years: “Mom and Dad, I’m gay.” In stunned silence, conservative-to-the-core Monte and Tammie paused and simply responded, “We love you.”

None could have anticipated the journey those three words set in motion. That moment was the first step on a long and often painful road of showing their son the meaning of those three words. If loving God is obeying his commands (John 14:21), how were they to love their son without compromising their love for Jesus? They are not alone in their struggle. A growing number in our conservative congregations are walking a similar road. For them, convictions regarding human sexuality are not merely a position to hold but a life to live of harnessing grace and truth to pull hard in the

same direction. Monte, Tammie, and others like them are proving it is possible to love with grace without compromising truth.

## **The Change in Them** **Starts with the Change in Me**

It’s been said that when kids come out of the closet, their parents crawl into it. Some parents may feel shame or question their parenting. Feeling like a failure can be isolating. Fear of what others might think woos us into a lonely existence. But we cannot love those who have come out of the closet if we insist on retreating into one ourselves.

Monte and Tammie are learning to bring those emotions to the cross, where they see Jesus—naked, shamed, and alone. There, Christ takes their shame, anger, guilt, and fear upon himself and exchanges it for his truth and grace. Until we bring our dark feelings into the light of the cross, it’s unlikely we will be able to join Jesus “outside the camp, bearing the disgrace

he bore” (Heb. 13:13). We cannot give grace unless we have first received it. We cannot teach the truth until we have first learned it. The change we pray for in them begins with a change in me. Tammie says through tears, “When I see myself and all that Christ has done for my sins, how can I not have compassion for my son and his partner in theirs?”

## **Hospitality Is More** **Effective Than a Hammer**

The conservative impulse might be to beef up on Bible verses to support the traditional position on human sexuality. But Monte and Tammie are modeling an important principle: grace and truth are communicated more clearly through hospitality than with a hammer, over dinner rather than in a debate.

At its core, the gospel is cosmic hospitality, an extraordinary display of God’s love for strangers. Paul says we were once “foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and

without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). Yet because of God's great love, we who "were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13). Is it any wonder that so much of Jesus' earthly ministry took place around a meal? Whether inviting himself to the home of the despised tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) or allowing himself to be blessed by a woman whose sordid reputation was known by the whole town (Luke 7:37), Jesus loved sinners through hospitality. In doing so, he wasn't condoning the woman's sins or Zacchaeus' selfish greed. On the contrary, God's kindness was meant to lead them to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Over the dinner table, Monte and Tammie remind their beloved son, "Just because we aren't saying something doesn't mean we are OKing something."

### **Getting Comfortable With Being Misunderstood**

Balancing grace and truth demands courage to accept the risk of being misunderstood. Won't my friends think I am affirming sin if we have dinner with our son and his partner? Possibly, but does it matter? As a friend of sinners, Jesus was often misunderstood. The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled when Jesus offered and accepted the invitations of known sinners (Luke 15:2). "Here is a glutton and drunkard," they shouted, wagging their fingers, "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:19). Monte and Tammie are learning it is far better to risk being accused of going soft on sin with Jesus than preferring the company of Pharisees without him.

### **Ask Questions and Be Prepared**

Have you noticed that when engaging with people, Jesus asked questions? To the disciples more afraid of the sea than their Savior, he asked, "Why are you so afraid?" (Mark 4:40). Of sightless

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one ourselves.**

Bartimaeus, he asked, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10: 51). Humbling himself before the woman who had had five husbands, he asked, "Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:7). Surely, he who knows people's thoughts (Ps. 94:11) wasn't fact finding. He did not need to become man in order for him to be our empathic High Priest (Heb. 4:15). Might the Master be teaching us something about engaging with grace and truth? Monte and Tammie think so. Unlike Christ, they have no way to empathize with their son unless they ask to learn and to understand.


Nonetheless, like Jesus, who did not fail to tell the thirsty woman what truly satisfies and Bartimaeus how to see by faith and the disciples about who calms the storm, Tammie says, "When God opens a door, we go through it!" She and Monte are modeling Peter's advice to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15).

### **Hold Fast to the Promises of God**

In teary-eyed desperation, Tammie randomly opened her Bible. God gave her a promise she's clung to ever since. She read, "My words that I have put in your mouth will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children and on the lips of their descendants—from this time on and forever" (Isa. 59:21). Looking beyond their son's sexual sins to his soul, these parents are holding fast to this promise as they wait patiently on the Lord.

Tammie recalls that after they told their son they loved him, he cried and said, "I thought for sure you were going to tell me I could never come home." That response has since taken on a deeper meaning.

"In the beginning of all this," Tammie confesses, "I was the older brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son: Resentful. Bitter. Angry. Lately, I feel a bit like the father, waiting and longing for my son to come home."

All his life, Monte and Tammie's son has heard the truth about the love of the Father that saves us from our sin and compels us to no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died and was raised again (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Perhaps now more than ever, he is experiencing this love through his mom and dad. 



Ben deRegt serves as the pastor of Second Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, Wash. Contact him at [ben@secondlyndenccr.com](mailto:ben@secondlyndenccr.com).



## BIG QUESTIONS

### Faith Formation

**I'm in my mid-50s, and it feels like my faith and my interest in faith matters have stalled. What's my problem?**

It is not unusual for our interest in or commitment to almost anything we do to wax and wane, so it is not surprising that we have seasons in our faith life as well. The good news of the gospel is that God's commitment to us does not wane. We are saved by grace, not by works. But that assurance doesn't mean that we should take our faith for granted. Developing our relationship with God is important, just as with any relationship that is important to us.

Christians over centuries have developed faith practices to help God's people develop fuller understanding of God and a deeper relationship with God. One way to spark your interest in faith is to engage in some of those practices. Here are three places to start:

**Read.** Spend time in Scripture. Spend time with commentaries. Spend time with books that explore how we understand parts of Scripture. The wisdom of many theologians over the years has been written down, and most is very accessible to lay people. Your pastor or wise friends might have some good examples for you to try.

**Listen.** Your pastor prepares a sermon every week to expound on the Word, but if those sermons are not getting you out of your faith-related rut, listen to other sermons online. The Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary ([cepreaching.org](http://cepreaching.org)) has many sermons you can listen to.

**Pray.** Get creative with prayer. Use prayers from the Bible, prayers your church uses, or prayers found in books or online.



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

There are other practices, too. Gathering people to have a conversation about a piece of writing or a piece of music can be a jumping-off point for faith conversations. Find a way to volunteer and use your gifts to bless others. Sabbath observance, hospitality, and gratitude are other options. If one is not sparking your interest, try another. It will be worth your time.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer in faith formation with Thrive, the ministry agency of the Christian Reformed Church. Robert Keeley is a professor emeritus of education at Calvin University. The Keeleys recently retired after 31 years as directors of children's ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

### Ethics

**Can you clarify the Christian Reformed Church's position on homosexuality?**

Synod 1973 established the Christian Reformed Church's official position on homosexuality. A distinction between homosexuality as an orientation and homosexuality as explicit and overt homosexual practice is central to this position. The summary statement on the CRC's website explains:

"Homosexuality is a condition in which a person is sexually oriented toward persons of the same sex, and for which the person may bear only a minimal responsibility. Persons of same-sex attraction may not be denied community acceptance solely because of their sexual orientation and should be wholeheartedly received by the church and given loving support and encouragement. Same-sex oriented Christians, like all Christians, are called to discipleship, holy obedience, and the use of their gifts in the cause of the kingdom. Opportunities to serve

within the offices and the life of the congregation should be afforded to same-sex oriented Christians as well as to heterosexual Christians.

"Homosexuality (that is, explicit homosexual practice), however, is incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture. The church affirms that it must exercise the same compassion for same-sex oriented persons in their sins as it exercises for all other sinners. The church should do everything in its power to help persons with same-sex orientation and give them support toward healing and wholeness."

This means that the church must not discriminate against anyone on the LGBTQ+ spectrum. We must not prevent CRC members who are LGBTQ+ from holding church office (e.g., pastor, elder, or deacon) simply because of their sexual orientation. However, God calls all of us to discipleship and holy living. Those who hold church office "must be above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:1-13).

Recently, starting in 2016 and also as part of a more comprehensive 2022 report, the CRC has looked at pastoral care towards LGBTQ+ people in relation to the legalization of same-sex marriage. Its theological position has not changed. Synod 2022 (upheld by Synod 2023) clarified that a proper understanding of "unchastity" in Q&A 108 of the Heidelberg Catechism includes homosexual sex.

Synod's declaration of this as a confessional teaching means CRC members and officebearers must necessarily comply with this understanding or potentially face church disciplinary measures.

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



## Relationships

### **My elderly mother has little interest in discussing details that might help us plan a meaningful funeral service. Any suggestions?**

It's always best if a family member can share their end-of-life and funeral preferences, but not everyone is comfortable with having those conversations. Perhaps they are simply unwilling to face their mortality or are unwilling to appear vulnerable in front of family members. Perhaps they have anxiety about death or questions about salvation. We can have assurance of our salvation in Jesus so we don't face death with fear (Rom. 10:9-10).

If your family member is uncomfortable planning their own funeral, don't force the issue. If they won't share answers now, you could simply ask that they leave instructions for when the time comes. Enjoy today with your family and focus on delighting in the time you have together.

Even without direct instructions, you might yet indirectly discern choices your family member would value. A conversation about favorite hymns or Bible verses or paging through their Bible could reveal cherished passages. Tune in to worship practices that evoke a reaction or stories that make them laugh.

Remember, funerals are for the living. While funerals recall and honor the life of the deceased, they serve the family and community as they grieve together in light of the gospel. You may host a service or sing a hymn even if it is not what the deceased would have chosen. The funeral home can help your family honor a loved one in a variety of ways, including sharing photos, memory books, or videos.

So, while direct instruction is helpful, it's not necessary. You can control only you, so preplanning your own funeral—from leaving a formal will to paying for the grave plot and casket to picking out favorite songs and a sermon text—is a gracious gift you can give your family. When hearts are heavy with grief, it is a blessing to not have to make so many decisions.

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

## Missional Living

### **I have supported a missionary all my adult life. With retirement around the corner, I'm not sure I can continue. Is there something I should do before my donations end?**

After consulting with my Resonate colleagues, many of whom are full-time cross-cultural missionaries, I have grouped their suggestions into three main ideas:

1. Connect with the missionary and let them know how your circumstances are changing and how much you have appreciated the opportunity to support them over the years. Then stay connected! Continue to receive their prayer letters and bless them with your ongoing engagement by sending letters, emails, or Facebook messages and by remembering them in your prayers.
2. Serve as an encourager of missions. If possible, visit the mission context. See the good work to which you have been contributing; meet the people, listen to their stories, and be blessed. With more free time, many retirees take the opportunity not only to travel and experience God at work, but to join

in by volunteering on site for several weeks or more. Becoming an advocate for missions and missionaries at home is another meaningful and significant way to continue to support missions. Your generosity over the years can inspire others to give. Your familiarity with what it's all about—bearing witness to the good news of Jesus' love for the world—can encourage others to come alongside full-time missionaries as we all seek to participate in God's mission, both locally and cross-culturally.

3. If our financial circumstances change, we might still be able to offer monetary support in different ways. One might consider reducing one's monthly giving. Even \$10 per month can make a huge difference! Or perhaps one could make occasional contributions through matching gift campaigns so that your gift is multiplied. A final way to extend your financial support is to include the missionary or agency in your will.

In the end, perhaps the best way to faithfully support missions is to remember that we are all missionaries, all made and called to be God's sent ones filled with the Spirit and God's great love to be what Jesus has already called us to be: the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-14).

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.



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.

# Church's Extreme Weather Shelter Brings Brokenness Close

## NEWS

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Gateway Community Church in Abbotsford, B.C., has partnered with BC Housing to run an emergency shelter since 2017. The ministry has faced difficulties, but volunteers say they still experience hope.

The Extreme Weather Shelter began in response to a call from Abbotsford's community services. "When the ask came, we had to say yes," said Marcel deRegt, pastor of faith formation at the Christian Reformed congregation. "As a church, we could not turn down a request to help those who are less fortunate. We had no idea what we were getting into, and we are still learning every day."

Seven years in, Gateway remains committed to its choice to say yes despite recent challenges.

The shelter is open from Nov. 1 to March 31 on evenings that are below freezing or when there are any special weather advisories for the area. It has room for 30 beds, though some nights as many as 50 people have used the space for shelter.

Some in the community worry that the shelter exposes the church to property damage and neighbors to possible disruption. Sheets of plywood have covered some of Gateway's entrance doors since break-ins in late 2023.



Photo by Dan Veenehan

**Despite challenges, volunteers from Gateway and multiple other churches in Abbotsford, B.C., still commit their time to ensure the Extreme Weather Shelter stays open.**

"We have been a little slow to repair the doors," DeRegt said. "(But) I like the imagery that it creates. We live in a broken world that needs Jesus. Maybe these broken doors will stir some conversations and thoughts as people walk past them on Sunday mornings."

The broken doors are the result of a series of break-ins between Nov. 1 and mid-December. Most of the electronic equipment used for Kids Church programs was taken. While there have been previous break-ins, never have there been three in such a short span.

