

BANNER

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¹⁶ **Good Job! Learning to Fail**
²⁰ **Sex, Intimacy, and
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⁵⁰ **Learning
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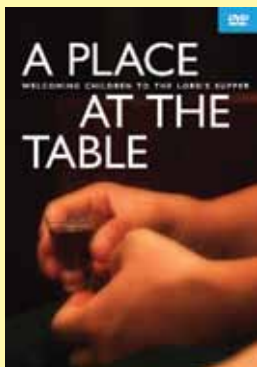
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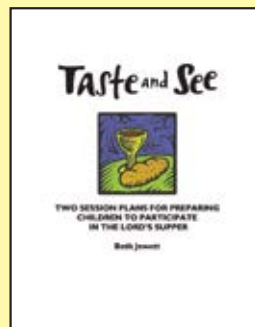
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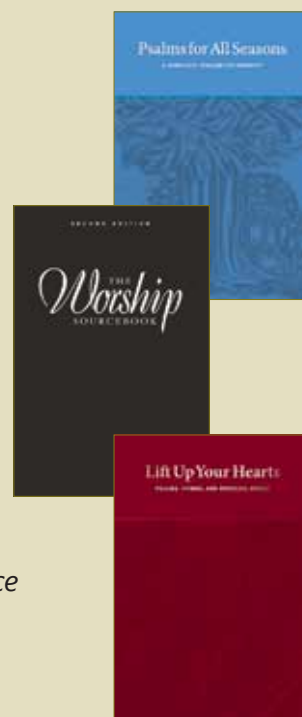
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Volume 148 | Number 7 | 2013



FEATURES

- ◀ **16** **Good Job! Learning to Fail** [STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)
Kids need to know life can be tough but they can learn to thrive in spite of it.
by Judy Cook
- 20** **Sex, Intimacy, and the Single Person**
Should the church provide guidance on how to live out our sexuality?
by Chelsey Harmon and Harry Van Belle

SYNOD 2013 HIGHLIGHTS

- Beautiful Feet 10**
2013 Candidates for the Ministry
- Synod 2013 in Our View: Singing Together, Old Songs and New** by Gayla R. Postma **28**
There was an air of expectancy and hope among delegates.
- Leadership 30**
- Diversity 32**
- Faith Formation 34**
- Missions and Education 36**
- Denominational Life 38**
- Ecumenical Relations 42**
- Who Came to Synod 48**

DEPARTMENTS

- Editorial: Why We Dare Not Play It Safe** by Bob De Moor **9**
Readers can freely converse around this kitchen table.
- Catch Your Breath: Jeremiah Memories** by Ashley Stam Bonnes **15**
Jeremiah taught me to give thanks for the little things.
- Just for Kids: Bag of Tricks** by Joanne De Jonge **18** ▶
When it comes to spreading pollen, flowers use a whole bag of tricks.
- Discipleship: Money Matters** by Martha LaBarge and Todd Steen **23**
Managing our money is about more than personal financial security.
- Tuned In: Living Large** by Sandy Swartzentruber **24**
Why do video games hold such strong appeal for kids?
- On the Journey: Where Is God?** by Cal Buquet **62**
Along with Habakkuk, we wait for the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- Punch Lines 63**

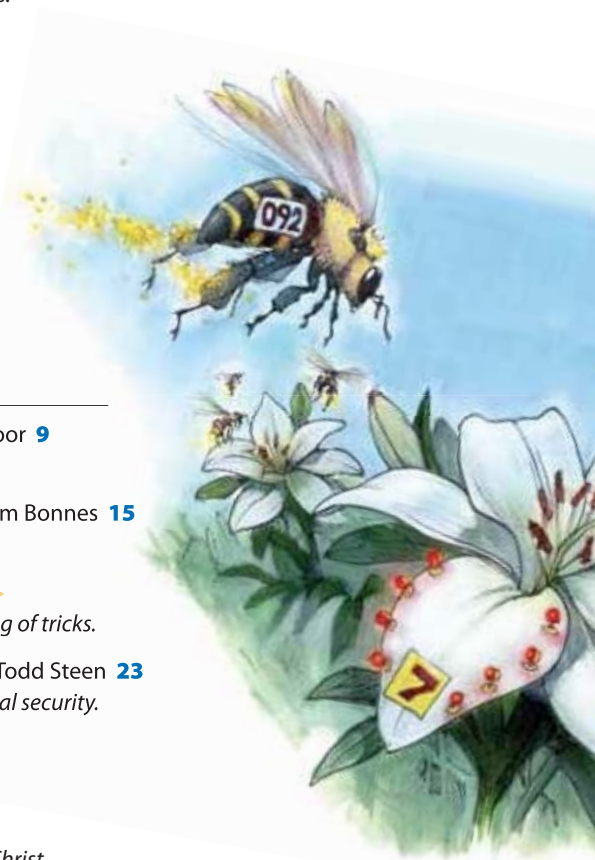
TOGETHER DOING MORE

- Specialized Ministries: Learning from Timothy** by Chris Meehan **50**
How the sin of racism affected one CRC community in the '60s.
- The View from Here: I Wish You Could . . .** by Joel Boot **54**



Cover: Theody Corton, an elder delegate from Classis Toronto, came to the Christian Reformed Church in 1978 through the work of missionaries in the Philippines. She urged delegates to continue supporting the work of Christian Reformed World Missions. "There are still more countries to go."

PHOTOGRAPH BY KAREN HUTTENGA





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Published monthly (12 issues per year).
Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids,
Mich. Postmaster, send address changes
to: The Banner, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE,
Grand Rapids, MI 49560. Canadian
publications mail agreement #40063614.
Return undeliverable Canadian addresses
to: The Banner, 3475 Mainway, PO Box
5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8.

Copyright 2013, Faith Alive Christian
Resources, a ministry of the Christian
Reformed Church. Printed in U.S.A.
The Banner (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 148,
No. 07, 2013.

Member of Associated Church Press and
Evangelical Press Association.

Why We Dare Not Play It Safe

BANNER EDITORS DON'T JUST GET TO SAY, DO, OR PUBLISH WHAT THEY WANT.

True, they don't answer directly to denominational leadership for editorial content. They answer to our widest assembly, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church. That way the magazine stays free from undue influence and is free to "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15).

Banner policy has been spelled out by synods past. The mechanisms used to keep the editor accountable on that score are

- an editorial council of Board of Trustees and Faith Alive board members,
- the Faith Alive board (now dissolved; temporarily the Board of Trustees),
- synod itself.

The highest level of scrutiny at synod comes in my meeting with the advisory committee, where synodical delegates ask questions, raise concerns, and give counsel. I enjoy those sessions. They include voices and perspectives from across the continent.

This year, as they do most years, some delegates asked why *The Banner* had published some very controversial articles. Why not play it safe and avoid stirring up trouble in our denomination? The committee was satisfied with my answer, but they wisely encouraged me to share it with you, our readers, as well.

The Banner is mandated by synod to do four things: inform, inspire, educate, and challenge its readers. The first three usually don't raise many eyebrows. However, articles that challenge sometimes do. That's because readers may mistakenly believe that such articles represent the official views of the magazine, the editor, or the denomination. But that's not necessarily so.

Since *The Banner* became an every-household magazine in 2005, the metaphor for its editorial policy remains a kitchen table—the place where family and friends freely converse about significant matters and where all reasonable voices are heard. This means that *The Banner* publishes articles (submitted or solicited) that represent different points of view. Those voices must contribute to the conversation by providing new information, perspective, argument, or insight (in a respectful, concise manner). The aim is *not* to push editorial agendas or positions, but to provide a place where important issues facing our denomination can be openly and honestly discussed. So we provide lots of avenues for reader response—especially at thebanner.org, where readers are free to comment and have their say.

The place where the editor shares his personal perspective is here on the editorial page. And there's also one place where readers get to be provocative and "pop off" soap-box style. That's in the IMHO column. Beyond that, our editorial policy allows for articles from a diversity of views and opinions—provided they are within the bounds of Scripture, don't directly advocate against the doctrines taught in the creeds and confessions, and remain reasonable and respectful.

So reader beware: do *not* take every article in *The Banner* for gospel truth. Use your discretion. Always. Especially around our kitchen table.

Scary? Perhaps. But isn't that what we're called to do together: *test the spirits* even as we maintain the unity of the body in the bonds of love? How else will we "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph. 4:15)? ■

The aim is *not* to push editorial agendas or positions, but to provide a place where important issues facing our denomination can be openly and honestly discussed.



Bob De Moor is editor of *The Banner* and pastor of preaching and administration for West End CRC, Edmonton, Alberta.



2013

Candidates for the Ministry

And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.”

—Romans 10:15

**Asterisks indicate candidates who are not eligible for call until they have completed all requirements.*

O **N THE FOLLOWING PAGES** you will find photos and descriptions of the persons approved by Synod 2013 as candidates for Minister of the Word. We could say they are nominees for the “Beautiful Feet” award.

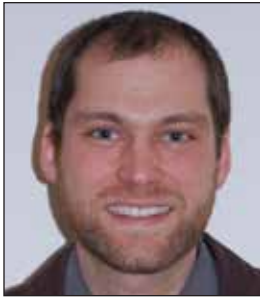
We don’t often describe feet as beautiful. Feet come in all sorts of shapes and sizes; they wear a variety of types of shoes. When we look at people, their feet are not usually the focus of our attention. Aside from the occasional celebrity foot fetish, most of us don’t find feet to be the most beautiful part of the body.

What makes feet beautiful is the message they bring. Carrying the gospel message, the “good news,” is at the heart of ordained pastoral ministry. The persons on these pages don’t want to be the focus of attention. Instead, they are eager to let God use their feet and every other part of themselves for the glory of God.

These candidates have completed the standard degree for ministry training, the Master of Divinity. Most of them have been trained at our denominational seminary, Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS). Those who have been trained at other seminaries have received a portion of their training at CTS and are familiar with the tasks, expectations, and commitments of ministry in the CRC.

As a church we are grateful for the faculty of CTS as they have worked diligently and lovingly to train these persons for ministry. We are also grateful for the home congregations and the many classis mentors and leaders who have played a part in their preparation. Finally, we are grateful to God for each of these candidates for ministry. Let us receive them with thanks and offer them our prayers and support in the journey ahead. **For more detailed information on any of these candidates, visit the Candidacy Committee website at crcna.org.** ■

—Rev. David Koll
Director of Candidacy



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Jeremiah Memories

MOST OF US are busy. When people ask how things are going, we respond, “I’m fine. Keeping busy.” If they give us a few more seconds of their time, we might run through the list of things we need to do: pick up groceries, do the laundry, finish schoolwork, pay bills, meet with so-and-so.

When I started seminary almost three years ago, one of the requirements of the Master of Divinity program was to participate in an hour of volunteer service each week. This requirement encourages students to model lives of service both now and in the future. But I saw it as one more thing to add to my already overwhelming schedule.

For the past two years I’ve participated in Kids Hope USA, a mentoring program for at-risk children. Every Thursday afternoon I drive to a local public elementary school to mentor my fifth-grade friend. I’ll call him Jeremiah. Jeremiah greets me with a warm smile and we spend an enjoyable hour together playing games, finishing math sheets, and memorizing multiplication tables. My weekly visit with Jeremiah breaks up my day and gives me energy for the other things I need to accomplish. This hour is a bit of an escape from my life as a student. For me it’s an hour of joy.

One of my favorite “Jeremiah memories” occurred this past December. I went to his school early to help deliver Christmas fruit baskets to Kids Hope participants. After choosing a basket for Jeremiah, I walked upstairs to the fifth-grade classroom. I knocked on the door, opened it, and asked, “Can I pull Jeremiah out of class for a couple of minutes?” Jeremiah gave me a confused look. He wasn’t expecting me. I handed him a white plas-

A big toothy grin formed on his face. His eyes met mine.

tic bag and said, “Jeremiah, I know I’m early, and you’re surprised to see me. I wanted to give you and your family a little something for Christmas.” Jeremiah peered into the bag, eyes wide. A big toothy grin formed on his face. His eyes met mine. He exclaimed, “Thank you, Ashley. Thank you!” The fruit basket I’d given Jeremiah wasn’t anything spectacular—an apple, an orange, a pear, and some grapes wrapped in cellophane. Yet to Jeremiah this was a wonderfully unexpected gift.

I hope I never forget the look on Jeremiah’s face as he expressed thankfulness about something so small, so simple. I wonder how often I miss moments of thankfulness because I’m too busy or because I think I deserve what I receive.

Jeremiah reminded me that even the little things in our lives are gifts that can evoke joyful gratitude. Thankful lives reflect the great gift of salvation that we have received through Jesus’ death on the cross—the gift of grace that is undeserved yet fills our every need. Thank you, Lord Jesus. Thank you! ■



Ashley Stam Bonnes is a recent graduate of the MDiv program at Calvin Theological Seminary and a current candidate for ministry of the Word in the CRCNA.

Good Job! Learning to Fail



LIFE IS FULL OF PARADOXES.

For parents this is especially the case: We love our toddlers above all else, but they drive us to distraction once they learn to say no. We think of our teens as adorable,

but they can be completely self-absorbed, cruel to their peers, and disdainful of us, their parents—in other words, not pleasant to be around.

So here's the question: how do we affirm our kids' sense of self so they will develop a healthy self-esteem while at the same time teaching them the coping skills and resilience they'll need when life treats them unfairly or they mess up? They will sometimes be passed over for someone

else. Their talents will sometimes be underappreciated. Their passion for becoming, say, a doctor, will not always match their academic or personal abilities to achieve that goal. And sometimes our kids will make bad mistakes with unpleasant or even dire consequences.

All these factors are capable of knocking a carefully nurtured self-esteem right out of the ballpark, at least for a time, much to our—and our children's—consternation and fear.

Ages 2 to 12

Children learn about themselves mostly from their parents and other caregivers, but they also take their cues from the culture they grow up in and the com-

munities they are part of. The most common temptation to which parents fall prey is to teach their children, from about ages 2 to 12, that they are special—more special than anyone else. In fact, parents who put their kids on a pedestal and give them the message that that they are smarter, better-looking, more gifted, and more important than anyone else do their kids no favor. When parents sacrifice everything for their children, their kids learn that the world revolves around them and that it should conform to their needs. They experience themselves as “kings/queens of the castle.”

Western culture often conspires to reinforce that notion. Pop culture for young girls, for instance, encourages them

to identify with “princess” status by providing outfits, books, and movies in abundance that reinforce that identity. Boys are taught to identify with all-powerful superheroes who always win.

Parents and teachers do well to be conscious of the cultural stereotypes kids identify with and to balance their influence with values and experiences that help kids

the only important “mirror” that can tell them who they are, what their place is in the world, and whether their lives matter.

Social media seems to have further broadened peer identification. More often than not parents are frustrated because their teens incessantly argue against the rules they try to impose to keep their kids safe and to teach Christian morals. Par-

thing’s fine.” Risky behavior in the world doesn’t scare many teens because their lives have been too sheltered.

Children who grow up in insular communities, including the mostly white and affluent Christian Reformed Church in North America, are especially at a disadvantage.

Learning to let their children experience the world as it really is and letting them risk harm in that world is a challenge for parents. But it should also help them relax their vigilance on behalf of their children. In the same way that a too-clean, germ-free environment can actually hurt a child’s developing immune system, a too-protected childhood can actually hurt a child’s ability to face and overcome the hardships of life. Like all of us, children learn best by doing. Besides being unconditionally loved no matter who they are and what they will become, our children need to know life can be tough—but they can get through the difficulty and learn to thrive in spite of it.

This helps us understand how God parents all of us. The question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” is answered when we realize that God matures us not only through his unconditional love and amazing grace but also through the hardships we suffer. We are refined through these experiences, and so are our children.

The good news of the gospel is that God promises to be with us “in the midst of trouble” (Ps. 138). In fact, God will use everything that happens in our lives to our benefit if we choose to trust in him.

More often than not, the hard lessons in life drive both us and our children back to a Father who has provided us with this no-fail guarantee in Jesus. What a relief! ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Judy Cook is a family therapist and a member of Meadowland Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ontario.

From a young age, kids need to learn to accept failure.

learn the necessity of fitting in, of working to achieve while accepting that they can’t always have what they want. From a young age, kids need to learn to accept failure and risk-taking in the face of uncertainty. They need to learn not to give up too soon after having failed at something. And they need to learn to be gracious and courageous in the face of defeat. Parents can look for activities that teach their kids these values. For instance, children as young as 3 can be taught they won’t always win in a competitive game and that losing is OK too—the game itself rather than winning is the challenge.

Teens

Teens ages 12 to 18 often present a special challenge for parents. In this stage of their development, teens learn to know themselves as separate from their parents and others. Paradoxically, they develop this separate identity—who they are and what they want to be—as part of the herd, namely, their friends and peer groups. Teen culture often seems to take on a life of its own. Kids appear to feel enormous pressure to belong to this social grouping. They seem to disdain the influence of any adults in their lives—mainly their parents and their teachers—and doubt its relevance. In contrast, they see the opinions and acceptance or rejection of their peers as

ents end up feeling helpless in the face of their teens’ apparent disrespect and self-will and fearful that the path their children are on will lead to alienation at best and destruction at worst.

But there is good news. New research on teen brains is helping parents better understand their teens’ behavior. As part of nurturing their teens to become mature and loving adults, parents are learning what they can do to give their kids experiences of the world beyond those within their kids’ peer groups.

In their book *NurtureShock: New Thinking About Children* (Twelve, 2009), Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman talk about parent/teen conflict in a new way. The teenaged brain, they say, “can think abstractly, but not *feel* abstractly.” Within their social groups, teens learn what it means to fail, to be afraid, to take risks. But they develop no such feelings *outside* of their social groupings because failure and resilience are not built in as part of their identify formation, in many cases because their parents are affluent enough to shield them from “the world” too well. So, for instance, parents may say to their teen, “What made you do such a stupid thing?” And because he or she has not been taught to fail, to take risks, to achieve in spite of obstacles, the honest answer may be, “You don’t have to worry, every-

Bag of Tricks

It's amazing what flowers will do to spread their pollen. They *must* spread it to make good seeds! Read on to find out what's in a flower's bag of tricks.



Hide the Nectar

Lots of flowers make nectar, a sweet liquid that attracts insects. Bugs love nectar. Some actually need it to stay alive. The nectar is stored in little "cups" deep down inside the blossoms. Insects have to push past the pollen parts on the outside edge of the blossoms to get to the nectar. Pollen brushes onto their bodies and they carry it to the next flower.

Look closely at some blooming flowers. You'll probably find the fuzzy pollen parts easily. But you usually won't find the nectar cups—they're out of sight. Somehow the bugs know exactly where they are!

Bee Zero-Niner-Two...
You are cleared for landing
on landing petal seven.
Repeat, petal seven, over.

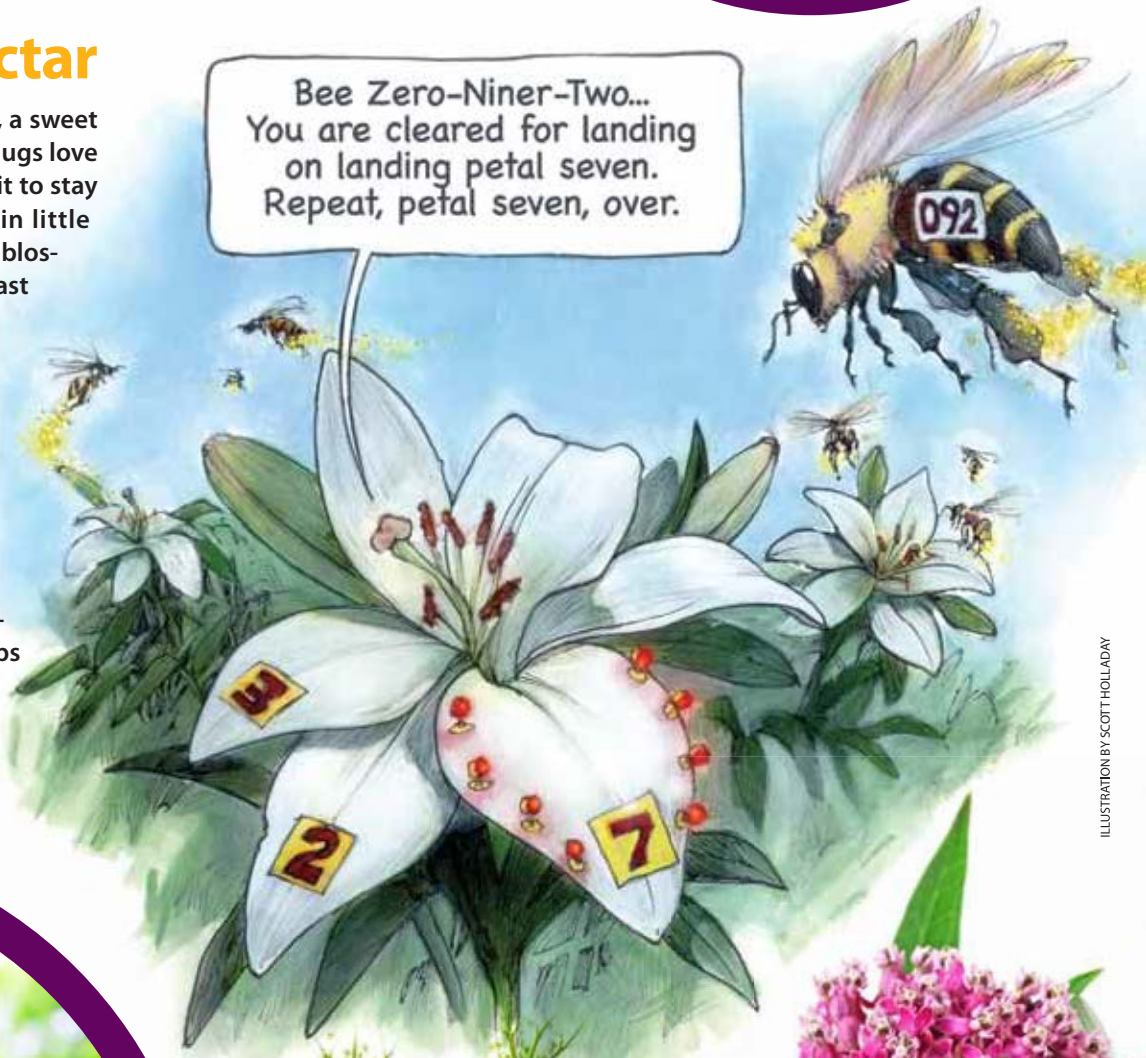


ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY



Go with the Crowd

Some flowers are just too small to attract attention, so they group together to make one big "flower." Look closely at a milkweed, Queen Anne's lace, or daisy. What looks like one big flower is really a whole bouquet of tiny flowers. As bugs travel among the tiny flowers, they pick up lots of nectar and spread lots of pollen.

