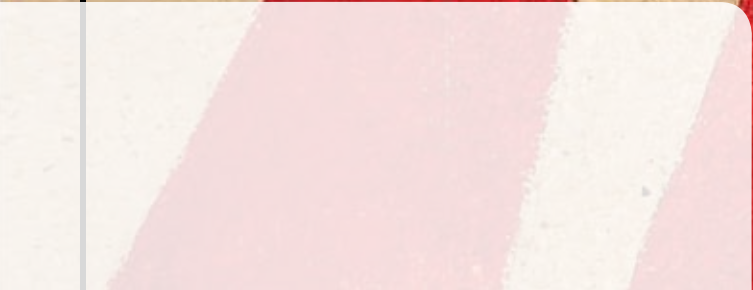


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### Other important organizations advertising in this issue

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# BANNER

Volume 148 | Number 12 | 2013



## FEATURES

### 22 **Belonging at the Manger** [STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)

*Would we follow the magi to find the child?*  
by Leonard Kuyvenhoven

### ◀ 40 **Living Well, Dying Well** *Where do we go with our fears and uncertainties about death and dying?* by Erika Dekker

## DEPARTMENTS

### **Editorial: Presents** by Bob De Moor 8

*Christmas really is all about presents—the kind you can't order online.*

### **Catch Your Breath: The Mom Club** by Erin Vandenberg 9

*A year ago, I didn't fully appreciate that children are a gift, not a given.*

### **IMHO: Live Free from the Grip of Porn** Jim Terpstra 10

*It's time for the church to speak up against pornography.*

### **Letters to the Editor** 10

### **News: Walking to Bethlehem** 12

### **Discipleship: Numbering Our Days** by Ben Hulst 20

*What does it mean to number our days?*

### **Frequently Asked Questions** 21

*Celebrating Christmas in a counter-cultural way.*

### **On the Journey: How Is God Being Glorified?** by Jennifer Altena 25

*In three days volunteers renovated our home and our lives.*

### **Just for Kids: Name That Tune** by Christin Baker 34 ▶

*A closer look at some of the world's favorite Christmas carols.*

### **Relating: A Beautiful Gift** by Sallie Ann Borrink 36

*A newcomer's perspective on women in the Christian Reformed Church.*

### **Tuned In: Neil Gaiman's Thin Barriers Between Life and Death** by Otto Selles 38

*Popular author Neil Gaiman explores unusual territory.*

### **Reformed Matters: The Three Marks of a Reformed Church Structure** by Kathy Smith 42 [STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)

*What's "Reformed" about our church structure?*

### **Next: Thinking in Light of Eternity** by Amanda Stephen 43

*Achieving a comfortable lifestyle isn't everything.*

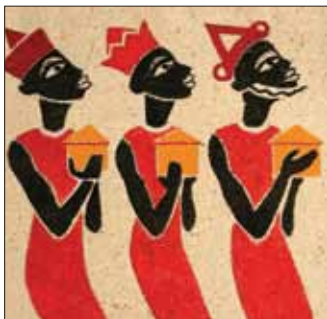
### **Punch Lines** 63

## TOGETHER DOING MORE

### **The View from Here: Gold, Circumstance, and Mud** by Joel Boot 26

### **Creating an On-ramp for International Development** by Matt Kucinski 27

*New website links college grads to entry-level jobs in international development.*



**Cover:** Sénégal, Keur Moussa, *Magi*. The Keur Moussa abbey church fresco was designed and painted in 1963 by Dom Georges Saget.

ILLUSTRATION BY SUPERSTOCK

## Presents

**CHRISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT PRESENTS. YUP.** For adults as well as kids. It's about the really expensive ones you can't order online.

Matthew records that the very first Christmas present was one that Best Buy doesn't stock. It's the gift of an heir to David's royal house (1:1), a Son to Abraham's lineage to bless all nations (Gen. 12:3), a Messiah saving all who live in brokenness and sin.

This is not a gift we can give ourselves. It was given to us by God (Matt. 1:18-25) on Christmas Day.

According to Matthew, that started a bit of a trend. In the article "Belonging at the Manger" (p. 18), Leonard Kuyvenhoven observes: "Everything [Matthew] wants to convey to us about the coming of Christ and what it means for our world is summed up in this single episode. And it is the magi who teach us how to respond (Matt. 6:21)."

The magi make their long, difficult journey to present gifts to King Jesus. Not just the Wal-Mart specials either, but gifts fit for a king: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

If you know Scripture, those gifts may ring a bell, especially when we toss in the caravan the magi would have taken: "Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense, and proclaiming the praise of the LORD" (Isa. 60:6).

Matthew announces that the great reversal prophesied by Isaiah and the others begins with Christmas. In former times, because of Israel's disobedience, God allowed the nations to beat up on them, to disrespect their kings, to rob them blind, and to slaughter or enslave them. Now, with the coming of the magi, the tide is turning. The nations have begun to give back to King Jesus—an endless stream of gifts that will never, ever cease: "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. . . . The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it" (Rev. 21:22, 24).

So Christmas really *is* all about presents. It's still true today, and that's where we come in. As God gave himself for us who were once aliens, we may now give our very best to him: Frisians, Mongols, Chilean aboriginals, and Quebecois.

Christmas isn't really about the gifts we give each other but those we present to our King.

True, Amazon doesn't ship to where Jesus presently resides. Actually, we don't have to send our presents quite that far. Jesus assures us: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Christmas is all about gifts that honor our King. O come, let us adore him! And let's wrap up our gift-giving to Jesus *before* we get all wrapped up with those gift lists. Jesus' impoverished sisters and brothers need your gift far more than Uncle Harold needs yet another plaid tie. Experience the magi(c). ■



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

Let's wrap up our  
gift-giving to Jesus  
*before* we get all  
wrapped up with  
those gift lists.

**Bob De Moor** Editor

**Judith Claire Hardy** Associate Editor

**Gayla R. Postma** News Editor

**Henry Hess** Editor,  
*Together Doing More*

**Kristy Quist** *Tuned In* Editor

**Dean R. Heetderks** Art Director

**Pete Euwema** Graphic Design

**Frank Gutbrod** Graphic Design

### Contact Us

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Editorial  
616-224-0785 [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org)

News  
613-330-3145 [news@thebanner.org](mailto:news@thebanner.org)

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## The Mom Club

**I**T'S REMARKABLE how much things can change in a year.

On January 1 we had a miscarriage. Just days before, at our family Christmas celebrations, we had shared the happy news that we were expecting. And then, on New Year's Day, we lost the baby.

About two weeks later, my sister, who was nearly six months pregnant, lost her baby too. The year ahead was looking incredibly bleak.

I had mourned the deaths of loved ones before, but nothing could have prepared me for the loss of my child and my nephew. Most of those who had gone before had been elderly—their loss was terribly sad, to be sure, but it was expected. Losing two children within two weeks felt so wrong, so unjust.

In the following weeks, I felt bitterness when I'd log on to Facebook and see updates and photos from moms highlighting their children's achievements and showcasing their beaming smiles. I felt annoyance with the mom-oriented programs at my church and how the moth-

ers would gather in a group as they sipped coffee following the service. For a brief moment, I had been in the "mom club," and then it was snatched away from me.

A few months later, we were blessed with another pregnancy, and in December our son was born. A year that started with such loss ended with such a gift. And yet the heaviness of the last year remains. My sister still longs for another child. I long for another niece or nephew. And we dearly miss the children we didn't get the chance to know.

It's remarkable how much things can change in a year. A year ago, I didn't fully appreciate that children are a *gift*, not a given. As a girl, I had always assumed that one day I'd get married and have children. And while I eventually learned that childhood dreams don't always pan out, I still assumed they would for me.

I've also learned that while camaraderie with other moms is a fabulous thing, the "mom club" can be downright cliquey for those who aren't members and even worse for those who long so desperately to be.

This year I remind myself not to take our child for granted. He is a gift. And while I celebrate this gift, I also try to remember the feeling of being on the outside looking in.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn," says Romans 12:15. So rejoicing moms: rejoice in that baby. Rejoice in the community of moms. But don't forget to mourn also. Remember and mourn with those who wish to be moms, the grieving moms, the struggling moms. They are part of the club too. ■



**Erin Vandenberg** is a member of Georgetown Christian Reformed Church in Ontario. In between diaper changes, she is a freelance writer and editor.



*Simply being present to and with one another when faced with our powerlessness . . . is our greatest power.*

—JANE HERRING

# Live Free from the Grip of Porn

**WE NEED TO START BY ADMITTING THAT THIS EVIL HAS CREPT INTO OUR CHURCHES AND HOMES.**

**THE CHURCH HAS BEEN SILENT** about the distortion of God's gift of sex for too long. It is time to speak against pornography.

Synod 2012 has adopted the overture from Classis Eastern Canada to confront pornography use within our congregations. Consider the following stats:

- Porn is the largest entertainment industry in the world, grossing more than all of Hollywood's major TV networks and all of the major sports networks combined.
- Every second, \$3,075.64 is spent on pornography.
- Every second, 12,258 Internet users are viewing pornography.
- Every 39 minutes, a new pornographic video is being created in the United States.

These statistics are staggering, and the numbers have been growing rapidly since the 2006 survey they are based on. The survey goes on to say that pornography revenues exceed the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC, totaling more than \$97 billion.

How can we as a denomination combat such a huge monster in our world? I

believe we need to start by admitting that this evil has crept into our churches and homes. The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light" (Eph. 5:11-13).

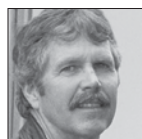
Synod has agreed to expose this evil and to "develop and implement a plan to assist churches in confronting pornography use within their congregations, in understanding the factors that lead to its use and the damage it causes, and in supportive healing for those who are affected by its use."

A song that we used to sing as children says it so well: "O, be careful little eyes what you see, for the Father up above is looking down in love."

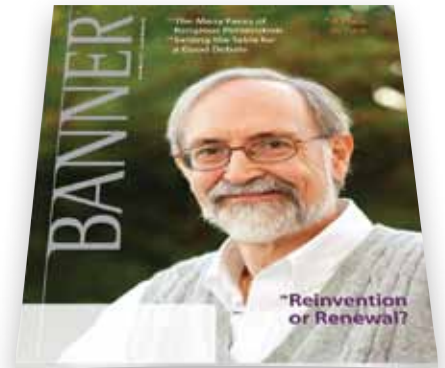
Our Father is grieving at how this evil has crept into our homes and churches. And he is looking at us in love. His plan for our sexuality is so much greater than the distortion offered by porn.

In the summer of 2014, a motorcycle trip across North America is being planned to create awareness of pornography and to call for action in our churches. "Shore 2 Shore With A Roar" will address the devastating effects pornography has on God's people. Please pray for wisdom and insight for the planning and implementing of this effort.

Help us as a church bring this to the light. ■



**Jim Terpstra** is a member of Charlottetown Christian Reformed Church in Prince Edward Island.



## God's Plan for Creation

Harry Cook names DNA as one of the "convincing" evidences "that biological evolution has occurred" ("God's Plan for Creation," September 2013). DNA, however, carries information—a language akin to a computer code. Only one cause is sufficient to produce language: intelligence.

Science seeks to explain phenomena by appealing to natural causes. In the case of DNA language, no natural process or mechanism will suffice.

It's a shame that even theists refuse to admit the limits of naturalistic explanations and give God due praise for directly authoring the language of life—DNA code.

—Jeff Conkin  
Haslett, Mich.

Evolution is a theory, not established science. It is offensive for Harry Cook to say that students are first exposed to "simplistic" (biblical) reasons for rejecting evolution and then later encounter "sophisticated" (secular) arguments for evolution ("God's Plan for Creation").

My simplistic belief is that in the beginning God created, just as he says he did. He is the only eyewitness.

—Carmen Reitsma  
New Sharon, Iowa

# TTERS

## Trying Times

I strongly agree with Rev. Joel Boot that we must “all try to prove by our lives that our faith is true” (“Trying Times,” August 2013), especially when modeling our faith to the next generation. Rev. Boot provides some good examples of how Christians can make a difference, but the only lasting impact we make is summarized by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*: “The Church exists for nothing else but to draw [people] into Christ. . . . God became Man for no other purpose.”

—Harry Molling  
Kentwood, Mich.

## Worth the Cost?

Most parents of school-age children fully realize that bringing up their children in the fear of the Lord is first and foremost their responsibility, as well as the responsibility of the church “Are Christian Schools Worth the Cost?” (News, August 2013).

In the past most of us were, with the help of booster clubs, able to pay our Christian school tuition. The tuition level today has for many become a real burden. Families who take their responsibility seriously may well ask themselves, might not a life without this financial burden give us a better chance to be more intimately involved in our children’s Christ-centered development?

—Gordon Kuipers  
North Haledon, N.J.

## Learning from Timothy

I’m pleased to say that, 40 years later, we who live on Chicago’s West Side are learning *with* Timothy Christian School (“Learning from Timothy,” July 2013). Chicago West Side Christian School (CWSCS) was founded in 1969 and is located with Lawndale CRC. This year over 180 pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup>-grade kids will receive a quality Christ-filled education at CWSCS. We enjoy the ongoing,

generous support of the broader CRC community, including our brothers and sisters at Timothy.

Beyond formal arrangements [of support from Timothy], overlapping circles of staff, board, parents, students, congregations and other organizations are resulting in real relationships. I pray that as we all continue to seek Him, our growth will continue to blur racial and economic lines and better reflect the kingdom.

—Dan Wagenmaker  
Chicago, Ill.

## Playing It Safe

Playing it safe, especially in the church, is detrimental to future developments. So I was grateful for the editorial “Why We Dare Not Play It Safe” (July 2013). The only way to grow up in every way into Christ is by testing the spirits of the time and by maintaining the unity of the body.

The article “Where Do We Draw the Line?” in that issue, controversial as it is, touches on one of the many subjects we have to talk about today. Only then can we be the salt and the light of the world.

—Simon Wolfert  
Surrey, British Columbia

## We Need Dialogue

I’m a layman, not a theologian or scientist. But as I note the negative reactions to Edwin Walhout’s article “Tomorrow’s Theology” (June 2013), what I miss is the acknowledgment of the Reformed doctrines that legitimize his approach. The Belgic Confession, Article 2, identifies not one but two ways to know God. It calls creation “a beautiful book.” A century ago, Calvin Seminary president Louis Berkhof spent many pages in his *Manual of Reformed Doctrine* noting the similarities and differences of what he called general and special revelation, pointing out that each needs the other to fully reveal God’s truth. As recently as 1990,

H. Henry Meeter’s *The Basic Idea of Calvinism* picked up the same theme, calling the book of nature “God’s book.”

Maybe our dialogue will contain less suspicion and alarm when Reformed scholars in many disciplines push the envelope doing what our Reformed tradition calls them to do.

Dialogue we need; diatribe we don’t.

—Donald Oppewal  
Lowell, Mich.

In 2010 the members of a list of nearly 1,000 scientists from around the world, many of whom were department heads of prestigious institutions, made a public declaration about the inadequacy of the evolutionary hypothesis to explain *the facts* as we presently know them. Just last year one of the world’s leading philosophers of science, Thomas Nagel (an avowed atheist), published a book with the subtitle “Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False.” In his conclusion he went one better than Walhout (“Tomorrow’s Theology”) by declaring that it would only be a matter of “a generation or two” before the contemporary scientists would “be laughing at” the “present right-thinking consensus.”

And yet we now have a leader within the CRC who is seriously suggesting that we accept evolution as “a fact.” Too often leaders of the institutional church are affirming as fact what members of the natural science community are either abandoning or are calling into question. Careful attention to the current debate seems to indicate that perhaps the tide has turned on this issue, and evolutionists, theistic or otherwise, are going to have to find a new paradigm.

—Kerry John Hollingsworth  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

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# NEWS

## NEWS CORRESPONDENTS

For correspondents' email addresses, see [www.thebanner.org](http://www.thebanner.org).

**Gayla R. Postma** News Editor  
Email: [gpostma@crcna.org](mailto:gpostma@crcna.org)

**Anita Beem**  
Classes Lake Erie, Kalamazoo  
248-559-2806 • 248-645-1990

**Trena Boonstra**  
Classes California South, Central California,  
and Greater Los Angeles  
760-807-9718

**Anita Brinkman**  
Classes Chatham, Huron  
519-354-9126

**Gregory Chandler**  
Classes Georgetown, Grandville  
616-392-8434

**Shashi DeHaan**  
Classes Arizona, Red Mesa  
623-418-6705

**Estefania de León**  
Classes Rocky Mountain, Yellowstone  
512-736-3939

**Callie Feyen**  
Classes Atlantic NE, Hackensack, Hudson  
240-422-1171

**Janet A. Greidanus**  
Classes Alberta North, Alberta South/ Saskatchewan  
780-484-3370

**Melissa Holtrop**  
Classes Central Plains, Chicago South, Northern Illinois  
708-217-7197

**Kyle Hoogendoorn**  
Classes Heartland, Iakota, Northcentral Iowa  
712-476-5955

**Jonathan J. Kim**  
Classis Pacific Hammi  
626-616-0411

**Daina Kraai**  
Classes Muskegon, Northern Michigan  
616-490-6997

**Noah Kruis**  
Classes Grand Rapids East, Grand Rapids North  
616-558-8166

**Jose Luna**  
Classis Toronto  
416-907-4895

**Jessica Oosterhouse**  
Classes Lake Superior, Minnesota, Wisconsin  
920-382-1532

**Ron Rupke**  
Classes Eastern Canada, Quinte  
905-349-2336

**Ryan Struyk**  
Classes Grand Rapids South, Thornapple Valley  
616-550-6723

**Amy Toornstra**  
Classes Columbia, Pacific Northwest  
503-399-9165

**Krista Dam-Vandekuyt**  
Classis Hamilton  
905-977-9855

**Susan Vanden Berg**  
Classes Holland, Zeeland  
616-212-7281

**Roxanne Van Farowe**  
Classes Illiana, Southeast U.S.  
919-477-2084

**Alissa Vernon**  
Classis Niagara  
289-214-2025

**Brenda Visser**  
Classis Eastern Canada  
613-802-9548

**Tracey Yan**  
Classes B.C. North-West, B.C. South-East  
604-420-3030

**Louis Tamminga**  
In Memoriam articles  
616-949-4539

If your region is not listed here,  
please contact the news editor.