"It's very easy to only see the negative from the outside if you don't see the changed lives or hear how we are making

## Good Friday Choir Festival Unites Frankford, Ont., Churches

a difference,” said Jenny VanderHeide, shelter coordinator for the past six seasons. “I can see how that would lead to a dark place.”

Laura Nicole, who is in her first year as the shelter coordinator, has already experienced that inside perspective. Recently a man died from an accidental overdose while at the shelter—“yet even in that, we have hope,” Nicole said. “Earlier in the evening, before Marvin had passed away, he had shared his story and testimony with some of the volunteers, expressing his faith in Jesus. Those are the stories that keep you going and give you confidence that we are making a difference in a dark world.”

“It can be tough,” deRegt said. “You often hear only success stories. So what do you do when it doesn’t always feel like a success? You bathe it in prayer.”

“No one here doubts we are doing the Lord’s work,” he continued. “We are in a broken world, and the challenges we are facing are a sure sign of that. Yet we have hope, for we know that this brokenness will one day be healed. If we can be agents of bringing that healing to those who need it most, then we must keep going.”

Despite some setbacks and difficulties, support from the congregation and the wider community remains high. Volunteers from Gateway and multiple other local churches still commit their time to ensure the shelter stays open.

—Dan Veeneman



**Lois Thompson, music director at Frankford (Ont.) United Church, directs a combined choir at Community CRC for the April 7, 2023, Good Friday Choir Festival.**

The community choir festival hosted by Community Christian Reformed Church in Frankford, Ont., on Good Friday 2023 revived a village tradition that was almost lost over the years of COVID-19 gathering restrictions.

“The ecumenical choir festival on Good Friday has been an important part of our village life for more than 20 years,” said Tena Groot Nibbelink, a pianist at the church and one of the organizers of the 2023 concert. She called local church leaders at the beginning of Lent last year to remount the festival, which last took place in 2019.

“This is the one time each year that all the Christians in our village get together to celebrate our faith in song together,” Groot Nibbelink said. “It is also a chance for us to reach out to the community to express our faith. ... Every year we have held the festival, it has been well appreciated.”

The 2023 Good Friday Choir Festival featured choirs from Community CRC and the Frankford congregations of the United Methodist Church and United Church of Canada. Groot Nibbelink said the 2023 attendance was about two-thirds of peak attendance, “but we all really enjoyed singing together, and I really think our Good Friday song festival is back for good.”

Community CRC plans to host the Good Friday event in Frankford again this year.

—Ron Rupke



## Ontario Church Is Experiencing Multicultural Growth



**After being augmented by a few newcomer families and growing organically from those connections, the congregation of Immanuel CRC in Cornwall, Ont., is joyfully multicultural.**

Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Cornwall, Ont., began sponsoring refugee families in 2015 and has grown organically through those connections, experiencing welcome, friendship, and vibrant worship for which they praise and thank God.

Joseph Bya and Hennie Velema, two members of the refugee sponsorship committee, recently shared their experiences at a retreat sponsored by Resonate Global Mission to help other congregations with newcomer welcoming strategies.

Velema's husband, George, was moved by the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and in 2015 started Immanuel's sponsorship program. He first contacted staff at World Renew, the CRC's hunger relief and development agency, which is a sponsorship agreement holder in Canada. Then Velema went to the council of Immanuel CRC. Immanuel had only 40 member families at the time, so Velema also approached the neighboring Community CRC in Brinston, Ont., to form a joint refugee sponsorship committee. Velema chaired the committee, which quickly raised \$5,000 in startup

funds, and worked with the staff at World Renew to find a small refugee family (four members or fewer) hoping to move to Canada. From the list provided, the committee chose the Bya family, refugees from Myanmar then living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Joseph Bya, his wife, Sana, and their two children arrived in Canada May 26, 2016. The sponsorship committee got to work helping the young family find their place in a new country and culture. Before the full support year ended, Joseph Bya had found full-time work, and the family was on its way to purchasing their home.

Although the sponsorship committee had not specifically asked to sponsor a Christian family, they learned that Joseph Bya was a trained Christian evangelist. At the invitation of Andrew Bowman, Immanuel's worship team leader, Bya now plays guitar with the worship band, and his son Eleazar plays the keyboard.

As the Byas began their new life in Canada, the committee prepared to sponsor another refugee family. This time the committee was matched with a Congolese family. Ramazan Masumbuko and his wife, Hasha, were living in a

refugee camp in Malawi. Introduced to the committee as a family of four, the Masumbuko family arrived in Canada in May 2018 with a newborn third child. The Masumbukos joined the Immanuel congregation, and before long Hasha was invited to sing with the worship team. Once Ramazan had found employment, he also enrolled in part-time studies at the University of Ottawa.

In early 2020, worship services and other church activities were paused at Immanuel CRC due to COVID-19. Meanwhile, the refugee sponsorship committee continued with a new focus, helping the original sponsored families privately sponsor extended family members through Canada's family reunification program. George Velema was too ill to chair the committee, but he persuaded Ramazan Masumbuko to assume leadership.

The refugee families who joined Immanuel CRC have encouraged friends and acquaintances from the refugee diaspora to worship with them. Several, including drummer Stefano Aristarique from Malawi and professional musician Matthew Gwar from Myanmar, have also



## Illinois Church Welcomes Men to Hear, Tell Their Stories

joined the worship team. The church now ministers to 67 households.

When Velema died in October 2021, Hennie Velema, who had served on the sponsorship committee alongside her husband, asked for memorial contributions to go to Immanuel CRC's refugee sponsorship fund. "For George, what began as compassion grew to be his passion," she said.

The newcomer families certainly share that passion. "You might have financial challenges to support refugee families right now, but when you step forward and reach out to the needy, you will never regret it," Bya said, referencing Matthew 25:34-36. "When refugees come to your church, the church will become more alive, that's for sure."

Hennie Velema appreciates the energy and joy the newcomer families have brought to Immanuel as well as the friendships. Ramazan Masumbuko formed a strong bond with George Velema and even called him Papa. In May 2023, when Masumbuko graduated from the University of Ottawa with a degree in international development, he invited Hennie to attend the graduation event as his Mama. "I love it," Hennie Velema said. "I was honored to be there."

And the welcome continues. "Ramazan is now working for the International Social and Economic Council of Ottawa-Carlton, welcoming refugees into the Resettlement Assistance Program and coordinating housing," Velema said. "In that role he meets a lot of people, and some of them show up at Immanuel Church."

—Ron Rupke

Since September 2019, Journeymen, a monthly story-sharing ministry of Elmhurst (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church, has invited men of many different occupations and stages of life to share their testimonies, "letting their lives speak to us and letting God speak through their stories," pastor Jeff Klein said.

Speakers have included Mike Swider, the winningest football coach of Wheaton College; Jim Engel, a cartoonist, illustrator, and designer who has worked on some of the world's best-known characters and franchises; and Ron Tazelaar, a deacon at Elmhurst CRC who is part of the Journeymen leadership team and who has been sustained by God through losses of many close family members.

Klein said the goal of the monthly early-morning meeting is to hear real, unfinished stories of believing men who are living their lives in Christ, including the ups and downs, the twists and turns, the good, the bad, and the ugly. It's not another sermon or Bible study, but a glimpse into the lives of other Christ followers, "helping guys to see God is at work in the mundane things in our lives," Klein said.

Klein began the ministry soon after joining Elmhurst CRC as its outreach pastor. He wanted a way to pull together men from a number of different men's discipleship groups already meeting in the church, which has more than 900 members.

He explained that the Thursday morning Journeymen meetings are an entry point, a way to "give other guys a chance to hop on board" in a large church where it might be difficult to attend an established group for the first time. At 6:30 a.m. on the other three Thursdays of the month, Klein leads a men's Bible study group.

The Journeymen leadership team comprises men invited from each of the established men's groups. Its list of speakers alternates between an "outside" speaker and an Elmhurst "insider," Klein said, noting that men who go to the same church might not know the stories of people they sit beside in the pew.

Around 80 men attended the first Journeymen talk with Swider. Attendance at other meetings has averaged around 35.

Though Klein offers speakers an orientation sheet, he said speaking at Journeymen is not that complicated—it's "just telling your story."

—Alissa Vernon



**Cartoonist and illustrator Jim Engel is one of the men to share his story with Elmhurst CRC's Journeymen ministry.**

Photo from video still, [elmhurstcrc.org/media/journeymen](http://elmhurstcrc.org/media/journeymen)

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Jerry L. Alferink*

1945-2023

Described by his daughter as “a compassionate, affectionate, affirming, and generous man,” Jerry Alferink was a very relational person, always willing to interact with and help a neighbor, and strangers quickly became friends. Jerry, 78, died Dec. 29, 2023.

Jerry graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary with an extra year of Clinical Pastoral Education. After ordination in 1971, he served Winfield (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church and in 1973 co-founded the Chicago Christian Counseling Center, which still provides Christ-centered professional counseling at eight Chicago-area locations. Jerry later pastored Trinity CRC in Ridgefield, Wash., and First CRC in Redlands, Calif. After two years as chaplain at Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Grand Rapids, Mich., he served Hillcrest Christian Church in Denver, Colo.; Overisel CRC in Holland, Mich.; and The River Church in Allegan, Mich.

While at Overisel, Jerry also volunteered as chaplain for the local fire department. He retired in 2006.

Jerry had a wonderful voice and sang in choirs during college and seminary. He once played the role of Captain Georg von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* for a community theater company. He enjoyed farming, fishing, hunting, and travel.

Jerry is survived by Darlene, his wife of 57 years; three children and their spouses; and 10 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## ‘Got Wood’ Ministry Cleans Up Fallen Trees, Supplies Heating Fuel



Photo by Rodney Versteeg, December 2018

**The Got Wood ministry in DeMotte, Ind., makes use of much equipment and many hands.**

Community Church Roselawn in DeMotte, Ind., is a Christian Reformed congregation with a specialized ministry supplying wood heating fuel to families who could use the help.

“Most of the people that receive wood from us are struggling to make ends meet, are older, and have burned firewood all their lives but can no longer go out and cut and split their own firewood,” said Rodney Versteeg, who leads the ministry and shares space on his business property to house the operation.

“This ministry is so much more than us giving firewood to those who need it to heat their homes,” Versteeg said. “It is about the fellowship we have when we work together. It is about helping the people in the community that have trees down and need to get rid of them. ... It is about giving these people some way that they can feel like they are helping others.”

The Got Wood firewood ministry started in 2017 and has given more than 700 full cords of firewood to 75 different families, Versteeg said.

The ministry collects trees and large logs, storing them in the yard until wood-splitting days hosted once a month from September to May. “Our split days

consist of anywhere between 15 to 45 men, women, and children coming to the Got Wood wood yard from 8 a.m. to noon,” Versteeg said. The volunteers then share a lunch prepared and delivered by other volunteers in the church.

Several people from Community Church Roselawn had been helping another ministry with its firewood ministry about 45 minutes away. “The group of us that were going started realizing that we could use this type of ministry in our area,” Versteeg said.

At first volunteers split and delivered wood only as needed. Now, with the use of the yard and a large haul of standing trees donated by a farmer in 2020, the ministry has storage space for split wood to dry for the next season, work space to do the splitting, and space to keep discarded logs until they can be split.

“On our split days we can have up to 10 hydraulic log splitters running, six to eight guys running chainsaws cutting logs into splittable lengths ... (and) as many as three machines to move the logs to cutting tables for the guys running chainsaws,” Versteeg said.

—Alissa Vernon

## Canadian CRCs Encouraged by Church-planting Meeting



Photo from 2017 Resonate Global Mission video still

**MosaicHouse Church in Edmonton, Alta., values multicultural worship and is planting a new congregation every five years.**

More than 60 Christian Reformed ministry leaders, local church leaders, and members met virtually Jan. 27 to hear and discuss stories and strategies of church planting in Canada. Hosted by the Canadian Ministry Board and supported by staff from Resonate Global Mission and Thrive, the CRC's congregation-focused ministry agency, participants heard stories of outward-focused churches in four different Canadian cities and then discussed how they might apply these ideas to their local contexts.

Board chair Greta Luimes opened the virtual gathering, hosted as part of ongoing Canada-wide conversations between the board and members of Christian Reformed churches in Canada. "Our hope and prayer is that each of us will leave here today feeling inspired and thankful for what God is doing across our country," Luimes said.

The stories included videos from the multicultural MosaicHouse Church in Edmonton, Alta., in which pastor Victor Ko told of his church planting a new congregation every five years, and from Forest City Community Church in London, Ont., sharing how the closing of Bethel Christian Reformed Church became a form of renewal as it merged with Forest City.

Leah DeVos, mission network developer at The Village Church in Thorold, Ont., and pastors Ben Verkerk and Marcelo

Viana of Winnipeg, Man., shared the other two stories. DeVos recounted experiences of "Dinner Church," which focuses on sharing the love of Christ over a meal, and Verkerk and Viana shared how Covenant CRC, an established church in Winnipeg, is encouraging Amber Church, a developing congregation of primarily first-generation immigrants to Canada.

"Church planting is an act of faith," Verkerk said. "You just have to step out in faith—1,000 little steps of faith."