Wear the Right Color

Have you ever seen a bee on a red flower? Not likely. That's because bees can't see the color red very well. So flowers that count on bees to spread their pollen don't wear red.

Hummingbirds, on the other hand, love red flowers. Notice the way "hummingbird flowers" dangle down from the plant when they're open. That's so hummers can hover in front of them.

The white flower of a Bladder Campion opens at night. Moths fly at night and can see white easily. They hover rather than land. So the white flower facing straight out is perfect for them.

Flowers that use butterflies to spread pollen—certain lilies, for example—bloom facing upward. That gives the butterflies a nice big landing platform.

Put on Perfume

If you go outside just after sunset, you might notice the faint smell of perfume in the air. That could be some flowers up to their old tricks. If they're pollinated by night flyers, they send out scent signals when those night flyers are out.

Most insects have much more sensitive smell detectors than we do. Imagine how strong those flower scents are to them. They probably feel like you do when you go into a pizza place. Think about it!

... Or Go It Alone

In most woodlands, flowers blossom in early spring, before the trees leaf out. They get more sunshine that way, and insect pollinators can find them easily.

Wild leek is one flower that doesn't seem to get it. It blooms well after the trees have leafed out and other flowers have been pollinated. Wild leek flowers stand almost all alone in the woods waiting for bugs to come by.

Fortunately there are always a few insects that cruise the woods after spring bloom. All they see is wild leek. So that's where they go for nectar. Sometime it makes sense to avoid the crowd and do your own thing!



Forget about Bugs

... or birds, or any other living pollinator. Some flowers simply toss their pollen into the air and let it fall where it may.

Take grass, for instance. If you stop mowing your lawn, grass "goes to seed." When that happens, it looks like the grass has grown tiny green brushes. Those are actually grass "flowers."

Hardly anyone ever notices wild grass flowers. That's because they're not made to be noticed. They're on slender stalks that sway in the breeze and release their seeds to the wind.

Some of that pollen has to land in exactly the right place on exactly the right kind of plant. To increase the chances of that happening, the plant makes lots and lots of pollen.

Aaaah-choo!

People who suffer from hay fever are probably allergic to ragweed pollen. Ragweed is a green plant that's pollinated by wind. It blooms in the fall at about the same time goldenrod blooms. Goldenrod is pollinated by insects. It has big stalks of yellow flowers so bugs notice it—and so do we. Even though its pollen is designed to stick to bugs and is too heavy to float in the air, we blame it for our allergies. Meanwhile, the ragweed plant that really makes us sneeze goes unnoticed. It doesn't need us—or bugs. But its pollen bugs us!



Enough Already

You get the point: flowers do much more than just bloom. Who knew God made them with such a complex bag of tricks for spreading pollen? Midsummer is the time for you to go out and watch flowers use those tricks.

Watch, wonder, and thank God for a beautiful summer and a wonderful world!



Joanne De Jonge is a freelance writer and a former U.S. National Park Ranger. She attends West Valley Christian Fellowship in Phoenix, Ariz.



BY CHELSEY HARMON AND HARRY VAN BELLE

SEX INTIMACY AND THE SINGLE PERSON



Christians agree that sexuality is a gift from God. But should the church provide guidance on people's sexual behavior? If so, what principles should it use? Until now, the position of churches has been primarily limited to the prohibition of sex before marriage. But how, then, are single people supposed to live out their sexuality? Here are two perspectives to begin the conversation. —Editor

Single and Sexual: As God Created Us

BY CHELSEY L. HARMON

IN KEEPING WITH HIS GREAT WISDOM, God designed and created men and women as sexual beings. Somewhere along the way our understanding of sexuality became mostly about sex—that sacred union intended exclusively for married people. But what about people who are widowed or divorced, who are purposefully celibate or functionally single, or who are “single and ready to mingle”? What are they supposed to do with their sexuality?

Offering pastoral and practical advice for the diverse variety of single people in the church is no small task. Perhaps the best place to begin is by telling the truth about sex, sexuality, and identity.

First, it's important to distinguish between sex and sexuality. They're not the same thing. Sex is what we *do*, sexuality is what we *are*. Although as a single person you may not be having sex right now, sexuality is for always. It's an essential part of your being. Even in the new heaven and new earth we will be sexual beings because we'll still be male and female. Our physical bodies matter. Look no further than the incarnation, when God took on flesh—including a sexual nature. Our whole selves matter to God and therefore should also matter to us.

Second, your experience of sexuality isn't something to be conquered or mastered. Anyone who tries to make you believe that is wrong. You aren't going to be able to defeat or avoid physical attraction and the desire for intimacy. That God-made desire for intimacy can be expressed in any number of ways, from a meaningful conversation with a friend or the hug of a child to the sexual union of two people. Just because you aren't experiencing some of these forms of intimacy doesn't mean you don't—or shouldn't—have the desire to experience them. Nor is it right for you to believe that you must experience all forms of intimacy in order to be “complete.” Consider Jesus, a fully human man who never had sexual intercourse. Would you describe his existence as incomplete? Sex is not integral to our identity; intimacy is.

Third, we need to acknowledge how difficult we often find this sexual part of our life, how easy it is for us to sin and to find ourselves separated from others and from God. God certainly made us good as sexual beings, but as soon as sin entered the world, our sexuality became a source of isolation. “It feels good” is never enough justification for doing anything. Rather, in all things, including what we do in our minds and with our bodies sexually, we are meant to give glory and honor to God. Being married doesn't safeguard us from sexual sin either; in fact, it simply adds to the number of opportunities we have to sin.

So what are we to do? I'd like to suggest three ways God invites us to explore how we're made.

1. Be honest in safe places. When we open up to God in prayer and to one another in love and name the things that are shaping our life, the Holy Spirit finds more access points into the core of our being and we become more teachable. Think about it: if it wasn't good for Adam to be alone in the

Garden of Eden, when literally everything was supposed to be right with the world, then it really isn't good for you to be alone now. God uses community to support, encourage, challenge, chastise, and shape us, so we must submit to the discipline and blessings of relationships.

The good news is that, in our culture, most of us get to choose whom we share our lives with. Singles are blessed to experience intimacy that goes beyond bloodlines, and our relationships point to the greater truth that all of God's people are family, brothers and sisters in Christ. So surround yourself with people who are both similar and different from you, people who will both support and challenge you. You may be surprised by the roles your friends take on.

2. Be yourself. Get to know who you are. Be ethically and morally responsible, but don't be afraid to explore how you are a sexual being. Remember, you were made by God's good design.

Be physical: play sports, get a massage, take a long walk. Be beautiful and loving: when another human being desires you, be reminded of how much *more* God desires you. How does being desired make you feel? How does it feel to desire another? How do all of these things make your body feel and your heart and mind react? Wonder and learn in community, through the study of Scripture and other trustworthy sources, and, inevitably, through confession and repentance, seeking to be faithful in all things.

3. Be empathetic. Try to understand where people are coming from. Much of other people's reactions, comments, and worries about your singleness and sexual expressions aren't actually about you. In fact, much of what they say on the subject is an expression of their own fears. Some people may be afraid that your singleness threatens their marriage. Some will never understand that men and women can be “just friends.” And some others always will think that all men think about is sex.

Though we are accountable to one another, you shouldn't feel the extra burden of carrying false perceptions. In all things, remember that you have an audience of one—the One who desires more than just your devotion and right living. God desires all that you are. So whether single or married, strive to live with integrity as God intended.

If you're single, my hope is that this may serve as the starting point of a conversation and journey of learning for you. May you discover the beautiful person God lovingly created to flourish, even as a “party of one.” »



Chelsey Harmon is associate pastor at Christ Community Church in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

Where Do We Draw the Line?

BY HARRY VAN BELLE

THE RECORD OF THE CHURCH when it comes to sex has not been stellar. It has, in fact, been characterized by the denial of sex. For much of its history, the message of the church to young people has been one of abstinence. If you wanted to become a full-time servant of God, your best bet was to become a nun or an unmarried priest—a prejudice that lingers to this day in churches that admonish their young people to abstain from sex until marriage.

This admonition about lovemaking is ironic, as anyone who practices sexual intercourse knows. That's because good sex can only happen in a relationship where the partners are able to let go, to passionately surrender to one another. By contrast, the North American obsession with performance in sexual relations—Viagra-induced or not—spells death to a relationship where you need to know yourself received, warts and all, by the other. The real goal of lovemaking is not the pursuit of technical expertise but the enjoyment of romantic intimacy, as the Song of Songs so poetically unfolds.

Nor is this prohibition about sex biblical. If I read Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs correctly, then God wants people to take pleasure in their youth—and that pleasure most certainly includes lovemaking. Could it be that God is less hung up about sex than we are, especially in North America?

Premarital Sex

Whether Christian single people should or should not practice premarital sex is a question that may have been relevant two or three generations ago, but the situation today has changed.

First, whereas in earlier times the practice of sexual intercourse among unmarried youths realistically could—and often did—result in pregnancy, today's young people have a variety of contraceptives at their disposal to minimize that risk. What's more, young couples generally practice "safe sex" to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.

Second, for all kinds of good reasons, people today tend to remain single a decade longer than their parents and grandparents did. During their 20s, many people are in a semi-dependent financial state and perhaps are still in school. They generally do not feel ready to marry and start a family before they reach their 30s.

Their situation is comparable to that of their grandparents in Europe several generations ago when, because of a severe housing shortage, young couples were often engaged to be married for longer than a decade. In the meantime they did have unprotected sexual intercourse, resulting in a large number of what used to be called "shotgun marriages." Young couples today are more likely to solve this dilemma by deciding to move in together. Many North American churches frown upon such relationships.

The question is whether they should.

Recreational Sex

An increasingly common form of premarital sex in our culture is recreational sex, or sex that's divorced from intimacy and

commitment. One form of that is "hooking up," the one-night stand in which two people meet one another (often in a bar), strike up a conversation, find they like each other, and go home to have sex. Nothing is considered other than the pleasure each gives to the other.

How should we judge these practices of casual and committed sex? What criteria can we use to evaluate these situations?

The prohibition of sex before marriage uses the criterion of behavior. We say single people should not engage in sex—period. But what exactly do we consider premarital sex? Where do we draw the line? Is it hugging or kissing, with or without the tongues touching? Is it touching each other's genitals or mutual masturbation? Is it oral sex or penetration, with or without ejaculation? How far can people go and still abstain from sex? How does the church decide how far young people should go? *Should* the church decide this question? Is the church competent to decide?

Maturity and Commitment

Better criteria for evaluating people's sexual behavior, I suggest, are maturity and commitment. Whether or not to engage in premarital sex should depend on the strength of the personal maturity of single people and on their level of commitment toward one another. These criteria, I believe, are much more appropriate ones for the church to consider in providing guidelines for sexual behavior. How mature should young people be? How intimate and committed should their relationship be before they *can afford* to have sex?

I'm not persuaded that recreational sex or "hooking up" is valid behavior for young people, let alone for Christian young people. Sex belongs within an intimate, committed relationship between two reasonably mature young people. But I do think, based on these same principles, that the church should change its stance on premarital cohabitation, recognizing that such relationships enable single adults to respond in a responsible way to the times they live in.

In the meantime, many young people have long decided to ignore the church and make their own choices for sexual behavior. I believe it's fair to suggest that most young people are responsible enough to distinguish between "hooking up" and sex as an expression of committed intimacy.

With respect to guidelines for sexual behavior, as with other contemporary issues, I fear that the church is playing catch-up in defense of a status quo that no longer exists instead of leading the next generation with biblically grounded insights. You may well differ with me on what those principles should be. This isn't the final word on how the church might provide guidance in the area of sexuality. But it's a beginning. ■



Harry Van Belle is emeritus professor of psychology at The Kings University College and a member of Inglewood CRC, Edmonton, Alberta.

Money Matters

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. —Matthew 6:21

THE SUBJECT of money is addressed more often in the Bible than almost any other. Yet Christians still struggle to make wise financial decisions.

The most recent economic downturn illustrates the lack of financial understanding and poor financial decisions of millions of North Americans. During the last decade, many homeowners refinanced their homes to take advantage of increased values. When housing prices dropped, they lost equity, and many found themselves underwater on their mortgages. Job losses and spending cuts have had a negative effect on local and national economies. Surely many of us have missed the boat of good stewardship.

Meanwhile, Christians have turned for advice to a variety of financial advisors whose counsel runs along a continuum from asceticism to materialism. On one end of the continuum are those who promote a simple lifestyle and who view the ability to create wealth negatively. Purchasing anything more than necessities is frowned on, as is saving large amounts of money for the future. On the other end are those who define success and happiness in terms of material goods. Accumulating wealth becomes the overarching rule to live by. This position is characterized by a lack of concern for those who are left behind by the process of wealth creation.

Dave Ramsey's popularity as a personal financial advisor has increased greatly in this tight economy, especially among Christians. Ramsey's mantra is "If you will live like no one else, later you can live like no one else." The "living like no one else" he is talking about focuses primarily on material well-being, although he



For Christians, personal finance is not just personal.

also acknowledges that achieving material success allows more choices in other areas of life. Ramsey advocates cutting spending, ridding yourself of all debt, and saving. He urges followers of his money makeover plan to take on extra jobs to get rid of debt so later on they can have fun. Ramsey often depicts the millionaire as the paragon of success. Although following the "baby steps" of his plan has undoubtedly had a positive effect on the financial condition of many believers, it may not result in good stewardship.

Focusing on our own material future to such a great extent can make us miss opportunities to help others. Instead, Matthew 6:33 reminds us that we are to seek God's kingdom. Our money is not our own. Our decisions about personal finances ought to be shaped by our call to be excellent stewards, accountable in all things to the Giver of all good gifts. Recognizing that our ability to work is a gift from God and a way to serve God and others, we do not orient ourselves merely toward seeking wealth but toward fulfilling God's call for

all of our lives. Our consumption can provide others with jobs that in turn supply their needs. Our investments should focus not solely on the economic rate of return but also on non-monetary values. When we follow a values-based approach to investing, we help to advance companies that positively impact the kingdom.

For Christians, personal finance is not just personal—nor is it purely financial. We desire to serve God with all of our financial decisions and love our neighbors as ourselves in our saving, our spending, and our working. ■



Martha LaBarge, a professor of accounting at Hope College, Holland, Mich., is a member of Daybreak Community Wesleyan Church in Hudsonville, Mich.



Todd Steen, a professor of economics at Hope College, Holland, Mich., is a member of Park Christian Reformed Church in Holland.

Living Large



MANY PARENTS, ME INCLUDED, harbor a deep grudge against video games. Seeing our kids playing them turns us into nagging harridans whose vision of well-used play time involves skipping rope or playing Kick the Can.

But recently I caught part of a conversation between radio journalist David Brancaccio and Dave Georgesen of Sony Online Entertainment that offered a bit of enlightenment. Speaking about video games, Georgesen said, “We all want to be better than what we are in real life, and games are a mechanism to be able to do that. People can go in and have a ‘larger than life’ life.”

At first blush, that might seem to be a bad thing—something people who are out of touch with reality might aspire to. Calvinists might say that wanting to be “larger than life” is a sign of misplaced pride. Psychologists might suggest that seeking to be something we’re not indicates either an inflated ego or a shriveled self-image. But really, isn’t the instinct to

Many parents harbor a deep grudge against video games.

be “larger than life” a driving force behind some of the best human impulses, including religious belief?

We want assurance that we are more than flesh and bones, that what we do transcends the mundane details of our everyday existence, that the physical world is not all there is, and that the supernatural world is not fictional. We read good books and watch good films because they inspire us to be more fully human, to participate in the triumph of good over evil, and even to experience the divine.

So it really shouldn’t surprise us that our kids want the same things from their digital entertainment.

Perhaps what we should find dismaying is not that kids are playing video games but that game developers have exhibited such a narrow vision for an incredibly powerful medium. Searching for positive yet engaging games that interest kids over the age of 10 is a discouraging and often fruitless pursuit. Here’s hoping that the next generation of game developers will use their imagination to help kids live “larger than life”—onscreen and off. ■



Sandy Swartzentruber is a freelance writer and editor. She attends Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

THE LOWDOWN: VIDEO GAMES

Some games have successfully broken the mainstream formula and are not only nonviolent but artistic, intuitive, thought-provoking, and genuinely fun. Recommended for middle school and up.

Minecraft: An endless world made entirely out of blocks is waiting for you to explore. With seemingly simple graphics, it is incredibly complex. (PC, Mac, Xbox 360)

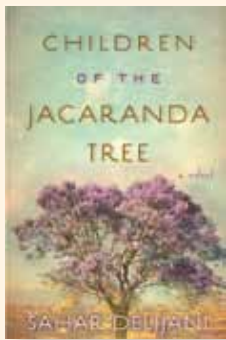
Journey: With unique gameplay and breathtaking graphics, this is the “Mona Lisa” of games. It only takes about two hours to play, but quality over quantity applies to the video game industry as well. (PS3)

Portal 2: A girl is trapped in an underground laboratory after an apocalyptic event. This puzzle game, riddled with smart humor, requires a sharp mind with good reflexes. (PC, Xbox 360, PS3)

FEZ: Artistic and intuitive, FEZ is a 2D platform game with 3D environments. Anyone who has played a side-scrolling game like Mario can enjoy this game. (PC, Xbox 360)

Braid: With the touch of a button, time can be reversed and all your mishaps undo themselves. Every level of this enthralling game holds new and exciting surprises. (PC, Xbox 360, Mac, PS3)

—compiled by Andrew Quist



Children of the Jacaranda Tree

by Sahar Delijani
reviewed by Kristy Quist

Opening with a woman giving birth while being held prisoner, author Sahar Delijani weaves together the stories of three generations of Iranians. The oldest endures imprisonment and executions, the second is left to pick up the pieces, and a third grows up in fear and insecurity. The novel explores the effect that oppression has on relationships, leaving the younger generation searching—some for solace and some for change. Poetic writing and compelling stories carry readers to another time and place, as well as to a new level of understanding. (Atria)



Quartet

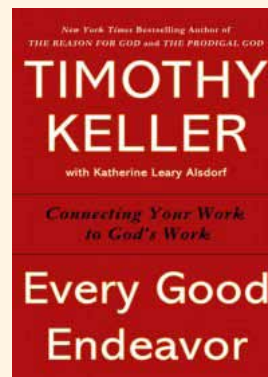
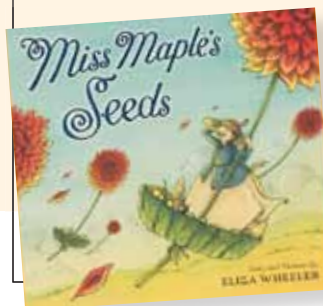
reviewed by Sandy Swartzentruber

Friends and former opera colleagues Reginald, Wilf, and Cissy live happily at Beecham House, a retirement home for musicians. Enter Jean (Maggie Smith)—a feisty soprano who shattered Reg’s heart years ago. When asked to perform a quartet from *Rigoletto* at a fundraiser gala, these singers must deal with each other’s egos and quirks as they navigate the uncertain terrain of advancing years and past regrets. By turns comic, touching, melancholy, and irreverent, this film is a charming, affirming tribute to friendship, forbearance, and life’s “third act.” On disc now. (Weinstein)

Miss Maple’s Seeds

by Eliza Wheeler
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Miss Maple is on a mission. All summer she looks for orphan seeds that failed to germinate. She transports them to her cozy home and teaches them what it means to be a seed. When spring comes, she sends them out into the world with this comforting message, “Never forget that even the grandest of trees once had to grow up from the smallest of seeds.” In this picture book, Wheeler’s gentle, earth-toned illustrations and winsome narrative capture the uniqueness of all four seasons and the built-in potential of each seed. Ages 3-6. (Nancy Paulsen Books)



Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Work

by Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

This profoundly biblical exposition of what it means to be a child of God at work in the world is both enlightening and inspiring. The authors note the necessity for Christians to recover the meaning of vocation—to understand that their work is not primarily for their own benefit, but for God’s glory and the common good. Such an understanding is undergirded by the hope that “every good endeavor, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God’s calling, can matter forever.” (Dutton)



Regions of Light and Sound of God

by Jim James
reviewed by Greg Veltman

In his first solo effort, Jim James, front man of the much louder and bombastic My Morning Jacket, takes a more mellow and reflective tone. His distinct vocals take up more introspective and spiritual questions. On “All Is Forgiven” he sings, “Son of man, was born in Bethlehem, called God / All us plan same old hallway to man / With words from God / Who said that all is forgiven.” Firmly planted in the roots rock tradition, James uses all of his imagination, including parts for choirs, horns, keys, and a dynamic rhythm section. (ATO Records)

MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

Synod 2013: Singing Together, Old Songs and New

In a week marked by humor and grace and bathed in prayer, Synod 2013 had an air of expectancy, even longing, to move forward as a church into a future full of hope, while not losing the biblical and theological foundations that have held firm through the ages.