## Walking to Bethlehem

People in West Michigan will once again make the journey to Bethlehem during Advent, a journey made possible through the efforts of more than 20 local churches, including First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven, Second CRC, Covenant Life CRC, and Ferrysburg Community CRC. Last year, more than 3,100 people made the journey.

Marian DeGram of First CRC participated, helping



### Visitors to Bethlehem encounter fierce Roman soldiers.

sew over 20 of the 200 authentic costumes worn by volunteers.

"We were put in the family of 'Zechariah' and received our family names of the tribe of Judah

coming from Nazareth, going to Bethlehem to be registered and to pay our tax," she said.

Led in groups of 25 by a guide along a dark outdoor trail from Nazareth to Bethlehem, visitors meet Roman soldiers, people tending fires, shepherds, angels >>

## Iowa Church Helps Bring Mobility to People in Need

For people in Third World countries who are unable to walk, receiving a PET—Personal Energy Transportation—can be life-changing. When presented with the opportunity to help, Second Christian Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, was eager to be part of that life change.

A PET wheelchair, propelled by a hand crank, is fitted with solid, puncture-proof tires and has a wooden box on the back. Started nearly 20 years ago, the goal of PET International is the "gift of mobility for all of God's people in need," including those who have been affected by polio, land mines, birth defects, or amputations.

"Our goal the first year was \$6,250, and we raised about \$8,500," said Zach Vander



The Second CRC team built 36 wheelchairs recently. One happened to be PET IA-Leighton's 600th vehicle.

Linden, a member of Second CRC. "This year our goal was to raise funds for 30 PETs, which was \$7,500, and we raised almost \$15,000. The extra money was donated to PET for operating costs."

In 2012 and again this past summer, a team from Second CRC spent a day building PETs. "We viewed this as an oppor-

tunity to lend a helping hand," said Vander Linden. "As a church, we are passionate about what this ministry is doing to give hope to 'the least of these' across the world."

To date, more than 38,000 PETs have been distributed in over 100 countries at no cost to the recipients. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Melissa Holtrop

Anne Witvoet and Anna Horst prepare coffee and cookies for the Christmas hamper clients.



MONICA DEREGT

singing about the newborn King, a beggar, live sheep and goats, and magi, among many others.

At the inn, groups are told there is no room and are then sent to the stable where they find Jesus, this King they had heard about since the beginning of their journey, in the manger.

"The experience was amazing," said Trudy Abraham, a volunteer from First CRC last year. "The whole journey became more real for the volunteers as they portrayed the event for the public, so it was not only a blessing for those who came but for those who volunteered. It drew people together from many area churches, which was also a blessing."

—Daina Kraai

## Ontario Church Hosts Christmas Hamper Program

For a week before Christmas, the rooms and hallways of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, are transformed into a free food and toy store for over 1,500 families.

The church shares a parking lot with a local food bank, forming a partnership for more than 10 years to offer the annual Christmas hamper program. The program provides free food for 6,400 people and toys for over 3,000 children in the community.

Church members organize food and toy displays and restock the shelves. They also serve coffee and cookies to families waiting in line and assist with carrying full grocery bags to cars.

"It's a wonderful atmosphere here all week," said Immanuel

member Jane DenHaan, who has been volunteering every year since the program started. "People are so grateful, some are even in tears. We get a lot of hugs!" she exclaimed.

"So many families just need a boost around Christmas time, and this is a great way to do it," said volunteer Melinda Flokstra.

Staff at the food bank said that they are thankful to be able to use the church facilities each year. "The larger space and the convenient location allow us to help a much higher volume of people

than we could in our own building. And the environment is always warm and welcoming."

Henry Kranenburg, lead pastor at Immanuel, said that an event like this helps build bridges into the community in different ways. For some people it's as simple as setting foot in a church where they may not have dared or desired to previously.

Visitors are invited to come back to attend the annual candle-light Christmas Eve service.

—Monica deRegt

## Nativity Show Helps Visitors Focus on Christ

People from around the world, including Haiti, Cuba, Holland, the Philippines, and Nigeria, have visited an exhibition of nativity sets at West End Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.

This is the 15th year the church is displaying nativity sets of all types—old and new, works of art by local artisans, humble handmade crafts, and unique sets from around the world.

The nativity show was the brainchild of Daniel and Rhonda Van Heyst, who saw a dozen or so nativity sets in the lobby of a dinner theater and envisioned a similar display in their church as a community outreach event, a nice counterpoint to the com-



Some of the more 600 nativity sets on display.

mercialism of Christmas. Little did they anticipate the growth of their

idea, which has now been picked up by churches in other regions.

In 1998, 300 visitors came to view 52 nativity sets. By 2010, the

exhibition included 638 sets, and the event draws thousands of visitors. People who wouldn't ordinarily step into a church building are drawn in.

West End CRC is situated at one end of Candy Cane Lane, ten city blocks of light displays and houses decorated with Santas, reindeer, sleighs, and plywood snowmen.

"Christ's birth is the most amazing story and one that has lost focus in our world with all of the other decorations," said Rhonda Van Heyst. "Thousands of people come and are reminded that Jesus is the center."

This year's nativity show will be held on December 20-21.

—Janet Greidanus

# NEWS

## World Missions Celebrates 125 Years

“Celebrating 125 years of God’s grace” was the theme for a gathering of 300 missionaries, former missionaries, and friends in Grand Rapids, Mich., on September 25. They were there to celebrate missions “through five generations” as part of the 125th anniversary of Christian Reformed World Missions.

church had sent the VanderWagen and Fryling families to New Mexico to establish a mission with the Navajo tribe. In the 1920s the DeKornes, Huizengas, and Dykstras were on their way to China as the first missionaries officially sent overseas by the CRC. Children and grandchildren of some of these missionary families attended the celebration.

The celebrants also looked forward. Director of international ministries Joel Hogan told of changes that are happening in mission work as partnerships with other churches and organizations are established and local missionaries are empowered.

CRWM now has 200 full-time or part-time missionaries working alongside partners in 50 countries, some in specifically CRC missions. Now “the whole church in the whole world is bringing the whole gospel to the whole world,” he said.

Winabelle Gritter, a missionary for more than 50 years, noted, “Not everyone can go [overseas], but all can pray and support others.”

[MORE ONLINE](#)

—Trena Boonstra



TRENA BOONSTRA

### Former missionaries **Jerre De Young** and **Winabelle Gritter**.

The room warmed to stories by Eugene Rubingh and William Van Tol, both former missionaries and directors.

The strength of the missionaries’ dedication to the work was evident in John DeKorne’s reports to synod in 1942, one week after the battle of Midway during World War II. “Nothing, not even global war, will hinder God’s Word,” he reported.

In the late 1800s, when the CRC was young and consisted primarily of Dutch immigrants, the urge to send missionaries was already strong. By 1896, the



Moms and girls prayed together at the We Walk event in Brookfield, Wisc.

## More Stories at [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org)

For more news, please visit our website at [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org). There you’ll find many more stories, including these:

- **Churches Celebrate Outreach to Mexican Migrant Workers:** Migrant workers celebrate with host churches before returning home for the winter.
- **We Walk Tour Visits Wisconsin Church:** Girls in grades 3 through 8 learn that they are created with a voice and a purpose.
- **Alberta Church Moves from Rented Classroom to Large Community Center:** The River CRC sees itself as an “incarnational resident” of a vibrant community center.
- **British Columbia Surfing Trip Builds Character:** Cold-water surfing helps build confidence in kids.
- **Hundreds Come for Encouragement in Ontario:** Ontario’s annual Day of Encouragement offers practical training and spiritual nurture.
- **Michigan Church Recycles Used Electronics:** Calvary CRC in Wyoming cares for the environment while raising cash for a mission trip.
- **Holland Church Hosts Pray4Reform:** Calvary CRC hosts a prayer vigil for immigration reform as part of a national movement.
- **Celebrating the Heidelberg Catechism in Song:** Jonathan Posthuma composed a song for the catechism’s anniversary.
- **Cultural Intelligence Workshop Travels to Ontario:** The Race Relations event made its first Canadian stop in Mississauga.

## Twin Toronto Churches Turn 50

Commuting to downtown Toronto, Ontario, from the far suburbs was not the real challenge for the hundreds of young Dutch immigrants packing First Christian Reformed Church each Sunday. It was finding a place to sit in the overcrowded church during any of the three Sunday services.

So it was that in 1963, First CRC birthed not one daughter church but two. The twins, Willowdale CRC and Grace CRC, turned 50 this year.

The families attending First CRC—just shy of 330—were assigned to churches based on where they lived, while some opted to remain at First to help maintain its ministry.

In the north, newborn Willowdale CRC first rented space. In 1967 the congregation moved into its own building on Hilda Avenue, where it still resides today.

Further east, Grace CRC, located in Scarborough, held its first official Sunday service at a Masonic hall until it, too, moved to its permanent home near McCowan Road and Highway 401 in 1967.

Grace CRC did not take long to respond to its calling toward a more community-oriented service open to people of all cultures. By 1967, Dutch was no longer used in the services at Grace, and its cultural diversity continued to lead it toward what Rev. Bart Velthuisen today calls “an example of God’s diverse and unified family.”

Willowdale CRC maintained its Dutch roots much longer, holding its evening services in Dutch until the mid-1980s. Today it is a much more multicultural church.



Coffee fellowship at Grace CRC.



Past and present Willowdale pastors: Lammert Slofstra (1964-1970); Louis Tamminga (1970-1980); Jack Westerhof (1981-1988); Joel Kok (2010-present); Herm Van Niejenhuis (1989-2000); Martin Benckhuysen (2002-2008); Jack Vos (interim pastor from 2000-2002 and pastor at Grace CRC 1971-1983).

Meanwhile, First CRC needed to readjust after sending out close to 80 percent of its congregation. For a while only a scattered few young people could be seen in

the pews, yet slowly the University of Toronto campus ministry filled that gap. Its Lighthouse Ministry was born as it adapted and focused on urban ministry.

—Jose A. Luna

### Write for The Banner!

*The Banner* is seeking a news correspondent in Michigan, primarily for the south side of the Grand Rapids area, and one for the northeast in the U.S. If you like to write and have a passion for telling stories of how God is at work in the Christian Reformed churches in your area, we’d like to hear from you. We’d especially welcome writers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Email expressions of interest to news editor Gayla Postma at [gpostma@crcna.org](mailto:gpostma@crcna.org). Please include a resume or letter outlining your newswriting experience and some recent samples of your work.

### IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Harvey Baas  
1929-2013

Harvey Baas, 84, a congenial, outgoing, and devout pastor, passed away from Alzheimer’s disease.

Baas was born in Falmouth, Mich. The youngest of 13 children, he was the only one in the family to graduate from high school.

After teaching for a year, he returned to school, graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary. Baas served Christian Reformed congregations in Wisconsin, Florida, Illinois, and Michigan. He retired in 1994.

Baas was very much a “people person.” Friends remember the meaningful visits they enjoyed with him.

He was a self-effacing pastor, humble and affirming. Baas loved the Word of God and preached it with joy. Serving in mainly large congregations, Baas belonged to that generation of pastors who did an astounding amount of work: making calls to the sick, teaching all the catechism classes, leading all the groups, and being responsible for the entire church program.

Baas is survived by his wife, Marilyn, and five children and their spouses. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available each year in the front pages of the *Christian Reformed Church’s annual Yearbook*.

# NEWS

## Highlights from 2013 Fall Classis Meetings

**T**wo or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to classis, a regional grouping of churches. Delegates at those meetings review and make decisions about their shared ministries and practice mutual accountability for their congregations' individual ministries. Here are the highlights of the most recent classis meetings:

Several people were **welcomed into ministry** in the Christian Reformed Church, including **seminary graduates** Matt Ackerman, Sam Boldenow, Ashley Bonnes, Mark Bonnes, Michah Bruxvoort, Derek Buikema, Justin Carruthers, Andrew Chun, Joe Ellis, Michelle Ellis, Ruth Febriana, Anthony Gretz, Brandon Haan, Joseph Hamilton, Joshua Holwerda, Allen Kirkpatrick, Hitomi Kornilov, Susan LaClear, Tim Luimes, Matt Riddle, Sue Rozeboom, Heather Strooboscher, Michael Ten Haken, Josh Van Engen, Justin Van Zee, Henry Veldboom, and Tony Westrate.

**Transferred in** from other denominations were the following: Myo Sook Cho, Chankun Chung, Jason Joo Sung Chung, Heejin Kang, Edward Kim, Buhwan Kwak, Joon H. Shin, Youngche Shin, Sung Pil Yang.

Andrew Chun, David Lee, Gary Stevens, and Ellen Van Tongeren were **loaned to another denomination**.

Revs. Larry Baar, Brian Bolema, Jack De Jong, Stephen Hasper, Patrick Hennen, and Jose Munoz **were released from their congregations**.

Steve Alsum, Dionisio Aguhob, Daniel Mendez, Paul Cha, Fred Eng, Gilbert Varela, and Philip Weaver **were released from ministry in the CRC**.

**New ministries** were started or planned in Niagara Falls, Ontario; Pembroke Pines, Fla.; and Lord's Heart Church and Marathone Church, both in Classis Pacific Hanmi.

An emerging church does not have its own council and is under the care of a council of a neighboring Christian Reformed church. An organized church has its own council. The following churches **were organized**: Areumdawoon Church in Las Vegas, Nev.; Cornerstone Prison Church in the South Dakota State Penitentiary; and mosaicHouse in Edmonton, Alberta.

Living Hope Community Church in Metcalfe, Ontario, and Queens CRC in Jamaica, N.Y., changed to **emerging status**.

Grace CRC in Moreno Valley, Calif., and Sovereign Grace in Perris, Calif., merged. Disciples Church and Hope Church both in Las Vegas, Nev., also merged.

Bethesda CRC in Pomona, Calif., First CRC in Crookston, Minn., Good Shepherd CRC in Flushing, Mich., The Garden in Fond du Lac, Wisc., and Immanuel CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich., all **closed**.

Three churches in Classis Zeeland and one church in Classis Lake Superior **protested the seating of female delegates**. Classis Central Plains will now **allow seating of female delegates**. Classis Minnkota welcomed two congregations from Michigan (Trinity CRC in Sparta and Second CRC in Kalamazoo).

Classes Illiana and Minnkota requested that the Board of Trustees **replace the editor of The Banner**. Classes Alberta South/Saskatchewan and Columbia sent communications **expressing concern about recent content in The Banner**. Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan requested that Synod 2014 establish a **study committee to set and/or review guidelines for fiscal management of donations**. Classis Wisconsin requested that Synod 2014 establish a study committee regarding **theologies that teach that Genesis accounts are not historical**.

For more classis news, please visit [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).

—Banner Staff



LINDA RIBBENS

Lauren and Sophia create birthday bags.

## Birthday Bags Bring Joy in Minnesota

For some people, celebrating a birthday may seem like a small thing. But it's a big deal for children whose parents are doing all they can just to survive, said Linda Ribbens, a member of Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Edina, Minn.

So Ribbens helps coordinate her church's involvement with a local volunteer organization that runs a community food shelf. Thanks to area churches like Calvary, children ages 1 to 12 can also receive a birthday bag complete with cake mix, frosting, age-appropriate gifts, and a party favor.

This past summer, two children from Calvary CRC prepared birthday bags for the foundation. Lauren H. and Sophia M. enjoyed putting their unique touches on four "girl bags" and four "boy bags."

Sophia said, "I hope that the bags we made will make children who receive them very happy on their birthday!"

Approximately 150 children receive birthday bags each month. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Jessica Oosterhouse



## California Classis Tries Sunday Meetings

Classis California South, a regional group of churches that stretches from the Pacific Ocean into Nevada and from Los Angeles County to the Mexican border, is not a typical Christian Reformed classis.

Of the 26 churches in this group, only a few were around 20 years ago. The size, structure, and ethnic makeup of the congregations vary widely, including Korean, Hmong, Laotian, Hispanic, Filipino, and Caucasian people of various backgrounds.

So it makes sense that classis meetings aren't typical either. What made a recent meeting even more different is that it was held on a Sunday.

Previous Thursday evening meetings focused on the typical agenda. As a way for the diverse groups to understand each other, to involve more leaders besides pastors and council members in the workings of the denomination, and to have a less rushed meeting time, classis committed to a series of three meetings on Sundays with worship, training, and fellowship as well as business.

Driving the parking lot that is I-15 W from Las Vegas to southern

California on any Sunday afternoon turns a routine 4- to 5-hour drive into one that is hours longer for leaders from three churches in Las Vegas. One pastor who had already preached that morning mentioned that he was grateful his elder was willing to drive.

This was the second of three meetings held as a trial run for Sunday meetings. One more is scheduled for February. Then it will be time to evaluate. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Trena Boonstra

### IN MEMORIAM



**Rev. David Blair Muir**  
1918 – 2013

David Blair Muir, 94, an erudite pastor, Hebrew scholar, and lover of music, died of heart failure in Burlington, Wash.

Muir graduated from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. He began ministerial service in 1946 in the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) in Iowa. He became an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church when he was appointed as director of the Paterson (N.J.) Hebrew Mission. He subsequently served CRC congregations in Michigan and Washington, retiring in 1983.

A quiet gentleman who was proud of his Scottish heritage, Muir had a delightful sense of humor. His heart beat warmly for those who had needs and burdens.

Muir was a highly skilled expositor of the biblical text. His scriptural knowledge and understanding of the original languages contributed to his excellent preaching. He loved classical music, as well as the arts in general, and was a fine vocalist.

Muir devoutly cared for his wife, Jean, during a long illness until her death in 2005. He is survived by two daughters, a son-in-law, two grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Louis M. Tamminga

Cornerstone CRC exists within the walls of the state penitentiary.

