

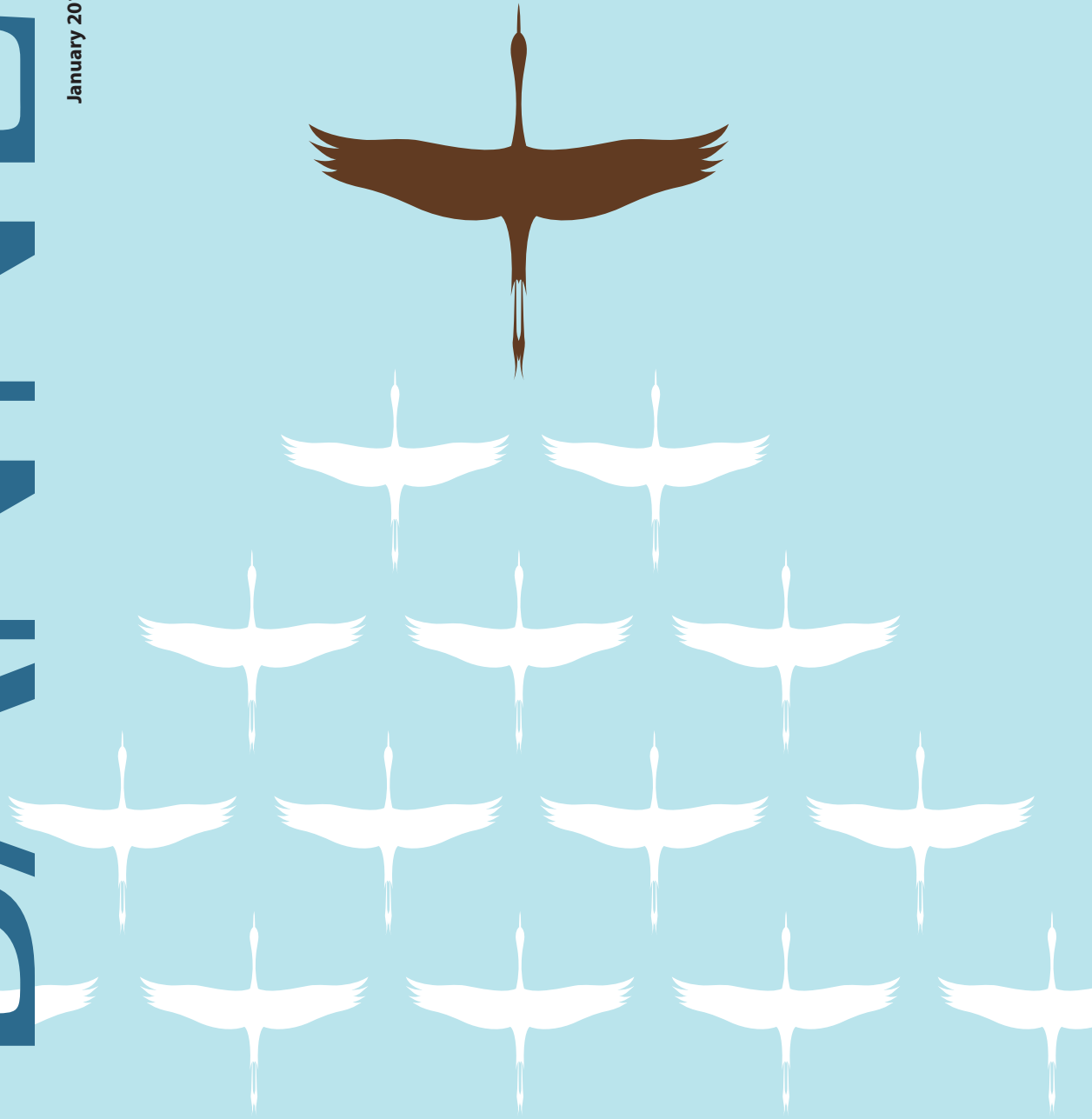
BANNER

150 YEARS

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³² Three Steps to Better
New Year's Resolutions
³⁸ Endangered Revelation