In this year of the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, references abounded in word and in song to Question & Answer 1, that we are not our own but belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

It was in that comfort that delegates were able to take steps toward a future that executive director Joel Boot described as a launch (p. 38), sometimes in

uncertain directions, but with God guiding the flight plan.

As delegates learned new songs and sang old favorites from *Lift Up Your Hearts*, so in the discussions and decisions they tried out some new tunes while hanging on to some old ones.

New Songs

Synod took more steps to achieving full ethnic diversity, building on work already done and setting new concrete goals with a budget to back it up (p. 32).

The church is moving forward with a proposal to seat deacons at major assemblies, including synod—but not without having more study on the respective roles of deacons and elders (p. 30).

Synod Writers Get the Job Done

The writers covering Synod 2013 for *The Banner* and CRC Communications were Ryan Struyk, Roxanne Van Farowe, and Charles Honey. Working behind the scenes doing live blogging, posting to Facebook and Twitter accounts, and keeping the webcast running were Jonathan Wilson, Tim Posthuma, Henry Hess, and Gayla Postma. All synod photos were taken by photographer Karen Huttenga.

Ryan Struyk, Roxanne Van Farowe, and Charles Honey.



Jose Rayas

Now that the search is on again for a new executive director, synod decided to at least consider hiring someone who is not ordained as a minister of the Word (p. 31).

Variations on Old Tunes

Synod 2013 appointed a committee to provide pastoral guidance regarding same-sex marriage while standing firm in its position on homosexuality, adopted in 1973 and affirmed in 2002 (p. 28).

An old model of centralized agencies shaping ministries has given way to a pilot project of a new model of coaches and encouragers coming alongside churches onsite all across North America (p. 35).

The Faith Formation Committee finished its six-year mandate without fanfare (p. 34), but its faith formation work lives on as the central melody as ministries and functions are realigned in the denominational ministry structure (p. 39).



Synod 2013 appointed three new study committees, including one on religious persecution (p. 29), using the new shepherding model that worked so well for the Faith Formation Committee. But a protracted discussion about who will serve on those committees shows a church that wants to be careful about who calls the tune (p. 42).

Dissonance

Synod 2013 celebrated the 125th anniversary of Christian Reformed World Missions (p. 37). At the same time, it learned of a major funding shift that will see our missionaries responsible for raising 90 percent of their basic costs (p. 37).

Delegate Thomas Byma: "Synod is like a cruise ship. They feed you really well, and it takes you a week to figure out where everything's at."



Synod agreed to let churches that exclude women from serving as officebearers move to a classis that agrees with those views, even at a great geographical distance. It's a tune no one wants to sing, but it may be better than not singing together at all (p. 40).

Harmony

Synod heard of the many ways the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America are working together and witnessed the signing of an agreement that will see World Renew be the domestic relief agency for both the CRC and the RCA (p. 43).

And even though a denominational survey shows an aging church (p. 39), a very active (and funny!) panel of young adult rep-

resentatives showed that many generations can sing together, both old songs and new (p. 42).

Rev. Terpstra, outgoing president of the Board of Trustees, spoke of the Bible's pattern of despair followed by a new resurrection of hope on the third day. "I sense God is moving in and through the Christian Reformed Church, calling us to put our hope in him, the God of the third day" (p. 41).

As newly appointed Calvin Theological Seminary professor Amanda Benckhuysen put it, "It's an exciting time in the Christian Reformed Church" (p. 36).

The church is learning that in our diversity (ethnic, gender, age) beautiful harmonies can complement singing in unison.

With God as the master composer, it's a good time to be in the choir, enjoying the old songs, and learning the new ones.

—Gayla R. Postma news editor of The Banner

Synod president William Koopmans, after a delegate suggested he apologize for an error: "I think that's a brilliant idea. That's why I did it two minutes ago."



(L-r) Officers of Synod 2013: William Verhoef, Reginald Smith, William Koopmans, and Loren Veldhuizen.

Synod 2013 Elects Experienced Executive

Synod 2013 was guided by an executive that has 27 years of combined experience.

Rev. William Koopmans, Classis Chatham, served as president for the week. This was his 15th synod, having served as a delegate and representing various committees of synod. He also served as president in 2009.

Rev. Reginald Smith, Classis Grand Rapids South, served as vice president. This was his third synod.

Elder Loren Veldhuizen, Classis Heartland, was synod's first clerk. This was Veldhuizen's third synod.

Rev. William Verhoef, Classis California South, was second clerk. This was his 10th synod, and second time serving on the executive.

Before synod started, Koopmans said he did not expect a contentious synod. "I think it will be significant in terms of visioning," he said, "where is God leading us together as a denomination while recognizing our diversity and trying to build positive momentum."

—Gayla R. Postma

Synod Approves New Study on Ministry to Homosexual Persons

After exhaustive debate, Synod 2013 decided to appoint a study committee to provide guidance on applying the denomination's policy on homosexuality to a rapidly changing culture. The Christian Reformed



Laura de Jong, young adult representative: "I'm speaking on behalf of all your children and grandchildren when I say this is the issue we are struggling with. These are our best friends and housemates and family who are struggling with this."

Church's stance on homosexuality is contained in a report to Synod 1973, and reaffirmed in a 2002 report on pastoral care.

Delegates decisively denied efforts to reexamine the CRC's 40-year-old stance that homosexual activity is sinful but the

orientation is not. The new committee's mandate does not include new biblical or sociological studies.

Instead, a study committee will work on how to communicate the current position in a loving way, given increasing public support for gay marriage and its legalization in Canada and in 11 states and Washington, D.C.

Pastors said that they need help in ministering to gay members and in responding to those asking to be married. While upholding the 1973 policy and a 2002 report calling for more gracious outreach to gay persons, increased cultural pressure has created new challenges and legal issues, they said.

"This mandate is exactly what we need to speak in love toward people who are hurting on all sides of brokenness," said Rev. Michael Bentley, Classis Northcentral Iowa.

"Obviously we need to understand the pastoral concerns," said Rev. Chad Steenwyk, Classis Holland. "But when you have pressure from groups like that, it colors our ability to look clearly at Scripture."

Others insisted that the CRC should revisit the biblical grounds of the policy because of new psychological, biological, and biblical scholarship over the past 40 years.

Elder George Monsma Jr., Classis Grand Rapids East, and Rev. Sean Baker, Classis Grand Rapids North, urged a wider study reexamining biblical teachings related to homosexuality and marriage.

"It is people from within our own tradi-

tion who are writing the books that I and my friends and many others are reading, that are challenging the assumptions of 1973," Baker said.

Young adult representatives made strong pleas for a wider study, saying that this is a prime issue for their generation.

"I'm speaking on behalf of all your children and grandchildren when I say this is the issue we are struggling with," said Laura de Jong, who will enroll in Calvin Theological Seminary this fall. "These are our best friends and housemates and family who are struggling with this."

"This is the women-in-office issue for my generation," said Cedric Parsels, a young adult representative and candidate for the ministry.

Elder Aaltje van Grootheest, Classis British Columbia North-West, implored delegates to heed the youth voices.

"I think we have to listen to our young people," van Grootheest

Michael Bentley, Classis Northcentral Iowa: "This mandate is exactly what we need to speak in love toward people who are hurting on all sides of brokenness."



Elder Aaltje van Grootheest, Classis British Columbia North-West: "I think we have to listen to our young people. They are leaving us in droves, and they are telling us this is our major issue."

said. "They are leaving us in droves, and they are telling us this is our major issue."

But some said that changing the 1973 policy could force them out of the church.

"I love the CRC," pleaded Rev. Joseph Byun, Classis Hudson. "Don't kick me out, please."

In the debate's most dramatic moment, elder Joseph Bowman of Classis Toronto said he spent 20 years in therapy trying to change his orientation, to no avail.

"I stand before you as a 40-year-old, single, celibate, and chaste yet openly gay man . . . no longer willing to be silent," Bowman told the hushed delegates.

Saying he had been excommunicated from another church, Bowman added, "I want to thank this denomination for being affirming of somebody like me."

Delegates gave him a standing ovation.

The new committee is asked to report to Synod 2016. Its mandate includes using the shepherd-ing model used by the Faith Formation Committee, which means that it will engage with churches and classes (regional groups of churches) in an ongoing way, and report to synod yearly on its progress.

—Charles Honey

Synod president

William Koopmans: "Synod is like whitewater rafting. You think you're going along smoothly, then you hit Grand Rapids. And you think, 'I'm glad this doesn't connect to Niagara Falls.'"

Delegate Bill Veenstra: "But in God all things are possible!"

Rev. Emmett Harrison,
Classis Grand Rapids
East: "What we have is a
broken criminal justice
system that is badly in
need of reform."



No New Study of Capital Punishment

Despite strong pleas to revisit the issue, Synod 2013 decided that the Christian Reformed Church does not need to conduct a new study of capital punishment.

The request came from Classis Grand Rapids East, noting that the current CRC position was formulated in 1981. Synod 1981 declared that capital punishment should be used only under "exceptional circumstances" such as a "substantial threat" to the foundation of society and should not routinely be imposed for first-degree murder.

Classis Grand Rapids East said developments since then have changed the picture. They include DNA discoveries showing that some convicted criminals were innocent. A 2005 synod report on restorative justice should also be considered, delegates said.

The United States incarcerates more people than any other developed nation—a disproportionate number of them people of color, said Rev. Emmett Harrison.

"The issue of capital punishment is perhaps the tip of the iceberg," Harrison said. "What we have is a broken criminal justice system that is badly in need of reform. I thought we are a reforming body that would take a stand on the side of justice."

"It was a good study for its time," said George Monsma, an elder from Classis Grand Rapids East. "But we know more now."

Rev. Tom Draayer of Classis Rocky Mountain said the request lacked clarity, but encouraged the classis to return next year "with a more clearly formed overture."

—Charles Honey

Synod Appoints Study Committee on Religious Persecution

Synod 2013 approved appointment of a study committee to advise the denomination on how to respond to religious persecution and religious liberty.

"All of our brothers and sisters around the world are dealing with matters of religious freedoms, and we in North America are dealing with it as well," said Rev. Henk Bruinsma of Classis Toronto, the classis that requested the study committee. "We are becoming more open to widespread secular attack in North America."

The committee's purpose is "to provide a biblical and theological framework regarding religious persecution and religious liberty" and direct the church to "walk alongside and intercede on behalf of those who are . . . denied religious liberty" globally and locally.

The study committee is asked to provide a progress report to Synod 2015 and provide the completed study to Synod 2016.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Rev. Henk Bruinsma, Classis Toronto: "All of our brothers and sisters around the world are dealing with matters of religious freedoms, and we in North America are dealing with it as well."

No Need to Study Yoga, Karate



Young adult representative Chadd Huizenga: "Yoga is not out of the sphere of reconciliation."

Despite concerns that Eastern spiritual practices undermine Christian teachings, Synod 2013 declined to authorize a study of them.

Delegates turned down a request from Classis Grand Rapids South to appoint a study committee on yoga, martial arts, and other practices rooted in Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

Several delegates forcefully urged a study, saying Eastern faiths and practices are widespread in their communities. Indeed, some Christian Reformed congregations use karate to connect with their communities.

"This situation that's being talked about is extremely insidious," said elder Mick Vanden Bosch, Classis Iakota.

"They're doing . . . things that may seem innocuous, but the devil's behind this."

Ethnic advisor Beverly De Vries said that yoga has been taught in her community's Christian school without parents' knowledge. "We need to seek out the root of where it's coming from so we know what we're up against," De Vries said.

But Chadd Huizenga, a young adult representative, said he practices yoga to glorify Christ, adding, "Christ has reconciled all things to him, and yoga is not out of the sphere of reconciliation."

Most agreed with an advisory committee that a study is not needed because there already are sufficient resources for churches to deal with the issue.

—Charles Honey

Chadd Huizenga, young adult representative: "I teach yoga, and I invite any of you who would like to, to come tomorrow morning and we can have a little yoga class."

Synod president William Koopmans: "I think you're asking some of the delegates to stretch on that one."

Synod 2013 Proposes Larger Role for Deacons

Synod 2013 took the first step toward revitalizing the role of deacons and giving them a broader role in the Christian Reformed Church.

This year's synod proposed changes to the denomination's Church Order that would see deacons join ministers and elders at the annual synod, as well as at meetings of classis (regional group of churches). The proposals require adoption by a subsequent synod to take effect.

In the meantime, deacons will be represented at synod already next year as advisers.

The recommendations came from a task force appointed by Synod 2010 to study the



Elder Paul Epley, Classis Illiana: "Let's slow it down and have a bigger discussion. I think we have a fuller, healthier church if we go that route."

role of deacons. It produced the report to synod called *Diakonia Remixed*.

Many churches already send deacons to classis, but deacons may not be delegated to synod, which is reserved for elders and ministers.

"[Having] deacons at major assemblies is a matter of full representation of the church," said Andrew Ryskamp, director of World Renew-U.S. and adviser to the task force.

Though considered equal to other officers, too often deacons are seen as "elders in training," task force members said. Most are young, first-time officeholders assigned "simpler tasks of mercy and benevolence," the study stated.

"Is the office of deacon just to decide what offerings to take and counting money?" asked Rev. Bruce Persenaire, "or should they be involved [in] thinking about how to transform their communities?"

Rev. Peter Byma, Classis Pacific Northwest, praised making greater use of deacons' gifts, noting that he once was a deacon. He said a renewed diaconate could be a beautiful fit with the Five Streams ministry priorities synod previously approved. "I can get really excited about a classis meeting that develops those five streams and the diaconate is present," he said.

But Rev. Clifford Hoekstra, Classis Iakota, was concerned about the proposal to have each classis send one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer. "That will effectively reduce the number of pastor delegates," he said, "in a time when there is less theological understanding in and outside the church."

In a long and sometimes complicated debate, many argued in favor of delegating deacons to synod and classis meetings.

Doing so would help small churches that can't always send elders and ministers to classis, said Rev. Stanley Jim, Classis Red Mesa.

"This provides a welcoming position for churches with limited leadership to be at the meetings and have a voice," Jim said.

Others objected that the changes would increase classis delegates by a third, adding expense and a duty many deacons don't want anyway.

"They want to be engaged in community," said Rev. John Vanderburgh, Classis Lake Superior. "They don't want another meeting."

Elder Paul Epley, Classis Illiana, suggested that the process be slowed down. "I'm not sure the church has discussed enough why it is important to revitalize all offices," he said. "I think we have a fuller, healthier church if we go that route."

But others thought the proposed timeline was too slow. Elder Theody Corton, Classis Toronto, said waiting for 2016 for implementation was too long. "We need full participation of deacons in all our assemblies."



Rev. Bruce Persenaire: "Is the office of deacon just to decide what offerings to take and counting money, or should they be involved [in] thinking about how to transform their communities?"

The changes proposed this year will go to Synod 2015; if adopted, they would be implemented by 2016.

Persenaire stressed that these proposals are a general direction. Before Synod 2015 will be asked to adopt the proposed changes, more study will be done on the respective roles of deacons and elders, their distinct tasks at major assemblies, and ways to revitalize both offices.

Those questions have been referred to a new task force that will report its progress to Synod 2014 before bringing a final proposal to Synod 2015 for adoption.

In the meantime, up to seven deacons will serve as advisers to Synods 2014 and 2015, functioning in a way similar to that of ethnic advisors and young adult representatives.

—Charles Honey



Rev. John Vanderburgh, Classis Lake Superior: "[Deacons] want to be engaged in community. They don't want another meeting."

Synod president William Koopmans:

“I found some money. You have to tell me how much it was and where I found it—and if you can’t meet the criteria, I’m giving it to John Bolt for the pension fund.”



“It’s hard for me to imagine we would be served as well by an unordained person as by someone who had a theological degree and an M.Div.,” said elder Paul Boersma, Classis Wisconsin.

Synod Allows Exception to Requiring Executive Director to be Clergy

Christian Reformed leaders may consider non-clergy candidates for the denomination’s top executive position, Synod 2013 decided.

Delegates approved allowing an exception to the rule that only ordained ministers can serve as executive director. That could diversify the pool of candidates for the next executive, whom synod hopes to hire in 2014, advocates said.

However, a non-clergy candidate would have to be or become a CRC office-holder such as elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor in order to be hired, delegates stipulated, which would include signing the Covenant for Office-bearers.

The Board of Trustees had hoped to hire a new executive director this year but its nominee withdrew. In their search, trustees passed over people with “wonderful qualifications” because they were not ordained pastors, said Rev. Archie VanderHart.

Delegates supported the measure as a way to possibly attract gifted leaders and foster diversity.

Others insisted the executive director needs theological education and wisdom to properly lead and represent the CRC.

“It’s hard for me to imagine we would be served as well by an unordained person as by someone who had a theological degree and

an M.Div.,” said elder Paul Boersma of Classis Wisconsin.

Elder Ruby Meekhof, Classis Northern Michigan, said a calling from God should be primary whether the candidate is ordained or not. “As pastors and elders who serve within the church, we are all called,” Meekhof said. “I believe whoever is called to this position will be able to do what is needed in order to perform their duties.”

Rev. Peter Borgdorff, who previously served as the executive director, said that while being an ordained pastor helps in dealing with other denominations, “it is an advantage, it’s not a deal-breaker.”

—Charles Honey

Synod Clarifies Status of Commissioned Pastors

Synod 2013 decided that commissioned pastors should be acknowledged by that title in their churches, and their work on church councils will be limited to their areas of ministry. Until now they have been considered elders. Commissioned pastors are ordained for work only in their own classis.

The change reflects the reality of the functions performed by commissioned pastors, formerly called evangelists and later ministry associates, supporters said.

“In most congregations, the recognition that the person is a pastor has already happened,” said David Koll, director of the CRC Candidacy Committee.

Synod also said that before a commissioned pastor is examined by classis to serve as the solo pastor of an emerging or organized church, that person will need to complete a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and



Rev. John Bouwers, Classis Toronto: “I think we do commissioned pastors and emerging churches a disservice by not seating them as pastors at synod.”

approved by the Candidacy Committee. Ordinarily the learning plan would include an introduction to the CRC Church Order, CRC history, CRC ministry, CRC creeds and confessions, Reformed hermeneutics, and an introduction to the discipline and art of preaching.

Though no longer considered elders, commissioned pastors still may go to synod as elder delegates under the approved changes. Only commissioned pastors who are solo pastors of established churches may be delegated as ministers—a rule that has existed since 2009 but that some opposed.

“I think we do commissioned pastors and emerging churches a disservice by not seating them as pastors at synod,” said Rev. John Bouwers, Classis Toronto.

—Charles Honey



Synod Launches Plans for Diverse Leadership

Synod 2013 approved plans to hire and inspire ethnically diverse leaders in the Christian Reformed Church.

To implement the plans, synod approved a budget of \$100,000 for each of the next two years.



Young adult representative Kyle Schaap: “This recommendation does not restrict anyone from engaging in their own grassroots efforts.”

The plans include

- a goal that all denominational boards strive for 25 percent multiethnic members;
- an action plan to ensure fair treatment of all staff; and
- specific plans to identify and recruit multiethnic staff to be in place by 2014.

Rev. Bruce Persenaire, Classis Central California, supported the recommendations, noting how difficult it was to recruit ethnic minority board members for Back to God Ministries International. “It was not always an easy task. Until the local church is better at reach-

ing out to people of all races, I feel sad that we are frustrated at the denominational level in finding people qualified but also eager to do the job, to sit on the boards. It’s a good recommendation, but it’s also a commentary on where things are at in the Christian Reformed Church.”