Near the close of the two-hour meeting, Kevin DeRaaf, director of Resonate, shared some encouragement: "The narrative that we've been living into has tended to be a narrative of decline," he said, "(but) the narrative of the church worldwide is not a narrative of decline. We get to participate in what God is doing all around the world, which is an amazing work of growth."

Luimes said there are plans for more meetings like this across the whole denomination.

"Share the gospel, live it missionally, and plant new churches" is one of the four milestones of the CRCNA's ministry plan. Additionally, Synod 2023 adopted a resolution to address membership decline in the CRCNA.

—Kristen Parker

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. H. David Schuringa*

1952-2023

David Schuringa believed strongly in the proclamation of God's Word as the primary means of grace. As president of Crossroad Bible Institute (now Crossroads Prison Ministry) for 15 years, his connections extended beyond the Christian Reformed Church as he served various boards and spoke in churches, schools, and prisons. David died Sept. 14, 2023, with a progressive, debilitating illness. He was 70.

David graduated from Trinity Christian College and Westminster and Calvin Theological seminaries. He was ordained in 1982 and served Beverly CRC in Wyoming, Mich., before earning a doctorate from Theological University Kampen in the Netherlands. He taught at Westminster Seminary and then pastored Bethany CRC in Holland, Mich. While leading Crossroad Bible Institute, he hosted *Crossroad Connection*, a weekly radio program promoting restorative justice; preached many Sundays; and was adjunct professor at Calvin and other seminaries. He testified on Capitol Hill about prison sentencing reform.

In later years the Schuringas lived on Minkler Lake in Allegan, Mich., where David wrote, translated Dutch theology to English, and enjoyed sunsets, fishing, and deep conversations with family.

Predeceased by a grandson, David is survived by Mary, his wife of 51 years; four children and their spouses; 14 grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus



## CRC Pastor Part of RCA Commission Meeting with Ukrainian Orthodox Church-USA



Photo by Very Rev. Fr. Vasyil Pasakas

**Anthony Elenbaas (third from left) met with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA delegation as a member of the RCA's Commission on Christian Unity.**

The Reformed Church in America's Commission on Christian Unity hosted a meeting in October with a delegation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA. Anthony Elenbaas, a pastor at Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ont., attended as a member of the commission.

The gathering was to hear about these American Christians' "experiences of the war in Ukraine, to consider further ways of supporting and partnering with the UOC-USA in war relief, and to offer the RCA's expressions of solidarity and support, with our prayers of intercession and prayers for peace in an in-person setting" as called for by the RCA's 2023 General Synod. Elenbaas said they "mandated the Commission on Christian Unity to reach out and to have such a conversation with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, recognizing that a number of RCA churches on the East Coast are neighbors and even friends with some of the Ukrainian Orthodox churches there."

Eight commission members went to the Metropolia Center in Somerset, N.J., to meet with Archbishop Daniel, ruling hierarch of the Western Eparchy of the UOC-USA and president of its Consistory, and his assistant. The commission met Oct. 18-20, 2023, ending with meeting Archbishop Daniel on Oct. 20.

Elenbaas said this meeting represented the RCA "coming around to support a fellow church in this awful time." One of the UOC-USA's main requests of its North American brothers and sisters is to pray for peace.

"Paul prays in Ephesians 3 that, together with all the saints, we might grasp how wide and high and long and deep is the love of Christ," Elenbaas said. "In visits like this, I always get that sense of recognizing (that) the love of Christ is a lot wider than perhaps we imagined. That is one of the things that strikes me most in ecumenical work."

Elenbaas has been a member of the Commission on Christian Unity with the RCA since 2020. He expects to serve until 2026, when his second three-year term ends. The nine-member commission is to include one member from a denomination other than the RCA who has been approved by that denomination's general synod and general secretary.

Elenbaas said, "The work of the commission is very similar to our own ecumenical and interfaith relations committee" on which he served from 2013 to 2019. Serving on the commission is at the invitation of the RCA and not as an official representation of the CRC, though other CRC people also have served on the commission.

—Kristen Parker

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Lugene (Archie)  
Bazuin*

1926-2024

Preaching was Archie Bazuin's passion. It is said he preached in 100 churches as a seminary student due to a shortage of pastors at that time. He was a popular speaker who spoke at many conferences. Archie died Jan. 12. He was 97.

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1950, Archie served Kanawha (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church; First CRC in Fulton, Ill.; Jewel CRC in Denver, Colo.; and Munster (Ind.) Church. For 25 of his 27 years in Munster, Archie hosted *Munster Christian Reformed Church's Evening Service*, a radio broadcast reaching hundreds of people with the gospel. Archie served nine times as a delegate to synod and served Classis Illiana for 15 years as a regional pastor.

After retiring in 1992, Archie served as an interim pastor for a couple of CRC congregations and for 22 years was chaplain at Village Woods Retirement Community in Crete, Ill. He retired again at age 88. Archie received the 2016 Distinguished Alumni Award from Calvin Theological Seminary.

Predeceased by an infant son and an infant grandson, Archie is survived by Ellie, his wife of 75 years; three children and their spouses; six grandchildren; and 12 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus



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# The Future Looks Bright



By Kristen deRoo VanderBerg, with contributions from Calvin University, Resonate, Thrive, and World Renew

**W**orld-changers from every generation live and work among us, making a difference in our communities, serving as Christ's agents of renewal, and actively engaging with culture. One of the key milestones of the Christian Reformed Church's Our Journey 2025 denominational ministry plan focuses on this reality by encouraging churches to be places that "listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together"—as one of the plan's benchmarks states.

One way we can do this is by celebrating younger people and highlighting the work they are doing to further God's kingdom. In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul encourages a 30-year-old Timothy, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."

Paul asked Timothy to live his faith boldly and in such a way that others could learn from his example. Here are a few "Timothys" that we've seen do interesting and inspiring things for God's kingdom. Who are the Timothys in your community that you can learn from and encourage?

#### **Kristyn DeNooyer Garcia**

**Connection to CRC Ministry:** Thrive  
**Role:** Communications specialist

Kristyn DeNooyer Garcia works as a communications specialist for Thrive, the agency of the CRCNA dedicated to supporting and encouraging congregations in the U.S. and Canada. Within this role, she streamlines strategy, creates robust and compelling content for publication, and contributes to binational marketing and communications efforts to promote quality resources for supporting healthy churches.

"After several years as a freelance writer and 'solopreneur,' I've enjoyed being part of a team dedicated to equipping congregations in the areas of faith formation, accessibility, abuse prevention, justice, and more," she said. "I've especially appreciated the congregation-led approach Thrive takes: listening to felt needs in localized faith communities and developing structures and resources of support to meet those specific needs."

Garcia added, "It matters to me that, as agents of renewal, we are careful to enter each unique ministry context with postures of humility, curiosity, and respect for each community as the expert on their own needs. Thrive's core posture of listening aligns with this personal value, and I've been grateful to witness the ways our team walks alongside churches with intentionality."

Kristyn DeNooyer Garcia (left) works for Thrive as a communications specialist.

#### **Debora Haede**



**Connection to CRC Ministry:**

Calvin University, class of 2020  
**Role:** Director of communications, Center for Public Justice

Debora Haede works as the director of communications for the Center for Public Justice, a nonpartisan Christian public policy research and civic education organization whose mission is to serve God by equipping citizens, developing leaders, and shaping policy to advance justice for the transformation of public life. She advances the organization's strategic communications efforts and stewards relationships with journalists, media outlets, and academic and policy partners. CPJ's offices are headquartered in Alexandria, Va., but Haede works remotely from Germany, the country where she grew up.

Haede's experiences as a student at Calvin University and now with CPJ have equipped her to live out her faith practically, to integrate faith with her work, and to love and serve her neighbors through politics. "In my current position," she said, "I have the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from partners, establish platforms for meaningful exchanges, and convey impactful stories of positive community transformations. I feel fortunate when my communication efforts bring people together around the table for meaningful conversations."

Haede advises younger colleagues and current college students to "build relationships, even if they don't necessarily lead to job opportunities," because relationships can provide invaluable mentorship and resources. Nurturing these connections can be a lasting gift, she noted, opening doors to new possibilities and personal growth. "The connections I have made with Calvin alumni globally have enabled me to foster a sense of community no matter where I am."

#### **Elle Hazlett**



**Connection to CRC Ministry:**

Calvin University, class of 2021  
**Role:** Rare disease advocate and marketer

Recently promoted from marketing specialist to marketer at *BeTheMatch.org*, Elle Hazlett creates marketing campaigns to recruit potential stem-cell donors to the organization's national registry. The

aim of Be The Match is to connect patients battling blood cancers and disorders to potentially life-saving donors, and Hazlett's important role is to convince healthy college-aged people to donate stem cells. "I love my job because I know that it is having a tangible impact on patients," Hazlett said.

Hazlett started her Calvin University career in the pre-med program because she herself battles several rare diseases and understands the patient experience first hand. Her own situation led her to start a Calvin chapter of Be The Match, which led her to choose a career on the advocacy side of health care instead of patient care. As a student, Hazlett also participated in a research fellowship that helped create a curriculum for rare disease patients in elementary school, and she helped launch the curriculum at several schools and events. More than half of rare disease patients are children.

Hazlett encourages friends, colleagues, and current students to "trust God to put you where you are needed. There aren't a whole lot of people in the place they thought they'd be five years ago. We think we know what we want, but God has much bigger, better, and more fulfilling plans for our lives. Pray for his guidance, and trust where he places your feet."

#### Ana Lucia Rivera



**Connection to CRC Ministry:** World Renew

**Role:** Global partnerships and relationships coordinator, Guatemala

Ana Lucia Rivera (Lucy) has worked with World Renew in her home country of Guatemala for the past five years. While going to school for communication and journalism, she also serves as a global partnerships and relationships coordinator for

Latin America, connecting World Renew's local programs with the individuals and churches who support the ministry from other places.

When mission teams and other visits to Guatemala were canceled during the pandemic, Rivera helped create videos and other presentations to show supporters how their gifts were being used.

"Lucy is the most creative person I have ever met," said Francisco Enríquez Narváez, Guatemala country director for World Renew. "I just tell her what is needed, and she appears with ideas for videos, audiovisual material, and other ways to communicate the work that is being done in our region. She always wants to improve and proposes new ideas to be more effective. It is a great pleasure to work with Lucy and see how she innovates in her role here."

"Lucy is a shining star here at World Renew and a joy to work with," added Kacey Spencer, donor engagement program

manager. "She has an incredible way of bringing joy to any room with her infectious smile and a beautiful spirit. What sets Lucy apart is not just her passion for the work she does and the love she has for people, but also the way her faith in God shines through everything she does. His light radiates from her, making her not only an invaluable asset to World Renew but also a true inspiration. Working alongside Lucy is not just productive; it's a delightful experience. Keep an eye on her; she's destined for greatness!"

#### Nate Roels



**Connection to CRC Ministry:** Calvin University, class of 2017

**Role:** Video producer

Nate Roels has dedicated his professional life to creating videos for nonprofits, ministries, businesses, and individuals as the owner and operator of Second Mile Video in Grand Rapids, Mich. Most recently, Roels created and produced "Behind Our Walls," a documentary chron-

icling the story of eight inmates enrolled in the Calvin Prison Initiative program. The film has been screened across the United States and Canada and is slated to be released for streaming this year. He also works part time as a chaplain for Exalta Health, caring for immigrants who often lack access to medical care, and he is taking courses online with Calvin Theological Seminary.

Roels credits his education at Calvin University with helping him develop a passion for serving nonprofits and encouraging him to work as a "co-laborer" with Christ. "I seek to be an agent of renewal by telling stories of God's work in the world and also by highlighting needs that exist for many marginalized groups—seeking positive change," he said.

Roels encourages college students to spend as much effort on spiritual development as they do on professional development. He says those spiritual disciplines are key to helping young Christians stay "grounded and centered on God's love."

#### Leah Sweetman



**Connection to CRC Ministry:** Resonate Global Mission

**Role:** Missionary, Central America

Leah Sweetman served as a Resonate Global Mission volunteer with Cohort Central America in 2021 and now serves as a long-term missionary with a local ministry, where she works as the intercultural facilitator.



"Throughout my young adult life, I have been blessed with opportunities to experience life in Latin America," Sweetman said. "I have found it to be a unique and beautiful culture and context in which there is so much desire to know God and practice faith. Yet oftentimes amidst the demands of daily life, those desires can diminish or lose priority."

That's why Sweetman is excited to work for a Christian nonprofit organization.\* "Our focus is to offer intentional programs that support pastors and church leaders in both their evangelism and discipleship efforts," she said.

Sweetman connects North American supporters to this vision and organizes site visits. "There is such an opportunity for learning in these relationships," she said. "North Americans can learn from the gifts and challenges faced by Central Americans, and Central Americans gain an understanding of gifts and challenges faced by the church in North America. I believe this helps us gain a greater understanding of the global nature of God's kingdom. It is a gift to get to learn contextual nuances, yet understand how God is the same across borders, languages, and cultures."

Sweetman also connects churches to other ministries in the area, including a Christian school where she taught for a year and a half and now coaches volleyball and substitute teaches.