A photograph of a large, dark, three-dimensional sign mounted on a light-colored wall. The sign reads "SOUTH DAKOTA STATE PENITENTIARY" in all caps. The letters are thick and blocky, with some shadows cast behind them.

## Prison Congregation Becomes First Independent CRC Behind Bars

Cornerstone Christian Reformed Church, located inside the South Dakota State Penitentiary, took a big step in September when it became a full-fledged congregation with its own church council.

Eight years ago, Rev. Steve Moerman and his wife, Diane, began a church inside the penitentiary with a congregation of inmates who were excited to continue or begin a relationship with God.

On September 17, Classis Dakota (the regional group of churches) unanimously voted to allow Cornerstone to become an

“organized” church, one that has its own council rather than being under the care of a neighboring congregation.

Moerman noted that the church has both inmate and non-inmate officebearers. He said, “We hope to maintain two elders and one deacon who live outside of the prison.” These men, along with their inmate counterparts, will attend classis meetings with Moerman, and they will be members of Cornerstone as they serve their terms.

Moerman said the move to organized status means the con-

gregation has come of age. “It means that the outside church has entrusted the church behind the walls to stand on its own and handle its own affairs. It helps the men to see their place in the kingdom and gives a true sense of purpose, a true sense of ownership,” he said. “For those who often have little or no status in the world, this means a lot.” [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

# NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

## Church News Outlets Struggle to Keep Editorial Independence

The closing of several Protestant denominational newspapers, magazines, and other news services has played a part in eroding the standards of professional religious journalism, according to members of the Associated Church Press.

As denominational news services contend with fiscal challenges that have beset secular media as well, church press officials worry that these outlets have lost their editorial independence and are increasingly performing public relations roles for their denominations.

"There has been a strong commitment on the part of many denominations to promote religious journalism that lives up to the standards of what professional journalism should be," said Meinrad Scherer-Emunds, chair of the ACP Religious Journalism Task Force. "We feel that has been limited in more recent years."

Jay Voorhees, executive editor of *The United Methodist Reporter*, bought the digital assets of the publication after it ceased publication in May when UMR Communications closed after months of financial losses.

"The reality is that it's very, very difficult to find a funding model that will allow for independent journalism that is not simply regurgitating what is coming out in press releases from denominational agencies," Voorhees said.

Joe Thoma, executive director of ACP, said his organization has seen a "significant change" in its membership as news services contract. Many denominations have resorted to telling the "good news" only, Thoma said.

Verity Jones, executive director of the Center for Pastoral Excellence at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, said that this shift toward public relations led the ACP, which has more than 100 member organizations, to write a statement affirming religious journalism.

"It's not optional, because the free exchange of ideas is central to the living out of Christian community. It's important for accountability; it's important for news sharing."

Jones also serves on the board of *Religion News Service*.

She added that sometimes news is not good for a denomination, pointing to scandals involving clergy sexual abuse of minors as an example.

Other publications that have shut their doors include *The Progressive Christian*, *Episcopal Life*, *United Church News*, and the *Church Herald*.  
—*Religion News Service*

## Charter of Quebec Values Would Ban 'Overt' Religious Symbols

In September, Quebec's government introduced its much-discussed Charter of Quebec Values, which would ban "overt and conspicuous" religious symbols worn by government employees.

Pushing the twin ideals of secularism and separation from Canada, the plan of the Parti Québécois would prohibit public employees from wearing large crosses and crucifixes, Islamic headscarves, Sikh turbans, or Jewish yarmulkes as a way to establish "religious neutrality" in public.

The prohibitions would apply to civil servants, teachers, law enforcement officers, firefighters, doctors, nurses, and public day care employees.

"The time has come to rally around our common values," said Bernard Drainville, the minister in charge of the plan. "They define who we are. Let's be proud of them."

Canada's federal government says that if the charter is approved, Ottawa would order a review by its Justice Department. "We would challenge any law that . . . violates the fundamental constitutional guarantees to freedom of religion," said Jason Kenney, the federal multiculturalism minister.

—*Religion News Service*

For more on these stories, please visit [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).



Natalie Geerlinks of Woodstock recently found a creative way to give back to her community.

## Ontario Teen's Act of Giving Inspires Community

Natalie Geerlinks, a cashier in a local grocery store in Woodstock, Ontario, was inviting people to donate 25 cents to the Food for Friends program during the week leading up to Thanksgiving. "I noticed a lot of people were saying no," said Geerlinks. "I decided . . . to donate a quarter for everyone at my checkout who didn't."

What started as a small donation decision started a trail of random acts of kindness.

At the end of her shift, Geerlinks, 18, had donated \$17.25, which she doubled. But the giving didn't end there. Her manager heard about what Geerlinks was doing and wanted to match the donation—and challenged other departments to donate as well.

A local radio station came for an interview. They shared the story with the Woodstock area and on Facebook, which inspired others to send in checks matching the donation to Operation Sharing.

"We were surprised at the response," said Natalie's mother, Irene Geerlinks. "She made the decision, and I thought, 'Okay, that's nice.' And then she came home from work a few days later saying, 'Um, I think I'm going to be on the news.'"

Geerlinks is a member of Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Woodstock.

—Anita Brinkman

## Ontario Man Posts Daily Devotional in His Yard

Many are unsure where to start when sharing faith with neighbors. For Bill Prinzen, a member of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ontario, it starts in his front yard. Every day, Prinzen displays a large-print version of the *Our Daily Bread* devotional in a wooden box on a post in front of his home for passersby to read.

The idea came to Prinzen after he posted a flyer advertising Immanuel CRC's neighborhood social this past summer. Seeing people stop and read this flyer, he wondered what would happen if he posted a devotional each day. The box "needs a little improvement," Prinzen chuckled, "so the devotion doesn't get damp when it rains."

Prinzen, a retired woodworker, has been involved in neighborhood evangelism for many years. He walks the neighborhood, builds relationships with neighbors, and prays for them. He keeps *Today* devotional booklets in his pocket to pass out to neighbors and delivers new issues to the homes of those who are interested.



KRISTA DAM-VANDEKUYT

**Bill Prinzen with his *Our Daily Bread* devotional display box.**

After reading these devotionals, one neighbor told Prinzen that she thought she believed in God. He gave her a Bible, and she now attends a local community church. He doesn't always discover what effect these devotionals have, but his actions sow seeds of opportunity.

Prinzen has found ways to share his faith using the gifts God has given him. "I'm a woodworker, not a preacher," Prinzen pointed out, "but I'm doing it the best I know how. It's very rewarding."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt



**Rev. George Vander Weit**

## Michigan Church Laments Pastor's Disappearance

Fuller Avenue Christian Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Mich., held a service of prayer for the family of George Vander Weit, the retired pastor who had served that congregation and went missing from his Rochester, Mich., home on July 5 this year.

Cathy Winterhalter, the worship assistant at Fuller Ave., had worked for many years alongside Vander Weit. She suggested the service for the family and community because "it seemed like a healthy thing to do for all of us."

About 100 people gathered at the church on a Wednesday evening to lament Vander Weit's absence. A service of Scripture, song, and prayer was interspersed with members sharing remembrances of his ministry.

"We sang songs that were special to George during his ministry and during his time of struggle," said Winterhalter. The service closed with words of hope for the future.

Vander Weit's son Randy attended the service. Afterward he said, "I felt it was a God-honoring service and a good time to hear how my dad affected the Fuller Ave. family, individuals, the Fuller community, and the CRC as a whole."

Updates from the family have been posted periodically on the Facebook group "Help Find George Vander Weit in Rochester, MI."

Vander Weit also served Christian Reformed churches in Wayland, Mich.; Cleveland, Ohio; Troy, Mich.; and, most recently, Han-Bit Korean CRC in Rochester Hills, Mich. He has also been a prolific writer for *The Banner*.

The family has been working with the Rochester chief of police to organize more searches.

—Noah J.K. Kruis

## Edmonton Man Part of Nobel-Prize Winning Group

After it was announced that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) had received the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize, chemistry professor Peter Mahaffy began receiving dozens of messages congratulating him for the part he and his research team at The King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta, played in OPCW winning this award.

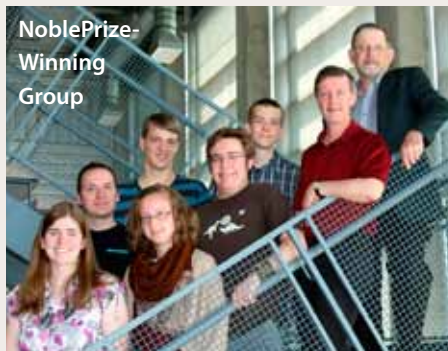
"We are thrilled with the news of this well-deserved honor for OPCW, which has been working tirelessly for a world free of chemical weapons," said Mahaffy, a member of the OPCW Temporary Working Group on Education and Outreach.

"The work King's students and faculty have done in support of OPCW is work of waging peace, and that flows squarely out of our mission as The King's University College," Mahaffy said.

Most recently, Mahaffy teamed with colleague Brian Martin and several King's students, led by fourth-year chemistry student Joseph Zondervan, to create the Multiple Uses of Chemicals website for an international audience of students, educators, and policymakers.

Professors Mahaffy and Martin are both members of Edmonton's Fellowship Christian Reformed Church. [MORE ONLINE](#)

—Janet A. Greidanus



# Numbering Our Days

**M**Y CHURCH just celebrated its 100th anniversary. Surely something to celebrate! But I wonder whether we should celebrate it the way a person might celebrate a 100th birthday or the way we celebrate an infant's first birthday. From the perspective of a lifetime, 100 years is a long time. Yet in the broad spectrum of history, 100 years seems short. We must also consider what the apostle Peter tells us: "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Pet. 3:8). If that is the case, celebrating our 100th anniversary is like celebrating the fact that we made it almost three hours into the new day.

Perspective is what we need. Psalm 90:12 has us pray, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." This is advice we need as individuals but also for us as a church. What does it mean to number our days that we might have wisdom to see clearly and move forward confidently?

On the one hand, we number our days as long. We look back at 100 years and thank God for his faithfulness over this long stretch. It *is* a long time. During those years, much has happened to celebrate. Many people have passed through these doors, people we remember fondly. Faithful service by many saints has preserved God's witness in this community. Not to recognize this long stretch would be to take for granted the dedicated labor by those who have gone before us and prevent us from learning from that great cloud of witnesses. More importantly, not to recognize this long stretch would be to take for granted God's gracious provision. How many churches make it to 100 years? Not all. Indeed, not many. We must ask, why us? Our history has its share of failures, divisions, and disobedience. It is all about God's grace in



In the grand scheme of eternity, we are all just babes.

preserving and maintaining a witness. We number our days as *long* in order to remember all this.

But we also must number our days as short. A 100-year-old man celebrates his birthday knowing that his time on earth is nearly spent. We must not celebrate in that way. We have many years behind us, but we pray for as many ahead—perhaps more. With this perspective, we celebrate like a young person heading into the prime of life: with optimism, with energy, and with strength to persevere. By God's strength and leading, we tackle the challenges of a new day with God's creative love and grace. We recognize that each generation must face new challenges, and so we are not afraid of the new paths God will lead us down. We must see ourselves as people of the Holy Spirit, a Spirit that

renews, enlivens, and that reminds us that in the grand scheme of eternity, we are all just babes. We number our days as *short* to remember all this.

With this wisdom, we move forward confidently, seeing God's faithfulness in the past that teaches us to trust him in the unknown future. We don't know where we're going, but looking back, we can't fully explain how we got here either.

But here we are, safely preserved in Christ. Because of this we proclaim from one generation to another the Lord's abundant goodness. He is faithful. He is gracious. He is loving. He is powerful. With this God within us, who could stand against us? "Teach us, O God, to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Praise be to God! ■



**Ben Hulst** is pastor at Comstock Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Mich. You can access his blog "Eager Expectation"

at [pastorbenblog.wordpress.com](http://pastorbenblog.wordpress.com).

# FAQs

## Missions

**Q** In recent years I've gotten fed up with the commercialism of Christmas. How do I convey to my kids and grandkids that I care about them in ways other than the traditional gift-giving that is so central to our celebrations?

**A** Christmas is a wonderful time of year, and it's central to our faith! God incarnate; God among us. One might argue that our entire way of life in the West, driven by capitalistic materialism, is completely unsustainable; it is a terrible irony that this holy season has become the focal point of it all. What better time to be counter-cultural?

Yet, as you note, when it comes to family, Christmas gets complex. I encourage you to articulate your concerns to your kids and allow them to communicate to their own children about possible shifts in your upcoming celebrations.

Focus on enjoying a good meal together. Sing some carols. Share the Christmas story. Tell about something God has done in your life over the past year. If you still want to incorporate some giving, consider gifts that are locally produced and sustainably made. Together create and wrap gifts that can be shared with those in need in your community and around the world. World Renew has some great resources for this.

Christmas is a season to celebrate. But it is also a subversive season in which a peasant child was born in the heart of an empire that embraced power. This child grew up to be a prophet whose critique of the status quo was sharp and whose love for the least among us went deep. He calls us to be lovers and prophets still. God is calling us into something new,

**A living wage for the working poor may mean fewer cheap prices in retail stores.**

beautiful, and holy, something that's good for all people and the entire creation. That's worthy of a celebration, if you ask me.

—Bryan Berghoef is a church planter in Washington, D.C., and is the author of *PubTheology: Beer, Conversation, and God*.

## Faith Formation

**Q** I "married into" the CRC three years ago after being raised Southern Baptist. Our church is a wonderful spiritual home, but I find it odd that our worship never includes testimonies. Why is that?

**A** You joined us at a good time, because we're going through a transition, and maybe you are here "for such a time as this."

Historically the CRC has shied away from testimonies because we felt that they put too much emphasis on glorifying the person instead of the Lord, and their tendency to become somewhat melodramatically emotional (at times) felt "cheesy" to us.

But now we're realizing that our own manner of reading Scripture as the one coherent story of God's faithfulness invites us to tell others how our life stories flow from God's great story. Furthermore, we love the psalms, and they are filled with declarations like "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts" (Ps. 145:4). Those mighty acts are present in our own lives, and we need to tell them. So we're beginning to "trial-and-error" our way into a Reformed way of including testimonies in our worship, small groups, youth groups, and other places.

Help us make this transition!

—Syd Hielema is a professor of religion and theology at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

## Justice

**Q** In church, when I talk about justice for the poor I am labeled a "liberal," and what I say is dismissed. How can I speak up for justice, as the Bible says, in this context?

**A** Your question is a common response to presentations I make in CRC circles about doing justice. It saddens and troubles me because it says more about a weak understanding of justice in our churches than it does about your actions. God is not a conservative or a liberal, and talking about justice is not a partisan action.

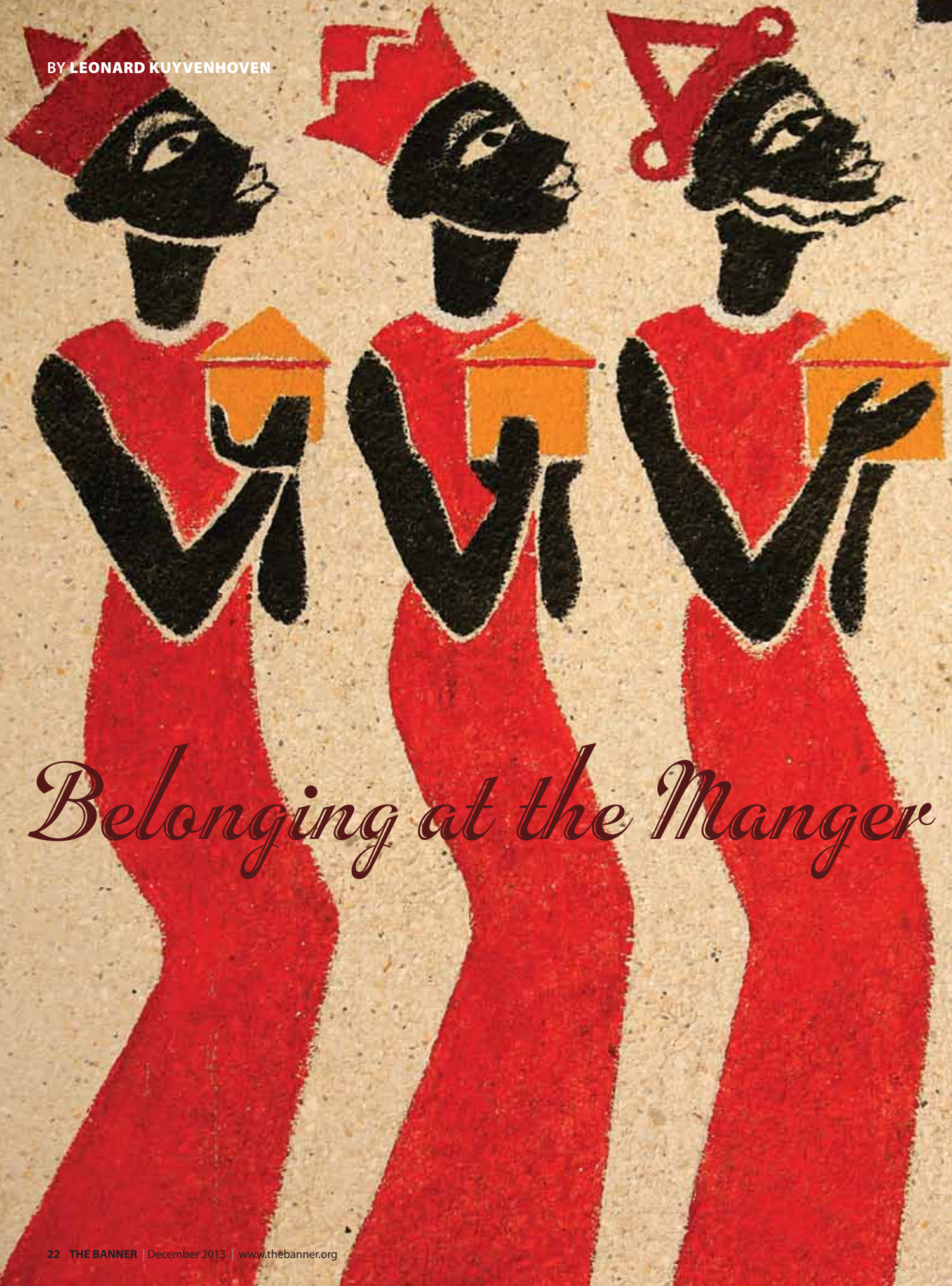
Labeling is often used to dismiss what challenges us. We tend to be comfortable with talk about helping the poor through charity but less comfortable with justice talk because it focuses on the *causes* of poverty, and things we enjoy may be part of the problem. A living wage for the working poor, for example, may mean fewer cheap prices in retail stores.