Several delegates raised concerns that the goal of raising multiethnic leaders should not be forced by top-down mandates but should happen naturally, but others said specific goals are necessary.

“If you don’t have a goal, nothing moves you,” responded Rev. Peter Byma, who reported on the plan for synod. “I often have a goal of losing weight, but if I don’t put a number to it, nothing seems to change.”

Stanley Jim, Classis Red Mesa, said that concrete measures will help ensure that something happens: “Since 1996 we have been bringing things before synod and talking about diversity but we haven’t really done anything yet because we leave it open-ended.” Jim was on the task force that brought the plan to synod.

“This recommendation does not restrict anyone from engaging in their own grassroots efforts,” said young adult representative Kyle Schaap. “Why not institutionalize these best practices at the highest levels? It will be a testament to our deepest commitments, and it will lend credibility and integrity to our witness.”

Grassroots involvement is vital to make the plans succeed, Executive Director Joel Boot said.

Byma echoed that sentiment: “This is 100 percent dependent

on your involvement at the classical level, making nominations, to include the awareness and encouragement and training of ethnic minorities—that’s the beauty of what we talked about,” he said, referring to conversation that happened in committee.

“I really love the way that the denomination is going right now,” said Harold Caicedo, an ethnic adviser. “I think the future of this church is unity in diversity. It means not only integrate the people but know the people.”

“Let’s start with our own homes and personal lives and community,” said ethnic adviser Jimmy Han. “It’s not just about trying to be top-down—it’s about trying to give goals, set goals, not to be multiethnic but to be a loving church to your community.” Delegates applauded his words.

Although the study committee had asked for the two-year appointment of a diversity leader, the diversity plan adopted by



Rev. Peter Byma, Classis Pacific Northwest: “This is 100 percent dependent on your involvement at the classical level.”

synod will instead be implemented through executive director Joel Boot’s office.

Synod closed the session in prayer, with the leaders who had crafted the plan for diversity in leadership standing in front of the delegates. Their task force, known as Diversity in Leadership Planning Group II, had worked on their report since mandated by Synod 2011.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Philadelphia Pastor Receives Dante Venegas Award



COURTESY OF RACE RELATIONS

Rev. Manny Ortiz is this year's recipient of the Dante Venegas Award.

"You can't know about diversity in the CRC without knowing about Dante Venegas," said his wife, Jackie.

Rev. Manny Ortiz, pastor of Spirit and Truth Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Philadelphia, Penn., was this year's recipient of the Dante Venegas Award.

The award was presented at the biennial Multiethnic Conference, held in conjunction with Synod 2013.

Ortiz was recognized as a trailblazer in cross-cultural ministry for his church planting in both Chicago and Philadelphia.

Ortiz could not travel to the conference, so Pedro Aviles, who was mentored by Ortiz, accepted the award on his behalf. "He has an incredible ability in cross-cultural relationships," said Aviles.

The Dante Venegas Award was established by the CRC's office of Race Relations in 2011 to honor those who "demonstrate a passion for multicultural congregations and a commitment to antiracism."

—Gayla R. Postma

Synod president William

Koopmans, on the request that delegates state their name before speaking: "The microphone doesn't work unless you state your name and your classis before you speak."

And later in the week

"For the next week or two, you'll be waking up in the middle of the night and saying your name and your classis."

For Such a Time as This

"For such a time as this," said Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, keynote speaker at the 2013 Multiethnic Conference, after reading from the book of Esther. "Our call always comes to us in a specific context, in the historic moment in which [God] has called us."

Salvatierra was challenging 100 attendees of the biennial conference to see their context in the Christian Reformed Church as one for such a time as this.

"In the church we don't have a compassion problem, we have a vision problem. We often do not see what is happening in hearts and lives of people in our communities because some of us are more invisible than others," she said. "It is not only unhealthy for the church if some of us are invisible. It is spiritually dangerous when people become invisible."

Salvatierra particularly challenged American conference participants to advocate for reform of the immigration system. She shared stories of individuals and said that the same stories are repeated all over the country in the



Rev. Alexia Salvatierra at the Multiethnic Conference.

communities around churches. "This is a broken system," she said.

"What does it mean to live in a democracy—voice, vote, and influence," she said. "How are you going to be a good steward of the influence you've been given? Are you calling your legislators to do what God has called them to do?"

The multiethnic conference included a whole day of workshops, including topics such as raising racism-free children and learning from the global church. —Gayla R. Postma



Ethnic advisers for Synod 2013 (l-r): Susie Silversmith, Rev. John (Harold) Caicedo, Bev De Vries, and Rev. Jimmy Han.

Ethnic Advisers: 'We Know It's Not Easy'

In a synod first, ethnic advisers were invited to speak to delegates about their experience at the assembly.

Rev. Jimmy Han did so enthusiastically, thanking Synod 2013 for giving him and three other advisers "a place at the table."

"Your intentional efforts to bring diversity to synod are really appreciated," Han said. "We know that it's not easy. It requires us to leave our comfort zones, listen more carefully, and extend our love to those who we don't know but [who] belong to the same family."

Ethnic advisers speak for ethnic minorities who are not adequately represented among synod delegates. They may not vote but frequently weigh in on discussions. Between two and seven are appointed, depending on the number of minority delegates.

Besides Han, this year's advisers were John Caicedo, Beverly DeVries, and Sue Silversmith.

Han said he hopes all CRC members invite diverse people into their churches and homes—and that eventually ethnic advisers won't be needed.

"We hope what we did at synod we would all be able to do one day," Han said.

Synod president William Koopmans thanked the advisers for their work.

"We say to you deeply and emphatically, your presence here is not symbolic," Koopmans said. "Your presence here is essential to who we are representing, the body of Christ."

—Charles Honey

Faith Formation Committee Ends, Work Continues

The Faith Formation Committee appointed by Synod 2007 ended its work at Synod 2013—quietly and without much fanfare. And that’s just fine with committee chair, Rev. John Witvliet, and committee secretary, Rev. Howard Vanderwell.

“We as a committee talked about how this is like running a race where we have to hand the baton off,” Witvliet said. “We’re grateful to see the baton being picked up.”

As the committee wrapped up six years of work—a year later than originally mandated—Vanderwell and Witvliet sat down with *The Banner* to talk about the journey that had turned the committee into “a family.”

A year before the committee was appointed in 2007, Synod 2006 proposed that children be allowed to take communion without a profession of faith. Synod 2007 decided not to adopt that. Instead they appointed the Faith Formation Committee to examine that issue as well as other issues



Rev. John Witvliet (left) and Rev. Howard Vanderwell, from the synodical Faith Formation Committee.

across the denomination, gather the wisdom already in the churches, and report its progress to synod each year, rather than following a traditional model of quietly researching an issue for two or three years and then coming to synod with a single report.

“We were not called to generate a solution but rather to gather up wisdom in the local context,” Witvliet said.

The committee knew at its first meeting already that the mandate was impossible, “but in the best sense,” said Vanderwell. “We did not know the kind of synodical action we would be recommending because we didn’t know what wisdom we would be getting. It required more trust or risk in some ways, but it also gave us a sense of freedom.”

As the committee worked through its mandate from year to year, Witvliet said, it was gratifying that consensus emerged quite quickly, both in the committee and with the churches. He noted

that each year at synod, when the committee reported the direction it was taking, synod supported them unanimously. “That gave us the space to really think about the larger questions of what the denomination needs, going forward,” he said. “Faith formation is not a problem to be solved by committee. It’s a permanent journey.”

Another value of the shepherding approach was an acknowledgment of and comfort with the diversity within the CRC. “We could hold up a mirror to the church and say, well there is diversity now in many different areas on many of these subjects, so when guidelines are given, we shouldn’t entertain the fantasy that all are the same,” Vanderwell said. “The comfort level with that developed well with no suspicion or accusations.”

Witvliet and Vanderwell also pointed out the wonderful partnership the committee has

enjoyed with Faith Alive, even as Faith Alive’s board is dissolved. As functions from Faith Alive and other ministries are realigned, they said, “We’re grateful that faith formation is one of the central motifs” in that work.

They also noted that the work is continuing in the faith formation pilot project headed by Syd Hielema, as a network of coaches and encouragers will be working with congregations on faith formation practices. “[That] is the most tangible place people will see this work going forward.”

And so the committee passes the baton to new hands, with some regret at having to let it go. “Sounds funny to say,” they said, “but after six years, we’ve become a family. We grieved the passing away of two of our members. It’s a part of who we are.”

But they will let go, as Witvliet said, with profound gratitude.

—Gayla R. Postma

Synod president William Koopmans, to delegate Bruce Persenaire: “I appreciate your analogy but I wish you wouldn’t use hockey because fights usually break out.”

connected to life-long faith formation such as baptism and profession of faith.

Synod also asked Faith Formation to be a “shepherding” committee—one that would listen



Mark Rice, director of Faith Alive.

Faith Alive Board Dissolved

Synod 2013 quietly approved plans to dissolve the board of Faith Alive Christian Resources, the Christian Reformed church's publishing arm.

"Faith Alive needs to change," said its director, Mark Rice. "Faith Alive has been trying to operate like a small commercial publisher . . . we thought revenue growth was the way out. It's not anyone's fault, it's just a statement of what is. It's a different market than it was 20 years ago."

Faith Alive's goal looking forward will be "creating vibrant ministry," whether by creating its own materials or by linking churches to outside materials, Rice said.

When delegates had few comments or questions, Joel Boot, executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, said, "Do not interpret [synod's] lack of discussion as lack of interest. We ask for your continued prayers as we move forward with this."

Synod also approved a motion that some "critical functions" of Faith Alive—mostly related to faith formation materials such as Sunday school curricula—will be assigned to other areas of the denominational structure.

The Banner will continue under the supervision of the Board of Trustees on a temporary basis.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Hears About New Ministry Model

The Christian Reformed Church is trying something new, Synod 2013 heard.

In response to changing times, the denomination is testing a new model of ministry.

The old model: centralized agencies, mostly based in Grand Rapids, Mich. The new model: leaders coming alongside churches on-site all over North America.

A pilot program for the new model has been set in motion by members of the Faith Formation Committee. The pilot program's goal is to help congregations "grow an intergenerational faith formation ministry," said Ben Vandezande, interim director of Canadian Ministries.

The staff person for the program will only work one day a week; 10 regional coaches will do the hands-on work at churches in their areas.

The regional coaches will have "gifts of encouragement, discernment, wisdom, adventure, possibility thinking—not experts so much as resource people and facilitators," Vandezande said.

The pilot program will help CRC leaders find "best practices" as they aim to realign the denomination's "specialized ministries," according to deputy executive director Peter Borgdorff. Specialized ministries include aboriginal ministries, chaplaincy ministries, disability concerns, race relations, and safe church ministry, among others.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



"[This] is a tremendous theological and pastoral resource," said young adult representative Cedric Parsels.

A Year to Celebrate the Heidelberg

Synod 2013 urged Christian Reformed members and churches to celebrate this year's 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism, one of the Christian Reformed Church's foundational confessions.

Churches and agencies are encouraged to "explore creative and culturally appropriate ways of using and celebrating the role of the Heidelberg Catechism in the life of the church."

Congregations are asked to recite the catechism's Q&A 1 during worship on Sept. 15. Some churches already have begun celebrating the anniversary.

Cedric Parsels, a young adult representative and ministry candidate, said that as a convert to the CRC he found the catechism "a tremendous theological and pastoral resource." Teens and young adults are "desperately in need of the pastoral theology" of the catechism, he said.

—Charles Honey



Synod 2013 Denies Shorter Entry Process for Non-CRC Pastors

Synod 2013 denied a request for a shorter training process for pastors who have received a theological degree and have served for at least five years in another denomination.

The request from Classis Heartland was to shorten the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) from two years to one year. Classis Heartland said that some of the EPMC program's courses overlap with seminary courses and other skills gained from ministry in local churches.

However, synod said no to their request with no discussion before the vote.

The reason for denying the change was that "the EPMC program has been carefully prepared over recent years to provide a uniform road of access to ministry in the CRCNA. Its integrity should be protected."

Synod noted that the two-year time frame also allows program supervisors to get to know candidates better in order to ground them in the CRC.

—Ryan Struyk

Calvin College president

Michael Le Roy: "One of the things we've learned from neuroscience is that one of the worst things you can do to promote learning is to do exactly what I'm doing now—stand up and give a 20-minute lecture." (laughter) "Some of you laughed, but most of you didn't because you're not listening!"

Synod Hires New Seminary Professor

For Rev. Amanda Benckhuysen, being hired to teach at Calvin Theological Seminary is a homecoming.

She thought she had landed for good at University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Benckhuysen told delegates of Synod 2013. But when she learned of an opening at Calvin Seminary, she wanted to come back to the denomination in which she was raised.

"This is an exciting time in the CRC," Benckhuysen said in her interview with synod. "To be able to contribute to that in some small way, that's an exciting opportunity to me."

Benckhuysen begins a three-year appointment as associate professor of Old Testament in 2014.

Ordained in the CRC, Benckhuysen was campus minister at the University of Michigan from 1998 to 2001 and also taught at Wycliffe College.

Her 45-minute interview with synod included some pointed questioning from delegates, particularly regarding her beliefs about the creation story in Genesis and the historicity of Adam. She won praise with honest, candid, and sometimes humorous answers.

Benckhuysen said Genesis contains "symbolic and literary elements with a historical core," adding, "I think there was a human being who the Bible has named Adam who fell into sin."

When asked for the central message of Job, she said

simply, "I am God, and you are not," drawing applause.

In another exchange, Benckhuysen was asked whether she would have been a Vietnam War protestor in the 1960s. Delegates laughed loudly at her blunt retort: "I'm Canadian."

Benckhuysen's husband, Martin, is also a pastor. They have two daughters.

"I'm passionate about the Scriptures, and I'm passionate about [students] learning to dwell



Dr. Amanda Benckhuysen is appointed as associate professor of Old Testament studies at Calvin Theological Seminary.

in the Scriptures," she said. "I'm also expectant of the Holy Spirit to be present in the classroom when we are studying Scriptures together."

—Charles Honey

Young Adult Representative 'Vlogs' Synod

Move over, Twitter: Nicholas Chuba, 19, has found an innovative way to share his views on Synod 2013 with the world.

Each day, the young adult representative uploaded a video onto YouTube—called vlogging—giving his explanation of events, his experiences with delegates, and his opinions on controversial topics.

"I prefer speaking and expressing emotion through speech instead of written word," said Chuba. "I think it's easier to watch something than to read it. You get specific inflections and wordings as well."

He hopes that people in his home congregation were able to watch the vlogs and learn more about the events of synod.

—Ryan Struyk

Young adult representative Nicholas Chuba uploaded a video "vlog" about his experiences each day at Synod 2013.



Synod 2013 Hears That Missionaries Need to Raise 90 Percent of Basic Costs

Missionaries with Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) now have an increased responsibility to raise their own support, Synod 2013 heard.

"Most of the decision was based on the lack of denominational ministry shares," said Jeff Dykema, reporter for synod's missions and ministry committee. World Missions

staff said they are hopeful the changes will help their ministry to stop shrinking—and start growing again.

Under the new funding formula, missionaries will be responsible to raise 90 percent of their basic costs such as housing and food. The remaining 10 percent, and "above basic" costs—such as airfare for children, training, and on-field travel—will be covered by ministry shares.

Previously, missionaries raised 60 percent of both basic and above-basic costs, with the total amount of costs divided evenly between missionaries.

Delegates expressed concern that missionaries will have to spend more energy raising funds, limiting their time on the mission field.

"Let's pay our ministry shares so that we can reduce this amount and not get into a situation where missionaries have to devote so much time to fundraising," said elder George Monsma of Classis Grand Rapids East. "That can create uncertainty and add stress for them."

World Missions director Rev. Gary Bekker sent a letter to supporters explaining the change in funding for missionaries, stating that "most missions organizations have already shifted to this type of support model. This has helped their organizations stay financially healthy and even allowed them to expand their ministries. CRWM is hopeful a similar missionary support model will enable us to continue ministering effectively for many years." —Roxanne Van Farowe



Elder Theody Corton: "There are still more churches, still more countries to go to. We have to support the vision for the next 125 years."

'There Are Still More Countries to Go'

Following a presentation on the 125th anniversary of Christian Reformed World Missions, Theody Corton, a Filipino elder delegate from Toronto, felt moved to speak from her heart.

"I stand before you today as one of the fruits of missionaries assigned to the Philippines," Corton told delegates.

She said she has belonged to the CRC in the Philippines since 1978.

"I encourage you to please continue with your generosity and support for Christian Reformed World Missions, because there are still more churches, still more countries to go to. We have to support the vision for the next 125 years."

—Charles Honey

No Questions from Delegates about Calvin College Challenges

Synod leaders commended Michael Le Roy, president of Calvin College, for his transparency in dealing with the college's financial problems. Delegates had no questions for Le Roy after he finished speaking.

"[It is] not always that a president's speech is spellbinding, but you kept our attention through the whole thing, so thank you," said synod president William Koopmans.

"You shared the joys, the highlights, but you were also very transparent about the challenges—we appreciate that. You laid them out in good faith, and that's not always easy."

In recent months, the college has revealed that it needs to repurpose 10 percent of its operating budget to meet payments on loans coming due in 2017.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Calvin College president Michael Le Roy.

Synod Will Move Around the Next Few Years

Synod will move around for the next few years. But after that, synod will mostly stay in Grand Rapids, Mich., at Calvin College.

In 2014 synod will be held in Pella, Iowa, in tandem with the synod of the Reformed Church in America.

Synod 2015 will be held in Sioux Center, Iowa, on the campus of Dordt College.

Synod 2016 will return to Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Synod 2017 will be held at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill.

This year's synod decided that, going forward, four out of every five synods will be held at Calvin College for reasons of cost and the need for the college to reserve the space in advance.

—Charles Honey

Executive Director Inspires Hope with Speech

The Christian Reformed Church is taking off in new and sometimes uncertain directions, said Rev. Joel Boot. But God is guiding the flight plan.

In a speech to Synod 2013, the CRC executive director likened the denomination's new initiatives to a flight that may seem uncharted but arcs toward a promising future.

"We're launching into a new kind of future with the faith and the Great Commission that is our past," Boot told delegates. "They haven't changed at all. But just about everything else has."

And while he is, unexpectedly, "still in the cockpit" after a nominee for executive director withdrew in May, Boot vowed, "As surely as I am standing in front of you tonight, I am convinced that God is still the pilot."

Boot's half-hour address aroused a warm response from 200 delegates and advisers as he outlined the challenges and opportunities facing the CRC.

Synod president Rev. William Koopmans lauded Boot for his vision and leadership.

"You're seeing what God is doing, and you're helping us to see that," Koopmans said. "We thank



Board of Trustees members laid hands on Joel Boot as delegates to synod prayed for him.

you for that kind of leadership because that's the kind of leadership we need: bold dynamic action."

Rev. Bruce Persenaire, Classis Central California, said Boot had kept his "pastor's heart" while managing the denomination.

"It's your pastor's heart that I believe has made (the CRC headquarters) a healthy place again, and a place that can help us as a denomination look forward to the future," Persenaire said.

Boot inspired praise by listing ambitious new ventures, from a task force reviewing the CRC's structure and culture to its efforts to increase diversity in leadership and ecumenical work with global churches.

Even the dissolution of Faith Alive Christian Resources could lead to new beginnings through deeper reflection on faith formation, he said: "Out of what could be construed as the death of one agency, a new mission is being born."

And he rebuked those who say the CRC is dying, declaring, "The Christian Reformed Church in North America is not the *Titanic*. We do ourselves no service and God no honor by declaring we're on our way down.

"Even the gates of hell itself can't prevail against the will and way of God," he vowed. "It's time we said and celebrate it."

—Charles Honey

Canadian Concerns Taken Care of, Synod Says

Synod 2013 turned down requests from two Canadian classes (groups of churches).

Classis Toronto had requested that Canadian members of the Board of Trustees conduct separate meetings to discuss Canadian issues.

"What brought this overture is that there are some items that are very different in Canada versus the U.S.," such as immigration issues, said Rev. Henk Bruinsma, Classis Toronto.

BOT President John Terpstra said that during regular board gatherings, Canadian board members have met informally about their country's concerns.

Another classis requested a task force in response to the "Canadian Catalytic Conversation," a recent gathering of Canadian Christian Reformed leaders.

But synod said "the requested reflection is already taking place and will continue to take place within the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Tightens Confidentiality Rules

Revised rules approved by Synod 2013 will protect the privacy of victims and others bringing appeals and confidential documents to synod.

Delegates voted to prohibit synod records from publishing names when disclosure could potentially damage a person's reputation. Confidential materials will be distributed only to committees dealing with the material, and names will be removed from documents if needed to protect someone's reputation.

The same restrictions apply to recommendations made to synod from the Judicial Code Committee, which hears appeal of actions taken by CRC agencies or assemblies.