"I pray that God will use ministries like these to bring gospel transformation in the lives of the people in Central America," Sweetman said. "I pray that God uses my role to connect people to his mission and give testimony to the way he is working around the world. Finally, I pray that the Lord uses this opportunity for me to grow in my own relationship with him as I depend on him each day."

\* *The organization's name and country are being withheld for security.*

#### Bill Warners



**Connection to CRC Ministry:**  
Calvin University, class of 2017  
**Role:** Attorney

As a commercial litigation attorney at Warner, Norcross, and Judd LLP in Grand Rapids, Mich., Bill Warners uses his work as a platform for transformation. At the law firm, he helps distribute charitable funds to various organizations in the Michigan area. He also serves on the

board of directors for the Festival of the Arts and the Rescue One Foundation, an organization that seeks to improve the lives of about 90 Haitian children. Warners' charity work and his professional life both remind him that "renewal happens everywhere" if we're willing to step into the places God calls us to.

Warners has always enjoyed public speaking and advocacy, and he said his education at Calvin University—both in the classroom and outside it—gave him multiple opportunities to passionately support ideas and policies that help others. Those opportunities led him to pursue advocacy in nonprofit and for-profit spheres all over the country. After college, Warners worked in Los Angeles for a nonprofit organization helping immigrants, refugees, and people needing housing. That experience informs how he navigates his responsibilities to his clients in commercial settings and guides them through a difficult legal system.

"You'll learn more from your failures than your successes," Warners said. "People who consistently fail develop perseverance, which pays off because it teaches you to think more deeply and intentionally about your actions and circumstances. Hopefully, it eventually leads to more success."

#### Eliezer Yeong



**Connection to CRC Ministry:**  
Calvin University, class of 2018  
**Role:** Art & design manager


Eliezer Yeong is the art and design manager at Crossroads Prison Ministries, an organization connecting incarcerated people who hope to learn more about God with Christian mentors on the outside. Due to increased security measures, many prisons now ban paper materials for inmates, but Yeong is developing digital solutions to get Bible study materials and letters from mentors to people who are incarcerated.

Yeong believes his Calvin University education helps him seek the gospel in messy situations. "At Calvin, I was introduced to the doctrine of irresistible grace—the uninhibited saving power of God to call us from darkness into light," he said. "This grace covers me each day, and I now realize that the grace God uses to cover a person in prison isn't any different."

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As he designs opportunities for the gospel to reach people in prison, Yeong is living out Calvin's mission to be Christ's agent of renewal in the world.

Some time ago, a friend of his reminded him of a simple truth: the God of the universe wastes nothing.

"This statement has encouraged me through times of anxiety, disappointment, and doubt," Yeong said. "Despite whatever is happening in my life, even if it feels like a setback or a waste of time, God has the power to use that moment for his glory and direct my life in the way he intends. God works in the detours to bring us where we need to be." 

## The View From Here

# Shaped for God's Purposes

**EVERY GENERATION** has its formative historical moments: COVID-19, for example, or 9/11, the Vietnam War, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., or World War II. Events like these shape the psyche of a generation and affect worldviews.

I often wonder what events and experiences are shaping the faith of today's young adults. The rise and fall of megachurches and celebrity pastors? The great migration of believers from south to north? The "de-churching" of the West? The fragmentation of North American congregations and denominations around cultural issues?

Without a doubt, it's a confusing time. I am reminded of the concluding chapter of Ecclesiastes, where the Teacher says, "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, ... before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken" (Eccles. 12:1, 6). How are we contributing to the breaking of golden bowls and severing of silver cords for our young adults?

While every generation faces its own challenges, I am thankful that God continually raises up faithful young

I am thankful that  
God continually  
raises up faithful  
young people to  
be witnesses in  
his world.


people to be witnesses in his world. During my years serving in Haiti with Resonate Global Mission, I was privileged to be an encouragement and mentor to so many young people, many of whom were preparing for ministry.

I will always remember one young man, Caleb, who was a youth ministry leader for a local church in Port-au-Prince. Caleb was tireless. In addition to his ministry, he worked to provide for his mother and sister, and he went to university in the afternoons. Caleb was relentlessly positive, even as he faced nearly constant adversity. His love of prayer, worship, and Scripture were infectious. Caleb was sitting in class on the afternoon of Jan. 12, 2010, when he became one of the untold thousands of students killed in Haiti's earthquake. As I write these words a few days before the 14th anniversary

of the earthquake, I remain thankful for Caleb's life and the many "Calebs" God is raising up.

As a denomination, we have committed to "listen to the voices of every generation, shaping us for ministry together." This, the third milestone of the Our Journey 2025 Ministry Plan, is about paying attention to the voices of every generation, especially our young people. There's constant temptation for older generations to tune out the voices of the younger.

But listening is not enough. The voices of our young people also need to shape us as a community of faith. Like sandpaper on wood, the Holy Spirit uses the voices of young people to mold the Christian community into a form useful for God's mission to his beautiful and hurting world. Without being formed by those voices, the joints of the church won't fit together to support its mission.

In these Our Shared Ministry pages, you will hear challenging and inspiring stories of young adults courageously serving God and his world. As you read the stories, pay attention to how God is preparing them. Our young adults have lived through a lot in our churches and societies. Give thanks for them and let them shape your own faith. 



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](https://TheBanner.org).

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## ‘God Is Using My Voice’

**MARALEISA VANDENHEUVEL** reads in her favorite nook of her bedroom. Surrounded by play scripts, homework, sheet music, and her work uniform, she's having a rare moment of calm in her otherwise full schedule.

While her days are full, VandenHeuvel regularly remembers why she serves and participates in so many activities at school and at LaGrave Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. This reminder comes with help from a devotional she read a few years ago.

“It can be easy to forget how special God made us,” VandenHeuvel said. “The devotional reminds me that God is using my voice in ways I never would have expected. God loves me just the way I am, and I am enough.”

The devotionals, published by ReFrame Ministries’ *Kids Corner*, have provided similar life-giving lessons to Dexter Leo, a 15-year-old attending Sherman Street Church in Grand Rapids.

“I remember a specific devotional about asking for help and how it’s OK to be vulnerable sometimes,” Leo recalled. “That just really struck me in a way that I didn’t understand at the time, but I knew it would be important.”

Today VandenHeuvel and Leo are more than listeners to the weekly devotionals; they both host the weekly two- to three-minute audio devotional, lending their voices and creative ideas to *Kids Corner*’s ever-growing catalog of resources for kids and their families.



Maraleisa VandenHeuvel and Dexter Leo voice *Kids Corner*’s devotionals found at ([kidscorner.net/devotions](https://kidscorner.net/devotions)).

“I used to think adults were the only people who could make a big difference in God’s world,” VandenHeuvel said. “It’s cool that, even though I’m just a teenager, God is using my voice to help kids and families access devotions and God’s Word.”

From “When We All Work Together” to “Big Plans,” you can hear the two voices guide the children or families in your life at [KidsCorner.net/devotions](https://KidsCorner.net/devotions).

“I love being the host for these devotionals,” Leo added. “It allows me to express myself and praise God in a unique way.”

—Brian Clark,  
*ReFrame Ministries*



# Rethinking Mission

**HOW DO YOU MANAGE** *living in another culture? Where is the justice? What should mission look like?*

These are a few of the questions Noemi\* wrestled with as a young adult passionate about living out her faith. She had always been part of churches that were more inwardly focused, and something about that rubbed her the wrong way. When her friend told her about Resonate Global Mission's Cohort Central America, she was intrigued.

Cohort Central America—known locally as *Caminantes* (“those that journey”)—brings together young adults from Latin America and North America to live in community, serve in a grassroots ministry, and engage in deep spiritual formation. Resonate offers opportunities for young adults to serve with cohorts in Central America, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States.

Noemi had just finished dental school in Mexico and was searching for a job, but she decided to serve with Resonate for a year instead.

“She came into *Caminantes* seeking a space where she could connect her faith and vocation and could rethink mission,” said Rachel Beveridge, who leads Cohort Central America.

Noemi moved to Guatemala and started serving with the community health programs of a local ministry called AMI San Lucas. Because of her background and interest in dentistry, she led workshops on oral health in rural areas and supported other church-based community development projects.

It wasn't easy. Noemi had never lived in another country before, and even



Resonate Global Mission's Cohort Central America provided a space for Noemi (left) to live in community with other young adults, serve in a grassroots ministry, and rethink what mission looks like in her life.

though Mexico and Guatemala were neighboring countries, she quickly noticed the different customs, traditions, and nuances in language.

But Noemi felt supported by the community. She said she learned a lot from her colleagues at AMI San Lucas, but also from the community of *Caminantes*. She met regularly over video call with Beveridge and other members of *Caminantes* serving in countries across Central America. Together they read the Bible, prayed, navigated living cross-culturally, and explored how to live out their faith.

“In the midst of this process, I have been able to see God in multiple ways, where people are valuable, but so is the entire creation, and our mission must be holistic,” said Noemi.

“As a *Caminante*, (Noemi) was incredibly curious and engaged,” Beveridge said. “(Noemi) thrived in spaces where people asked hard questions or suggested novel ways of

understanding God, the church, and mission. She asked great questions, didn't accept easy answers, and put in a lot of effort to understand herself, the context where she was serving, and the ideas she was being presented.”

Resonate hopes that *Caminantes* walk away from Cohort Central America “with a prophetic voice and a pastoral heart,” Beveridge said.

Noemi is back home in Mexico now, but she'll always carry with her a piece of Guatemala and her experience with Cohort Central America.

“It was a year of a lot of learning,” Noemi said. “I hope not to stop here, to apply everything we know. ... I want to practice the proclamation of the Word, fellowship, and community.”

*\*Last name removed for safety.*

—Cassie Marcionetti,  
Resonate Global Mission

## Feeding Students and Nurturing Faith

“As I go around to local Christian Reformed churches and classis meetings, I’ve realized that it is not always apparent to the person in the pew where ministry shares end up and the impact they have,” said Sarah DeMoor, campus chaplain at the University of Guelph, Ont. “In my experience, ministry shares have very concrete impacts in terms of the kinds of connections we can make with students, faculty, and staff.”

DeMoor and the others who are part of Guelph Campus Ministry use classical ministry shares, denominational ministry shares (through Resonate Global Mission), and other donations to feed students weekly meals, offer Bible studies and small groups, and be a faithful presence on campus without the risk of running out of money.

For students like Jesse DeBoer (Bethel CRC, Dunnville, Ont.), Vanessa Kloostra (Bethel CRC, Listowell, Ont.), and Grace Ann Kroondijk (Maranatha CRC, Woodstock, Ont.), this has had a tremendous impact.

“Guelph Campus Ministry has really helped me grow in my faith, especially in making the transition from living at home with my parents, going to a church with everyone I’ve known my whole life, and going to a Christian school—where you have that really solid foundation—to moving out on your own and trying to navigate that,” said Kroondijk. “It has really helped me have a strong start at becoming an adult and having to make my own decisions.”

“I think the nice thing about campus ministry is there is something for everybody,” DeBoer added. “They have a hot chocolate night (and) Guelph campus community dinner, but on top of that they have stuff like church crawls, where you go as a group to different churches in the Guelph area,



Jesse DeBoer (Bethel CRC, Dunnville, Ont.) and Vanessa Kloostra (Bethel CRC, Listowell, Ont.) are active participants at Guelph Campus Ministry.

and after you go to the church you meet with all these people after the service and you can ask questions about the church. I really liked that so that I could find a good church.”

The campus ministry also reaches students, faculty, and staff of other denominational and faith backgrounds or no faith at all. DeMoor explained that after the weekly community dinners, the ministry has been offering a Narnia read-along where participants read and discuss C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

“This has provided so many opportunities for us to have conversations with students for whom the book has been a great jumping off point to be able to talk about the nature of God, evil in the world, and what redemption looks like,” DeMoor said.

DeMoor and participants in the Guelph Campus Ministry recently shared these stories and their appreciation for ministry shares in two YouTube videos ([YouTube.com/crcna](https://www.youtube.com/crcna)).

“Thank you so much for your support over the years,” Kloostra said. “What you are sending us really does make a difference for students.”

“Ministry shares allow me to be the hands and feet of Jesus on campus, literally feeding people who need to be fed—people who are hungry and looking for nourishment in all sorts of ways,” DeMoor concluded.

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,  
CRC Communications



Hear from Guelph Campus Ministry students in this video.

# How Can We Help?

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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  
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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**



# Snow

**I LOVE SNOW.** I even have a collection of snowflakes made of different upcycled material. I have wooden ones made from scraps of lumber, plastic ones made from milk cartons, paper ones made from toilet paper rolls, and metal ones made from charge cords. But none of them compares to the incredible beauty of the ones our Creator God makes each winter. How does God do it? That's where the scientific process of observing, recording and reporting come in. Nature enthusiasts and scientists have been studying snow for a long time. You can too!

## How Do You Describe Snow?

People in countries that are familiar with snow, such as Sweden, Canada, or Russia, have many different names for snow. You have probably heard of snowflakes (flat, six-sided crystals), slush (sloppy, partially melted snow), or hail (tiny ice balls). But how about *yis* (the Witsuwit'en name for snow), graupel (small pellets of snow), or "diamond dust" (tiny ice crystals close to the ground on a clear day)? What are some names for snow where you live?