Your question also reflects an unhealthy polarization in our public life that has permeated our churches. Changing that mentality is part of doing justice. Christians should be able to avoid ideological labels and address issues on the basis of ethics rooted in Scripture. Cutting out all the texts dealing with justice for the poor in the Bible would leave holes, literally and spiritually. If justice is central to the Good News we preach, treating it as the hobby of a few "liberals" in church needs to change.

A few practical hints: It helps to start with a story that can't be dismissed. Two voices or a small group may be taken more seriously. Ask your church leaders to make learning what the Bible says about justice a higher priority. Above all, persist.

—Kathy Vandergrift teaches public ethics to university students and advocates for the rights of children. ■

BY LEONARD KUYVENHOVEN



*Belonging at the Manger*

ILLUSTRATION BY SUPERSTOCK



**EVERY YEAR** I go down to the basement storage room and scan the highest shelves. I find the big, well-worn cardboard box marked “Christmas.” I wrestle it down, open it up, and pull out a smaller, more ornate box. Inside are clay figures individually wrapped and carefully put away the previous year. I line them up and do a head count. Everybody’s there: the angel, sheep and shepherds, magi, Mary, Joseph, and the baby. Those figures have been a part of every Christmas I can remember. In fact, it’s so routine that it’s easy to miss the radical inclusiveness of God and the radical news of Christmas—because the magi don’t belong.

Many of us have heard favorite and familiar Bible stories for so many years that we race to the punch line or head straight for the ending that’s no longer a surprise. But when we do that, we miss important things along the way. In Matthew’s story of Christ’s birth, for instance, we’re likely to skip right past this disconcerting line spoken by the magi: “We saw his star when it rose.”

Israel was a tiny island in a vast sea of pagan beliefs. Everyone in the whole known world of the time believed that a person’s fate was written in the stars. They believed that our future was first played out in the heavens before the events followed here on earth. The script had already been written, and there were sorcerers (“magi” shares the same root as the word “magic”) who could read the signs and give people guidance. The Greeks, the Romans, and the Canaanites before them all had sorcerers who claimed to be able to read the stars. But the highest reputation by far for divination belonged to the priests of Babylon—the magi.

Israel was different. God’s people didn’t need to read the stars because the LORD, who made the heavens and the earth, spoke to them. They didn’t need magi because the word of the LORD came to them through prophets and priests. Israel knew that their lives were not written in the stars but in the book of life, which God alone holds. They understood that they were to live their lives not in a stoic kind of fatal-

ism but in a dynamic covenantal relationship with the living God.

### **A Star Out of Jacob**

When Israel settled the Promised Land, they conquered the nations who consulted the stars. As Israel conquered the land of Canaan, all the nations could see that the success of the armies of Israel went far beyond military might. They recognized that a powerful spiritual force was at work. And the Canaanite nations were afraid. The Moabite king, Balaak, was so afraid of Israel and their God that he hired a mercenary prophet, a spiritual expert named Balaam, the son of Beor. Balaam had a reputation for wisdom, powerful spiritual insight, and the ability to manipulate the spiritual realm. He was a magus.

The king of Moab hired Balaam to curse the people of Israel. He wanted Balaam to launch a spiritual attack against whatever spiritual forces were at work in Israel. A remarkable part of the story as it unfolds in Numbers 22 is the fact that Balaam the magus knows about God.

## **Whoever you are and wherever you’re from, this child is for you.**

That’s not to say he was a worshiper or a disciple—clearly he was not. But he did know that the ultimate power in the spiritual realm belongs to the God of Israel, and that it is futile to oppose him.

In one of the most poignant episodes of the Old Testament, Balaam travels to meet the king of Moab near the battlefield where they can catch a glimpse of the armies of Israel. Along the way, the angel of the Lord appears in the pathway with sword drawn. In a beautiful irony, the donkey sees the angel but Balaam the seer does not. At the angel’s first appearance, the donkey swerves off into a field. Balaam responds by beating the animal. The angel appears a second time in a narrow pass, and this time the donkey veers as far to the other side as possible, crushing Balaam’s foot against the wall. When the angel appears a third time in a spot too narrow to squeeze by, the donkey finally just lies down.

Balaam hits the donkey with his staff. It’s a wizard’s staff, like Gandalf’s staff or Harry Potter’s wand—a tool of the trade for a man of magic and power. But Balaam is using it as a farm implement—a cattle prod. The donkey gets a speaking part, protesting the inhumane treatment he’s getting from the man he has served so faithfully for many years. Then the LORD opens Balaam’s eyes so he can see the angel with sword drawn. The angel says three things to Balaam: First, the donkey was right. Second, I would have killed you and spared the donkey. Third, when you meet the king of Moab, speak only what I tell you. And this is what Balaam the magus says about Israel:

The LORD their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them. God brought them out of Egypt. . . . There is no divination against Jacob, no evil omens against Israel. It will now be said of Jacob and of Israel, “See what God has done!” (Num. 23:21-23).

Those who bless Israel will be blessed, Balaam says, and those who curse Israel will be cursed. And finally, looking into the future, the magus says, “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel” (Num. 24:17).

The great Balaam, son of Beor, the mysterious magus of Numbers, said there would be a star—and a ruler would rise out of Israel.

When Israel was later exiled from the Promised Land, consulting the stars was one of the reasons God gave for their punishment. Turn to the New Testament, and every other allusion to magi is unfavorable: the magi are portrayed as power-thirsty, idolatrous con artists (Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-11). Read Paul’s letter to the Ephesians or scan the writings of the church fathers, and you’ll find that the earliest church was in a pitched battle with divination. Yet magi were the first to worship, having read of the »

coming One in the stars. And they are revealed to us as exemplary disciples.

### Following the Magi

The magi don't belong at the manger because they are foreigners; they're excluded from the covenant because of race. They shouldn't be there because they are officially priests of another god who have consulted the stars to find their way. Not just ordinary outsiders—these magi are outsiders in the extreme. But there they are in the story of Jesus' birth, bringing their gifts and worshiping the King.

The magi's presence at Jesus' birth is a declaration of the radical inclusivity of his grace. We all belong in this story, no matter how far off we feel. Whoever you are and wherever you're from, this Child is for you. Whatever bondage has enslaved you and whatever false idol you worshiped—you belong at the manger. This is why the church celebrated Epiphany centuries before it celebrated Christmas. Not just because the presents show up in this story, but because we *all* show up in this story. This is where we belong, falling on our knees in worship, adoring the One who has come.

But there is another side to all this, a side Matthew's earliest readers must have felt profoundly. The story sets up a stark contrast between those who have the Scriptures and fail to worship the Messiah and the magi, who read the stars and find the long-awaited One. Priests of a false god worship at Jesus' feet while, apart from a few shepherds left unmentioned by Matthew, God's chosen people miss the great arrival. At Christmastime we sing, "Come and worship; worship Christ the newborn king!" But Matthew's gospel clearly makes absence a part of the story. There is a whole group of people who do *not* come and worship.

Here's a question that begs to be asked when you read the story: Why did no one from Jerusalem follow the magi? Haven't you ever wondered why no one made the short trip from Herod's palace to the little town of Bethlehem? If there was even the slightest possibility that the long-expected Savior had arrived, why not go and see? Part of this story is the total lack of interest by those who were supposed to be most interested.

We're left to ponder how this could happen. It's possible that the religious establishment thinks the magi are con artists, not worth their time or effort. Or maybe, since the magi had already missed the mark by so much (after all, they ended up in Jerusalem instead of in Bethlehem), nobody believed the magi could actually find the child.

But there's another possibility. Maybe the faithful in Jerusalem believed that there was no way God could possibly have told "them" something he hasn't already told "us." Maybe it was unthinkable that some foreigners, some priests of a false god, were going to get the message when the ones who pored over the Scriptures night and day did not.

Those of us who hold the Scriptures regularly in our hands sometimes believe that we possess a monopoly on the truth and on the revelation of God. We assume that God would not tell an outsider something he has not already told us. But that is a dangerous and false assumption. Both Balaam and the magi show that God is at work in the whole world.

Whatever the reason, the magi leave Jerusalem to continue their search, and nobody else comes along. They find Jesus while the religious community misses this awesome opportunity to meet the newborn King. In his gospel, Matthew is implicitly warning all religious insiders. He is warning the church. And maybe, as I unwrap those three kings each December and set them up around the nativity scene, I need to ask myself this question: Would I tag along with them?

### Come and See

The King comes not in a palace but in a manger. The One who deserves all honor and glory did not cling to these things but instead took on the form of a servant. And his natal appearance on our planet seems intentionally hidden among the plain and the poor. Later he would warn us that the kingdom comes like yeast hidden in a lump of dough, like a seed buried in the ground. And he would encourage us to seek his presence by serving the "least of these my brothers." Until he comes in glory, the "hiddenness" of the kingdom is a given. And we must ask ourselves, am

I even looking? Am I paying attention to the testimony of others—even those I assume are unlikely candidates for knowing about God? Would I journey with them?

God is alive and active; God still graciously shows up in our world. If he's not, then Christmas is not worth celebrating. If he is, then we need to be on the lookout. And we have to be humble because God can show up in unsanctioned ways.

Matthew's gospel does not have the shepherds, the angel chorus, or even the manger. Everything he wants to convey to us about the coming of Christ and what it means for our world is summed up in this single episode. It is the magi who teach us how to respond, how to prepare for Christmas.

The magi's journey from Babylon to Bethlehem has been retraced by several people through the ages. Even in modern times, using modern modes of transportation, the trip is long and dangerous. There are many points along the way for second thoughts about turning back. Matthew holds out for us the example of the magi who make an epic pilgrimage to end up before this Child in worship. They persevere even when the trail disappears. They believe that God has done something awesome in the world, that a star has appeared and a scepter has risen and the world will gather to say, "See what God has done!"

To arrive there, to throw ourselves down in worship and to respond to this awesome grace with costly gifts is the calling of all true disciples.

Those magi figures at the nativity remind us that this is a journey of a lifetime, a journey that will take dedication and perseverance. God did not write out the script far away in the stars; he has shown up right here among us. The story of Christ's birth is not a script to be feared or dumbly played out. It is a story still being told.

Our approachable God invites us to come, for he can be found and worshiped and adored. We belong there at the manger. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



**Leonard Kuyvenhoven** is pastor of worship and administration at Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



## How Is God Being Glorified?

*“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” —1 Thessalonians 5:11*

**O**UR FAMILY was delivered a blow in September several years ago when my 40-year-old husband was diagnosed with colon cancer.

Through several consultations with doctors, 27 radiation treatments, surgery, chemotherapy, and multiple hospitalizations, the cancer was defeated.

While we praised God for this, it was increasingly difficult to understand why it had happened in the first place. Why our family? Why at this point in our lives? Why was everything still so hard? Though my husband had come through treatments and surgeries well, the side effects had taken away his ability to do construction—a job he loved. We got behind in paying bills, and our aging home fell into disrepair.

But with the faithful support of family, friends, and our beloved church family, we never struggled for basic needs or felt abandoned. Blessings were easy to find when we chose to look for them. There were certainly many more people out there who had things much worse than we did! We never really felt “in need.”

So when our church council approached us about a service project to repair our roof, we were hesitant to accept. Were we worthy of such an act of love from those who had already given us so much? The request was framed as providing an opportunity to build unity among church members by allowing the congregation to unite in a local short-term service project. We accepted, unsure of what God was trying to accomplish.

What happened next was beyond imagining. The roofing job exploded into an all-out remodel of everything in disrepair. In just three days we watched over 100 volunteers ages 4 to 86 completely



renovate our home and our lives. Young and old together primed and painted the house, tore off and replaced shingles, sided and painted and shingled a garage, landscaped, built a fire pit, dug out window wells, did electrical repairs, replaced a door, and removed a stump, among other improvements. Volunteers ate breakfast and lunch (with snacks in between) together in a tent set up for devotions and family-style meals. Bonds were formed and skills we never knew our church neighbors had were revealed. God took over in a very powerful way.

No sooner had the last touches been put on our home than the next project was being planned. As the deacons prepared to pay the bills connected with our home repair project, they found that unbelievable discounts had been granted by retailers and bills had been anonymously paid. The blessings were multiplied in ways only God can provide.

We sent out an email to family and friends sharing the blessings and the love that God had given us through this project. In a very short time we started getting phone calls and emails asking for details.

What had begun as a simple, local roofing project spread to church families across the U.S. We received so many comments from church families who had “forgotten” how important it is to band together in service—not just in remote places but in their own backyards.

I will never say that my husband’s cancer was the best thing that could have happened to our family. But I will say that it has been more of a blessing than a burden in so many ways!

The unity of a church is tested so often with disagreements over music, worship style, budgeting, and other things. But the important question is “How is God being glorified through your service today?” I praise and thank God every day for the blessings he has granted my family, and for the body of believers we are so fortunate to be a part of. ■



**Jenny Altena** and her husband, **Derrick**, live in Sanborn, Iowa, where they attend Sanborn Christian Reformed Church. Derrick serves as an elder, Jenny as a Sunday school teacher, and both lead a Bible study for young couples.

## Gold, Circumstance, and Mud

I first saw the title above in a church bulletin. It was the title of a story about a Christmas pageant.

The center of attention was a flashlight wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Everyone knew who that was supposed to be. Six-year-old John had on his dad's bathrobe. Ten-year-old Jane had a dish towel wrapped around her head and said, "I'm Mary; he's Joseph."

Four-year-old Margaret, with a pillowcase on her arms, which she flapped, said, "I'm the angel."

Then 8-year-old Sarah appeared. You could tell she was playing a wise man because she walked as though she were riding a camel. She was wearing all the jewelry she could find, and on a dog's pillow she carried three items. She bowed to the flashlight, to Mary and to Joseph, and then to the angel. She said, "I am all three wise men, and I bring precious gifts of gold, circumstance, and mud." She spoke more truth than she knew.

Circumstances in this world, and maybe in our lives right now, find us standing in the mud of broken promises, financial calamities, natural disasters, fire, and flood. We need to come, as those wise ones came, to the gold of the manger with our circumstance and mud.

Sometimes we miss the arresting nature of the opening chapters of Matthew's gospel. We miss the dramatic, even revolutionary, nuances of the genealogy we usually omit reading. We gloss over the pain the annunciation brought to a starry-eyed young couple contemplating marriage. And as the magi ride in gallantly on their camels, we completely miss the point that they do not belong in the story at all. But their very

appearance is God shouting that the doors to the kingdom are swinging open. We are no longer—as if we ever were!—the gatekeepers. The birth announcement from God is addressed to the whole world.

We do not know the number of these wise ones, or their names, their origin, or even their exact occupation. We can neither identify the star they followed nor how they followed it. We do not know when they arrived or how long their travel took.

We should also observe, in Matthew's gospel at least, that shepherds and angels and the stable are missing. Even Joseph is not mentioned. The world "saw the child . . . and worshiped him" (Matt. 2:11). That's the point! The gospel that ends with the Great Commission sending followers into the world begins with the

Great Invitation summoning the world.

Do you hear the message of Christmas? This vignette from the story fairly shouts at us that God wants people to know Jesus; God wants the world to know Jesus; God wants each of us to know Jesus.

Which star led, how many and who these wise ones were, even the whereabouts of Joseph—who, by the way, never says a murmuring word in the entire New Testament—all the things that arouse our curiosity and occupy our attention simply vanish in the glory of the fact that the One who was and is and is to come lay (or, by the time the magi arrived, stood) helpless before them—more wonderfully still, stood *for* them. That star, still glittering in the sky overhead, calls us to a similar mission: to worship Christ and to point him out to all.

At the outset of his gospel, Matthew introduces us to the world that is invited to come and worship the King. At the conclusion, Matthew shows us the disciples going out into the world to repeat the invitation. May God find us bringing that gold into all human circumstance and mud.

A blessed Christmas to you and yours—and all of his! ■



“We need to come, as those wise ones came, to the gold of the manger with our circumstance and mud.”



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

You add.  
God multiplies.

## Creating an On-ramp for International Development

**A** Calvin College professor and one of his students recently launched the website *Entravos.net* to connect recent college graduates to entry-level jobs in international development.

Roland Hoksbergen, Calvin's director of international development studies, and Calvin senior John Michael LaSalle took on this project in the hope of providing an on-ramp for students looking to gain experience in their field.

"We'd like Entravos to become a central place where there's a broad variety of different types of work around the world," said La Salle, "so that the inability to find a job early on is not a deterrent for someone who wants to have a long-term career in

international development."

"Lots of Christian organizations have opportunities, internships, fundraising, and even some paid positions in a variety of settings," said Hoksbergen. "What we wanted to do is get these organizations to post their internship and entry-level types of opportunities for the graduates who are going to be looking for them."

LaSalle said the idea isn't new. Sites like *Idealist.org* post thousands of internships and volunteer opportunities already. But many Christian organizations don't use it, he said.

"[*Idealist.org*] draws from a really wide audience, so they end up getting lots of applications that don't fit their mission or their organization," said LaSalle. The Entravos site

is appealing to these Christian organizations, which approach development a little differently, he said.

So far, LaSalle said, the response has been mainly positive. He's contacted 85 non-governmental organizations, parachurch ministries, and volunteer organizations, and all but three have shown interest in posting to the site.