—Charles Honey

Executive director Joel Boot:
"If I pop up like this every once in a while after you say 'boot up,' don't be surprised."

Synod president William Koopmans:
"Just realize that we might give you the boot if you do it too often. Your tenure might be extended, but you are on tenuous grounds."

Denominational Survey Shows CRC Older, Less Devotional

Older. Fewer children. Less prayer, Bible reading, and Sunday-evening worship.

The trends are not promising for the Christian Reformed Church based on a new survey of CRC members, but researchers also found signs of hope.



Rodger Rice

The average CRC worshiper is older, spends less time in private devotions, and has fewer children at home than 25 years ago, according to a major survey presented to synod.

And though loyalty to denomination and church has begun to rebound, it's still lower among younger members.

All trends point to a need for congregations to rethink their methods and mission if the CRC's mem-

bership decline is to turn around, researchers said.

"The first thing our churches have to do is to ask themselves, what does the Lord want us to do as a congregation?" said consultant Rodger Rice, who helped conduct the study for the Calvin College Center for Social Research.

He and fellow researcher Neil Carlson, director of the CSR, also were concerned that the more income CRC members have, the less they give proportionately to the church. The highest rate of giving is among those 75 and older.

The survey, taken every five years since 1987, involved 2,609 respondents from 102 churches. Among the findings:

- The average age of respondents rose from 46 in 1987 to 53, reflecting the aging of baby boomers;
- Attendance at Sunday evening services fell from 51 percent to 17 percent;
- Daily family devotions and Bible reading fell from 60 percent in 1992 to under 40 percent.

Rice and Carlson also found reasons for hope in the survey. Respondents placed a high value on Scripture, and a majority felt their church was healthier than five years ago.

Better engagement with immigrant and ethnic minority churches, the CRC's fastest-growing segment, also holds promise for future growth, Carlson said later.

"It's at the grassroots where we really have to do the work of renewal, at the congregational level," Rice added.

—Charles Honey

Synod president William Koopmans: "One of our delegates has an allergy to perfume and aftershave, so we ask you to be sensitive to that."

Delegate Archie Vander Hart: "I do have deodorant on today, so everyone should be happy about that."

Synod 2013 Accepts a New Concept for Denominational Priorities

In the age of Twitter and text messaging, the Christian Reformed Church needs a new way to communicate its core message.

"It's a different day, folks," said Rev. Scott Greenway, speaking on behalf of the Board of Trustees. "We need a tool that can capture the imagination of every generation (and) that can explain in very simple terms what we're about as a denomination."

That new tool is a concept called Five Streams that sums up the denomination's top priorities. The concept comes from the Task Force to Review Structure and Culture (TFRSC), appointed by a previous synod to review the structure and culture of the denomination's administrative structure.

The top priorities named are faith formation; servant leadership; global missions; loving mercy, doing justice; and gospel proclamation and worship.

While still a work in progress, the model will help Christian Reformed churches and agencies communicate with each other as well as reach younger people, supporters said.

Task force members stressed that they welcome feedback on the exact wording and content after several delegates expressed concerns.

"How are we going to be sure this is more than a reshuffling, but a real change in the culture of our denom-

ination?" asked Rev. Kory Plockmeyer, Classis Lake Erie.

However, Nicole Veenkamp, a young adult representative to synod, said she was "excited and encouraged" by the concept. "I'm really glad to see us applying our strength of thinking hard to what we *do* rather than just what we *believe*," Veenkamp said.

Delegates voted unanimously to endorse it for discussion among churches, agencies, and boards.

—Charles Honey



"[I'm] excited and encouraged. I'm really glad to see us applying our strength of thinking hard to what we *do* rather than just what we *believe*," said Nicole Veenkamp, young adult representative.

Join a Faraway Classis If You Must, Synod Tells Churches

Synod 2013 allowed two West Michigan Christian Reformed congregations to move to whatever classis (regional group of churches) is willing to receive them, provided that that is those congregations' desire.

Synod received requests to allow Trinity CRC (Sparta, Mich.) and Second CRC (Kalamazoo, Mich.) to form a new Michigan classis based on a shared theological conviction that women should not hold church offices.

Synod did not allow that, stating that such a classis would "create a fixed uniformity that runs contrary to biblical principles and practices of unity."

Synod instead advised the churches to "seek ways to continue in their current classes" and to seek reconciliation. But if that isn't an option, it said, those churches could join Classis Minnkota—a classis of theologically conservative churches in Minnesota and the Dakotas that is willing to accept them. It is a request that Synod 2011 turned down.

Synod heard that, in spite of written requests from the two churches, no geographically closer classis wants to take them in.

Over 20 delegates spoke about the matter.



Rev. Joe Vanden Akker, Classis Minnkota.

But Rev. Joe Vanden Akker, Classis Minnkota, said that allowing a theological classis would have been a gracious acknowledgement of what past synods have affirmed as a valid interpretation of Scripture. "Now that those [supporting women in office] have a position of power, other concerns are being swept under the rug," he said.

Some delegates expressed concern that a new classis might incline other theologically conservative churches to jump ship from their classes.

"I hope there are not churches thinking about leaving our classis," said Rev. Timothy Howerzyl, Classis Zeeland. "I might guess that there would be several. In our classis we have a great diversity of opinions, but we've forged a careful policy of holding together."

The CRC is organized into 47 classes, mostly based on geography (though Classis Pacific Hanmi is based on Korean identity). In an earlier decision, Synod 2013 allowed Urim CRC in Lake Forest, Calif., to move from Classis California South to Classis Pacific Hanmi.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Ministry Allocation by Board:

Back to God Ministries International	\$43.97
Calvin College	\$31.60
Calvin Theological Seminary	\$35.91
Christian Reformed Home Missions	\$46.88
Christian Reformed World Missions	\$60.56
Board of Trustees:	\$113.87
Faith Formation	\$6.53
Former Faith Alive	\$21.99
Specialized Ministries ¹	\$47.94
Denominational Office ²	\$37.05
Special Assistance Fund ³	\$0.36
TOTAL Per Member Assessment:⁴	\$332.79

Note: World Renew does not receive ministry shares.

Ministry Share Breakdown for Fiscal 2014

¹Chaplaincy and Care Ministries, Disability Concerns, ministries in Canada (Aboriginal Ministries, Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue), Pastor-Church Relations, Race Relations, Office of Social Justice, Restorative Justice, and Safe Church Ministry.

²Synod Assembly, Board of Trustees, and General Administration.

³A fund that provides assistance to cover the cost of a pastor's final move at retirement, as well as special needs of retired pastors or their surviving spouses.

⁴These amounts represent allocation for the \$332.79 ministry share for the 2014 fiscal year budget (July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2014).



Elder George Monsma Jr., Classis Grand Rapids East.

"I'm glad there are some churches who want to stay in the CRC in spite of their differences," said elder George Monsma Jr., Classis Grand Rapids East. "I wish they could agree to stay with other churches that feel differently, but if they can't in good conscience, let's give them another option."

Exiting Board President 'Senses God Moving'

"Even Garrison Keillor would not dare to describe this as a quiet year in the [Christian Reformed Church]," said Rev. John Terpstra, the outgoing president of the Board of Trustees told synod, referring to the popular radio personality.

Terpstra outlined the challenges that have faced the denomination in recent years: "A leader released from service. Followed by another, and then another. Tension and anxiety followed. 'What's going on?' many wondered," he said.

Terpstra spoke extensively of the Bible's pattern of despair followed by a new resurrection of hope on the third day. "As I read the Agenda for Synod 2013 . . . I sense the powerful movement of the God of third-day hope. Of course he has been with us all along. . . . We know the One in whom our only comfort lies."

Outlining the many organizational initiatives underway, he said, "I sense God is moving in and through the Christian Reformed Church, calling us to put our hope in him, the God of the third day. God is inviting us right now to face with new confidence the second-day challenges that have come before us in recent years."

Terpstra also introduced Rev. Sheila Holmes, who will take his place as BOT president after synod concludes.

"Sheila and I first met five years ago," he said. "I have grown to appreciate her wisdom, her courage, her devotion, her life of prayer-filled service, and her deep passion for the overall work of the church and its desire to continue the journey toward a more diverse family of God."

Holmes is the first woman and the first person of color to be BOT president. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Learns Firsthand About Value of Specialized Ministries

Rev. Tom Draayer, Classis Rocky Mountain, has Parkinson's Disease. So when he got up to speak, someone else held the microphone for him.

He noted that he wasn't always this shaky. "Usually after I preach a good sermon, which isn't very often," he joked. "I always wanted to be a mover and a shaker in the CRC but I hadn't planned on it this way."

Then he turned more serious. "Pastorally, it is always appreciated when someone asks me what it's like to live with Parkinson's," Draayer added. He expressed his thanks for the denomination's excellent health plan, singling out John Bolt, the denomination's director of finance.

Draayer's comments came following a presentation to delegates about the CRC's specialized ministries, one of which is Disability Concerns.

Delegates watched a video about the specialized ministries, which also include Safe Church ministry, Race Relations, Office of Social Justice, Chaplaincy and Care, and Pastor-Church Relations.

"There was an aura of peace, gentleness, and compassion in that video," noted synod president William Koopmans. "The people featured have such a compassion, such a heart for the people of the church. We love you for the way you love the church."

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Synod 2013 prays for the directors and work of the CRC's specialized ministries.

Synod President Auctions Old Voting Machines



Synodical services director Dee Recker and synod president William Koopmans auction off the old synod voting machines.

"And if you're not sure what to do with yours, you can use it as a door-stop," he quipped about the bulky boxes.

Dee Recker, director of synodical services, acted as Vanna White, presenting the voting system.

"Bring it over to the [young adult representatives]," joked Koopmans, referring to the group that cannot vote. "That way, they can push buttons all they want."

Tim Bossenbroek of Classis Chicago South won the first voting machine during the live auction; young adult representative Laura de Jong won a second machine.

—Ryan Struyk

Synod 2013 Careful About Who Is on Study Committees

Delegates engaged in vigorous discussion on the last morning of Synod 2013, showing that they cared deeply about who gets appointed to the study committees they created.

Those committees are the following:

- Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon
- Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage

- Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Religious Liberty

Delegates brought concerns about whether proposed committee membership had expertise on topics under study, proper representation of ethnic minorities, and those who can do thorough biblical exegesis.

"We had a whole conversation last night about inclusion and diversity with minority sisters and brothers, and I don't think [this committee] is as diverse as it could be or should be," said Rev. William Wilton, Classis Columbia, about the make-up of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage.

Wilton also questioned the lack of exegetical expertise on that committee, while acknowledging that the exegesis of Scripture regarding homosexuality is not in that committee's mandate.

"What is the make-up in terms of Canada and . . . from states where gay marriage is now the law?" asked John Kooiker, Classis Heartland, regarding the same committee.

Discussion about the membership of the other two committees was also meticulous.

Rather than add more people to the committees, synod decided to ask the committees to consult extensively with pastors in both the U.S. and Canada, with members of ethnic minorities, and with others representing a wide range of experience and expertise. It said that this would promote engagement within the churches in the spirit of the "shepherding" model that was followed by the Faith Formation Committee.

—Gayla R. Postma

Young adult representative

Laura de Jong (holding up an old electronic voting machine): "Point of order — our machine's not working." Synod president William Koopmans: "I'm surprised it took you that long to figure that out."



Young Adult Representatives for Synod 2013 (l-r): Chadd Huizenga, Nicole Scholten, Cedric Parsels, Kyle Schaap, Nicholas Chuba, Nicole Veenkamp, and Laura de Jong.

Young Adults Encouraged by Synod 2013

For Laura de Jong, 22, attending Synod 2013 was a huge encouragement about the direction the denomination is headed.

"I wish all young people in the [Christian Reformed Church] had the opportunity to come to synod," she said. "Witnessing the process of synod is the most encouraging thing in the face of frustration and doubt."

In a report to synod, the young adult representatives said being a part of Synod 2013 encouraged them, and they look to the church's future with hope.

"All of the young adults were welcomed with open arms first into each of our [advisory] committees and then onto the floor, giving us the best gift possible: respect and attention while we spoke," said Nicholas Chuba, 19.

He said that the young adult representatives entered the week with fear that their opinions would be dismissed, but he "was proved wrong almost immediately."

Nicole Veenkamp, 23, said she was filled with love for delegates at synod and for the church.

"You are people who love God and love the church and are eager to serve it and discern the best way to do ministry in a changing context," she said.

—Ryan Struyk

Belhar Not Included in Synod Declaration of Unity

The Belhar Confession, an ecumenical faith declaration in the Christian Reformed Church, will not be included in the new version of a public declaration delegates make at the beginning of each synod to indicate their adherence to the Reformed creeds and confessions.

Delegates voted to remove reference to Belhar from the new public declaration recommended to synod by the Board of Trustees.

The BOT had proposed recognizing the Belhar as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration, a new category Synod 2012 approved for the Belhar Confession, along with affirmation of the CRC's three historic confessions.

Synod removed reference to the Belhar to align the public declaration with the Covenant for Officebearers.

—Charles Honey



Synod's ecumenical guests were (l-r) Rev. Stephen Kendall (Presbyterian Church in Canada); Rev. Pieter Sinia (Netherlands Reformed Churches); Rev. Gerrit Dawson (Evangelical Presbyterian Church); Dr. Stephen Lytch (World Communion of Reformed Churches); and Rev. Thomas De Vries (Reformed Church in America).

Synod 2013 Welcomes Ecumenical Visitors

Synod 2013 welcomed visitors from other denominations that have ecumenical relations with the Christian Reformed Church.

Denominations represented this year were the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Netherlands Reformed Churches, Presbyterian Church in Canada, and Reformed Church in America. A representative from the World Communion of Reformed Churches was also present.

"You help us understand how the issues we deal with in North America are paralleled in a significant way in your context," synod president William Koopmans said.

The CRC actively pursues ecumenical relations with similarly minded denominations and sends representatives to their synods. The CRC also participates in the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

—Roxanne Van Farowe, Ryan Struyk

Synod 2013 Waits to Define Ecumenical Faith Declaration

Synod 2013 declined to outline more specific criteria for the category of Ecumenical Faith Declaration (EFD) created by synod last year for the Belhar Confession.

Instead, the church will hold more discussion about the criteria within the denomination and with partner churches around the globe.

"One of the things that became very apparent to Peter [Borgdorff] and me as we traveled is that Reformed churches are interested not only in this category, but in what synod said when it said that we adopt the Belhar as an Ecumenical Faith Declaration,"

explained executive director Joel Boot.

Synod 2012 did not approve the Belhar Confession as a full confession, but instead called it an Ecumenical Faith Declaration, a label that is unprecedented in the Reformed sphere.

In a related matter, synod decided to wait on a request to include ecumenical faith declarations such as the Belhar in the Covenant for Officebearers.

"This overture is asking us to say yes to something without knowing what we'd be saying yes to," said Christopher Fluit of Classis Atlantic Northeast.

—Ryan Struyk

Delegates and Spectators Join #crcsynod on Twitter

When synod started, young adult representative Nicole Veenkamp had never sent a tweet in her life.

But after following discussions under the hashtag #crcsynod during the first few days of session, she finally created an account.

"I've used Twitter as a way to reflect on my experiences at synod ... and to highlight moments and decisions of Synod 2013 that I find particularly meaningful," said Veenkamp, 23.

Almost 50 delegates, spectators, and organizations used the hashtag over the course of the week. By the end of the week, more than 1400 tweets had been sent with the #crcsynod hashtag.

Others used Twitter as a way to learn more about important issues or synodical procedure.

"It's like I'm in class and the teacher has given me the tools and the permission to pass notes in an on-task sort of way," explained elder James Heethuis, Classis Grandville. "With Twitter, I can observe people's color commentary as well as the play-by-play."

But some pointed out shortcomings of the social media site.

"The immediacy of being able to tweet something as soon as you think of it is not as conducive to the formulation of the carefully-articulated arguments presented verbally on the floor of synod," said Veenkamp.

—Ryan Struyk



Leaders from the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America signed a memorandum of agreement for domestic disaster relief work.

Synod 2013 Witnesses Strengthening Ties Between CRC and RCA

Offering what they called a "window into what God is doing," leaders of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) spoke to Synod 2013 about ways the sister denominations are collaborating.

One key development in the RCA-CRC partnership is that the RCA is adopting World Renew as its domestic relief agency. Already the two denominations have collaborated in storm clean-ups, most recently after the Moore, Okla., tornado in May.

"We talk about our denominations holding hands, but you've taken that metaphor one step further," synod president William Koopmans said to the RCA leader. "More than holding hands, we are becoming part of one arm. You have added muscle and money." —Roxanne Van Farowe



CHRIS MEEHAN

Former American Idol finalist Phil Stacey headlines the chaplains conference.

Chaplains Conference Draws Record Attendance

Headlined by former American Idol finalist Phil Stacey and kicked off by Jolene DeHeer, a speaker described as a cross between Erma Bombeck, Lucille Ball, and Billy Graham, the 71st Christian Reformed Chaplains Conference drew a record attendance of 114 people. The event always runs in conjunction with the annual synod.

"The fact that this conference had a record attendance was a big surprise," said Ron Klimp, director of CRC's chaplaincy and care ministry. That "helped set the stage for a very positive and exciting event overall."

For Klimp, the highlight was welcoming five of the eight newly endorsed (and relatively young) chaplains who had become chaplains since the last conference, plus processing two more during the conference. This is indicative of the growing popularity of chaplaincy as a ministry choice ... more and more often a first choice rather than an option discovered later in one's career.

"We currently endorse 130 chaplains," Klimp said, "which represents a significant ministry force (roughly 10 percent of our ordained ministers) who impact thousands of lives in the midst of some sort of crisis experience every week." [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Janet A. Greidanus

Rev. Reggie Smith, after the roll call: "There seems to be a quorum. I will constitute synod to be constitutedly together. I just made up something new. ... That just means that we can have a meeting."

Campus Ministers Attend Synod 2013

Seven people associated with campus ministries attended Synod 2013. They are (l-r) Matt Ackerman (University of Michigan), Paul Verhoef (University of Calgary), Rick VanManen (University of Alberta), Tim Bossenbroek (University of Illinois), Cedric Parsels (Manna Christian Fellowship at Princeton University), Kory Plockmeyer (Michigan State University's Campus Edge Fellowship), and Brian Bork (University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University).

—Ryan Struyk



Sea to Sea cyclists ride in to Synod 2013.

Sea-to-Sea Cyclists Visit Synod

Cyclists planning for the third Sea to Sea tour rode into Synod 2013 Wednesday afternoon accompanied by their giant "gear truck."

This summer's tour will involve 219 cyclists, 87 of whom will ride from coast to coast.

Riders of the full tour are raising \$10,000 each, not including their own expenses. The goal of the tour is to raise \$1.5 million for anti-poverty ministries, including Partners Worldwide, RCA Global Missions, and World Renew.

The nine-week ride starts on June 24 in Los Angeles and ends in New York City on August 24.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Rev. David Bosscher (right) with elder Arnold Koster.

Youngest and Oldest Delegates

Rev. David Bosscher, 26, was the youngest delegate to Synod 2013 and elder Arnold Koster, 78, was the most elderly delegate.

It was the first synod for both. Koster, of Classis Grand Rapids South, is a retired nurse who worked with Hope Network for many years.

Bosscher, of Classis Thornapple Valley, fast-tracked through Calvin Theological Seminary, becoming a pastor “about as quickly as you possibly can.”

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Rev. Louis Tamminga (left) baptized synod president William Koopmans in 1959.

‘He Made Me Think of Moses’

In a light-hearted moment at synod, Rev. Louis Tamminga, a retired pastor, put his arm around Rev. William Koopmans and recalled a precious moment more than 50 years ago in Smithers, British Columbia—when he baptized the baby who would become president of Synod 2013.

“He was on the small side as a baby,” Tamminga said of the short-statured Koopmans, to the laughter of delegates. “But he was a beautiful child. He made me think of Moses.

“I told his father and mother, ‘You may be sure that he will go places.’ And today he’s here.”

—Charles Honey



Synod Sends Off 50 Candidates for Ministry

Synod 2013 delegates celebrated the candidacy of 50 candidates for the ministry, the largest group since 2008.

“Be bold as you use the gifts that God has given and developed in you,” synod president William Koopmans charged the candidates.

Calvin Theological Seminary president Jul Medenblik said, “God desires to use you in the lives of others. He has gifted you, equipped you, and now he is the one who commissions you.”

Synod closed the session by laying hands on the candidates to bless them in their future work.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Delegate Sean Bakker:

“Am I making sense? I think I am. I’m going to stop talking.” Synod president Koopmans: “When you’re making sense, that’s a good time to stop talking.”



Synod 2013 a Family Affair for Many

Rev. Will Verhoef, synod's second clerk [center], attended synod with his two sons. His son Paul was a minister delegate from Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, and his son Joel was an elder delegate from Classis California South.

Elder Marvin Vandervalk, of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, and his son, Rev. Chad Vandervalk of Classis Eastern Canada, both attended Synod 2013. Marvin, a grain farmer for 35 years, was attending his first synod.