## How Do Snowflakes Form?

Snow, of course, is frozen water. As very cold water droplets fall from a cloud, they attach to tiny pieces of pollen or dust and form crystals. These crystals always have six sides because of the structure of water. The specific shape depends on the air temperature and humidity. Scientists have noticed that long, needle-like crystals form at -5 degrees Celsius (23 degrees Fahrenheit), and plate-like crystals form at -15 degrees Celsius (5 degrees Fahrenheit). As each snowflake takes a different route to the ground, it is exposed to slightly different conditions at each turn, forming the uniquely beautiful and intricate shapes we see.

## Become a Snow Scientist!

It's easy to explore snow.

- » When it is snowing, grab a piece of dark paper and see if you can catch some flakes. Look at the shapes and record the air temperature.
- » Look at the snow on the ground. Can you pack some together to make a snowball, or does it fall apart? Does it look sparkly, like little crystals?
- » Find a ruler and measure how deep the snow is. Are there layers? Is there a crust with different snow underneath? Can you see evidence of creatures living in and around the snow?

Don't forget to add your observations to a nature journal using words, numbers, and/or pictures ([wildwonder.org/store/p/nj-zine](http://wildwonder.org/store/p/nj-zine)). Fill in the blanks for these three questions:

I notice \_\_\_\_\_.

I wonder \_\_\_\_\_.

It reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_.

**B**



Cindy Verbeek lives in Houston, B.C., where she works for A Rocha Canada. She has been working on creation care issues since 1993 and is a member of Telkwa Community Church.





# What's in a Name?

## Complementarianism, Egalitarianism, and the CRC's Stance on Women's Ecclesiastical Roles

By Amanda W. Benckhuysen

**A**bout a year ago, a young couple approached me asking whether the Christian Reformed Church is “comp” or “egal.” To clarify, “comp” and “egal” are shortened forms of the terms “complementarian” and “egalitarian,” words used to describe different understandings of what the Bible teaches about women. This couple was looking for a church home and wanted to make sure that the faith community they joined aligned with their understanding of Scripture and their values.

It's not uncommon to hear Christians today use the terms “complementarian” or “egalitarian” to describe churches, seminaries, authors, conferences, denominations, organizations, and networks, splitting the Christian world into two opposing camps divided by their beliefs about women. But where does the CRC fit into this theological landscape? Recent communications and overtures to synod have referred to the two perspectives affirmed by the CRC on women in

church office as “complementarian” and “egalitarian.” But can the decisions of synod be faithfully captured with these terms? Not exactly.

### Defining Terms

The term “complementarian” was first coined in 1988 as shorthand for the beliefs articulated in the Danvers Statement. The Danvers Statement is a document drafted by a group of conservative evangelical theologians to describe their understanding of the biblical teachings about men and women. Their concern was what they perceived to be an accommodation of Christianity to the spirit of the age and modern feminism. In response, they published a document outlining their conviction that the Bible teaches that though men and women are equal before God, they have different roles in the church, society, and home. In the home, men are to exercise leadership and authority over their wives while wives are to submit to their husbands. This principle of male headship extends to the church, where

ecclesiastical roles that involve leadership and authority (preaching, teaching, and church leadership) are to be limited to men. Furthermore, subtly implied in the Danvers Statement but made explicit in other writings, the authors claim that the husband's divinely ordained responsibility is to provide for his wife and that the wife's divinely ordained responsibility is to care for the home and children. In other words, “complementarian” refers to a belief that God ordained from the beginning and for all time different roles for men and women characterized by differences in authority and in spheres of responsibility. Men are to lead; women are to submit. Men are primarily to provide for their households; women are to manage their households.

While “complementarian” is a relatively new term, the word “egalitarian” began showing up in political and philosophical works in the late 1700s to describe a belief that all people are created equal and that this equality should be reflected in equal rights

and opportunities. While the term has been associated with equal rights for women, its use in social and political circles is much broader, targeting any and all inequalities between people as a result of race, class, gender, and (dis)ability.

In the 1970s, some biblical scholars and theologians began using the term “egalitarian” with some regularity to describe Jesus’ or Paul’s treatment of women or the biblical teaching about marriage. The association of the term with female equality grew, and by the 1980s, the term came to be used in Christian circles to refer almost exclusively to the belief that the Bible supports the full equality of the sexes. Christians for Biblical Equality, for instance, describes itself as the world’s largest egalitarian organization. Their mission is rooted in the belief that “the Bible teaches that women and men are equally created in God’s image for shared governance in all spheres.”

According to CBE’s foundational statement, men and women are created for full and equal partnership in the home and are to defer to each other, seeking to build each other up. Roles within the church are determined not by gender, but by giftedness, recognizing that the Spirit has poured out spiritual gifts on men and women alike. In terms of spheres of responsibility, men and women share jointly in having dominion over the created order and thus are free to explore the best use of their gifts and competencies both in and outside the home.

CBE’s foundational statement goes on to state that gender inequality exists between men and women not because God ordained it to be so, but because of the fall into sin. In other words, the disparity that exists in the opportunities and expectations given to men and women is a reflection of brokenness in the world, not God’s intention for women and men. In Christ, all things are made new, and by grace through faith, women as well as men are restored in their relationships with God and with each other, freed from

**Synod wrestled  
again and again  
and again with  
differing  
positions on what  
the Bible says  
about women. In  
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constellation of  
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cannot be  
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complementarian  
or egalitarian.**

the burden of sin and patriarchy. For CBE, the larger definition of “egalitarian” as equal rights and opportunities for all people is woven throughout its foundational statement.

Still, in Christian circles today, the term is typically used in a more limited sense to refer to beliefs about men and women.

#### **The Conversation in the CRC**

Almost two decades before the Danvers Statement was penned and CBE formed, the Christian Reformed Church began a conversation on biblical teachings about men and women. In 1970, synod appointed a study committee “to examine the Reformed practice of excluding women from ecclesiastical office.” The discussion took place at the request of the CRC

delegates to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (now known as the Reformed Ecumenical Council). They believed the CRC should clarify its own position on this matter so they could “play a responsible role” in the conversation unfolding within the RES.

Since 1973, CRC synods appointed 10 different study committees to explore various aspects of the issue of women’s roles in the church and at home, having the issue come up at no fewer than 40 synods. Buried in these study reports from the past 50 years is a stunning amount of excellent biblical interpretation and theological reflection on what the Bible says about women. Unlike the drafters of the Danvers Statement, however, the synods did not approach the question about biblical manhood and womanhood in a comprehensive way. Instead, over the years, the synods adopted various statements addressing issues related to women’s roles in the church as questions arose.

In 1973, for instance, synod’s focus was what the Bible says about women serving in ecclesiastical office. By 1978, the conversation narrowed to address the possibility of women serving as deacons. This decision was deferred, giving way to a broader study of male headship in Scripture and its implications for women in marriage and in the church. In 1984, synod adopted a statement that defined male headship in marriage as a direction-setting role that is to be exercised by husbands in self-sacrificial ways that build up their wives as Christ built up the church. Synod 1984 also gave churches permission to ordain qualified women to the office of deacon.

A second study committee was appointed by Synod 1987 to discern the implications of male headship in marriage for women’s roles in the church. Reporting to Synod 1990, this second study committee noted that no biblical or confessional grounds had been established for extending the headship principle from marriage to the church and that no synod had



affirmed this application of headship. Furthermore, it noted that the affirmations about male headship in marriage made by Synod 1984 are themselves subject to debate and thus were not a promising foundation for developing a theology of women in the church. As such, it invited synod to set aside the conversation about male headship and reconsider the matter of women in ecclesiastical office.

In response, Synod 1990 decided to permit churches to use their own discretion in deciding whether to use the gifts of women members in all offices of the church on the grounds that years of biblical study of this issue had not provided definitive evidence that biblical teaching is opposed to the ordination of women to any church office.

Over the 50 years of discussing the nature and role of women, synod tabled, defeated, or adopted numerous statements and decisions that are worth noting. Synod 1984, for instance, resisted defining headship in terms of authority and power over one's spouse, preferring instead the notion of direction-setting and self-sacrificing love. Additionally, Synod 1984 and Synod 1990 affirmed that there is insufficient biblical grounds for extending a headship principle beyond the home to the church or to society in general. Finally, Synod 1990 urged the churches to recognize that the issue of women's roles in the church is not one of salvation and that even in our differences we remain sisters and brothers in Christ.

In 1995, synod ultimately concluded that "there are two different perspectives and convictions, both of which honor the Scriptures as the infallible word of God, on the issue of whether women are allowed to serve in the offices of elder, minister, and evangelist." Twenty years later, Synod 2005 affirmed that "churches ought to make use of the gifts of women, including invitations to ordained women to preach and licensed women to exhort in those congregations where it is permitted."


Just as telling as the statements of what synod has affirmed are the statements and resolutions that were not approved over the years. For example, Synod 1984 rejected statements proposed in overtures and by advisory committees that described male headship as a creation norm and God's intention for male-female relationships from the beginning. Synod also did not adopt statements that claim that the man should exercise primary leadership and direction-setting in the home, in the church, and in society in general. Additionally, synod did not approve the statement "that God gave woman to be man's fitting helper for the whole of human life, and that she should render her service and exercise her gifts in a way which acknowledges the headship of the man" (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 624).

#### A Way Forward?

The statements that were adopted or defeated were the subject of robust and at times heated debate. Synod wrestled again and again and again with differing positions on what the Bible says about women. In the end, the constellation of adopted positions cannot be described as either complementarian or egalitarian.

Instead, what synod has affirmed is that there are two perspectives and convictions that honor the Scriptures as the infallible word of God on whether women may hold ecclesiastical office. Synod did not affirm male headship as a creation norm or the notion that men and women have fundamentally different roles in church, home, and society. Neither did synod explicitly affirm an egalitarian position, particularly with respect to marriage. Different from the positions of other institutions that claim to be complementarian or egalitarian, synod's statements, and thus the CRC's position, are characterized not just by nuance, but by reserve and restraint, resisting declaring more than can be supported clearly by the Scriptures or more than is needed to provide direction to the church. Beyond that, the

CRC has sought to pitch a large tent that can hold a variety of perspectives on the issue of women, affirming neither the complementarian nor the egalitarian position, but creating room for those who identify with either of these positions and anywhere in between.

Not everyone is happy with this approach. It is challenging for those who don't believe women should hold positions of leadership in the church to be seated at larger assemblies with ordained women. It's also incredibly hard and painful for women in leadership to know that there are people in the room who don't think they should be there. But there is a kind of righteousness and holiness in this willingness to sit together in the discomfort of disagreement, to have humility about our interpretations of Scripture, and to hold our deepest convictions with enough grace that we can be in relationship with those who think differently. In a polarized world where people prefer to retreat into their own echo chambers, being willing to continue the journey together, to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ even in the face of disagreement, is a gift and a testimony to the work of the Spirit among us. 



Amanda Benckhuysen is the author of *The Gospel According to Eve: A History of Women's Interpretation and Immigrants, the Bible, and You*. She works as a safe church consultant for Thrive and attends Kelloggsville (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church.

1. How have you understood the theological terms "complementarianism" and "egalitarianism"?
2. Are you surprised to read that the Christian Reformed Church's official position "cannot be described as either complementarian or egalitarian"? Why or why not?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

# The Church Is Not a Building

Is this defeat? A church razed after it was raised in joy and promise decades ago?

**BRICKS AND CEMENT BLOCKS** are heaped in one pile, scrap iron in another. Casement windows are stacked in the parking lot. One wall is gone, exposing the sanctuary, now filled with a massive pile of broken lumber, to wind and rain. Pink-glazed windows on the far wall wait to be removed.


A church is being demolished. Its doors have been closed for almost a decade. But here songs were sung, prayers prayed, sermons preached, marriage vows declared, baptismal water splashed on babies' foreheads, coffee socials enjoyed, meetings attended, and more—so much more—took place within those walls amid laughter and tears, solemnity and levity.

Is this defeat? A church razed after it was raised in joy and promise decades ago? Is this downfall? A church torn down after it was born of God's power with the people's desire to build up God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven? Is this hopelessness? A church broken after it was built on the hope and foundation of God's providence and presence?

A song whispers: "The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people" (Richard K. Avery and Donald S. March, "We Are the Church"). The church is a people—not brick and mortar, not stained-glass windows and a carved wooden cross mounted on a sanctuary wall, not a baptismal font and a pulpit, not pews and hymnals. No—a people! For those who grapple with defeat, a sense of downfall, and hopelessness, the apostle Paul's words to the church in Ephesus focus on the true church building: "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph. 2:19-20).

Are there tears when churches face endings? Are there fears when what once seemed stable, strong, and possible is demolished? Of course. But where tears and fears loom large, renewed vision focused on the Word of God cheers the children of God onward. The apostle Peter instructs and comforts us: "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

We are living stones—not stones vulnerable to an excavator's tearing steel jaw, nor stones that crumble under the onslaught of the elements, but living stones who are living life for God with other living stones, together being built into a spiritual house where spiritual sacrifices—acts of love and mercy for the building of God's kingdom—are offered for God's glory. Hymnist James E. Seddon encourages God's living stones to look upward and to move onward: "Church of God, elect and holy, be the people he intends, strong in faith and swift to answer each command your Master sends. Royal priests, fulfill your calling through your sacrifice and prayer; give your lives in joyful service, sing his praise, his love declare" ("Church of God, Elect and Holy," *Lift Up Your Hearts* #252). 