The project is part of the college's McGregor Undergraduate Research Program, which since 1999 has provided funding for collaborative student-faculty research in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. ■

—Matt Kucinski,  
Calvin College



BTGMI's Hindi ministry reaches out to people like Piyush.

## Standing Strong

**P**iyush says BTGMI's Hindi radio program led him to his Savior, but at a high cost.

When Piyush shared his faith with his family, they were disturbed. They started pressuring him to return to his old beliefs and became angry when he refused. They imprisoned him in his bedroom, taking away his Bible and phone. They pushed meals under the bedroom door.

One day Piyush escaped. The first thing he did was call the BTGMI Hindi program producer, asking for prayer and support. In fact, the time spent imprisoned in his room seemed to prepare him for the next step in his faith.

"Piyush told us he was ready to be baptized," said the Hindi ministry leader. ■

—Brian Clark, *Back to God Ministries International*



Roland Hoksbergen and Michael LaSalle

## CRC to Hold Consultation About Ecumenical Faith Declarations

The Christian Reformed Church will hold an Ecumenical Faith Declaration Consultation in early 2014 to discuss the category into which the CRC has placed the Belhar Confession.

Along with the Reformed Church in America and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the CRC is inviting representatives from a multitude of Reformed denominations to the consultation.

About 50 people are expected to attend the event at Calvin College, said Rev. Peter Borgdorff, deputy executive director of the CRC.

The goal will be to help churches determine what an ecumenical faith declaration is and how they are to interpret and use it as a statement of belief and worship.



Synod 2012 had been asked to make the Belhar a fourth confession of the Christian Reformed Church, putting it on a par with the other three historic confessional statements of belief.

Instead synod created the new category “ecumenical faith declaration” and placed the Belhar into it.

After Synod 2012 created the ecumenical faith declaration category, people in the

CRC began to ask what exactly that entails. With questions remaining, the issue went before Synod 2013.

Synod 2013 decided not to take on the task of outlining specific criteria for the category. It voted instead to hold more discussion about the criteria within the denomination and with partner churches around the globe.

The World Communion of Reformed Churches will meet, also at the Prince Center, following the ecumenical gathering. The WCRC will discuss how it has been doing since it was formed in 2010 and look at what “communion” means in light of its development. ■

—Chris Meehan,  
CRC Communications



Potluck at Trinity Grace CRC

## Forming a Gospel Community

Church planter Shawn May describes Midland, Mich., as an “oasis of success” in the recession-ravaged desert of neighboring auto industry towns.

Yet, according to May, behind the pristine façade of immaculate boulevards and various amenities lives a corporate culture far less independent than it would like to think.

“People think they can take care of their own needs; they don’t see how others can help them,” said May.

May and his wife, Rachel, felt a clear call from God to serve in the city whose affluence stems from local corporations Dow Chemical and Dow Corning.

In April 2012, the Mays began to plant kernels of faith and community, resulting in the start of Trinity Grace CRC, a Home Missions partner ministry.

“We have a vision to form a gospel community where the gospel affects all areas of life,” said May.

Trinity Grace CRC hopes to meet in homes and then reach into the “natural relationships” existing in neighborhoods.

“It’s exciting to think of reaching the people here who think they have it together,” said May. ■

—Lorilee Craker, Christian Reformed Home Missions



## IMPACT Club Has Impact

**M**any youth in the Dominican Republic are unemployed. With no stable job in sight, many slip into a world of prostitution, gangs, and drug trafficking.

Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) and the Center for Transforming Mission (CTM) have partnered for several years to share Christ's love and grace with these at-risk youth, equipping local leaders for building relationships.

Recently, CRWM and CTM have begun a new youth ministry—IMPACT clubs.

“We want to encourage churches, other organizations, and the youths themselves to see young people as agents of transformation,” says Mario Matos, CTM’s Dominican Republic executive director.

IMPACT clubs are for young people ages 12 to 20. While the groups include adult mentors, youths lead club activities—playing games, studying the Bible, receiving vocational training, and organizing community projects.

The IMPACT club in Guaricanos has 20 youths ranging from ages 11 to 19.

### Youth IMPACT members at play in the Dominican Republic.

Francisco, 16, is a club member. “We have a lot of fun, and at the same time, we learn things we were not learning anywhere else,” he said. “The leader helps us think about how we can help our community to be a better place.”

“The only way today’s youth can imagine a brighter future is if we invest in equipping them today,” says Matos. “The task is not an easy one. It will take prayer, time, money, and people’s involvement.” ■

—Sarah Lin, *Christian Reformed World Missions*

## Seminary Offers Donation Option

**T**he American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 has had a beneficial impact on charitable giving, including gifts toward education at Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS).

The law provides an IRA rollover extension, allowing United States taxpayers over 70½ years of age to make tax-free charitable gifts from their IRAs to the seminary through the end of 2013.

In light of this, a small group of CTS friends is offering a match incentive.

Qualifying donors can give a year-end gift to the seminary through their IRA and have the donation matched dollar for dollar, up to \$110,000 in total matches.

One of the donors stated, “Considering the cost of education, living expenses, and investment of time, we are honored to do all we can to assist young people as well as the seminary.”

Learn more by contacting CTS director of development Robert Knorr at 616-957-6039 or [rknoor@calvinseminary.edu](mailto:rknoor@calvinseminary.edu). ■

—CRC Communications



## Calvin Seminary Celebrates Ph.D. program

Richard Muller



Graduates and supporters of Calvin Theological Seminary’s Ph.D. program gathered on Oct. 9 in a packed DeVos Auditorium to celebrate the program’s 20th anniversary.

Although it began two decades ago, no doctoral degree was conferred until 15 years ago. Today, 48 of the Ph.D. program’s graduates serve the church and academy in various parts of the world and 31 students are

currently enrolled in the program.

Several current Calvin Seminary faculty members contributed to the afternoon celebration.

Richard Muller gave the plenary address. Muller is

internationally known for his scholarship on post-Reformation theology. He has taught in the Ph.D. program since its inception and has been key to its success, said Ronald Feenstra, one of his colleagues at the seminary.

Muller spoke about the program’s progress and its early and ongoing commitments to the church and academy worldwide, to students, and to scholarship. He also spoke about how the efforts have borne fruit.

From publications and conference participation to church leadership roles to the establishment of scholarly networks, Muller noted the international range and theological depth of graduates’ impact. ■

—Kristie Manion, Calvin Theological Seminary

## Ordinary Pastors

The rhythm of meeting monthly to share, pray, and discuss readings helped pastors reconnect with the human side of ministry, says pastor Ken Gehrels of his participation in a Sustaining Pastoral Excellence peer learning group.

Gehrels is one of 16 ministry leaders from Eastern Ontario and Quebec whose common hunger for support initially brought them together to share their ministries, experiences, and insights.

The blessings of mutual care, prayer, collegiality, and

encouragement—as well as support—kept them coming back.

One pastor reported, “I enjoy getting to know the other CRC pastors/leaders. . . It’s nice to have other people in the same boat as I am.”

Group members formed smaller groups of two and three that meet between their larger gatherings.

Since most of the pastors minister in significant isolation, these times of interaction are important. Gehrels says there’s “a very high need for fellowship with others in a similar life position.”



Pastors from Québec and Eastern Ontario met as a peer group.

The peer group has become a safe place. Bridges have been built between colleagues who are geographically separated and who have

few opportunities to make meaningful connections.

Those wishing to apply for a peer-learning grant must submit their application to SPC by May 1. ■

—Lis Van Harten, Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

You add.  
God multiplies.

## “It All Belongs to God”

Vicky Kademi had been teaching for so many years that she believed she had nothing new to give her students. She began seriously considering other jobs. Then she discovered Educational Care, a new teacher training program.

Educational Care is a six-part training curriculum based on biblical principles of education. Since its development three years ago, Christian Reformed World Missions missionaries Mwaya and Munyiva Wa Kitavi have led Educational Care training seminars across Eastern and Southern Africa.

In many African countries, most Christian school teachers and administrators have had little training in applying

their faith in the classroom. Additionally, many people have viewed teaching as something one pursues when all other avenues are closed.

Increasingly, however, Christians are recognizing the significance of Christian education.

In August, Kademi attended the Wa Kitavis’ latest Educational Care workshop in Kenya. For five days, she and over 80 teachers and administrators explored what a biblical worldview means. For the first time Kademi realized that, as a teacher, she had a unique opportunity to nurture children’s faith.

“When a child comes to my class, [it] is my responsibility as an educator to give the child a biblical worldview . . . from

God’s heart, to my heart, to the child’s heart,” she says.

Kademi and her fellow Educational Care participants are now carrying out action plans they made during the training. Their goal is to teach students, through their lessons and classroom environments, what it means to view and live life as a Christian.

“The phrase ‘It all belongs to God’ will forever be ingrained in my mind and soul,” says Kademi. ■

—Sarah Lin,  
*Christian Reformed World Missions*



Students sign action plans.

A farmer in rural Nicaragua.



## Little Gardens of Eden

**T**he birds are singing. Acres and acres of fields are filled with lush greenery, healthy crops, and bright flowers.

For many farmers in rural Nicaragua, this had not always been the case.

Ten years ago, they were among the poorest in Nicaragua. They rented the land or share-cropped. Despite hard work, profits were limited; they struggled to provide for their families.

World Renew began to work with two local partners, Christian Medical Action and the YMCA of Nicaragua, to help people build better lives.

At first they had little success. Without owning the land, farmers were unwilling to make a long-term investment in new farming techniques.

After several years of working with farmers, World Renew concluded that they needed to address the issue of land

tenure, said Mark VanderWees, World Renew's country consultant in Nicaragua.

They prayed and determined to create a "land bank" from which farmers could access land and pay for it until they owned it outright. As these farmers made payments, the "bank" could purchase more land.

Support from Partners Worldwide and farmers in Iowa provided the capital; World Renew and the Foods Resource Bank provided support for the organizing and training components of the project.

"From the onset it was obvious that this would be a long-term process," VanderWees said.

Lost crops, delinquent payments, farmers unable to live by the program conditions, difficulty in marketing excess crops, and other hurdles arose.

The land for the land bank was hilly, compacted, and overgrazed. World Renew

divided it into individual parcels and trained people in better farming and marketing techniques.

"The first couple of years for these farmers could be compared to homesteading in North America when the population moved westward," said VanderWees.

But then things started to change. Farmers planted beans, corn, and a variety of flowers and vegetables. They started irrigation systems, planted fruit trees, and improved their homes.

Today, there are seven land banks and almost 100 farmers in the program. Many of these families now have food year-round.

"For me, the best part of the visit was seeing plots of land that were barren turned into lush oases of vegetation," VanderWees said. "They are little gardens of Eden." ■

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,  
World Renew



You add.  
God multiplies.

# network

## “Hand Raising” on The Network

In school if you had a question, you’d raise your hand to get an answer. But what if you have a question about serving in ministry at your church?

The Network is the place to find the answers, resources, and ideas for serving in your church.

Here’s a little math quiz:

There are about 1,000 CRC churches. So if you are a Sunday school teacher, how many of your fellow teachers can you potentially connect with and learn from about Sunday school ministry?

The answer is easy—just guess the average number of Sunday school teachers per church and multiply by 1,000. That’s a lot of teachers to help answer your question!

But it’s not just for Sunday school teachers. The Network can help you connect with thousands of other CRC members who are serving in a variety of ministry roles. That’s thousands of pastors, elders, deacons, church librarians, ministry coordinators, small group leaders, sound technicians, and more.

The Network offers three unique ways to help you in ministry:

- Blogs and discussion forums dive into compelling topics such as guns at church and how the coffee you serve at church reflects your church’s DNA.
- Ministry Q&A lets you ask specific questions and get the answers you need. Currently there are more than 300 questions with over 1,000 responses from helpful people on topics ranging from church building dedications to combining youth groups to gluten-free bread.
- Webinars are free, hour-long online learning events that provide practical training on various ministry essentials. Sit down with an expert and listen, take notes, and ask questions.

Next time you have a question, raise your hand a new way. Log on to The Network at [crcna.org/network](http://crcna.org/network) to find the answers, resources, and ideas you need for serving in your church—and to learn, share, and connect with thousands of others serving in ministry. ■

—Jonathan Wilson, CRC Communications

## CRC Members Reflect on Residential Schools

After listening to indigenous people describe the abuse they suffered while attending residential schools in Canada, one nurse realized that she won’t be providing health care in the same way she has done in the past.

She learned by attending Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) September gathering in Vancouver, British Columbia, that those who survived the residential schools bring with them a range of special medical care needs.

The nurse was among those who attended and spoke at a TRC debriefing held at First Christian Reformed Church in Vancouver.

The TRC has been holding events all over Canada to compile the history of abuse indigenous people underwent in residential schools and to create a process of reconciliation between aboriginals and non-aboriginals.

A contingent of CRC staff attended the event. Trevor Vanderveen, pastor of First Vancouver CRC, took part in the TRC program. Time was set aside for him to present a formal Expression of Reconciliation to the indigenous people of Canada, stating that placing young men and women from native groups in residential schools was contrary to the gospel of Christ.

“Our denomination does not have a history of operating residential schools in Canada,” said Vanderveen. “However, as a member of the church of Christ, we are sorry for those sins committed in the name of Jesus.”

The debriefing at First CRC drew more than 40 people. ■

—CRC Communications



Two women talk together during the Truth and Reconciliation event at Vancouver First CRC.

# Name That Tune.

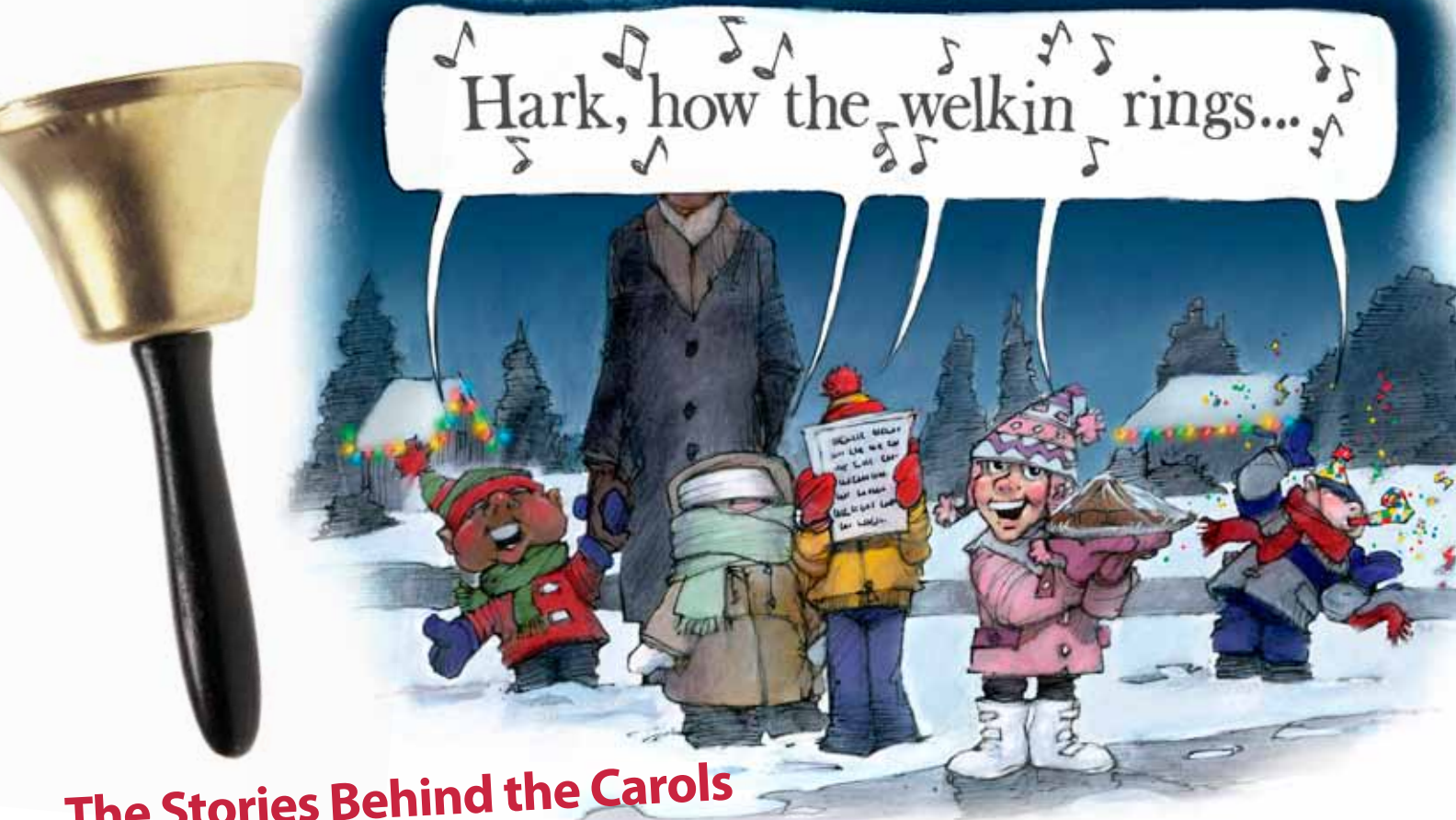
Candy canes. Sparkling trees. Glittering cards. Nativity scenes. Whether you're decorating your Christmas tree or baking delicious cookies, your

favorite holiday activity would not be the same without the joyful jingle of a Christmas carol. Many Christmas songs, also known as carols, began

as poems that describe the wonder of our Savior's birth.

Let's take a look at a few of the world's favorite Christmas carols.

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY



## The Stories Behind the Carols

### Silent Night

The Christmas carol "Silent Night" was written as a poem by an Austrian priest named Joseph Mohr. In 1818, Joseph Mohr faced a troubling problem—the organ used for playing worship music was broken and could not be repaired in time for Christmas services. Eager to provide music for that evening's Christmas Eve service, Joseph Mohr took the Christmas poem he had written two years earlier to a friend named Franz Gruber. He asked his friend to write some music for his Christmas poem.