Rev. Rebecca Jordan Heys of Classis Grand Rapids East and her mother, elder Susanne Jordan of Classis Muskegon, became the first mother-daughter delegates ever to serve at a synod. It was a first synod for both of them.

It was a special week for the Ackerman family. Elder Linda Ackerman of Classis Pacific Northwest, was at her first synod. In the process, she saw her son Matthew stand before synod as a candidate for Minister of the Word.

Neither Rodger Rice or his son Mark were delegated to Synod 2013, but both were at the podium. Rodger, a researcher for the Calvin College Center for Social Research, helped present the denominational survey. Mark took the podium as director of Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Rev. David Tigchelaar from Classis Huron and his brother-in-law Rev. Paul Verhoef were both first-time delegates this year. The two used to play Frisbee golf when they were students together at Calvin Theological Seminary.

And finally, brothers Lee and Loren Veldhuizen reconnected. Both from Iowa, Lee, an elder from Classis Central Plains, is a farmer in Pella. Loren, an elder from Classis Heartland, is a lawyer in Orange City.

—Banner writers



Rev. William Verhoef (center) with sons Joel (right) and Paul (left).



Rev. Chad Vandervalk (left) and father Marvin (right).



Rodger Rice (left) with son Mark (right), director of Faith Alive.



Brothers Lee (left) and Loren Veldhuizen (right).



Paul Verhoef (left) with brother in law David Tigchelaar (right).

Executive director Joel Boot:

"It would not only be friendly to make that amendment, but it would be unfriendly not to."

Delegate Stanley Jim (struggling to adjust the microphone): "They didn't feed me enough milk, so I'm short."

What Is God Up to in the Christian Reformed Church?

Delegates of Synod 2013 joined Roosevelt Park Community Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., for the synodical worship service—a service held in both Spanish and English and punctuated by applause and cries of “Amen!”

Pastor Pablo Canché led the liturgy and communion, and Rev. Reggie Smith, vice president of Synod 2013, delivered the message.



Rev. Reggie Smith brings the message at the synodical service of prayer and praise.

“What is God up to in the Christian Reformed Church?” Smith asked the congregation. “We are dealing with big issues, structure changes, expanding minority leadership, falling ministry shares. What is God up to in the Christian Reformed Church?”

Preaching on the Gospel of John, Smith said we need to talk less, listen more. “God first speaks to us,” he said. “When God speaks, it is up to us to listen. At Synod 2013, if we listen, will he not show us where we need to go?”

Smith told worshipers that while we might wish for more light to know where we are going, God gives just enough light. What we need is more faith, like the faith of Abraham and Noah and the apostles.

“We will gather this week at Calvin College. We’re going to let our little light shine because God has called us to be his witnesses, and we shall do it by faith.”

—Gayla R. Postma

—Gayla R. Postma

—Gayla R. Postma



Susanne Jordan (left) and daughter Rev. Rebecca Jordan Heys.



Candidate Matthew Ackerman with mom Linda Ackerman.



Elder Gerrit DenHartog is Synod 2013’s seargent-at-arms.

“Sarge” Gets Delegates Back to Work

Elder Gerrit DenHartog, aka “Sarge,” was serious about corraling delegates back to work after their coffee breaks.

The designated “sergeant-at-arms” sported a sash and whistle.

“People are very good-natured even when I do blow a whistle, which has been very loud at times,” said DenHartog. “I also quote Ecclesiastes 3:1—‘there is a time for everything’—in as loud a voice as possible.”

—Roxanne Van Farowe



NEWS

SYNOD 2013

(l-r) Sheila, 12, Madeline, 10, Kate M., 10, Kate W., 10, and Luke, 10, sing in the choir at a hymn sing that featured music from *Lift Up Your Hearts*. For many, it was their first look at the new hymnal.



Synod president

William Koopmans:

"After being taken to the hospital yesterday, [delegate] Walter Bruinsma was told that he would be given the stress test this morning. I thought that meant he would come to synod."

Delegate Archie

Vanderhart: "Prediction is always difficult, especially of the future."



Bear S., 5, and his little brother Johan, 3, got a chance to try out the president's chair at Synod 2013 when they visited grandpa, Rev. Tom Draayer of Classis Rocky Mountain.



Calvin president Michael Le Roy and his wife, Andrea, host the annual president's picnic for synod delegates.

Cliff Sanders on sax with Anthony Elenbaas on drums.





Delegates of Synod 2013 gathered on the lawn for a photo op.



A delegate, on the pace of synod days: "It's not John Grisham at the beach."

Sheila Holmes, incoming president of the Board of Trustees.

Delegates waved their new hymnals in appreciation for the book's editors.

Synod president William Koopmans: "I'd like to request that when we are in synod you turn off your cell phones. Nobody should be calling anybody during synod, unless it's my wife... and she's absolutely not calling you, Jose."

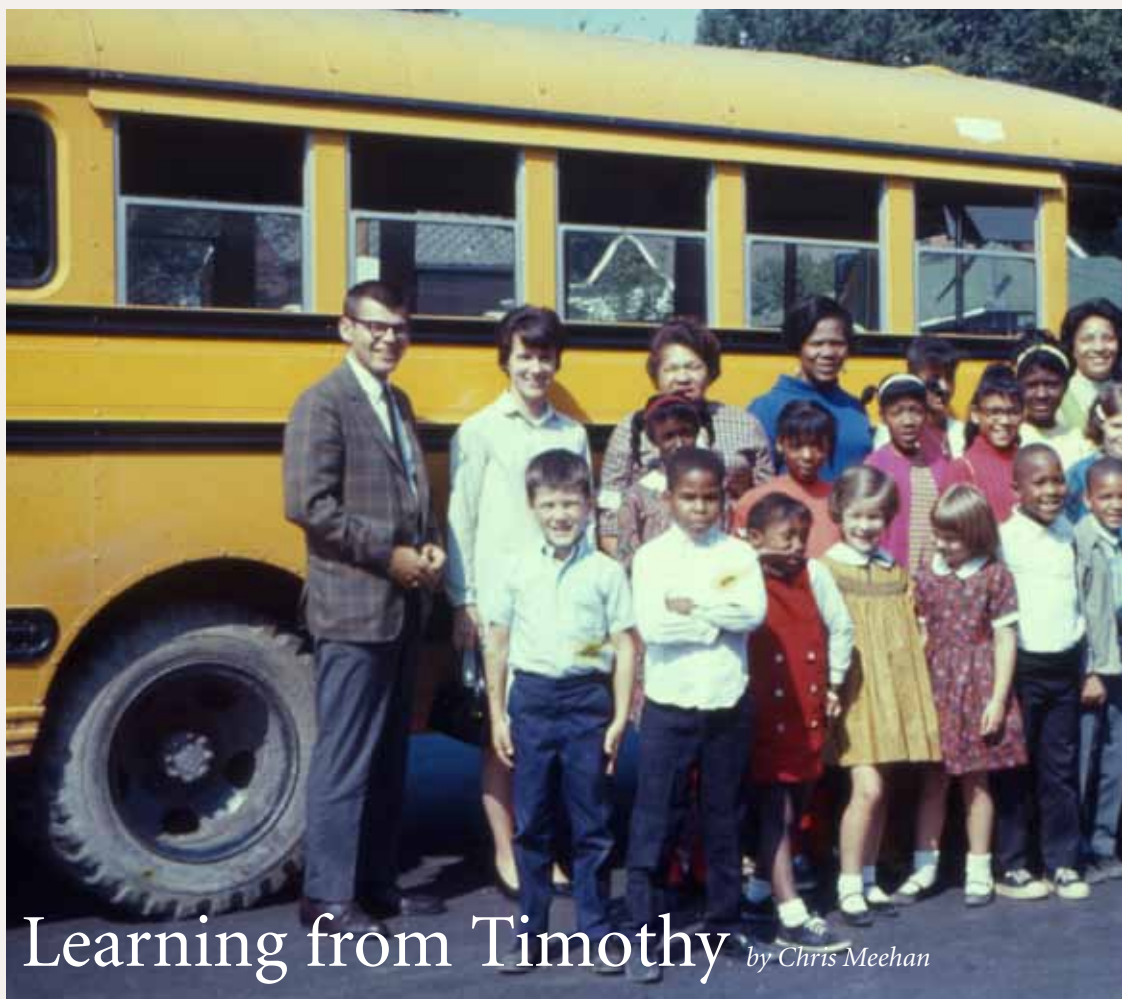


Synod president William Koopmans (left) and executive director Joel Boot enjoy some synod fun.

The Specialized Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church often work quietly in the background, addressing issues that are important to the church.

In this issue, we feature stories about several of these ministries. These stories include

- the Timothy Christian School controversy of the late 1960s that led to the formation of today's Office of Race Relations;
- an initiative by Chaplaincy and Care Ministry that aims to more closely connect CRC chaplains and their supporting churches;
- a woman who lives with disabilities and has become a leader in her congregation with the help of Disability Concerns and her church;
- the advocacy work the Office of Social Justice is doing on the issue of immigration.



Learning from Timothy by Chris Meehan

Lynn stepped off the school bus in September 1967 and walked into Des Plaines Christian Elementary School along with nearly 20 other students from Lawndale Christian Reformed Church.

This was the seventh-grader's first day at the school, and she was scared. All of them were. They had no idea how they would be treated at this school 28 miles from their urban Chicago church.

"I thought they would put me last in line," Lynn wrote later in a school paper. "I thought that they wouldn't talk to me. They would call me black."

Almost right away, she says, she felt accepted. Still, she couldn't forget why the students had to make that nearly 60-mile round-trip bus ride.

Lynn's parents, as well as other parents, had applied to have their children attend Timothy Christian School in the community of Cicero, Ill., about three miles from their church. But they were repeatedly turned down. They were convinced it was because of their race.

"I had a grudge," Lynn said. "Education was a mere stage I had to go through because I thought the whites would never let us prove what we knew."

At Des Plaines Christian School, her attitude changed.

"Des Plaines has helped me to change my thoughts through the grace of God," she wrote. "And I thank him for letting me be here."

Lynn was part of a story that still echoes down the decades, rife with disturbing lessons and significant developments for the Christian Reformed Church.



Lawndale school bus

The story took place in the 1960s during a time of great social upheaval in the United States over civil rights. Some 45 years ago this June, the issue of blacks being barred from the school came before Synod 1968.

Synod's action included starting a process that eventually led to the creation of the current Office of Race Relations. But the road was long, complex, and painful.

Lawndale CRC, formed in the mid-1950s from a CRC chapel, was located in a sturdy two-story brick building that once housed a CRC outreach to the Jewish community.

Lawndale was one of the first largely black congregations in the CRC. By the mid-1960s, parents had decided to ask

that their children be enrolled at Timothy. They made a formal request in April 1965.

In June, the Timothy board told parents that the school would not admit their children.

The decision had nothing to do with race, the board said. Rather it was a matter of safety. Cicero, they said, was historically racist, and black students would be at risk of being attacked if they attended the school.

Many people, including a later generation of Timothy parents, didn't agree with that line of reasoning.

In the school's 2011 centennial booklet, a section reflecting on that time says that denying admission because the children were black is "certainly something that's difficult to comprehend. . . . As Christians, we understand that seeming racism has no place in the kingdom of God."

It also says that many people insisted that racism was not the reason for rejecting the students. "It wasn't racism," one former teacher says. "It was Cicero."

Duane VanderBrug, the pastor of Lawndale CRC during that time, says their assessment was accurate: "It is true that (admitting black students) into the school would have been risky and tense; no one doubted that."

He adds that the Lawndale Christian education committee and the church council, in seeking to have the children admitted, framed the issue in terms of Christian discipleship, believing that in this context, the Timothy Christian School board could find reasons to help them take a courageous, biblical stand.

That approach didn't work; the school board refused to bend.

"Every year that the children were not admitted was a cumulative loss of 20 years," says VanderBrug.

In early 1967, Lawndale parents again petitioned the school board to admit their children. They were again turned down—a decision that continued to inflame their sense of rejection, indignation, and frustration.

In an open letter to *The Banner*, the parents of the black students expressed their feelings. They wrote: "We are really puzzled—and distressed. When we joined the Christian Reformed Church, we thought we had come into a fellowship (of fellow Christians). We did not think of ourselves as a minority. Can you imagine, then, how we felt when a number of the members of the denomination threatened to stop contributing money (to Timothy school) if 'they,' our dear children, would be received in the school?"

After being turned down again, the Lawndale parents took another approach, asking Des Plaines Christian School to admit their children. Although school officials wondered how neighbors would react to black children being bussed to the suburban school, they quickly reached a decision.

"Last Monday evening the Lord opened an exciting possibility to us when the Des Plaines school board informed us that they would receive our children to be in their Christian grade school," VanderBrug announced in a letter.

The students arrived in the fall of 1967, riding in a bus that Lawndale CRC had to buy and maintain with the help of area churches.

Despite early misgivings, the children reaped the benefits of attending a school where racial harmony was celebrated.

But parents grew weary of having their children take the long bus ride on busy Chicago freeways. In addition, it turned out that the Des Plaines school was going to have a hard time accommodating the nearly 30 Lawndale students planning to attend in 1968.

Once again, the parents asked Timothy Christian School to reconsider admitting their children. When it became clear that the board was not going to change its mind, Eugene Bradford took action.

Bradford, now deceased, was the pastor of Ebenezer CRC, a nearby congregation. He stood on the side of Lawndale »



DOIT



and asked his church council to send an overture requesting synod to address the situation.

In the overture, Ebenezer asked synod to “declare that members of the Christian Reformed Church . . . freely receive as brethren, regardless of race or color, all who repent of their sins and make a credible profession of faith in Christ and (to declare) that the exclusion from full Christian fellowship on account of race or color is sinful.”

Synod also received other overtures, some supporting Ebenezer and others strongly backing the Timothy school board.

After a long and bitter seesaw battle, the controversy was brought before Synod 1968.

Emotions ran high, as did the rhetoric. Biblical arguments were made on both sides of the issue. Synod delegates, however, ultimately sided with the Lawndale parents, unequivocally stating that “obedience to Christ does not warrant denial to anyone, for reasons of race or color, of full Christian fellowship and privilege in the church or in related institutions, such as colleges and schools.”

Synod also declared a denomination-wide day of prayer to seek racial unity, strongly reaffirmed the reality that Holy Scripture teaches that racism is a sin and injustice, and instructed Christian Reformed Home Missions to develop programs “through which the denomination, individual churches, and members can effectively use all available resources to eliminate racism, causes and effects,

within the body of believers throughout the world in which we live.”

Synod also asked Timothy to reconsider and enroll the Lawndale students, citing its actions and referring to the statement that “racism is a sin.”

But the Timothy board balked, believing that synod had no jurisdiction in the matter.

Finally, members of a commission on race formed by Synod 1968 met with the school board and strongly suggested that it take up the matter again. Before reluctantly doing so, the board sent out a survey asking Cicero residents for their opinions on admitting blacks to the school.

Eugene Bradford attended the meeting in early 1969 when the survey was addressed.

In a written recollection of that meeting, Bradford describes people packing the room, angrily calling for the board to continue barring blacks from the school.

As he looked around, Bradford says, he found it sad and disturbing how many people—many of them his friends—clung to deeply entrenched beliefs about the separation of the races. He came to the meeting hoping for a breakthrough, but that didn’t happen.

Later that same year, four Timothy teachers marched into the school and turned in their resignations, protesting the school’s racial attitudes. The principal later resigned.

In a letter to the Timothy board, the teachers wrote that they took the action out of frustration following four long

years during which the Lawndale parents had sought a Christian education for their children.

“One of the great tragedies in this situation is the harm done to the white children who are cut off from fellowship with their black brothers and sisters in Christ at the time in history when this lesson most urgently needs to be learned,” they wrote.

“Everyone got hurt in this situation,” says VanderBrug.

At the same time, a large group of demonstrators from Calvin College and Trinity Christian College protested the actions of the Cicero school board by walking the streets outside the school, carrying signs.

The demonstration led to headlines and heated discussion, bringing the issue to the forefront on a national stage. Many in the denomination spoke out, coming down on one side or the other. But there were no real changes.

Since the children still couldn’t attend the school, some of those involved took the issue to federal court in 1971, charging the school board in Cicero with violating the civil rights of the students.

The court strongly criticized the school board and its behavior, but it declined to rule on the lawsuit, essentially saying it had no control over private schools.

The standoff between parents and school was eventually resolved—quietly and without any real reconciliation—when Timothy officials decided to build another school outside of Cicero.

Ironically, says VanderBrug, the building was sold for \$400,000 to a school for persons with disabilities, and, because it received federal funding, the school was integrated.

Perhaps the most concrete development to come out of the overall confrontation was the creation of the CRC’s first

*You add.
God multiplies.*

Keeping Chaplains Connected

Rev. Darren Colyn serves as a hospital chaplain on an island off the coast of British Columbia, ministering especially to people who are nearing the end of their lives.

He and his family are members of nearby Christ Community Christian Reformed Church, which supports him as a chaplain.

Often the chaplains associated with the denomination's Office of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry work in faraway places and have minimal contact with their affiliated congregations.

That's not the case with Colyn, and members of the church appreciate the close relationship.

Colyn enriches the church by "offering training for hospital visits and how to manage the different emotions and experiences that people are encountering in times of suffering and pain," said Chelsey Harmon, a pastor at the church in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

He also gets to preach and has "been just a very calm presence in our community."

"The close-knit relationship between the church and the chaplain is something that the chaplaincy ministry would like to see happen more often," said Rev. Ron Klimp, director of the CRC's chaplaincy office.

Klimp noted that in 2009 "the name of our denominational office was changed to Chaplaincy and Care Ministry; its mandate expanded to include finding further ways to connect chaplains to their local churches and the churches to the work of chaplaincy.

"Today we are seeing more and more calling churches taking an active role in encouraging the work of the chaplains as an extension of their church's ministry to the world and inviting chaplains to play a more active role in the church's fellowship and ministry to its own members," said Klimp.

In order to do this, his office is working with churches to reinforce and clarify a Covenant of Joint Supervision.

"This is a covenant creating and helping to sustain the relationship between chaplains and their calling churches," he said.

Especially when—as is the case with many chaplains—they serve in distant places, "they can sometimes become invisible to the local congregation that called them," said Klimp.

"The chaplain thus loses a sense of support and encouragement, while the church loses a connection with a gifted servant and to an exciting area of ministry."

The Covenant of Joint Supervision was created to verbalize and solidify an agreement of mutual accountability, communication, and meaningful prayer support.

"It suggests use of the chaplain's gifts on a local level as well as at broader assemblies. When these things happen, the church is enriched, the chaplain's work is celebrated, and the chaplain is encouraged." ■ —Chris Meehan



Darren Colyn



1. Timothy Christian School as it looked in 1911.
2. Rev. Eugene Bradford
3. Synod 1968 affirmed that racism is a sin.
4. A group gathered in the chapel at Lawn-dale CRC.

race relations committee, formed by Synod 1968. That eventually became the Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR), which in turn has become the Office of Race Relations with Rev. Esteban Lugo as its director.

As he reflects on the Timothy school story, Lugo says that it clearly served as the catalyst for the CRC to focus more fully on the issue of race.

Even so, he adds, it was just the beginning, since fighting racism remains an ongoing challenge in the church.

Racism may not be as blatant today as it was then, but that doesn't mean it no longer exists, Lugo says. "The dismantling of the sin of racism in the church and society is long and hard work.

"Racism is a systemic problem, and our approach must be one that deals with it systemically. Only in the process of time, and with intentional efforts of building cross-cultural relationships, will we be able to see the barriers begin to come down." ■



Chris Meehan is news and media relations manager for the Christian Reformed Church.

Elizabeth's Story

Faith Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., has made ministry with people who have disabilities a priority. To take its ministry to a new level, Faith CRC consulted with various people, including Rev. Mark Stephenson, the director of Disability Concerns, who led a worship service and met with some of the ministry leaders. Because they were ready, the leaders at Faith recognized the giftedness of Elizabeth Schultz. She tells the following story.

Growing up with cerebral palsy that affects my movement and my speech, I constantly had to prove myself. As an adult, I had to tell people

that I have a college degree so that they would not “baby talk” to me. Some thought of me only as a “project.” They saw my wheelchair and heard me speak, and then assumed that I was intellectually disabled. They certainly didn’t think of me as a leader.

When I joined Faith CRC, the shift in public perception—from being a project to being a leader—was just mind-blowing. After 44 years, a body of believers truly understood me. This shift became clear one Sunday evening when Pastor Jim told me that I had been nominated to be an administrative deacon. At that moment, I knew that I had



Elizabeth Schultz, a deacon at Faith CRC.

been blessed with a church family that “got it.”

After being elected a deacon, I have served in many ways, including taking the weekly offering and representing Faith as a deacon at classis meetings.

At classis I can give a different perspective on issues

relating to making people with disabilities feel welcome at church.

Although the word “I” appears a lot in this article, it’s really not about me. It’s about God, who has blessed me with a church family that understands and celebrates differences. If it were not for God, I would not be here. I give all the glory to God. In fact, I thank God for my disabilities, because through them I am the woman I am today.