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

## Seven Miles Into Hell

On a Friday 2,000 years ago, Christ was crucified.

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

—Hebrews 11:1

**WITH AN UNQUENCHABLE THIRST** for adventure, Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh huddled together inside a reinforced-steel submersible and slowly descended into a dark trench seven miles below the ocean surface.

Nine years before Apollo 11 rocketed human beings into space to circle the moon and then walk its alien surface, an ambitious plan was made to boldly explore an alien landscape much closer to home. In the winter of 1960, the submarine *Trieste* was lowered into the choppy waters of the North Pacific Ocean, 250 miles off the island of Guam. Its mission was to reach the bottom of the Mariana Trench, the deepest known oceanic crevice in the world.

Dipping to a staggering 35,814 feet below the ocean surface, the Mariana Trench is so deep that if Mount Everest were flipped upside down and placed inside, the peak of the mountain would not touch the bottom. The trench is continually etched as the rocky edge of the Pacific tectonic plate slides into and then underneath the Mariana plate. Begun 180 million years ago, this slow-motion collision has formed a crescent-shaped crevice five times the length of the Grand Canyon. With 21 active volcanoes, this hellish underwater landscape is littered with hypothermal vents that discharge into the water like smokestacks. Molten sulfur breaks through the crust, turning the water acidic and jet-black with chemical bacteria.

At the southern tip of the Mariana Trench is a slot-shaped indentation called Challenger Deep, the deepest known place on Earth. Here, intense pressure measures over 1,000 times that of the standard atmospheric pressure (the weight of 15 jumbo

jets), enough to make land-dwelling creatures quickly collapse in on themselves.

As the reinforced submarine descended through the watery depths, Swiss scientist Jacques Piccard and U.S. Navy Lt. Don Walsh looked out a small window as sun-streaked ocean gave way to pitch black. They descended through the twilight and midnight zones, through the abyss, and into the trench. At 30,000 feet, an exterior viewing window cracked and shook the submarine. They kept going. After a harrowing 4 hours and 47 minutes, they touched down and became the first humans ever to reach the deepest place on the planet: Challenger Deep.

On a Friday 2,000 years ago, Christ was crucified. He was taken down from the cross, wrapped in cloth, and placed in a tomb. A large stone was rolled over the entrance, sealing the tomb. There were no infrared sensors. No rock penetrating radar. No livestream. The details of what happened next are shrouded in mystery.

The Apostles' Creed says Jesus "descended to hell."

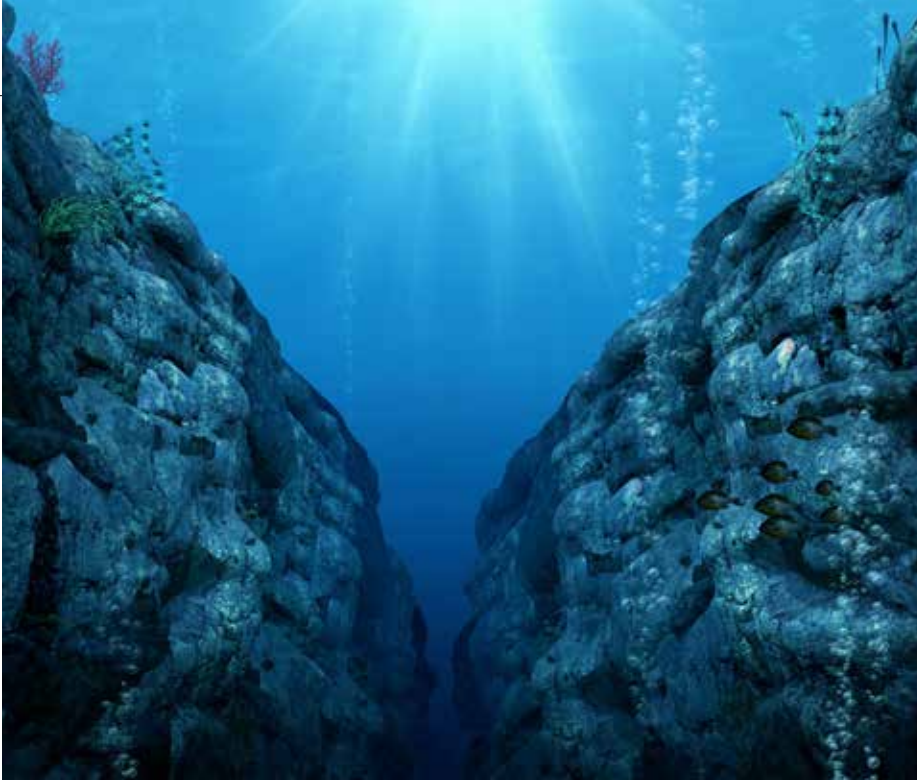
Many of the creed's succinct summaries of the foundational truths about God have caused even the most devout to pause before professing "I believe." But out of all the lines in the creed, scholars and thoughtful Christians for centuries have wondered specifically what the four words "he descended into hell" could mean. With holy curiosity, we turn to the Bible to find answers.

1 Peter 3:18-20 is a key passage that is often cited as supporting evidence of the creed's unapologetic statement. In these verses, Peter says that Christ, after being raised from the dead, went to preach to the disobedient imprisoned spirits from the time of Noah. On the surface, this passage might seem straightforward, yet scholars



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passionately debate what it means and caution us about constructing a theology based on a few perplexing lines. Strangely, apart from this one passage, the Bible is largely silent on what the creed so specifically asserts.

Still searching for insight, many have turned to the interpretive wisdom of the Heidelberg Catechism. Rather than offering details, the catechism paints with a broader brush by drawing on Scripture passages that point to the implications of Christ's work. Q&A 44 says that Christ descended to hell "to assure me during attacks of deepest dread and temptation that Christ my Lord, by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul, on the cross but also earlier, has delivered me from hellish anguish and torment" (Isa. 53; Matt. 26:36-46; 27:45-46; Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7-10).

According to the catechism, in times of temptation, difficulty, and doubt, the four powerful words "he descended to hell" assure us that no matter what we might experience in this life, God is with us and for us.

The catechism implies that sometime between Friday and Sunday, Christ sank through the stone floor of that sealed tomb. Following the creed's suggestion of hell as somewhere down below, hidden from human eyes, he

descended through layers of watery depths, into the midnight zone, the abyss, and still deeper into the unfathomable trenches of hell. The creed's "he descended to hell" succinctly summarizes what the lyricist of Psalm 139 says poetically: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ... Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Ps. 139:7-8, 10).

Scripture, the Apostles' Creed, and the Heidelberg Catechism all speak with one voice: Christ went all the way down into the deepest darkness to find us, hold our hands, and lead us out of despair into the light of his marvelous new life.

On March 26, 2012, filmmaker James Cameron squeezed into a vertical submersible and was lowered into the thrashing waves of the North Pacific Ocean. His goal was to repeat what had been accomplished 62 years earlier by Piccard and Walsh—to touch down in Challenger Deep, the deepest place on Earth on the far end of the Mariana Trench. After a harrowing descent at twice the speed of the *Trieste*, Cameron reached a depth of 35,787 feet in 2 hours and 37 minutes. Although the

submarine suffered some minor mechanical failures, after about three hours under the crushing pressure at the bottom of the ocean, he ascended into the daylight and became only the third person to reach the mysterious and dangerous trench floor.

Since then, others have descended to the depths, but only Christ went all the way down to the absolute bottom of reality.

The good news of the gospel, affirmed in the Apostle's Creed and applied in the Heidelberg Catechism, makes it clear that Christ went all the way down so that we can rest knowing that no dark place is beyond his reach. Now, not even hell on earth is devoid of Christ's presence. Our personal trials and tribulations can make us feel lost in a murky prison of pain and loneliness. We might feel crushed by the weight of guilt. For some of us, depression sits heavy on our shoulders, bearing down with increasing pressure. For all of us at one time or another, the light fades from our eyes as sadness envelops us. But we are not alone. God knows. God sees. God is present.

On Friday, Christ died. On Saturday, Christ descended to hell. On Sunday, Christ rose from the depths of crushing death. Forty days later, Christ ascended to heaven and sat down at God's right hand to assure us that his presence, love, and power reach all the way from the highest high to the lowest low. That is very good news. **B**

1. How have you understood the phrase that Jesus "descended into hell," in the Apostles' Creed?
2. Have you experienced God's presence in the midst of your darkest moments? Can you describe it?

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

# Artemis of the Ephesians Was Nobody's Mother

**AFTER SANDRA GLAHN** had suffered eight miscarriages and her three efforts at adoption were disrupted, she wondered what her role was to be if not a mother. So she embarked upon an academic journey that led her to becoming a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, a bastion of conservative theology.

Her personal story, combined with her interest in the early church and New Testament theology, led her to explore a specific phrase in 1 Timothy 2:15 that “women will be saved through childbearing.” Countless believers have puzzled over what Paul meant, and the childless Glahn was especially perplexed. What was the implication for someone like her? “I had to know: What is a female human and what is God’s vision for her?” she writes in *Nobody’s Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament*. Her painstakingly researched book is the result.

As she dove into the passage, Glahn realized that the key to reading and applying 1 Timothy lies in unveiling the mystifying goddess Artemis and the cult that had a “stranglehold” on the people of Paul and Timothy’s day. Her image adorned coins, a month of the year was named for her, and Olympic-style games—the Artemesia—were held in her honor. “She was trusted as guardian and protector of the city,” Glahn writes. Ephesus lay in “the grip of magic and Artemis worship.”

As a graduate of a Bible college myself, I can hardly remember Artemis being

referred to at all, never mind as a backdrop to the ancient church. Most people in Timothy’s congregation in Ephesus would have had to wrestle with her influence, a factor that enhances our understanding of both the times and Paul’s exhortations.

Paul was neither confused nor misogynistic (though he’s been accused of both) when he wrote that women would be “saved through childbearing.” According to Glahn, Paul was alluding to Artemis’ role as the virgin goddess of midwifery. Timothy and his congregants would have instantly known this, Glahn asserts.


First-century Ephesus, says Glahn, was a “goddess-first context.” Artemis was commonly seen as having the power to bring women through childbirth, either by safely delivering the child or shooting the mother with flaming arrows to put her painlessly out of her agony. Women in that time could die horrific deaths by laboring for days on end, so Artemis and her arrows were seen as saviors. But Paul staked his life upon a different deliverer, the one true God, and he wanted the early Christians to place their trust in God too.

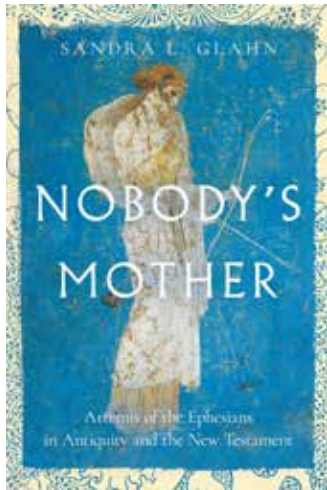
The author delves into a panoply of sources, including same-era literature by Pliny the Elder and Homer, ancient inscriptions on monuments and statues (the discovery of which has nearly doubled in the past 30 years), architecture and art to sketch out the identity of Artemis, and descriptions of how worship of this goddess led to many problems in the church.

Some Christian women probably still trusted Artemis, not God, to bring them through labor, either by delivering the babies or euthanizing the mothers. And that was a big problem.

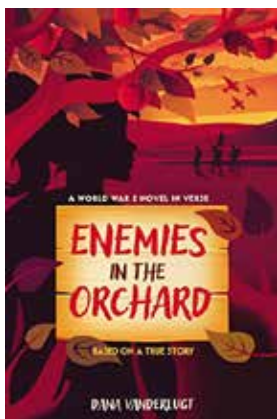
Though the book also wrangles with other controversial words and phrases in 1 Timothy 2, Glahn focuses mainly on verse 15, which is impossible to explain without understanding the role of Artemis worship in the social imagination of Timothy’s church members. Readers might not agree with the author’s conclusion—that Paul was saying only Jesus Christ and salvation in him could “deliver” a woman through childbirth and everything else—but they can’t deny Glahn’s extensive scholarship.

As someone who is endlessly fascinated by women of the early church, this book colored in many intriguing details. Most of all, I join historian Beth Allison Barr, who endorsed the book, in praising Glahn’s clarity in addressing centuries of confusion regarding this verse.

“What a clear and compelling explanation for one of the most unclear passages in Scripture!” Barr writes. “This eye-opening book ... helps us better understand not only the historical context of Paul’s words but also how the spiritual worth of a woman is not tied to the physical state of motherhood.” (IVP Academic) 



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



## Enemies in the Orchard

By Dana VanderLugt

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Based on a true story, this World War II novel written in free verse is narrated from the alternating perspectives of 13-year-old Claire DeBoer of the fictional Apeldoorn, Mich., and Karl Hartmann of Ulm, Germany.