Within a few hours, Franz Gruber had created the tune to "Silent Night" that we know and love today. The music was played on a guitar, and the people of St. Nicholas Church had Christmas music for their evening service after all! Over time, the new carol was sung in churches throughout Europe. Eventually it made its way to North America, and today "Silent Night" is one of the most popular Christmas carols in the world.

### Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

This Christmas carol was written by English hymn writer Charles Wesley in 1739. He wrote: "Hark, how the welkin (heaven) rings, glory to the King of kings." Years later, a man named George Whitefield changed the words of the song to the familiar words we all know today: "Hark! The herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king!"

What do you think the word *hark* means?

- a) sing
- b) watch
- c) fly
- d) listen

What do you think the word *herald* means?

- a) a messenger bringing news
- b) angels singing songs
- c) someone who announces that a king has been born
- d) a soldier following orders

# Christmas Crafts

## Shiny Star

Here's a cool craft to give away when you go caroling. (Make an extra one for your Christmas tree!)

### You'll need

- two kinds of gold, silver, or copper-colored wire (thicker 18-gauge wire and thinner 24-gauge wire, available at craft stores)
- star-shaped cookie cutter
- scissors
- thin ribbon

### Here's what you do:

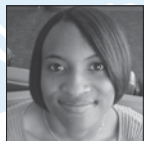
- Wrap the thicker wire around the outside of the cookie cutter once or twice, pressing it firmly to the cookie cutter to make a star shape.
- Remove the cookie cutter and cut the wire. Twist the ends of the wire to the star shape so they don't come apart.
- Now wrap the thinner wire around the star shape as many times as you like. Twist the ends again when you're done.
- Loop a piece of ribbon through one point of the star, cut it to the length you want, and tie a knot.

## Matchbox Manger

To make this manger scene, you'll need three empty matchboxes, white cardstock, tape, and markers. Here's what you do:

- Carefully wrap each matchbox in white cardstock.
- On two matchboxes, draw and color a picture of Mary and Joseph.
- On the third matchbox, draw and color a picture of baby Jesus.

Put them on your mantle or on your kitchen table to remind you of Jesus' birth.



**Christin Baker** is a full-time stay-at-home mom who writes for Faith Alive. She is a member of Resurrection

Fellowship church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



# A-Caroling We Go!

This Christmas, invite friends and family to go caroling in your neighborhood! Here are a few tips to remember:

- Always go caroling with an adult.
- Be sure to bundle up if you live in a place with cold temperatures and lots of snow!
- Print out the words of your favorite carols to have with you when you sing.
- Take along some holiday treats or crafts with you to give to the people you sing to.
- When you're done, have a party. Ask a grown-up to help prepare some hot cider or cocoa and Christmas cookies.

## Name That Tune

Read the following clues. Then grab a pencil or pen and fill in the blanks to name that tune!

1. Baby Jesus was placed in a feeding trough for animals. Which Christmas carol has another word for **trough** in its title? (Hint: It rhymes with *danger*.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ in a \_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Luke 2:8-14. What is the name of the Christmas carol that talks about heavenly beings making a great announcement?  
\_\_\_\_\_! The \_\_\_\_\_ Sing
3. The title of this Christmas carol describes a quiet evening.  
What's another word for **quiet**? \_\_\_\_\_  
What's another word for **evening**? \_\_\_\_\_
4. This Christmas carol talks about happiness on earth because "the Lord is come!"  
What is the name of this Christmas carol?  
\_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_

## Write Your Own Carol!

Write a Christmas poem and sing it to the tune of your favorite Christmas carol! Invite your family to sing it with you.

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# A Beautiful Gift

## HAVING A BABY CHANGED EVERYTHING.

For years, my husband and I struggled to find a church home. While we are theologically conservative in many ways, we are less so in the area of women functioning in the church. As we sought a church home, we consistently felt that we were forced to make a choice that would compromise our faith in one way or another. If we chose a church where women were warmly encouraged to use their gifts, we were faced with compromising on essentials of the faith. If we chose a congregation where the doctrinal standards and theology were strong, we were faced with compromising on the issue of women freely serving.

Because I grew up Baptist, I very much wanted to stay in that denomination, and so we considered many Baptist churches around us. We muddled along for a number of years, dropping in and out of churches of various denominations. If we compromised on the theology issue, we were unhappy. If we compromised on the women's issue, we were miserable.

### A Matter of Urgency

Then one day in the midst of it all we were delighted to discover that we were finally expecting a baby after nine years of marriage. We had prayed all of those years for a little girl. While we would have loved a boy as well, it had always been the longing of our hearts to have a daughter. Nine months later we were blessed with the birth of Caroline. We dedicated her at the Baptist church where we were members at the time. But the church's views on women and the lack of ministry opportunities for me weighed heavily on us.

With this little girl to raise for God, the issue of women using their gifts in the church became more urgent in our lives. This was no longer just about the opportunity to use my gifts. It had become a question of what our daughter would see and hear each week in church. A question about the kind of teachings our daughter would absorb and the theology she would hear year after year regarding how God views women and the gifts they receive from the Holy Spirit. After spending years wrestling with the issue of women in the church, I had learned to filter what I was hearing when necessary. But I did not want to have to constantly re-teach my little girl if she heard things at church that we felt were not in line with our beliefs.

While there was never a single defining moment that pushed us to the choice, there was a steady development in our thinking. We would not compromise on the gospel or the essentials of the faith. At the same time, we believed that it was imperative for us to raise our daughter in a church where she saw women actively involved every week in the service. It was not



enough for us to know that women were working behind the scenes. Caroline needed to see women leading the congregation in prayer. We longed for her to see and hear godly women reading Scripture. We wanted her to interact with the female deacons who would visit us in our home.

After much prayer and conversation, we eventually ended up at our current church, Beckwith Hills Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Yes, the issue of where to raise our daughter relative to teachings on women was more important to us than the mode and view of baptism. This life-long immersionist chose to embrace infant baptism so that my daughter could experience freedom as a woman in church.

The CRC was the answer to our years of struggling and wandering.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY SUPERSTOCK

## It was not enough for us to know that women were working behind the scenes.

There are many women (and men) outside the CRC whose faith requires both a strong overall theology grounded in the authority of the Scriptures and a steadfast commitment to the value of women exercising their gifts in the local church.

It is my prayer that the CRC will continue to welcome people such as our little family. I hope there will be many other little girls like our Caroline who will worship each week in congregations where godly women read the words of life aloud. I pray that many little girls will look up to vibrant Christian women who preach or teach the children's sermon or lead the congregation in prayer. And I long to see our churches filled with little girls who will know their entire lives that God is real, God deeply loves women, and God delights to see them fully participate in the life of the church.

It is a difficult line the CRC currently walks. We must be aware of the danger of falling into error, as has happened in other denominations, and guard against it. But I hope that the members of the CRC will keep in mind that the impact of their choices about using the gifts of women in church goes far beyond only current members and those who grew up within the denomination. Those decisions also impact other believers outside the CRC who long to find a congregational home full of both truth and freedom for women. The CRC is truly a beautiful gift to these brothers and sisters in Christ. ■

### The CRC Is a Gift

I'm fully aware that the debate about women using their gifts in our denomination has been a difficult one for decades. I don't wish to minimize either the concerns related to this issue or the pain it has caused many of our brothers and sisters. But as an outsider who has become a part of the CRC, I encourage my fellow members to consider the unique gift the denomination can be to the body of Christ.

The CRC offers a strong, God-centered, Christ-honoring theology. It honors the sovereignty of God, God's love for us, and the beautiful work of Jesus on our behalf. At the same time, the denomination demonstrates a commitment to the value of women and their gifts. Sadly, fewer and fewer churches and denominations bring both of these to the body of Christ.



**Sallie Ann Borrink** is a wife, mom, and professional writer. She enjoys encouraging others through her website *A Quiet Simple Life* ([aquietsimplelife.com](http://aquietsimplelife.com)). She's a member of Beckwith Hills CRC in Grand Rapids.

## Neil Gaiman's Thin Barriers Between Life and Death

### I FIRST ENCOUNTERED

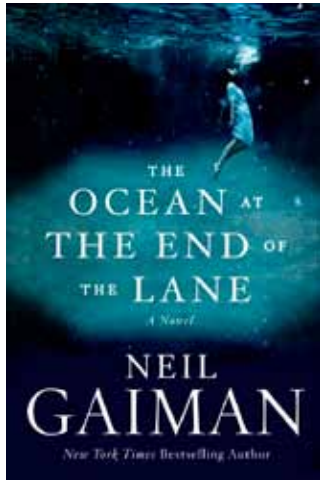
Neil Gaiman's prolific and wild imagination when my children and I watched the 2009 movie *Coraline*, based on the novella of the same name. In this story, an unhappy young girl discovers in her home a marvelous parallel universe where her Other Mother, unlike her real mother, is kind and attentive. Nice, at least, until Other Mother asks to sew

buttons into Coraline's eyes in exchange for eternal life. Who thinks of a plot like that?

After seeing the film, I learned that Gaiman had won the prestigious Newbery Medal in 2009 for his young adult novel *The Graveyard Book*. It tells the story of Nobody Owens, a boy who is brought up by ghosts in a graveyard after his parents are murdered. After reading it, I wondered again: How does he think this up—and dare to aim it at a young adult readership?

Gaiman's recent book *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (William Morrow) is, by contrast, a children's story for adults. The middle-aged narrator returns to Sussex, England, the countryside of his childhood, and a farm "where the barriers between life and death were thin."

**Gaiman approaches good and evil, life and death, with a sense of essential seriousness and style.**



Without spoiling the plot too much, I can say that Ursula doesn't like the narrator and Lettie one bit; rather harrowing (it's not for young readers!) moments ensue. At one point, voices call out to the boy: "How can you be happy in this world? You have a hole in your heart." Indeed, the book is a fable about becoming an adult, finding contentment outside of greed, giving trust, and accepting sacrifice.

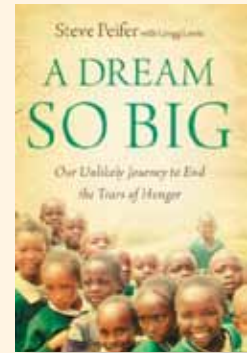
The bookish narrator clearly stands in for Gaiman when he says, "Why didn't adults want to read about Narnia, about secret islands and smugglers and dangerous fairies?" Indeed, Gaiman's fantasy owes a lot to C. S. Lewis but also to the British humor and linguistic cleverness of classics like *Alice in Wonderland*.

While his perspective is not Christian, Gaiman approaches youth and adulthood, good and evil, life and death, with a sense of essential seriousness and style that goes beyond what fantasy literature usually has to offer.



**Otto Selles** teaches French at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

He remembers meeting Lettie Hempstock, a precocious 11-year-old who believed that the farm's pond was as big as an ocean. That memory leads him to another: when he was 7, he discovered a body near the farm. That suicide unleashed an ancient force of greed, violence, and destruction taking the form of Ursula Monkton, a profoundly evil governess.



## A Dream So Big: One Unlikely Journey to End the Tears of Hunger

by **Steve Peifer with Gregg Lewis**

reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

In 1997, Steve and Nancy Peifer's newborn son died after only eight days. Running from their grief, the Peifers signed on at Kenya's Rift Valley Academy, a school for children of missionaries. When the family encountered drought, famine, and the repercussions of AIDS in the surrounding areas, they decided to do something about it. In this powerful, refreshing narrative with large doses of self-deprecating humor, Steve Peifer focuses on Jesus as his provider and the only One who can make something beautiful out of our failures and pain. (Zondervan)



## Americanah

by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie  
reviewed by Sandy Swartzentruber

When teenager Ifemelu leaves Nigeria to study in the U.S., she is confounded by America and its unrelenting emphasis on race. After a gut-wrenching beginning, she eventually finds her feet, achieving success as a blogger about racial issues. When she feels Nigeria calling her back, Ifemelu returns to her homeland with the changed perspectives and values of an expatriate. Though some readers may find *Americanah* a bit too didactic and sexually detailed, it provides much food for thought on the complexities of race in a global society. (Knopf)



## The Inconsolable Secret

by Glass Hammer  
reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

Glass Hammer is a progressive rock band offering instrumental virtuosity, long multi-part songs, and lyrics that address the big questions of life. What's more, the band's lyrics are often inspired by writers like J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. On their recently rerecorded and remixed double CD *The Inconsolable Secret*, they've added new instruments and vocals that are a better match for their vision. This tale of a King fighting off the evil Knight of the North to save his daughter is a clear Christian allegory. (Sound Resources/BMI)

## Inland

by Jars of Clay  
reviewed by Greg Veltman



Having spent the last 20 years firmly entrenched in the contemporary Christian music scene in Nashville, Jars of Clay attempts to find some distance by recording *Inland* with Tucker Martine in Portland, Ore. Lead singer Dan Haseltine avoids some of the over-produced vocals of past albums, giving his voice more natural tones and even sometimes breaking into falsetto. Adding more instruments makes their sound more dynamic. Exploring themes of forgiveness and struggle, the band has found a way to mature along with its audience. (Gray Matters)

## The Matchbox Diary

by Paul Fleischman  
reviewed by Jenny deGroot



"What's in the little boxes?" the little girl asks her grandfather. "My diary" he says. "Pick one and I will tell you the story." So begins this picture book, based on the author's discovery of a matchbox diary years ago. The grandfather unfolds family history as the child opens each box . . . an olive pit, a bottle cap, a fish scale. Masterful storytelling and the golden illustrations of Bagram Ibatoulline make this a book to be savored by all ages. Ages 6 and up. (Candlewick)

## THE LOWDOWN



**Art Works:** Michael J. Bauer examines the power and importance of using creative gifts in the local church in his book *Arts Ministry: Nurturing the Creative Life of God's People*. (Eerdmans)



**Fowl Play:** Love "Duck Dynasty"? This is the Christmas album for you. *Duck the Halls: A Robertson Family Christmas* includes duets with the likes of Allison Kraus, Luke Bryan, and George Strait. (Capitol Nashville)



**Dream On:** James Thurber's short story *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* gets a theatrical reboot this month with Ben Stiller as the daydreaming Mitty. (20th Century Fox)



**Evidently:** Creed's lead singer, rocker Scott Stapp, enters the Christian music scene with his second solo album, *Proof of Life*. (Wind-Up Records)

## Into the Noise

reviewed by Greg Veltman

Christians have long debated how they can best engage the culture in which they find themselves. Into the Noise was formed as a new approach to this question. This organization seeks to form a community around the connections between spirituality and culture. Participants travel to significant cultural events, such as the Sundance Film Festival, to have conversations in community around how spirituality and culture intersect. Rather than attempting to bring relevant cultural artifacts to a festival or conference, this organization wants participants to enter into the noise of popular culture. ([intothenoise.org](http://intothenoise.org))

MORE REVIEWS  
ONLINE



## Living Well, Dying Well

**H**ELLO. My name is Erika, and I'm going to die. You are going to die too. I don't know when. I don't know how. But it's one of the few things in this life I can say with absolute certainty.

This might seem like an inappropriate way to introduce ourselves to one another. Nonetheless, it's true. And while I don't advocate changing the way we greet each other, I do think it's essential to acknowledge the reality of death—to name it and give it a place. Because whether we are comfortable with it or not, death is a part of every life.

Those of us who live in the 21st century in the Western world have the “luxury,” unwise though it may be, of not having to look death in the face. Quality medical care, a deceptively dependable food supply, and countless other unmerited privileges mean that in our part of the world infant and child mortality are rare; many people enjoy long and healthy lives. As a friend

who recently emigrated from Cameroon observed, “Your people get so old!”

That is a good thing, of course. I am profoundly grateful for the blessings of three healthy children, a healthy spouse, two sets of healthy parents, and a relatively healthy 97-year-old-grandma. But the dark side of this reality is a growing inability to accept and to incorporate the inevitability of suffering and death into our daily living.

Only a few generations ago people were born at home and died at home. When a person died, loved ones washed and clothed the body and laid it out in a coffin in the living room. Friends, family members, and neighbors stopped by to pay their respects and to comfort the grieving. Usually at least one person sat by the body—held vigil or “waked the body”—until close friends and relatives carried the remains to the funeral and burial. This was still the case when my great-grandfather died in 1946.

Today hospitals and funeral homes have replaced bedrooms and living rooms

as the more common venues for death. Medical and funeral home staff now perform tasks once carried out by family members and friends. These professionals provide valuable services. But an unintended consequence of the care they offer has been a general distancing among many people from the reality of death.

What, then, is the rightful place of death? Is it simply a natural part of life that we should strive to accept and embrace? An enemy that we should rage against and fight with our dying breath? Something else entirely?

And where do we go with our questions, uncertainties, and fears?

As believers, we look to God, the Creator and Source of all life. We look to Jesus, who was born and died and lived again. We look to the Holy Spirit, the Breath of life. We turn to the deep, mysterious truths of the Christian faith revealed in God's Word. While these truths are more than we can humanly comprehend, explain, or prove, they provide the foundation for our



ability to live well and to die in hope and expectation.

In the beginning God made us and gave us life, but we rejected his way and tasted death and distance from God. Death is a painful sign of the brokenness within and among creation, people, and God.

But God is Love, so once again God offered us life—this time by sending God-in-the-flesh, Jesus. Counter to all expectations, Jesus died. Three days later—again, counter to all expectations—Jesus rose again. After giving death its due, he showed the mighty, eternal power of life.

And this is the point in the story where we find ourselves today. Jesus, who was raised from the dead, is “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). He is our living proof that death does not have the final say. Jesus shows that he is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). And although this way is *through* death, our ultimate destination is life, true life.

## Whether we are comfortable with it or not, death is a part of life.

So what does this biblical teaching mean for how we face and experience death—our own and the deaths of those we love—in our everyday, mortal lives?

Here’s a start: “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him” (1 Thess. 4:13-14). We grieve because death still wreaks havoc on the life that God has given us. But we grieve with hope. Our hope is in the power and promise of a life that is ultimately impervious to the power of death. Again

we turn to the words of Scripture, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

Our grieving with hope will take as many different forms as there are people and deaths and those who mourn them. The sudden, traumatic death of a young person is different from the quiet passing of a 90-year old great-grandpa. An unexpected terminal diagnosis cannot be compared to the general knowledge that death comes to everyone.