Note: A longer version of Elizabeth’s story appeared in *Breaking Barriers*, Winter 2012. ■

—Elizabeth Schultz

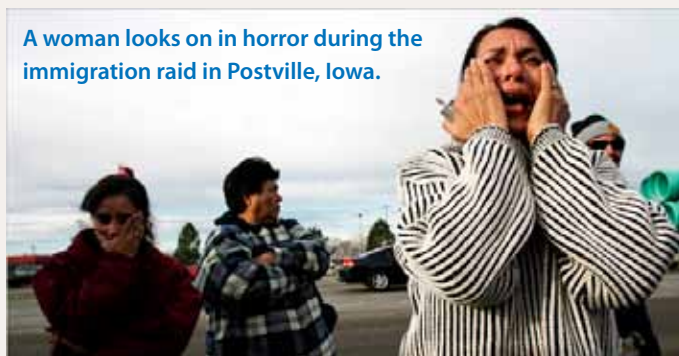
Mobilizing for Justice

Kelly Organ was near the end of her senior year in high school when she saw a chaotic scene taking place on the television mounted overhead in the school cafeteria.

The news in Postville, Iowa, was showing a federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid on a farm business processing plant.

The daughter of an immigrant from Canada, Organ watched in horror as hundreds of people were shackled, lined up, and herded onto buses.

“The ramifications of the raid for my personal understanding of immigration policy were dramatic,”



A woman looks on in horror during the immigration raid in Postville, Iowa.

Organ wrote in the Office of Social Justice’s booklet *Church Between Borders*, which features an education program on immigration justice.

“Along with others in my community, I struggled to understand the situation and what my role as a Christian was in all this mess.”

Organ works as an intern for the CRC’s Office of Social Justice, which addresses a range of issues. Recently it has emphasized immigration reform in the United States.

“Our two main efforts right now are raising awareness about the issue through the *Church Between Borders* workshop and helping set up meet-

ings with U.S. legislators to advocate on this issue,” says Kris Van Engen, a congregational justice mobilizer.

The call for immigration reform is becoming a nationwide movement of Christians, Van Engen said.

“Undocumented immigrants tell their stories to new friends at church, and now more Christians are recognizing that it is nearly impossible to immigrate legally under our current system in order to take jobs.”

Van Engen says that as churches hear these stories, many are turning to the *Church Between Borders* workshop or other resources their denomination offers. ■

—Chris Meehan

You add.
God multiplies.

THE VIEW FROM HERE

I Wish You Could . . .

The *View from Here*. That's what we call this column I write each month. Right now, "here" is a chair at one end of a table in front of Synod 2013 behind a sign that reads "Executive Director," and my heart is full.

Seated before me are about 188 delegates arranged alphabetically according to classes. We have been meeting for four days now. We're thoroughly engaged, nearing exhaustion, and deepening some brand-new relationships. But most important, we're absolutely convinced we are serving our God—together.

Permit me to offer some candid observations from "here."

First, we are a group of devoted Christians. We sing together. We pray together. We hear God's Word together. Our morning worship is stirring. I wish you could hear it. I know God does.

We are also a group of devoted officebearers. We are elders, chaplains, pastors, and more. Some of us have served for decades, some for years, and some just for months. Some of us have attended synod before; others have not. None of us has served here for more than days. But we are doing that with all our hearts. I wish you could know each of us. I know God does.

We have all now served on an advisory committee. Comprehending the agenda of an advisory committee is like drinking from a fire hose. But we did it for anywhere from 18 to 24 hours over the course of a few days. We considered things we may not have thought about much before. But we gave it our all. I wish you could have been in those committee rooms. I know God was.

We've had fun together. We have laughed—often—*with*, not *at*, each other. We have cried—not because of but on behalf of one another—even for some we will never have the privilege

of meeting. We have prayed together, sometimes reading prayers, sometimes singing them, sometimes speaking, sometimes whispering, sometimes silent—but always intent, always fervent. I wish you all could have been part of it. I know God was.

We've discussed matters of enormous significance. We've listened to one another. We were listened to when we talked. New thoughts were considered with patience and tolerance. All 188 of us were engaged for hours in a single conversation.

We heard. We changed. We grew. We decided. We wished you could have been with us. We know God was.

We tried to keep the big picture in mind, to see more than our own desires, to think of more than our own needs. We tried to think of the whole church. We represented the whole church. We experienced together a taste of God's Revelation 7 church. We gathered together as brothers and sisters from many races and nations. We prayed and read the Word and sang in many languages. We witnessed a partial fulfillment

of the Great Commission. We wish you could have seen it. We know God did.

We're thinking too about going home. We miss our loved ones. We are also concerned about the churches to which we belong and which we miss dearly. We have been worshipping with that church in mind. We have prayed for her, for you. We have debated and decided on her behalf. We have prayed and worked for her welfare. You have been on our minds and in our hearts all week. We hope you know that. We know God does.

All week long, delegates have been sharing with me how wonderful it has been for them to be here. They have been watching God in action. And they have been blessed. They wish you all could have been here with us. Now maybe you feel a little more like you actually were here. We all are fully convinced God was. ■



“You have been on our minds and in our hearts all week.”



Rev. Joel Boot is executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Healing the Mountain People

The Luke Society, an international medical missions organization, has been improving the health of the mountain people in Chin state in Myanmar for the last 16 years.

“Because the health workers are working hard every day except Saturday and Sunday, the health condition of the rural people is much improved,” writes Rev. Chan Thlen, general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar, in a report he recently shared with Calvin Theological Seminary.

Hopefully, says Chan, the Luke Society will be expanding its work in the country to care for other groups who are in need of health care.

The summary of health improvement is part of a report put together by Thlen, a graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, as an overview of the 2012 general assembly of the CRC in Myanmar.

Delegates to the CRC’s Synod 2011 approved entering into full ecclesiastical fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar.

Churches in ecclesiastical fellowship are those Reformed churches with whom the denomination is most closely connected. These churches often exchange fraternal delegates with the CRC, and their pastors may preach from CRC pulpits and vice versa.

“Over the past 28 years [the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar] has been working hard to bring transformation to the rural communities in the southern part of Chin,” he wrote, adding that his denomination appreciates the support of the CRC.

Topics addressed by the assembly, wrote Chan, included the ongoing need for pastors, the progress in construction of a new ministry center for the church, and agricultural developments such as farmers learning a new way to plant rice.

He also wrote about a project translating Christian literature into Matu, one of the country’s main languages.

Chan has been active in this project, translating books and the Bible into Matu.

“Many Matu communities speak only Matu and not Burmese nor English,” he said. “The Matu Christian Literature Committee is trying to help the children of Matu to teach them how to read and write. . . . Matu readers have been prepared by me, and some young people are willing to teach the children.” ■

—Chris Meehan



Mike and Megan Ribbens with their children, Stella, Amira, and Nico.

Called to a New Land

Like Abraham, Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) missionaries Mike and Megan Ribbens are hearing God calling them to a new land.

The Ribbens have worked in Nigeria with Christian business people, politicians, church leaders, and teachers interested in applying their faith to everyday life.

In January 2014, following a six-month home service, the Ribbens will be answering a new call to serve with CRWM in Johannesburg, South Africa.

CRWM has had a limited presence in South Africa over the years. A previous missionary used to train health care professionals applying biblical principles. More recently, CRWM’s Regional Leader for Eastern and Southern Africa, Mwaya Wa Kitavi, has initiated a “Big Five” ministry approach with South African partners.

Traditionally in Africa, the “Big Five” refers to the hard-to-find wild animals seen on safari tours. For CRWM, the “Big Five” describes CRWM’s ministry foci in Eastern and Southern Africa: leadership development, Christian education, theological education, church planting, and farming in faith.

CRWM links with local and international partners in these

areas to equip and strengthen local Christian leaders for applying a biblical worldview.

As in Nigeria, Mike and Megan’s task will be to equip local leaders for Christ-centered transformation. Already, they’re seeing inklings of what this work may involve.

“There are people empowered by the Holy Spirit walking the long, difficult road of reconciliation. It is a great opportunity to be invited to join this walk,” says Mike.

The Ribbens plan to identify opportunities for North American youths to learn and serve with South African youths. Since half of South Africa’s population is under 19, Megan hopes her children’s participatory photography program, “Through Their Eyes,” may be useful in hospitals, orphanages, and schools.

“South Africa certainly shows residue from apartheid,” notes Mike. “Suspicion, corruption, high crime, and malaise are visible.”

Many people still rarely connect with people outside of their own ethnicity. Yet “the people, particularly the young people, remain resilient and hopeful.” ■

—Sarah Lin,
Christian Reformed
World Missions

Jo's Faith Journey in Japan

Jo Ushioda stood up in his church in Japan on Easter morning in front of 27 of his fellow believers, publicly professed his faith, and was baptized.

Jo, a 42-year-old follower of several Back to God Ministries International Japanese programs, has shared each step of his faith journey with Rev. Masao Yamashita, BTGMI's Japanese ministry leader.

"Since last July, Jo has faithfully sent more than 180 comments to our programs," Yamashita said. "He has never had the opportunity to become a Christian until now."

Although Japan enjoys freedom of religion, 70 percent of citizens claim none and only 1 percent are Christian. There is only one way Jo could have stayed connected to BTGMI: through faith and prayer.

In fact, Yamashita has requested prayers for continued growth in Jo's faith nearly every month since his first contact.

Jo had the opportunity to attend church with his grandmother when he was young but lost touch with his faith until coming across BTGMI's online radio programs.

Today Jo especially enjoys hearing the online edition of *Morning Word*, a five-minute radio program that airs each Sunday in northern Japan.

Yamashita also believes that joining the ministry's text-messaging group, *Pajapaja*, made a difference in Jo's faith journey. The group provides a community of believers, even if they do not meet face-to-face. ■

—Brian Clark, Back to God Ministries International



Jo is baptized.

Water Fosters "Gold-Rush" in West Africa—and Ontario

"Water used to be like gold to us," said a Gourmanche woman in West Africa.

Now, thanks to the support of Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Goderich, Ontario, and the work of World Renew, she has access to clean water in her village. The Ontario church has also benefited richly.

The Gourmanche people are a minority ethnic group that makes up only about 1 percent of the population in their country. In 1993, World Renew began working with some Christian Gourmanche leaders to train and assist community groups—Christian and Muslim—across the region to improve their lives.

In 2009, as part of this ministry, nine communities identified wells as a top priority.



A women pumps water from a well in West Africa.

Lack of a nearby well meant taking time from working in the fields to walk long distances to get water. The leaders asked for assistance to build nine wells.

Meanwhile, Trinity CRC was looking for a special cause to support during Advent. After hearing about the need for wells, they committed themselves to the cause and raised \$28,500—enough to build 17 wells.

But the communities asked for only nine wells, requiring World Renew to

find other communities willing to support the project. Slowing things down as well was the January-April rainy season that made it hard to reach rural areas.

Only five of nine wells were completed in the first year. Over the next two years, World Renew leveraged the funds to complete 13 additional wells and a village borehole.

Several more are planned for the next year. The communities are pleased with the results.

"We used to only be able to get eight jugs of water per day; now we take 150," said one community member.

Trinity CRC was deeply affected by participation in the project. The ability to raise funds for wells demonstrated to the church community that they had the capacity to plan and implement a major initiative. This was the catalyst to raise nearly \$2 million for a new ministry center.

They also raised support to build churches in communities around the world. Today those international churches are mostly complete, and Trinity hopes to hold the grand opening and dedication ceremony on its new ministry center on August 24.

"Francis of Assisi said that it is in giving we receive. That was the case for our congregation," explained Pastor Stephen Tamming. ■

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg, World Renew

ADS

Deadlines: September issue is 8/5/13. Details online.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.33^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.26^{US} per character applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements. Photos are \$22^{US} extra.

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

Denominational and Classical

Calls Accepted

HERITAGE CRC of Byron Center, Michigan rejoices in the acceptance of their call to Rev. James Boer of Holland, Michigan to serve as their next pastor.

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS HEARTLAND will meet at the Hawarden, Iowa, CRC on September 28, 2013. Submit agenda materials to the Stated Clerk, Rev. Robert Drenten, no later than August 2: 1405 Albany Ave NE, Orange City, IA 51041. robert.drenten@gmail.com

CLASSIS OF HOLLAND will meet in regular session Thursday, October 3, 2013 at 3:00 PM at Graafschap CRC, Holland, MI. Agenda items are due by August 16, 2013 and should be sent to: Rev. Tony Louwerse, Stated Clerk. Email: louwerse@macatawa.org, FAX: 616-494-6054.

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, September 19, 2013 @ 4PM, at the Haven CRC of Zeeland. Agenda deadline is August 8. Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, S. C.

Financial Aid

CLASSIS NORTHERN ILLINOIS is now accepting student aid applications from students pursuing word-related ministries. Contact committee chair, Mark van Stee, 5130 Wolf Rd., Western Springs IL 60558 (email office@crcls.org). Application deadline July 31.

Retirement

PASTOR DUANE VAN LOO retired from active ministry in the CRC in June. He served churches in Indiana, Michigan and Illinois before ministering to several churches as certified transition pastor. Grace Community CRC in Oak Lawn, IL praises God for his years of service to the church and to his Savior and Lord.

Available for Call

FIRST CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF DENVER announces that Rev. Nathan DeJong McCarron is available for call. We joyfully recommend him for further ministry in the CRC. We wish him and his family the Lord's blessing as they seek to serve a new community of faith. He can be contacted at natedejongmccarron@gmail.com

After 14 years of faithful service, **FIRST CRC, HIGHLAND, IN**, having united in ministry with Faith Church of Dyer, IN, commends Rev. Randall Bergsma to the churches as available for call. He can be reached at randallbergsma@gmail.com or call (219) 838-6231.

We are pleased to announce that **MICHELLE ELLIS** has now completed her academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word Rev. Joel R. Boot, Executive Director

Congregational

Church's 50th Anniversary

CRESTVIEW CHURCH, BOULDER, CO is celebrating 50 years of ministry! Celebrations and dedication of the remodeled sanctuary are set for Sep 7-8. If you are a former member or attendee we invite you to join us. Please RSVP to office 303-444-5780 so we can plan accordingly

Birthdays

100th Birthday



ANNE (HELMHOLDT) ROSE 4452 Cedar Lane, Muskegon, MI 49441 celebrated her 100th birthday on June 23. Her family thanks God for her loving, faithful life.

90th Birthday

JULIET BLYSTRA Celebrates her 90th birthday July 27. Our family gives praise to God for her many years of love and devotion! Her address: 95 Old Mill Dr. #16 Holland, MI 49423.

ADRIANNA DANHOFF of 4214 Ste Rte 103 S, Willard, Ohio 44890, is celebrating her 90th birthday on July 23. Join us in thanking God for the love and guidance from our Mom and our Dad, Harold (dec 2004). Their children are Doug (Annemarie), Rita (Joel) Bcraft, Becky (Dave) Veltkamp, Harve (Sue) and Don (Sharon), 13 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren. To God be the Glory!



BERENDINA MAKKINGA RIESEBOS ... Moeder, Oma & Great Oma "Her children arise and call her blessed." July 5, 2013 #21~110 Caverly Rd. Aylmer, ON N5H 2P4



DOROTHY PERSENAIRE YONKER of 12447 S. Natchez, Palos Heights IL 60463 celebrated her 90th birthday on June 15 in the thankful company of her husband Wendell, three children and spouses, nine grandchildren and spouses, and 16 great-grandchildren, all of whom are still looking

for her missing purse. We praise God for his love and faithfulness, and this wonderful lady.

85th Birthday

ANN BILTHOUSE HAVEL of Lake Geneva, WI and Longboat Key, FL will turn 85 years young on August 15. Her husband Bob and her children Dale (Joy), Bob (Jennifer), Ed (Jan), Randy (Melissa), Patty (Kyle), 16 grand children and 6 great grand children thank her for all of her love and encouragement. We love you and we'll see you at the lake! N1562 Oak Shores Ln Fontana, WI 53125

80th Birthday

RON ZIGTERMAN of St. John, IN, celebrated his 80th birthday on June 5. Congratulations with love from all the kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids!

Anniversaries

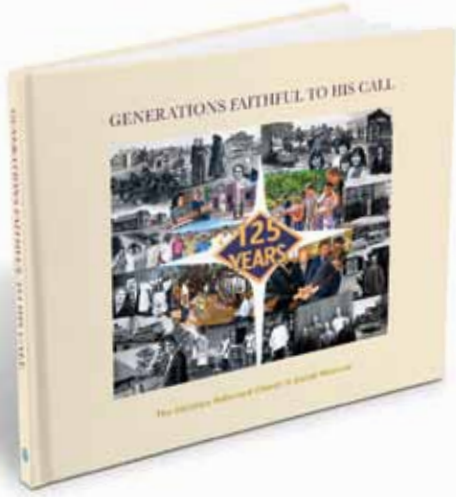
70th Anniversary



KALLEMEYN Earl & Harriet will celebrate 70 yrs of marriage July 17. Their 7 children, 15 grandchildren and 25 great grandchildren thank God for their love and guidance.

65th Anniversary

BAZUIN Rev. Lugene (Archie) & Ellie (Jansma) of 35 Village Woods Dr. Crete, IL 60417 will celebrate their 65th ann. on June 11 D. V. Their loving children: Dan & Theresa, Lou Anne & Bart (Sybenga), Mary & Richard (Doornbos): their grandchildren Monique & Tom Levesque, Nick & Melanie Doornbos, Chad & Lisa Doornbos, Lindsey & Justin Lageste, Nicole Bazuin and Alex Doornbos; great grandchildren, Chase



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(Complimentary copies have been offered to CRC churches.)



and Chloe Levesque and Leah Doornbos join in thanking God for his faithfulness and mercy.

DE WAAL MALEFYT Karel and Catherine (Busch) of Franklin Lakes, NJ celebrated 65 years of marriage on June 26. We, your children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and friends, give thanks to God for your steadfast love to each other and for your faithful example of a marriage in Christ over these many years!

PYNAKER, Andrew & Nancy (Gemell) 7517-20th Avenue, Kenosha, WI 53143 will celebrate 65 years of marriage on July 16, 2013 along with their children; Dave, Judy, Bob, Karen, and Pam and their spouses; 12 grandchildren; 21 great-grandchildren. "Dad-thanks for asking; Mom-thanks for say yes"! We love you!!

60th Anniversary

BIEL Rudy and Henny (VanderHoning) will celebrate 60 years of marriage on August 3, 2013. Their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are thankful for their love and wish them God's blessings! 45 Edward Street, Drayton, ON, NOB 1P0

BUURSMAN John & Barbara of Holland, MI celebrated 60 years of marriage on June 12. We are thankful for their love & faithfulness to their Father, His church, and their family. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." - their commitment, our blessing! We love you! ~Dick & Sue(Renee, Tom) Greg & Kathy(Dan, Jake & Jenelle, Nate) Randy & Debra(Ben & Becky, Derek, Erica)

SMEELINK Jud and Elaine of Grand Rapids, MI, celebrated 60 years of marriage on June 19. Their children, Judy (Harvis), Jack, Joy (Paul) and Joni (Rob), and grandchildren thank God for their love and commitment to Him, to each other, to their family and to the many people whose lives they've touched over the years. A family celebration in Vermont is planned for later this summer.

VOS Arthur Jr. & Joanne (Groenboom) 13701 Lauerman #58 Cedar Lake, IN, 46303. Will celebrate 60 years of marriage on September 4. Children, Loretta (Dennis) Keizer, Ruth (Dave) Buikema, Ardythe (Hank Jr) Iwema, Arthur III (Kris) Vos. 10 grandchildren, Dennis Jr (Amanda) Keizer, Joanne (Matthew) Gritters, David Jr (Paula) Buikema, Joseph (Kristina) Buikema, Rebekah (Jerry) Deuerling, Henry III (Trisha) Iwema, Jacquelyn (fiance Kevin Drenth) Iwema, Makenzie Vos, Olivia Vos,

Arthur Vos IV; 11 great grandchildren. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

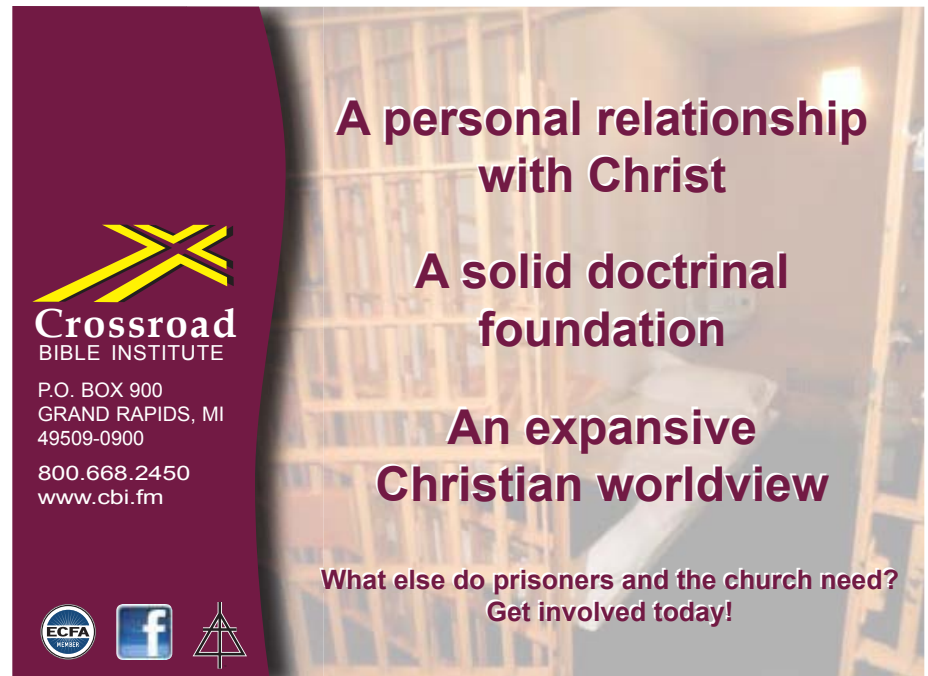
50th Anniversary



JANSE "It is with a thankful heart to the Lord that Art and Pat Janse will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on July 20. Truly the Lord has been gracious and has blessed their marriage. Congratulations Mom and Dad. Love Shawn."