In September 1944, Claire's father decides the only answer to his labor shortage is to hire German prisoners of war brought to Michigan by presidential order. But Claire and her mother are unhappy with the prospect of enemies working in their orchard.

When Karl travels to Michigan, he begins to realize that the propaganda he's heard since he was forced to join the Hitler Youth when he was 10 years old is nothing but lies.

Though recommended for readers aged 9-12, this novel—deeply moving and filled with poignant insights—is better suited to children ages 12 and older. (Zonderkidz)



## Take Care of Maya

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

This documentary chronicles the tragic loss within an immigrant family due to systemic failures of America's child protection system. When 10-year-old Maya Kowalski experiences a mysterious and debilitating pain whose cause escapes most local physicians, her dedicated mother, Beata, a nurse, decides to seek unconventional treatment in Mexico. But when Maya's illness flares up again and lands her in the emergency room a few months later, staff at the local hospital suspect medical child abuse and begin to question Maya's parents.

Injustice and oppression can take different forms. In this case it is found in the hospital system and in child protection services, where care for the most vulnerable is supposed to be a core value. (Netflix; PG-13)



## English Ministry Podcast

Reviewed by Daniel Jung

Those of us who lead ministries in Asian American contexts have become experts at making theological *sullungtang*, a Korean soup dish that requires continual straining of excess fat and nonessentials until the desired milky-white color is achieved.

But we are beginning to see an influx of media content that brings contextual wisdom into the blossoming theological spaces we occupy, benefiting the entire body of Christ.

The *English Ministry* podcast is one example of this trend. Pastor John Sungyak Kim hosts this podcast to “amplify (Asian American) voices far and wide.” He meets his guests in person, and their face-to-face conversations about ministry in immigrant church contexts are nearly unedited, with episodes ranging from one to two hours.

The *English Ministry* podcast is part of a growing menu crafted specifically for us.

## The Lowdown

**Strange Religion:** Award-winning author, blogger, speaker, and New Testament teacher Nijay Gupta traces the emerging Christian faith in its Roman context in this accessible and engaging book. (Brazos Press)

## Millie Bobby Brown

**Stars:** A new fantasy movie called *Damsel* sees the *Stranger Things* star play the role of an imperiled maiden who takes matters into her own hands to escape a place guarded by fire-breathing dragons. (March 8, Netflix)

## Based on a Real Dog:

*Arthur the King* is a new dog adventure film directed by Simon Cellan Jones and starring Mark Wahlberg and Simu Liu. It's based on the 2016 nonfiction book *Arthur: The Dog Who Crossed the Jungle to Find a Home*, by Mikael Lindnord. (In theaters March 15)

## The Great Divide:

**A Novel:** Cristina Henríquez, author of *The Book of Unknown Americans*, tells a tale of the building of the Panama Canal from the perspective of fish-mongers, laborers, doctors, and journalists. (March 5, Ecco)



## Why Should We Be Good?

Kids are smart.  
They'll figure  
out a loophole  
in anything.



Brandon Haan serves as the senior pastor at Ivanrest Church in Grandville, Mich. He lives in Grandville with his wife, Sarah, and their two sons, Levi and Titus.

**I USED TO GET THIS QUESTION** (or some variation of it) all the time during my seven years as a youth pastor: If Jesus atoned for our sins, why should we try to be good?

You see, kids are smart. They'll figure out a loophole in anything, be it a silly youth group game or, you know, their eternal salvation. With some regularity, my students would ask: "If the gospel is true, and Jesus died for my sins, then why do I still have to live a certain way? I'm already forgiven. I'm already saved. And God's not going to take that away. So what's the point? Why do I have to live the way he wants?"

To which I would respond, "Because, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in his masterful book *Discipleship*, when you accept Christ's atonement but then live however you want, it cheapens Christ's blood and sacrifice. So be good, lest you make Christ's sacrifice less costly than it actually is."

OK, I never actually said that. I wanted to sometimes, but I never did. Here's what I would say instead:

"Imagine someone gave you an expensive gift. Maybe a family member or friend gave you a Playstation 5 or an Xbox Series X for your birthday. That'd be a costly gift, right?"

"Yes," my students would say, especially the gamers, who at this point would start visibly salivating.

"Well, how do you think they'd feel if you just shrugged your shoulders, muttered, 'This is OK,' and then tossed it against the wall? Do you think they'd feel as if you appreciated it?"

"No."

"What do you think they'd appreciate instead?"

"Me saying, 'Thank you,'" they'd say.

"Right," I'd say. "Same goes for God. You see, he's given us a costly gift too. It's the gift of our salvation. And that gift came at great cost to him. It cost him his Son's life, in fact. So, just as with someone else who gives us a gift, we need to say 'thank you.' And part of how we say 'thank you' to God is by living the way God asks. That demonstrates our gratitude to him. It doesn't earn our salvation. But it does thank him for it."

That explanation reflects the Heidelberg Catechism's three-part structure of guilt, grace, and gratitude. As the catechism teaches, our sin leads to guilt, our guilt leads to God's grace, and that grace leads to our gratitude to God, which includes living the way God asks us to.

There are other ways to answer this question too. For instance: Christians should live good lives because our actions are an important part of our witness to nonbelievers. Good living is also the result of the ongoing, indwelling, sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and we shouldn't quench it (1 Thess. 5:19). Finally, living well helps us embody the proverbial "not yet" of the new creation in the here and now, giving us a foretaste of the life God will enable us to live in the life to come.

But my answer was the one I most often give: Our good living is one of the ways we say "thank you" to God for all God has done for us. And, having received that gift, I humbly think "thank you" is something we should say a lot, both with our words and our actions. **B**

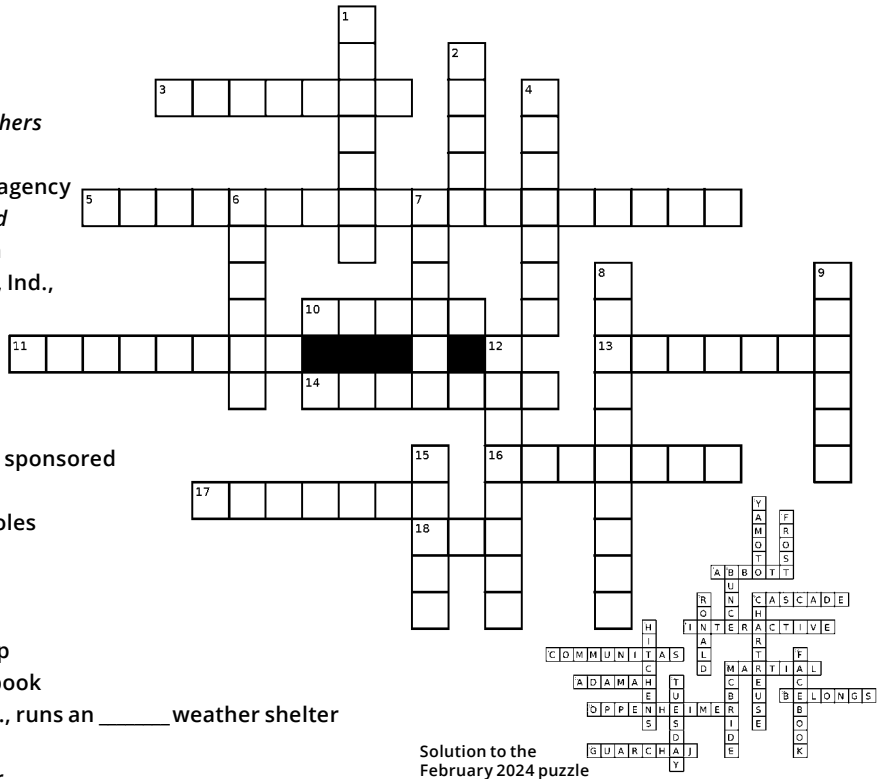
Find the answers to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*! See the solutions next month.  
 (Please note we do not publish Word Play in the July/August issue.)

**Down**

1. Small pellets of snow
2. Last name of the author of *Strange Religion*
4. Dutch theologian who wrote *Preaching and Preachers*
6. We are \_\_\_\_\_ stones
7. Kristyn DeNooyer Garcia works for this ministry agency
8. Last name of the author of *Enemies in the Orchard*
9. The type of love modeled by the Good Samaritan
12. What Community Church Roselawn in Demotte, Ind., shares with people in need
15. Youth ministry leader killed in the Haiti earthquake.

**Across**

3. Country of origin of the first refugee family to be sponsored by Immanuel CRC in Cornwall, Ont.
5. The belief that men and women have different roles in the church, society, and home
10. Good Friday \_\_\_\_\_ Festival
11. The act of starting a new church
13. Six \_\_\_\_\_ Reserve, where Adrian Jacobs grew up
14. \_\_\_\_\_ of the Ephesians is the subject of a new book
16. Gateway Community Church in Abbotsford, B.C., runs an \_\_\_\_\_ weather shelter
17. The world's deepest known oceanic crevice
18. A co-host of the audio devotional for *Kids Corner*



Solution to the February 2024 puzzle

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**DEADLINES:** Ads for the April issue are due March 1, 2024; May issue: April 5, 2024. 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.

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### Church Positions Available

**CO-PASTOR SEARCH** Drayton Reformed Church, in Drayton ON, Co-Pastor search, to assist with preaching, teaching, youth leadership & other ministries. Please check our Pastoral Search tab on website: [www.draytonreformed.org](http://www.draytonreformed.org), or contact [dkabbes75@gmail.com](mailto:dkabbes75@gmail.com)

**COORDINATOR/YOUTH PASTOR** Calvary CRC in Orange City, Iowa, is seeking a coordinator or pastor to oversee youth ministries, enhance congregational life, and preach as educated/gifted. Duties may include, but are not limited to youth meetings, service trips, counseling, as well as leading worship services. For more information, please contact Wayne Huisman at [wayne@huismanglobal.com](mailto:wayne@huismanglobal.com).

**DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP AND YOUTH POSITION** Aylmer Christian Reformed Church in Southwestern Ontario, Canada is seeking a full-time Director of Worship and Youth. The ideal candidate is a deeply committed follower of Jesus Christ with experience in and passion for both youth ministry and worship leadership. The successful candidate will plan and lead musical worship in Sunday and special worship services which will resonate across generations and artistic styles (60%) and will also oversee and lead the youth group for high-school aged teens in a Christ-honouring way that helps students grow as disciples of Christ (40%). A full job description can be found at [www.aylmercrc.org](http://www.aylmercrc.org). Resumes should be submitted to [office@aylmercrc.org](mailto:office@aylmercrc.org)

**FULL TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR First CRC** in Lynden, Washington is seeking a full-time ordained associate pastor to provide general pastoral ministry in the congregation to support our senior pastor, including preaching, with specific focus on overseeing our ministry to youth, young adults and young families. Email resume and statement of faith to Brian VanderWoude at [search@firstcrlinden.org](mailto:search@firstcrlinden.org).

**FULL TIME PASTOR** Enjoy beautiful sunsets followed by the glow of a bonfire in west central Minnesota. Raymond CRC is searching for a full time pastor to preach the Bible and lead our congregation as we together seek to glorify God in all we do and to joyfully acknowledge His sovereignty over all things. Our prayer is that our next pastor will lead us as we continue to grow our faith in God and stir in us a passion for reaching the lost in our community, so they know Jesus Christ. If you feel the Holy Spirit nudging, you to consider being our next pastor contact secretary@raymondcrc.org for more information.

**FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR:** Bethel CRC, a thriving, multi-generational congregation, committed to our Reformed roots and located in the growing, dynamic, scenic Gallatin Valley of SW MT seeks a full-time, ordained Associate Pastor to work in tandem with our Lead Pastor, shepherding God's flock with preaching, pastoral care, youth/education ministries and outreach. Please contact Jack Huttinga at [prjackhu@gmail.com](mailto:prjackhu@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).

**SEEKING FULL TIME PASTOR** Lafayette Christian Reformed Church, a traditional gospel-based church, is actively searching for a Pastor whom God has chosen to lead us into the future. LCRC is unique, placed in a community with great need for the healing word of God, a family-oriented church in an inner-city location drawing people from throughout the city of Lafayette, IN and Purdue University. We are a united congregation with a strong foundation of 160 years of ministry. Our loving, motivated, and compassionate congregation needs a dynamic visionary pastor to lead us. In addition to being a strong equipper and exhorter, the candidates gifting should also include scripture based, practical, and relevant preaching and teaching. Please send resume to: Lafayette Christian Reformed Church, Attn: Dale De Young 1200 Tippecanoe St. Lafayette, IN 47904. Please visit our website and/or e-mail us at [dm.deyoung@frontier.com](mailto:dm.deyoung@frontier.com).

**SENIOR PASTOR REQUIRED** Hebron CRC, located in the fast-growing multi-ethnic community of Whitby, ON Canada, requires an experienced ordained pastor to lead, teach and encourage our members in fulfilling the great commission in our community. If you feel called to serve in this capacity, please contact

Fred Engelage at [fredengelage@gmail.com](mailto:fredengelage@gmail.com) for more information.