Although every person and situation is unique, we are called to live thankful, hopeful lives in the ever-present shadow of death. Perhaps the following suggestions could be a starting point for developing a faithful response to that calling, both as individuals and within the family of God.

- Talk about end-of-life health issues with your family and close friends. For example, think about what kind of medical interventions are acceptable or unacceptable to you. Then write them down and name a medical decision-maker to represent you, should the need arise.
- Think about what kind of funeral and burial arrangements you prefer, and talk about them with your family. Do you have a favorite Scripture passage or song that you’d like people to sing? Hate the idea of being embalmed? Let your loved ones know.
- Speak openly and honestly with children about death whenever it touches their lives—whether in the death of a grandparent or other family member, a friend, or a pet. Use these opportunities to reassure them and to invite their questions. Leave the door open for further conversation.
- Respect the timing and manner of people’s grief. Losing a beloved friend or family member will permanently affect a person. Although people will make their way through grief, they will never ever “get over” it.

Although death still has a voice, it does not have the last word. The refrain to a well-known Southern gospel song comes to mind:

*Because [Jesus] lives, I can face tomorrow  
Because he lives, all fear is gone  
Because I know he holds the future  
And life is worth the living just because  
he lives.*

Because Jesus has the last word, our life is worth the living. ■

### For Further Reading

- *The Art of Dying: Living Fully into the Life to Come* by Rob Moll with foreword by Lauren Winner (IVP, 2010)
- *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* by Allen Verhey (Eerdmans, 2011)
- “Death, be not proud” by John Donne, from *Holy Sonnets*
- *Getting to the Other Side of Grief: Overcoming the Loss of a Spouse* by Susan Zonnebelt-Smeenge and Robert C. De Vries (Baker Books, 1998)
- *In Life and In Death: A Pastoral Guide for Funerals* by Leonard J. Vander Zee (Faith Alive Christian Resources, [faithaliveresources.org](http://faithaliveresources.org))
- *Letters to Myself on Dying: A Journal of Hope, Pain, and Courage* by Mirth Vos (Baker Books, 1999)
- *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* by N.T. Wright (HarperOne, 2008)
- *The Undertaking: Life Studies from the Dismal Trade* by Thomas Lynch (W.W. Norton and Co., 2009)
- *Wit: A Play* by Margaret Edson (Faber & Faber, 1999)



Erika Dekker is a chaplain at a rehabilitation and long-term care facility in Grand Rapids, Mich. She and her husband are parents of

three children and are members of Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church.

## Three Marks of a Reformed Church Structure

**WHAT IS A “REFORMED” CHURCH STRUCTURE?** What structure is proper for a Reformed church, and specifically for the Christian Reformed Church? Many things could be said, but here are three general principles.

**First, a Reformed denominational structure should point to Christ.** Too often we argue about who is in charge of the church. Is it the churches or the synod? Individuals and families who pay ministry shares or the Board of Trustees? The answer to those questions is “None of the above.” *Christ* is in charge of the church. The church is shaped by Christ and forms the faith of Christ-shaped people and communities.

The structure of the church, then, must make it clear that Christ is in charge of our denomination and our churches; our synod, classes, and councils; our boards, our agencies, and our educational institutions; our executive director and all our staff and officebearers. All of them are called to function in a way that emulates Christ.

Recently a seminarian asked me if delegates to synod are bound to vote according to their classes’ wishes or whether they are free to make up their own minds. Neither, I said. They should think about the issues and discuss them in their own church council or classis, but at synod they have to hear the deliberation of the delegates of the whole Christian Reformed body of Christ, to listen for Christ’s leading in the discussion. That’s being Reformed.

**Second, a Reformed structure is marked by mutual accountability.** Our Reformed polity is full of examples of accountability—between members and leaders, between pastors and councils, between councils and congregations, councils and classes, classes and synod. We have many checks and balances in our decision-making processes, and we don’t encourage lone rangers.

Why? Well, because it’s biblical. The Bible is the story of God’s corporate people from Israel to the church—a community of both care and accountability. Being Christian means being part of that community, and “no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself [or herself]” (Belgic Confession, Art. 28).

Those who belong to Christ belong to those who belong to Christ. As churches, we don’t have the freedom to do whatever we want, nor are we allowed the “freedom” to struggle on our

## Those who belong to Christ belong to those who belong to Christ.

own without help. We covenant together to be part of a denomination that is more than a voluntary association. We believe God calls us to work together as we love one another.

Sometimes we have disagreements. But being committed to Christ and to each other means being committed to working things out together. So we don’t make it easy to leave the church. Sometimes we acquiesce in the resignations of members, officebearers, or even congregations. But we believe in sticking together and working things out.

**Third, a Reformed structure should be nimble and responsive.** If the church is to be effective in reaching the world with the gospel, it will discern its context and adjust as needed, while still making sure to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, not other spirits.

John Calvin taught about the church’s need to change along with the times, using the example of worship practices. He wasn’t in favor of change for change’s sake but of thoughtful change for the upbuilding of the church. Calvin realized that deciding on appropriate changes can be difficult, but he remembered the Bible’s call to love one another. “If love is our guide,” he wrote, “all will be safe” (*Institutes*, IV.X.30).

A church structure that is focused on Christ includes provisions for mutual accountability and can change along with its context as the church discerns the leading of the Spirit of Christ. Now *that’s* Reformed! ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



**Kathy Smith** is associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and adjunct professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary.

## Thinking in Light of Eternity

In your 20s or 30s? We want to hear what's on your mind as it relates to living out your faith in today's world. Please send manuscripts (600 words) to [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org). (And, no, you don't have to be ordained!)

**FOR MY ENTIRE LIFE** I have been shaped by North American culture to expect that holding a respectable job, ideally an enjoyable one with benefits, is the fulcrum of my future. I've been told that ideas are the currency of success, and that brilliant innovation will translate into making enough money to allow me to settle down and lean back. It's as if, starting in kindergarten, I was set on a track toward retirement. If I work hard for 70 years I'll be able to afford a comfortable life. And if I spend my money well, I'll be able to enjoy annual weeks of vacation on a tropical shore along the way. Comfort, among a few other things, should be my priority—or so I'm told.

But we, the restless ones who are citizens of the already-but-not-yet kingdom of God, know that tangible, permanent comfort is found in Jesus. We believe that there is no good, lasting life apart from Jesus and his ways.

Jesus asks me to think first about his kingdom, to abide with him and listen to his Spirit who guides me. He asks me to not worry. He asks me to be prepared to hold nothing back from him—not a single secret sin, and not even good things like my dreams and desires. This sounds difficult.

Repent from what makes me spiteful and arrogant? I'm willing to do that. Relinquish weighted and worrisome thoughts? That's increasingly difficult to do, but is a reassuring condition to be in. Saying no to good things in order to say yes to something better? Hold on. Seriously, you don't know how much I enjoy laughing into summer nights with friends on the patio at my favorite restaurant.

Essentially when Jesus invites me to follow him, he asks me to make all my decisions in light of eternity. And if I am daily asking him, "What are you doing today, and how can I join you?" the answer may well make me uncomfortable. And sometimes it won't be, "Go hang out with your friends."

Every day Jesus asks me to surrender my thoughts, ambitions, and plans in cooperation with how he's moving, because every moment counts. So for me, sometimes saying no to a fun time with friends is ultimately worthwhile because I know that my money, time, and energy may need to be used for that moment in another way.

Whether you are a teacher or an artist or a zoo keeper or a social worker or a barista, Jesus is asking you to set your gaze farther ahead than the weekend or the day you walk down the aisle or your retirement. Jesus willingly suffered the most excruciating death and rose again to save us from a mediocre life, and even worse, an eternity outside of his presence. He allowed himself to be nailed to a cross because he knew the end of the story—a kingdom worth the investment. He knew that ultimately he would be seated at his Father's right hand, securing our adoption. His gaze was farther-reaching than Friday night, and while he suffered he had you and me in mind, and Sunday morning resurrection, and the kingdom.

If fully and passionately following Jesus seems too difficult or too awkward, remember that Jesus knows not only the difficulty but also the end of the story. The "meanwhile" may not be comfortable, but it's worthwhile. ■

**Amanda Stephen** is an alumnus of Kuyper College in Grand Rapids, Mich., who works at Bridgewood Church in Savage, Minn. She often wonders which of the two states has more lakes.

NEXT



Jesus' gaze was farther-reaching than Friday night.

# ADS

**Deadlines:** Jan. 2014 issue is 12/2/2013; Feb. issue is 1/6/2014. Details online.

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

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## Denominational and Classical

### Meetings of Classis

**CLASSIS HEARTLAND** will meet in regular session Saturday, March 1, 2014, 8:00 AM, at Calvin CRC, Le Mars, Iowa. Agenda items are due

January 11, 2014. Rev. Robert Drenten, Stated Clerk, 1405 Albany Ave NE, Orange City, IA 51041. [robert.drenten@gmail.com](mailto:robert.drenten@gmail.com)

**CLASSIS ZEELAND** will meet on Thursday, January 16, 2014, 4PM, at the Coopersville CRC. Agenda deadline is December 5.

Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, S. C

## Financial Aid

**FINANCIAL AID** Students preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church from Classis Heartland may apply for aid to assist them in their study by contacting Rev. Loren Kotman; 1111 5th Street, Hull, IA 51239; (712) 439-1123; [pastor@hull1stcrc.com](mailto:pastor@hull1stcrc.com). The deadline is February 1, 2014.

## Congregational

### Retirement

**LAGRAVE CRC** announces the emeritation of Rev. Mel Flikkema. We thank God for 41 years of faithful service as minister of the Word in the CRC. During that time Rev. Flikkema served 11 years in parish ministry, 6 years as hospital chaplain, 4 years in the Chaplain's office of the denomination, 7 years as the Director of Field Education at Kuyper College, and 12 years as the Provost of Kuyper. In addition Rev. Flikkema served as a reserve Army chaplain from 1985-2006 and was deployed to Iraq in 2003.

**LAGRAVE CRC** is celebrating what God has done through the faithful ministry of Rev. Don Klop who served as minister of the Word in the CRC for the past 40 years. He will be retiring at the end of 2013, and all are welcome to join the congregation in affirming his ministry by sending cards to him, in care of the Retirement Committee (107 LaGrave Avenue SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503), by attending the farewell reception after the morning worship services on January 12, or by attending a dinner honoring Don and his wife Winnie on January 10 (call 616-454-7204).

**RIVER TERRACE CRC** in East Lansing, Michigan, announces the retirement of Eunice Bossenbrook, Director of Service Ministries. Mrs. Bossenbrook has been invaluable to the operations and vision of our church over the last 30 years.

## Announcements

**LK ALFRED MINISTRY:** located on Rt. 17/92, Lk. Alfred, Fl. Close to Winter Haven & Rt. 27. Services 10:30 AM, 5:50 PM. January '14-Rev. Dale Cooper preaching. February-Rev. A. Jongsma; March/April-Dr. George Kroeze. Phone: 863-422-2187, 863-422-6442.

**WINTER CHURCH SERVICES** in Mesa, AZ. Please join us for our Sunday Worship Service at Maranatha Comm. CRC in Mesa, AZ. We are a winter church and our services start the 1st Sunday in December through the 2nd Sunday in April. For more information contact, Rev. Gary Hutt @ 509-499-4561.

## Birthdays

### 95th Birthday



**REV. CHESTER SCHEMPER** 1111 Ontario St., #606, Oak Park, IL 60302, will celebrate his 95th birthday on December 23, 2013. His children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren are grateful for his long and healthy life. He continues to bless us with his faith, wisdom, and good humor.

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#### 90th Birthday



**BETSY DEKORNE (VANHALSEMA)** will celebrate her 90th birthday on December 13, 2013. Her 5 children along with their families are thankful for her loving example and life of service to God, family, and church. Open house on Saturday, December 14 from 1:30-3:30pm where she resides at 2121 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

**DORIS IMMINK** of 500 Parkside Dr. #260 Zeeland, MI 49464 will be 90 on December 25. She will celebrate her birthday with an open house on December 28 at Royal Park Place from 2-4 pm. Her children are Jim (deceased) & Beth Immink, Bev & Harv Mesbergen and Marilyn & Joe Reeves. She has 8 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren. Her family is thankful that God has blessed her with many healthy years.



**JOHN UBELS** will celebrate his 90th birthday on Dec 31 with his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. We thank God for his long, loving life. He resides at 706 Village Lane Jenison MI 49428.

**MERLE VIS** of 2156 Banner Dr. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509 will celebrate his 90th birthday on January 6. His children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren praise God for his love, faith, and encouragement.

#### 85th Birthday

**GARY DE HAAN** of 3079 Regency Pkwy Zeeland, MI will turn 85 on Jan. 3, 2014. He gives thanks for his large extended biological and step-family, Psalm 127:1. Family and friends will celebrate with an Open House on Dec 28, 2-4 pm at the North St. CRC in Zeeland No gifts please. Soli Deo Gloria

### Church Position Announcements

**MUSIC LEADER** Covenant CRC (Grand Rapids) is an intergenerational, 600 member, music-loving church seeking an energetic, organized, part time Music Leader to oversee our music ministry and help organize our blended worship services. For further information, see our website: covenant-crc.org

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR** Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Winnipeg, MB, is seeking an associate pastor (ordained or unordained), to have primary responsibility for the youth ministry of the congregations of Transcona and Covenant in Winnipeg. Additional pastoral opportunities will be determined on the basis of church needs and candidate's gifts. Seeking a person who has a passion for the Lord and his church. Contact rbooy@covenantcra.ca or call 204-667-1116 for a position description.

**SEEKING YOUTH PASTOR** Crossroads Church in Madison, WI is seeking a part-time Christian Youth Leader who would be responsible for the development, coordination and implementation of programs and activities pertaining to grade school, middle school and high school youth education at Crossroads Church. For information or to send a resume, please address all correspondence to "Search Group" at YthLderPosition@gmail.com.

**PASTOR** Saugatuck CRC is committed to "Growing, Caring and Sharing". We are seeking a pastor with the passion and gifts to lead a small congregation in living out this mission: growing in faith and love, caring for others, and effectively reaching our diverse community with the gospel message. Please send inquiries, resume/ministry profile to JoAnn at jtdejonge@gmail.com

**PASTOR:** Orland Park Christian Reformed Church, located in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, seeks an energetic, passionate pastor who will champion OPCRC's mission of REACHING OUT with the Good News of Jesus Christ and BUILDING UP people in their faith. We are seeking a team pastor, especially gifted in congregational care and outreach ministries, who will challenge the congregation spiritually and provide in the leadership of staff and church ministries. For a complete job description and to learn more about what God is doing at OPCRC, visit www.orlandchurch.com. Resumes and questions regarding this position should be directed to pastorsearch@oprc.org.

**CO-PASTOR** Ebenezer CRC in Jarvis, Ontario is seeking to fill a vacant co-pastor position. We are looking for a co-pastor who will share in all aspects of ministry at Ebenezer as well as take a leadership role in ministry to the youth, young adults and young couples here in Jarvis. Applicants may contact or submit their resumes to the Search Committee secretary Debbie Eggink at d.j.eggink@hotmail.com

**PASTOR** Westview CRC, a NW suburban Grand Rapids church of 400 members, is searching for a pastor. We have a passion for energetic and joyful worship, neighborhood outreach, hospitality, and sound Biblical teaching for all age groups. Recent lessons and strategic

analysis have taught us to be humble, flexible, tolerant, joyful, energetic, and caring. We have renewed passion for unity and we have a cohesive team of youth, worship, and office staff. If you would like to partner with us in that same vision, please respond to search@westviewcrc.org

**ASSOCIATE MINISTER** Rehoboth Fellowship CRC in Toronto is seeking an experienced person to be our ministry leader. We want someone to inspire and lead us to become a more effective presence in our neighbourhood and the communities where God has placed us. Responsibilities will focus on our community ministries and monthly preaching. This is currently a part time position, requiring a minimum of 24 hours of work per week. The successful candidate will work alongside our current full-time pastor. Rehoboth Fellowship is a mature, welcoming, suburban congregation with active cell groups, Alpha and Coffee Break programs. For a complete position description, please email Jane Frost Council Chair at jm.frost@sympatico.ca Application deadline is January 31, 2014

**TWO POSITIONS AVAILABLE** The Human Resource Team of Mountainview Christian Reformed Church in Grimsby, Ontario is searching for a full-time **Worship/Music Director** and a full-time **Director of Community Life**. Job descriptions for these positions are available upon request from Nelly Baarda at nbaarda@mountainviewcrc.org. Anyone interested in either of these positions is invited to submit an application to Sue Kikkert, Secretary of the Human Resource Team, at hr@mountainviewcra.org. Please include a brief history of your work experience that is appropriate for the position you are applying for.

**ANCASTER CRC** is a larger congregation in the Greater Hamilton area. We are a congregation with a diversity of rich programs and many passionate volunteers. Our church is seeking a second pastor who will be part of a team ministry working together with our Lead Pastor. This pastor's responsibilities will include preaching and pastoral care. Interested parties are encouraged to forward their letter of interest or profile to accrcalling@gmail.com.

**MINISTER/CONGREGATIONAL LIFE** LaGrave Ave. CRC, Grand Rapids, MI seeks a Minister of Congregational Life with strengths in Spiritual Formation and Pastoral Care. Led by the Holy Spirit, LaGrave's members seek to worship and serve God in all of life, transforming His world and being transformed to reflect the character of Christ. For a full job description and to apply, please visit our website www.lagrave.org.

**FULL TIME PASTOR** Dispatch CRC in rural north central Kansas is seeking a lead pastor for its well-established congregation. We seek a leader who is passionate about preaching God's Word in blended worship services and inspiring members in spiritual growth. If you have strong leadership skills and enjoy relating to people of all ages, contact the Search Committee at dispcc@ruraltel.net.