VANDERPOL Vernon and Mina (VanLangen) 510 3rd Ave N, Edgerton, MN 56128. You've been an example of Christian marriage to children Doyle and Velda Baker, Russ and Cynthia, Stan and Becky, Mark and Julie and 13 grandchildren. Friends and family will celebrate with Vern and Mina on July 27th.

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Church Position Announcements

PASTOR Bethel CRC in Listowel, ON is seeking a second full time pastor to serve a vibrant, all-ages congregation of approx. 650 members. For a job description, please email John Greydanus jhgreydaus@gmail.ca

NEERLANDIA CRC is a large, rural congregation located in Northern Alberta. We are a well-established, active church enjoying a blended style of worship. Our Search Committee is looking for a full-time pastor willing to assist us in becoming the church God expects us to be. Interested applicants may contact Erna at famvn@hotmail.com for more detailed information.

YOUTH DIRECTOR 12th Avenue Christian Reformed Church of Jenison, MI, is seeking a part-time Youth Director for our children's and youth ministries. We are looking for a Christ-follower who has a passion for young people and for reaching out to the community. The Youth Director responsibilities require approximately 20 hrs/wk. Please visit our website at www.12thavercrc.org to view the full job description and to apply. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled.

PASTOR: Lakeside Church serves a small, diverse population in Ludington, MI. Our vision is to be joyful followers of Jesus through worship, service and play and to offer "church" to those for whom church may not have worked in the past. We are seeking a full-time pastor: a spiritually-gifted teacher to connect Biblical truth to daily life and a shepherd to love and encourage children, youth and adults. Our fellowship is warm and our beaches are fabulous! Contact brendajmassie@gmail.com

MINISTER OF WORSHIP Calvary CRC of Pella, IA is seeking a full-time pastor who is called to faithfully preach from Scripture, share a pas-

sion for the Gospel, and lovingly serve as lead pastor of the ministry team. Contact us at search@calvary-crc.org.

FULLER AVE CRC seeks a full-time pastor to lead a ministry team and a highly committed congregation in SE Grand Rapids, MI. Our priorities include inspiring preaching, strong interpersonal skills, and effective leadership in cross-cultural ministry with our neighbors. Please send letter of interest, CV, and profile to John Chapin, Search Committee secretary at john.gf@earthlink.net. All inquiries held in strict confidence.

FULL TIME PASTOR Bethany CRC Fenwick, an active church located in the beautiful Niagara Peninsula, is seeking a full time Pastor. We desire a humble leader passionate for the Lord, who's gifted in preaching to diverse age groups, committed to spiritual development and has an enthusiasm for community outreach. Profile available upon request. Respond to: andriaslappendel@gmail.com.

WE AT IMMANUEL CRC in Hamilton, Ontario, are looking to grow in the specific areas of youth ministry, outreach, ministries development coordination, preaching, and discipleship. Do you sense the call of God and have gifts in any or all of these areas? If so, then we would like to discuss with you the potential of joining our current ministry team. Please email search@immanuelministries.ca so we can get in touch with you.

LEAD PASTOR Knox Presbyterian of Cranbrook B. C. is looking for a full time Canadian pastor whose strengths include: sound Biblical, Reformed Preaching and strong leadership skills. We offer a blended worship service to our 175 members and adherents and are located in the heart of the scenic Rocky Mountains. We are a 4 season community offering a fantastic place to live and serve our Lord. For information contact: Rev Doug Johns revdjohns@hotmail.co

YOUTH PASTOR Westwood CRC of Kalamazoo, MI is seeking a full time Youth Pastor who is committed to developing relational ministries with middle school and high school students within our church family and from our community. Visit westwoodcrc.org for a job description or call (269)381-8691. Applicants are invited to send a cover letter and resume to cheri@westwoodcrc.org.

PASTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL CARE (part-time) Beechwood Church of Holland, Michigan, is looking for a spiritually mature, discerning person with experience in ministry to senior adults and others facing illness or crises. The Pastor of Congregational Care will regularly make hospital, nursing home and bereavement calls and also serve the Young at Heart (seniors) in pastoral support and Bible studies. Email resume to Pastor Dawn Vagle at dawnvagle@beechwoodchurch.org

PASTOR Lake City Christian Reformed Church in Lake City, Michigan is seeking a Pastor who shares our passion for outreach and spiritual growth. As a growing congregation of approximately 450 members, LCCRC has a celebrative, contemporary style of worship and many vibrant ministries. We are a congregation of people from diverse backgrounds looking for a Pastor with gifts of preaching, teaching and passion for people from all walks of life. If you exhibit these gifts and work well in a team environment of staff and volunteers, send resume/profile or a request for a church profile to Gerard Winkle, Lake City CRC, P. O. Box 659, Lake City, MI 49651 or e-mail to office@lakecitycrrc.org

PASTOR First Pella, IA, CRC is seeking an energetic, gifted pastor to grow a diverse congregation into a vibrant, discipling body of believers who seek to radiate God's love and expand His Kingdom. Direct inquiries to Mona Roozeboom roozeboom@central.edu

WAGENVELDS Louis and MaryAnne Wagenveld celebrate 50 yrs of marriage. Join the family as they host an Open House on Sat. Aug. 3 from 1-4 p.m at Niekerk CRC in Holland MI

Obituaries

DYKE, Grace (Vander Laan) of Highland, IN, joined her Lord on May 16, age 89. Beloved wife of late William Dyke, who joined his Lord in 1979. Loving mother to Arlene (late Simon) Visser, Beverly (Wesley) Mesman, William (Harriet) Dyke, John (Elaine) Dyke, Thomas (Christy) Dyke, Marilyn (Dennis) Churilla, Janis (David) Standarski, Linda (Scott) Paarlberg. Proud grandmother to 17, great-grandmother to 28, and sister to Alice Redeker. Preceded in death by 4 brothers and 5 sisters. Also preceded in death by son-in-law Simon Visser, granddaughter Stephanie Mesman-Blom, and great-granddaughter Isabella Dees.

Grace's children feel blessed that their parents provided a loving home, Christian education and Godly heritage to each one of us.

KUIPERS Harm A. of Platte, SD went to his eternal home, March 23, 2013. Lovingly remembered by his wife, Bertha, of almost 64 years, and children: Donna (Ron) Kaemingk, Darrell (Gretchen), Arla (Mike) Mattock, Bonnie (Mike) Danielson, Dennis (Lynda), Kurt (Guik), Kent (Nancy), Lori (Mike) Holcomb, 15 grandchildren, 3 great grandchildren, 2 sisters and 3 brothers.



ROBERTS Frank Carl, aged 75, of Grand Rapids, MI passed away on Good Friday, March 29, 2013. He was History Professor and Academic Dean at Calvin College total of 32 years. He loved telling of God's grace TO ALL GENERATIONS. He was preceded in death by an infant daughter, his parents

Louis F. and Frances Roberts of Rochester, NY, and his sister Alma (John) Hoogland. He is survived by his wife of 49 years, Doris M. Roberts (Ludwick), brothers David (Cindy) and Doug (Margie, deceased), his sons Barth (Denise), Blake (Kristina Oliveira), F. Corey (Brynne), Derek (Kristen) and seven grandchildren, Anneke, Ashton, Jared, Elena, Katerina, Simon, and Vivian.

ROOKS Steven T., age 69; May 20, 2013; Menlo Park, CA, formerly of Grand Rapids, MI. Active in Christian testimony, but humble in his work, Red Cross volunteering, and community service. Steve was pre-deceased by one brother (David) and is survived by three brothers and two sisters.

TERPSTRA Lois, age 87 of Holland, MI entered the glorious presence of her Lord and Savior on May 13, 2013 at Hospice House of Holland following injuries sustained from a fall. She was preceded in death by her husband Donald in May 2012 after 64 years of marriage. Lois is survived by her children: Doug and Dawn Terpstra, Judy Terpstra, Mary Terpstra, Duane and Cindy Terpstra; grandchildren: Lisa and Jeff Van Wyk, Laura Terpstra, Brian Terpstra, Darren Terpstra, Jason Terpstra, Cassie Terpstra; great-grandchildren: Abby, Zachary and Cohen Van Wyk; siblings: Marcella Bosch, Eunice Yankiv, Sherwin and Ruth Kamps; sister-in-law Mary Ruth Kamps; several nieces and nephews. Memorial contributions may be made to Hospice of Holland.

Employment

CAREGIVERS NEEDED Are you interested in working for the best living assistance services company in West Michigan? Visiting Angels is looking for people who can be excellent, not average; make a connection with our clients; be perfectly dependable; practice compassion and work with integrity. Contact Heather at 616-243-7080 or heather@vangels.com. www.vangels.com

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MALE ROOMMATE wanted to share 2 bdrm - 2 bath home with garage in Hudsonville MI. \$400/Mo, 616-669-6364.

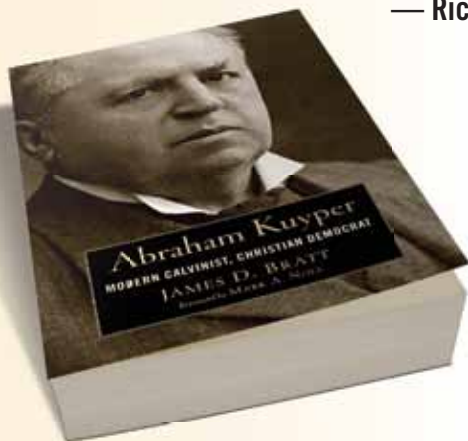
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PILGRIMAGE TO ISRAEL March 3 - 15, 2014 led by Pastor Bill and Lyn Vanden Bosch. A "disciple's pilgrimage," following in the footsteps of Jesus to understand the Gospels and the early church in its historical, geographical, and cultural context, and also increase our commitment to wholeheartedly respond to His invitation to "Follow Me." Visit New Testament sites in Galilee, along the Jordan Valley, and Jerusalem. In addition to having led other groups to Israel, the Vanden Bosches have studied at Jerusalem University College and under the leadership of Ray VanderLaan. For more information, contact Pastor Bill at (616) 826-1927 or william.vandenbosch@gmail.com. Arrangements by Witte Tours, a leader in spiritual journeys since 1975. Early booking discount of \$100 pp for applications received by August 15.

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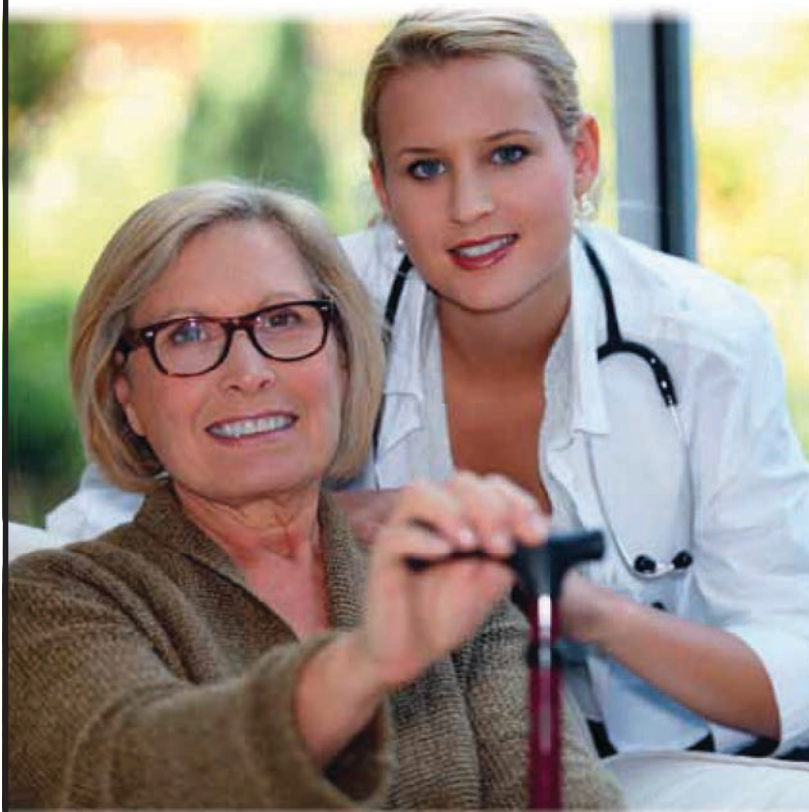
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Miscellaneous

THANK YOU to all who remembered me on my 95th birthday. I truly appreciate your thoughtfulness, and I thank God for all His blessings these many years, Betty Clousing.

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Where Is God?

I **T WAS 1968.** Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy had been murdered. Racial and political riots had reached the streets of our cities and college campuses. The war in Vietnam played out on our living room televisions, with body counts announced as routinely as the weather. It seemed that the only certainty I and others had as young men was the draft classification on our selective service card. God seemed remote to me.

In 1972 I joined the Grand Rapids (Mich.) Police Department. To me it was an opportunity for community service, and I anticipated that God would use such service. But I soon realized I had to rid myself of any “save the world” naiveté. The streets were dangerous and unforgiving. As one veteran officer explained, “There is no second place in a street fight. You have to win or you might not go home at night.” He was right. I lost my partner, Joseph Taylor, on November 17, 1986. He was shot and killed as we and other officers searched a home for a murder suspect. We made the arrest, but at the expense of Joe’s life. As sirens blared and emergency medical workers feverishly tried to save Joe, I wondered, “Where is God?” Joe was leaving behind a wife and family. How could this possibly work out for anyone’s good? Why does it seem that the good die young?

Several years later I stood beside the body of a baby girl who’d been discarded among the trash alongside a creek that runs through the city. It’s an image I can’t forget. The case remains open.

Last December we mourned for the 20 children and six adults gunned down at an elementary school in Connecticut. Days later, two firefighters in New York were ambushed and killed while respond-



The only certainty I and others had as young men was the draft classification on our selective service card.

ing to a house fire. There are many other examples of such human depravity, and we know there will be more. Where is God in all of this?

As believers we wait. We wait not for eventual calamity but for Jesus Christ himself. And as we live and wait, I begin to understand what the prophet Habakkuk means when he tells the people of Judah to wait for the revelation—a revelation that will come and not be false (Hab. 2:3). In this revelation of undeserved grace, salvation comes to those who love Jesus. It’s the revelation of Romans 8:28, where we’re told that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

Abraham’s willingness to slay his son in obedience to God (Gen. 22) will always be a horrendous concept. But so begins our covenantal relationship with God. This solemn act of obedience is the harbinger of something much greater. Jesus, the Son of God, hanging on a cross in absolute shame and unconceivable pain, is the sacrifice given for our atonement. It’s amazing grace.

Along with Habakkuk, we wait for the revelation of Jesus Christ. We wait in a broken and crying world. And while we wait, we have an assignment. God calls us to love one another and to serve one another in love (John 13:34). It is a love that has no room for apathy, a love that may even require a supreme sacrifice. “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

In my humanness I remain uncomfortable. Amid challenges, I continue to look for God, not always understanding his ways. But for now I understand with certainty that his way is for our eternal good—for yesterday, for today, and for tomorrow. And that is all I need to know. ■



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Punch Lines

What has made *you* smile lately? Got a joke or funny incident you'd care to share with your wider church family? Please send it to *The Banner* at 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560; or email it to *editorial@thebanner.org*. Thanks!

Between the couch and the glass-door cabinet there was just enough room to stack some pillows and blankets for our grandchildren who were staying overnight. Jonathon and Madison were having fun using them to make a mountain in front of the couch to climb, and then sliding over the arm of the couch into their "cave."

"Grandma doesn't think you should be doing that," I said. "I don't want you to break the glass and get hurt. It makes me nervous."

"Grandma," Jonathon replied, "maybe you should just go in the other room."

—Donna Heuker

A Sunday school teacher asked, "Johnny, do you think Noah did a lot of fishing when he was on the ark?"

"No," replied Johnny. "How could he, with just two worms?"

—Jean L. Washington

After a very moving rendition of the song "Please change my heart, Lord," the congregation burst into laughter when our interim pastor stated that this was a very appropriate song for his last Sunday with us.

You see, he was scheduled for open heart surgery.

—Gordon Weima

Hello, son," said our daughter to her 2-year-old child.

"Hello, moon," replied Matthew.

—Hermina Nauta

Boss to employee: I'm giving you a raise because I want your last week here to be a happy one.

—Dick Bylsma

One morning my 3-year-old daughter and I were home alone. I overheard her say, "Don't you just love my hairband?"

To which I replied, "I do. It's beautiful!"

"No, Mommy," she said. "I'm talking to Jesus!"

—Willena van Donkersgoed

My daughter sent me this text: My apartment is now as cat hair-free as it ever will be. ☺

I replied: What did you do?

She texted back: Vacuumed like Kuyper. Every square inch.

—Dianne Van Rooyen

One evening we were showing our granddaughter, Lacy, the old finger play we did as kids: "Here's the church, here's the steeple; open the doors, and see all the people!" Then came the next part, with fingers exposed: "Here's the church, here's the steeple; open the doors, and where are the people?" Lacy's immediate response: "They're on the roof!"

—Barb Miedema

Over supper one night, the grandchildren asked if we could speak to them in Dutch.

Much laughter followed because they didn't understand what we were saying.

Then the 4-year-old asked, "How do you laugh in Dutch?"

—Hilda Wiersma

A marketing guru walks into a pizzeria to order a pizza. The waiter asks, "Shall I cut it into six or eight pieces?"

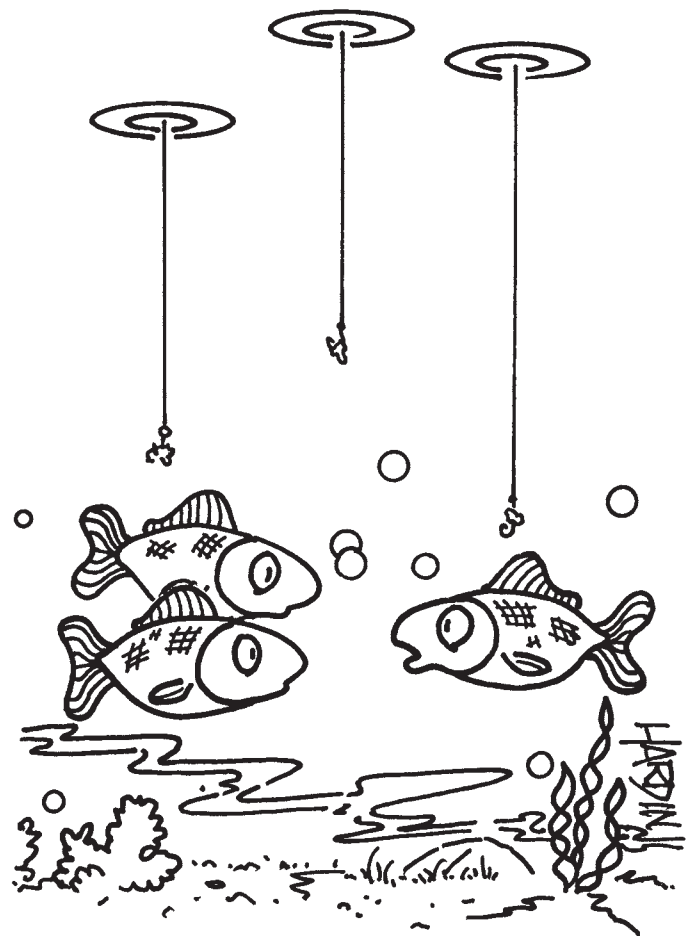
"Better make it eight," says the guru. "I'm feeling pretty hungry right now."

—John Veltkamp

A speaker addressing a large group of women asked, "Where would man be today if it were not for woman?"

From the back of the room came a voice. "He'd be in the Garden of Eden eating strawberries."

—Sue Lauritzen



"First Carl and Celia mysteriously disappear—now it's Ed. I say we put our heads together over lunch and figure this thing out."

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