**WASHINGTON, DC CRC:** We are a small but mighty, multigenerational, multiethnic urban congregation looking for a pastor with a spiritual and emotional growth mindset, sense of humor, forthright communication, careful listening, and humble service who can lead us to grow spiritually and serve our communities. To request a church profile and submit your resume/CV, please contact [search@dccrc.org](mailto:search@dccrc.org).

### Meetings of Classis

**CLASSIS KALAMAZOO** will meet on Tuesday, March 12 at 6:00 PM at Prairie Edge CRC in Portage MI.

### Employment

**AVAILABLE FOR PULPIT SUPPLY** Recently retired CRC Pastor is available for pulpit supply, ministry opportunities and/or possible interim assignments in the greater Western Michigan area. Contact Dr. James Busscher at [jbusscher@gmail.com](mailto:jbusscher@gmail.com).

**TRUCK DRIVERS** Zeeland greenhouse looking for motivated CDL A & B drivers for deliveries. Get paid well by the HOUR, not the mile! Drivers rewarded for dedication & hard work. Full & part time (if not available 4+ days a week) positions starting mid-April through start of June, also opportunities in the fall. Be home Sundays. Some Saturdays may be required. All expenses - trucks, fuel, & tolls, are covered by the company, not the driver. Retired? Great extra income if you have a current CDL, medical certificate, & good driving record. Contact Amy: 616-875-7211 for info or @ Meadowridge: 8952 Tyler St. in Zeeland

### Anniversary

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS



**DOORNBOS** On March 24 Dr. Milton & Jeanne Doornbos celebrate 70 years together. Always a team, they served 5 Midwest congregations and CRC Home Missions. They ministered into their 90's while always blessing a grateful family. Their children Jim & Joyce, Keith & Brenda, Larry & Linda, Mark & Tami, Elizabeth & Herb (Garmen) and their families celebrate this amazing milestone! God is faithful!



## Birthday

### 95 YEARS

**BETTY PUNT** will be celebrating her 95th birthday on March 24. She is a blessing to her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. 2105 Raybrook SE, #1027, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

**STALLINGA, WIL** celebrated his 95th birthday on February 19. We thank God for your example of faithful living & trusting God in all circumstances. Please send birthday greetings to Wil at 1730 Main Street, Pella Iowa 50219. With love from Herm, Marcia, Brad, Sara, Jack & Jase Werkman

## Obituaries

**ANDRIESEN, JERITA (BROEKEMA)** age 97, passed away peacefully on Thursday, January 11, 2024 at the Churchill Retirement Home in Churchill, MT. She was preceded in death by Klaas, her husband of 64 years. Jerita is survived by her 4 daughters and their husbands, Myra and Bernie Westra, Connie and Ron Dyk, Barb and Rich Schemper, and Claudia and Dan Holler; along with 7 grandchildren; and 24 great-grandchildren. The first born of 9 children, Jerita is also survived by her sisters, Irma Tiffany, and Marcia Hogue. Her family gives thanks for her long and faithful life serving our Lord.

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Oct 10 - Oct 21

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### PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN GREECE

May 31 - Jun 11 | Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima

### HIGHLIGHTS OF VIETNAM

Jun 5 – Jun 20 | Dr. Fred Johnson III & Ian MacNeil

### CAA\CALL STRATFORD FESTIVAL

Jun 25 – Jun 28 or Sep 16 – Sep 19

Debra Freeberg & Gary Schmidt

### ENGLAND: HERITAGE & COUNTRYSIDE EXPLORATION

Sep 11 - Sep 20 | John & Rachel Witte

### GRECIAN GETAWAY

Sep 29 - Oct 5 | Ginger Lange & Debra Bierley

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Oct 7 – Oct 17 | Nate & Deb Barendse

### A TASTE OF SPAIN AND MOROCCO: TAPAS TO TAGINES

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## Walk a Mile in My Moccasins

I was so happy as a child that I thought, “There are two kinds of people in the world: Indians, and those who want to be Indians.”



Adrian Jacobs, a member of Six Nations of the Grand River (Ont.), is senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation in the Christian Reformed Church in Canada. He is an educator on Indigenous history, culture, and contemporary issues.

**COME WITH ME** to the Six Nations Reserve in southern Ontario. Come with me to the banks of the Boston Crik. As a child I spent hours playing, often by myself, along the wooded banks of this little stream flowing through my father’s land along Third Line. I grew up in the largest reserve in Canada, with a current band membership of over 25,000. I was so happy as a child that I thought, “There are two kinds of people in the world: Indians, and those who want to be Indians.” (“Indian” was the common term for Indigenous people at the time.)

I grew up as the second of five children. Our home was a peaceful place in a neighborhood that was otherwise. My father was a faith keeper of the Handsome Lake Longhouse religion. My mother was Anglican. The longhouse and my mother’s church were down the road from one another. Even though our mother was Anglican, we children were raised in the longhouse way. Growing up, I knew my mother and father had different beliefs, but they never argued over it. There was no violence, yelling, or alcohol in my home.

Our neighborhood had four other families: two church families with alcoholic fathers, a non-church family with an alcoholic father, and another Indigenous traditional family with no alcohol in their home. One of the church families was always fighting with the non-church family, and we lived between them. My father was friends with both families, so we were always protected from their feuds.

Because of the stability and peace in my home, I had good self-esteem. I struggled with lots of challenges from experiences outside my home, as every child does, but I could strive in school without having to deal with many things others had to deal with. My parents enjoyed 57 years of

marriage. I did not learn how to fight domestically!

At 20 years old, I came to Christian faith. After this, I learned from my mother that when she had her first child, my older brother, the doctor told her she should not have any more children. She didn’t obey him. She prayed for another son who would “serve Jesus and help his people.” My mother’s prayer and God’s will has brought me to the work I now do with the Christian Reformed Church in North America as senior leader for Indigenous Justice and Reconciliation.

As a follower of Christ, I have had to learn to fight—in a good way—to deal with my emotions and those of others in the real work of relationship building. Once, after I complained to my mother about her silence and subject-changing after I shared my emotional struggles with her, she told me, “One thing your father and I didn’t do for you kids was show you how to deal with your emotions.” This admission by my saint-like mother really helped me embrace the emotional struggle that is the real rocky ground of reconciliation between people.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has clearly shown the damage to Indigenous people in Canada through the Indian Residential Schools, and Justice Murray Sinclair, the commission’s former chair, has indicated the long, upward climb we face on the mountain of reconciliation. It took more than 150 years for the damage to be inflicted on Indigenous people through the residential school system, which only ended in 1996. He said it will take a few generations to undo the damage and build new, healed relationships between Indigenous people and settlers in Canada. I am ready to do my part. **B**



## My Last Dollar

‘Jesus is like that. When you are at the end of everything, you still have him. He’s always there when you’re truly in need.’



Rod Huguen is a retired co-founder of the Village Church in Tucson, Ariz., and disciples and mentors young pastors and leaders on behalf of Classis Arizona. He is author of *Parallels: A Lenten Devotional*.

**“I’VE BEEN A JUNKIE** for a long time, pastor.”

His gaunt, cancer-ridden, AIDS-diseased body testified to the truth of his words. He was dying. There was no doubt about it. The rehabilitation program I was part of had placed him in an shabby, inexpensive hotel room to help keep him as comfortable as possible during his last days. I’d gone to visit him. He huddled, shivering, under several blankets as we chatted about his life.

Life on the streets had been brutal for him. Eating out of dumpsters and sleeping on park benches all while constantly searching for heroin had taken a toll. AIDS had ravaged his body, and now it kept him outside the community of the rehab center. It was a rough existence.

I had difficulty sitting at his bedside and seeing up close all the devastation. But his eyes were bright and engaging and revealed something deeper than the loss. “Since I’ve found Jesus,” he said, “I’m no longer running. I no longer crave the junk. It’s all kind of a miracle. I’m at peace.”

I rejoiced with him while choking back tears.

“Jesus is always with you, pastor. He’s like that \$20 bill that every junkie hides in his shoe or stuffs in a hidden compartment in his wallet. If all hell breaks loose, a junkie always has that one last fix stashed away. Jesus is like that. When you are at the end of everything, you still have him. He’s always there when you’re truly in need.”

I asked him if he still had a \$20 hidden somewhere. He grinned and told me he didn’t need it anymore. “All my needs are taken care of. I have a place to sleep, food to eat, and a roof over my head.” Then, he ruefully added, “Honestly, I always have a buck or two

hidden away. Old habits die hard.” He smiled. “Besides, I might want a soda or something from the vending machine.” We laughed together, mostly to keep the tears away.


When I finally stood to leave, he asked me to grab his wallet from the table. I obliged and he pulled a dollar bill out of it and handed it to me.

I declined it, telling him, “You need it way more than me. After all, you may crave a soda.”

He smiled again. “I want you to take it, pastor. I want you to stick it in your wallet, and if you’re ever stone-cold broke, open your wallet and look at it and remember that Jesus cares for you and he will provide everything you need.”

I took it, folded it up, and put it in one of those little slots behind my driver’s license. He nodded approvingly. “You’d make a good junkie,” he laughed.

He died a few weeks later.

I open my wallet from time to time and take the dollar out—not because I’m broke, but because I need to remember that Jesus provides all I need. 



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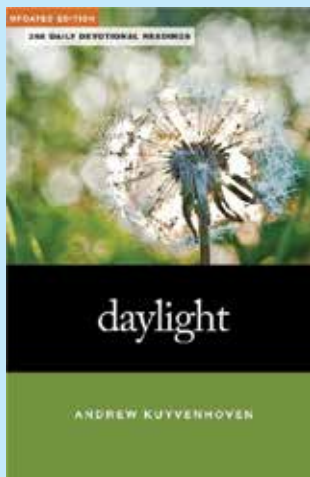
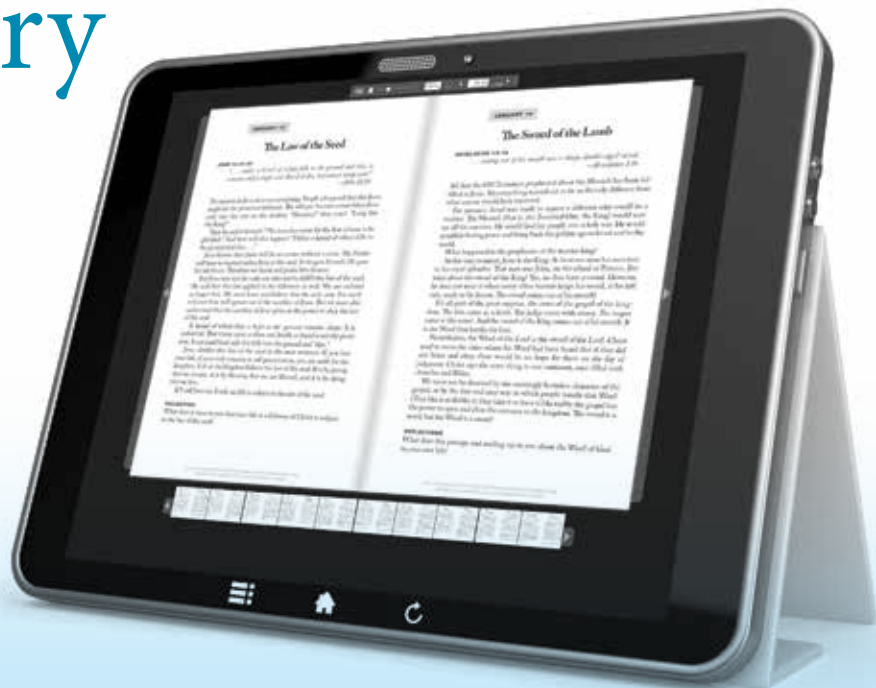
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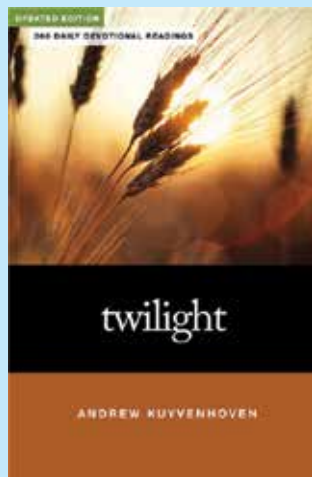
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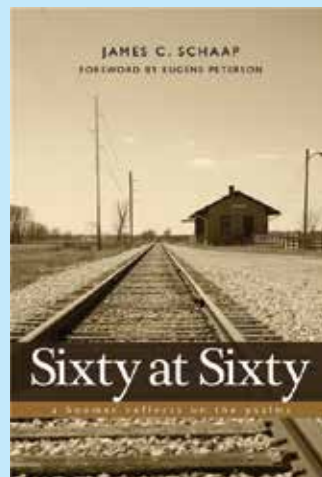
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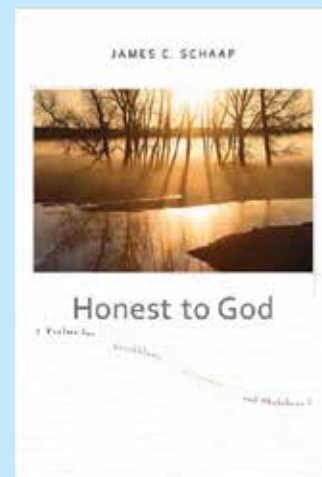
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