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## Anniversaries

### 65th Anniversary

**DANHOF** John and Tressa (VanderMolen) of Churchill, Montana celebrated 65 years of marriage on Oct. 15. Their children Corinne & Gary, Jane & Del, Keith & Rose, and Lois, 10 grandchildren & 25 great grandchildren rejoice together for God's faithfulness!

**VAN DRUNEN** Milton & AnnaMae (Huizenga) celebrated 65 years of the Lord's blessing on Oct. 15, 2013 in Lansing, IL. Children Milt (Rita), Kathy (Bill) Dykstra, Deb (Jim) Panozzo, Steve (Deb), Joel (Carol), 18 grandchildren, 14 spouses, 28 great grandchildren (1 in glory). "As for me and my household, we will serve The Lord." Joshua 24:15



**VEELE** Adrian and Harriet (Busscher) 817-136th Ave, Holland, MI 49424, will celebrate their 65th anniversary on Dec. 14. Their children are Diane (Ron) Schreur, Connie Werner, Sharon (Kelly) Wagner, Duane (Pat) Veele, Steve (Lisa) Veele. They have 15 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren. To God be the glory!

### 60th Anniversary

**FABER** Warren and Verna (Veltema) 1858 Elizabeth Lane, Jenison, MI 49428. With praise to God and thankfulness for His faithfulness, they will be celebrating 60 years of marriage on December 29th Children: Marcy, Jim and Dawn, Melinda and Bob, 7 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.

**KREDIT** Kenneth & Deanauralee celebrate their 60th anniversary on December 22, 2013 at home - PO Box 175, Platte, SD 57369. Children: Karen & Tim Schaid, Lois & Dale Leister, Laura & Mike Meyer, Roger & Nikolyn Kredit. 12 grandchildren. We praise the Lord!

**NAGEL** Douglas and Lois (De Haan) of 2529 Autumn Ash Dr. Grand Rapids, MI 49512 will be celebrating 60 years of marriage on December 17. Their children Julie Nagel, Joni and Tom De Fouw, Jim and Deb Nagel, Jan and Peter Malek, 10 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren are thankful for their example of faithfulness to the Lord and to each other.

**SPEKKERS** Jan & Feikje celebrate 60 years of marriage on Dec. 17, 2013. Their children, 8 grand children and 9 great grandchildren praise God for His faithfulness. Daniel 6:10. Address: 209-9030-158th Street, Surrey, BC V4N 5G4

### 50th Anniversary

**CORNELL** Ray & Mary (Jellema) Cornell have been married for 50 years. Their children and children-in-law, Tom & Samantha Cornell, Mike & Cheri Cornell, and Bill & Amy Boerman-Cornell think that is amazing and wonderful. (Their 6 grandchildren are impressed too.) I mean, just think of that. 50 years. Wow. We are proud of our parents and thankful to God for them too. Maybe if you learn to laugh a lot and take care of each other, someday you might be married as long as they have

**DE RUITER** Herb and Rosemary, 5526 Fairway Drive; Crestwood, IL 60445 will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on December 21. Their children, Mike and Kerri, Steve and Tara, and Grandchildren, Alison, Nathan, Caleb and Alice thank them for their love and support over the years and wish them God's blessings on the years to come. To God Be The Glory!

**HAMMINGH** John and Elaine celebrated 50 years of marriage on October 11. Their 3 children along with their spouses and 8 grandchildren praise God for this blessing.



**NYHOF** Jerry & Joan with gratitude to God, their children and grandchildren will celebrate their 50th anniversary on Dec. 27. We praise God for your life of Christian service and your wonderful example of Christian marriage. We love you Mom and Dad

**ZANDBERG** Karl & Judith (Jorgensen), Abbotsford, BC, celebrated 50 years of marriage on November 8, together with their children Linda

& Scott, Diana & Daniele, Jason & Roselyn (Chloe, Jackson, Ellie). God is good to us.

## Obituaries

**BOERSMA** Grace A. nee Togtman of Alsip IL went to be home with her Lord on Oct. 25. She was the beloved wife of (late) Theodore "Ted", mother of Dave(Pris), Carol(Jim) Evenhouse, Janet(late Rick) Kwantes, Theodore(Cheryl), Rev. Robert(Jan), Ken(Lisa), Debra(late John) Thatcher and Marge(Fred) Hayward. Beloved sister of Clara Togtman, the late Martha De Groot, Marguerite, Edna Huisenga, Nettie Ebbens, Ray and Hoddy and sister-in-law of Ruth Togtman, Millie Hoving and Dorothy Boersma. Grandmother of 29 and great-grandmother of 33. She was a wonderful servant of her Lord, her family and her church.

**DEBOLSTER** Jacoba On Oct 15, 2013, Jacoba DeBolster died peacefully surrounded by her loving family. She is now safely in the arms of Jesus.

She was the beloved wife of Rev. H. R. DeBolster and loving mother of: 5 children. She was blessed with 15 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren.

**DE NEEF** William F., aged 88; October 18, 2013; Grand Rapids, MI; He was preceded in death by his wife Trixie and his daughter Elly De Boer. He is survived by his children: Herma and William; eight grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

**DEWITT** Edith (Brouwer) age 87; October 30, 2013; 2105 Raybrook S. E, Unit 4035, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; She will be dearly missed by her husband of 61 years, Henry; sons and daughters-in-law: Daniel and Ginny DeWitt and Craig and Sher DeWitt; grandchildren: Michael (Missi) DeWitt, Colleen (Phillip) Luckner, Sam DeWitt, Lauren (Tom) Cooper, Steven DeWitt, Claire (Fiancé Dan Larabel) DeWitt, Emma DeWitt; great grandchildren: Desmond and Vivian Luckner, Mahalia DeWitt; sisters: Marian Vrugging and Florence (Dale) Schreur; brother-in-law: Justin Schipper; in laws: Cornelia VanderPloeg of Fulton, IL and Dick DeWitt of Phillipsburg, KS.

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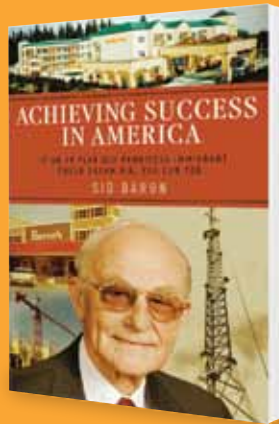
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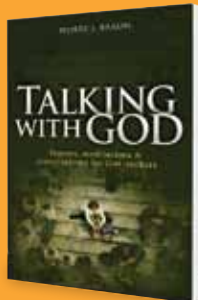


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**FOLKERTS** Florence, nee Cook, went to be with her LORD, October 31st, 2013, 611 S. Ahrens Ave, Lombard, IL, 60148. Loving wife of the late Jacob Folkerts; loving mother of Jack (Barb) Folkerts, George (Karen) Folkerts, Dave (KayLynn) Folkerts, Joe (Sue) Folkerts Alan (Kellie) Folkerts; devoted grandmother of 24; great-grandmother of 15; fond sister of Kay (the late Jerry) Sevenberg and George (Ok-tan) Cook; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Crossroads Bible Institute, P. O. Box 900, Grand Rapids, MI, 49509.

**FRANKEN** Lawrence H. (Larry); aged 85; October 3, 2013; 1289 Bowdoin St. SE, Kentwood, MI 49508; He is survived by his wife of 60 years: Harriet (Jalving) Franken; children: Carl (Barb) Franken, Nancy (George) Kessler, Steve Franken; daughter-in-law: Nancy Franken; grandchildren: Joshua and Bethany Franken, Joel and Karli Franken, Nick, Alex and Jennifer Kessler, Michael Franken, Nichole and Cole Kooistra, Andy Thorton; great grandchildren: Hannah, Caleb, Drew, and Mason; twin sister: Phyllis Cornelisse; brother-in-law and sisters-

in-law: Gordon and Norma Schrotenboer and Connie Meinke; several nieces and nephews.

**GRITTERS** Muriel, 74, of Sioux Center, IA died unexpectedly Sunday, September 29, 2013, while traveling in Peru. Muriel is survived by her husband Lyle and their 5 children and 13 grandchildren: Lyndon (Melanie) Gritters of Lakewood, NY, and their sons: Andrew and Sean; Lynette (Dean) Eekhoff of Holland, MI, and their children: Rebecca and Jeremy; Lisa Gritters (fiancé Todd Juranek) of Sioux Center, and her children: Brody, Nick, Josh and Marisa; Laurie (Arlan) Kooiman of Hospers, and their children: Zach, Jacob and Katie; Lance (Nicole) Gritters of Waverly, IA, and their children: Ian and Aliya.

**LEYSTRA** Ellen "Eelkje" (Oegema) August 31/26-September 20/13 Ellen passed away peacefully in Surrey into the Lord's presence, dearly loved by many friends and relatives. Predeceased by her beloved husband, Sjouke(2009) Survived by four children, Elly (Steve), John, Bart (Arlene), James. Eight grandchildren, three great grandchildren.

Three brothers, Pete, Bart (Holland) John(Ottawa) two sisters Folkje, Anne (Holland) Forever in our hearts and dearly missed. Correspondence to 409 Dartmoor Drive, Coquitlam BC V3K 5V3. 604-936-4340

**MEYER** Aleda, age 93; October 31, 2013; Grand Rapids, MI; She was preceded in death by her husband: Russell Meyer; daughter: Roselyn (Posy) Plasier; sisters: Florice Rietzma, Phyllis Buskers. Aleda is survived by her daughter: Judith DeYoung; sisters: Charlene Nanninga, Faith (Larry) Segaar; grandchildren: Tami (Tom) Hardy, Amy Cavanaugh, Mike (Robyn) Plasier, Eric (Carrie) Plasier, Tim (Lelahni) Plasier; many great grandchildren, 2 great great grandsons.

**NIEHOF** Thelma Arlene (Terpstra); aged 83; October 5, 2013; 3710 Riley, Hudsonville, MI 49426; She is survived by her devoted husband of 63 years, Philip Marvin Niehof; children: Diane Niehof (Sam D'Amico) (Jenison, MI); Thomas (Deborah) Niehof (Ames, IA); Jeffrey (Janis) Niehof (Hudsonville, MI); and Douglas Niehof (Albuquerque, NM); many grandchildren and several great grandchildren; her siblings: Kathleen (Ed, dec.) Oppenhuizen, Stewart Terpstra (dec.) (Donna Vliestra), Carolyn (Abe) Geertsema, and Marilyn (Arv) Leisman.

**RIBBENS** Robert G. age 85, Sept. 27, 2013 of Bradenton, FL formerly of Hinsdale, IL. Preceded in death by wife Anna M. nee Lanenga and infant son Robert Gary. Survived by daughter Sandra Ribbens, son Ronald (Diane) and daughter Sherry (Edwin) Taneling, 9 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.



**SLAGER** William age 84, and Harriet (Pal) nee Kerkstra, age 82, beloved husband and wife of 64 years went home to their Lord at the end of September. They are survived by their four children: Carolyn (late Roger) Boss, William Slager Jr., Alyce (Ted) Camphouse, and Jennie (Riggs) Klika. Grandparents of thirteen, one predeceasing them in death. Great grandparents of 6. Brother and sister-in-law of Nellaine (Vernon) Lich and the late Robert (late Angeline) Slager. Sister and brother-in-law of Ray (Betty) Kerkstra and the later Martin (Cora) Kerkstra. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

**SOLLE** Richard, 78, of Naples, FL, formerly Orland Park, IL passed away Sept. 7, 2013. Beloved husband of Janet nee DeVries. Father of Cheryl (Tom) Vloedman, Lori (Terry) Matthuis, Tom (Carla) Solle, Sandra (Jeff) Bultema. 8 grandchildren, 2 great grandchildren. Fond brother of Ed and Henry. Preceded in death by 6 sisters and 2 brothers.

**VAN HAFTEN** Alice Fern (Vanderstelt) age 89, went safely to the arms of Jesus on Friday, September 20. She was preceded in death by her husband, William, in 1987. She is survived by two daughters, Judith (Ray), Patricia (Michael) and one son (William) Jane, six grandchildren, nine great grandchildren and one great great granddaughter. We thank God for her faith and Christian example and her many "sweet hours of prayer."

**VAN WEELDEN**, Adriana, 91, went to glory Oct. 18, survived by husband of nearly 70 years, Rev. J. W. (30-10 Wentworth Dr, Grimsby, ON L3M 5G3); children Jeralyn (David) Enns, Alan (Pamela), Patricia (Bob) Nightingale, Susan, and Joel (Yvette); 12 grandchildren; 21 great grandchildren. Preceded in death by son Jim, son-in-law Clarence Lodewyk, grandson Jeffrey Lodewyk, and all 4 DeWolf siblings. The Lord cared wonderfully all the way!

**VISSER** Dr. Earl aged 82; October 18, 2013; 2030 Little Huron Ct. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; He is survived by his wife: Gertrude; sons: Tim (Sue), Steve (Kim); daughter: Jane (Bob); nine granddaughters (four grandson-in-laws) and one great granddaughter; Earl is now with his mother and father, brother, Jack, and beloved son Daniel.

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### Human Trafficking: In our world, our neighborhoods, and our families

Last month, I spent a sunny afternoon outside with my family. My children were running around with their friends, in shorts and tank tops, asking for the sprinkler to be turned on. It was on that day like any...

[Read more](#)

### Why I Gave Up Chocolate

It was this speaker that changed how I saw chocolate. I don't remember much about him except that he had a couple tattoos and that he wore a Boston Bruins jersey one day. I do, however, remember his talk one...

[Read more](#)



### Day and Night – Work and Rest – Justice and Contemplation

On the surface, a life of action in the cause of biblical

### Action for Jorge and Ricardo

Prison mistakes have power. When the normal liberties of life have been stripped away, all that

### Does Obamacare Match with Biblical Ethics?

During this U.S. Government shutdown, it may be fitting for American Christians to consider how the



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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 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407; or email it to [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org). Thanks!

**M**y birthday falls on December 23, two days prior to Christmas. Each year my family has a gathering to celebrate my birthday. One year, amidst the gift-giving and joy-filled moments, my 3-year-old grandson's face suddenly lit up, as if a new bit of knowledge had just dawned on him. He came running up to me and shouted, "Grandma, you're two days older than Jesus!"

—*Marvel Bryne*

**M**y husband's grandmother died when our youngest son was 5. During the funeral we sat near the front with the rest of the family, and our son had a good view of the closed coffin. He leaned forward and asked in a concerned voice, "Is she in there?"

I quietly spoke a word of reassurance into his ear: "Just her body."

To which he replied in a horrified whisper, "Not her head?"

—*Annie Oegema*

**M**y mom watched our kids so I could go to our polling station and vote. When I got home, she started saying goodbye

to the kids. One of the boys had gone to his room, so she went to his room and held out her arms for a hug. He got up and walked over to her, then reached out with one hand. Shaking her hand, he said, "Goodbye, Grandma. Thank you for your help." Then he turned back to his toys.

"Don't I get a hug?" she asked.

"Why, of course," he said, going back and giving her a hug.

—*Jessica Smith*

**L**et's eat, Grandma."

"Let's eat Grandma."

Commas sometimes save lives!

—*Jan Ortiz*

**W**hile working for an organization that delivers lunches to elderly shut-ins, I used to take my 4-year-old daughter on my afternoon rounds. She was unfailingly intrigued by the various appliances of old age, particularly the canes, walkers, and wheelchairs. One day I found her staring at a pair of false teeth soaking in a glass of water. As I braced myself for the inevitable barrage of questions, she turned to me and whispered, "The tooth fairy will never believe this!"

—*Herm Kelderman*

**M**y son, Kenyon, participates enthusiastically during the singing time at Sunday school. One morning the song was "The B-I-B-L-E, that's the book for me." After belting out the song

along with the other kids, he asked me, "Mommy, what does that spell?"

—*Rachel Katje*

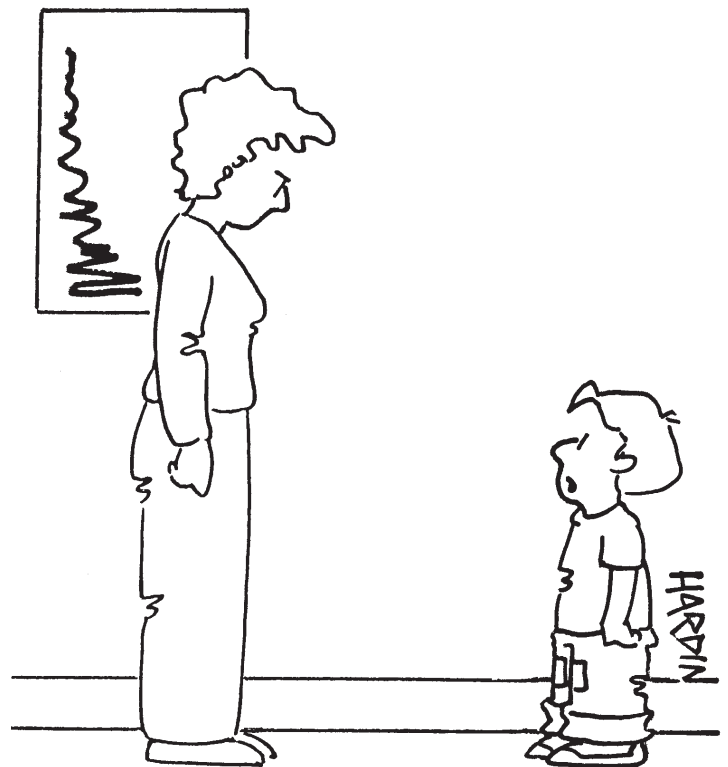
**T**he time: World War II; the place: London, England.

The city was lost in a thick fog. Two sailors emerged from a pub, wondering where they were. Out of the fog came a high-ranking general. The sailors approached him without the proper salute.

"Don't you know who I am?" roared the general.

The sailors looked at each other and said, "Now we're *really* in the soup! We don't know where we are and he doesn't know who he is."

—*Walter Vanderbeek*



"I know what I did, but I don't know what you've found out about."

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