²² Journeying
with Refugees



¹⁸ The Art of
Following



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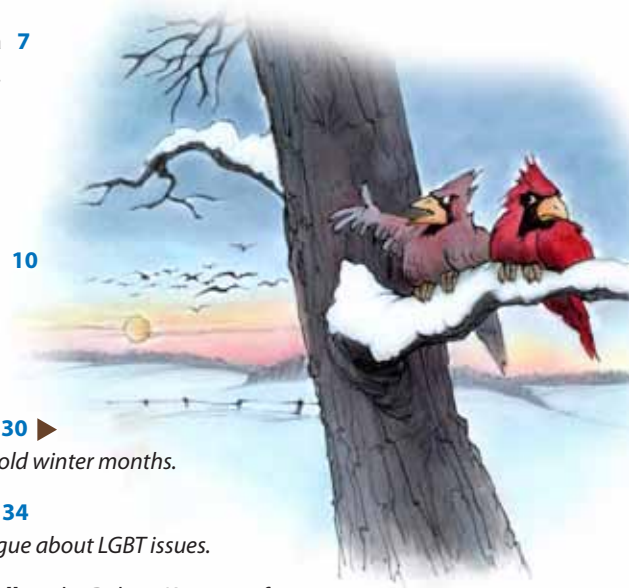
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The Business of Worship Music

IT IS A BUSINESS. Nearly all churches today have a CCLI (Christian Copyright Licensing International) or other music license, which is purchased for a yearly amount based on congregation size. You will see it in small letters under a song projected on the screen. It's a way for songwriters to be compensated when a church uses their music. I have no problem with that: "The laborers are worthy of their hire."

What many people don't understand is that an artist who makes it to the top 25 list of CCLI songs can reap a huge amount of money. I mean hundreds of thousands of dollars. Well—big swallow—what's wrong with that?

And here's the problem. Contemporary Christian musicians are not any more immune to the lure of money than you or I are. And they can make lots more by writing songs that are like the ones in the top 25, with similar emotive words and chord changes. The logic of all this is that the songs will begin to sound strangely similar. From there it spreads to Christian music and hymnal publishers.

The problem is worldwide. I was privileged to teach for a semester at a Korean seminary attended by not only Koreans but students from all over the world. I looked forward to experiencing the unique forms of worship and song that emerged from various cultures. What I heard in chapel worship services were all the same songs on the top of the CCLI list. These future pastors were not learning how to worship with the unique gifts of their own cultural settings but according to the business model of the Christian music conglomerates.

I fear the same thing may be happening in many local churches. There's a strong urge to model our worship on what we see as successful and what we hear on Christian radio. As a result, what many congregations sing in worship is overly influenced by a business model rather than what's theologically rich and spiritually healthy for the life and worship of the congregation.

I'm not saying that all the songs and artists in the top echelons of the CCLI world are shallow or imitative. But I've heard from talented songwriters who produce theologically robust and musically inventive music that there is enormous pressure from publishers and distributors to go with what sells. And the results are plain to see.

So what's the answer? We first need to acknowledge the problem, and it's not trivial. There's an old saying that Christians absorb more theology from what they sing than from most other sources. If that's the case, then, considering the CCLI top 25, we'll soon be in a theological desert.

Once we recognize the problem, pastors and music leaders in congregations need to be much more careful about what their congregations are singing. It may take some work, but I know of contemporary-Christian-music-singing churches who carefully plan worship music with musical and theological sensitivity. The material is out there, and sometimes it comes right from budding artists in their own congregations.

I'm not saying we all have to haul out our hymnals and sing Genevan psalms, though it's a terrible mistake to leave behind the riches of the past. Last week my church sang a wonderfully rich old Isaac Watts hymn all dressed up in a brand new tune for guitar, mandolin, and accordion. I'm saying that whether we sing our praises and laments to God accompanied by an organ or a band, our worship music profoundly affects the faith formation of our congregations. We can't put this enormous responsibility in the hands of the music business. ■

FOR MORE, SEE
AS I WAS SAYING
at thebanner.org



Leonard J. Vander Zee is interim editor of *The Banner*. He attends Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Christians absorb more theology from what they sing. . . .

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Belonging

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

*That I am not my own, but belong—
body and soul,
in life and in death—to my faithful
Savior Jesus Christ. . . .*

WHEN I WAS diagnosed with breast cancer a second time, these words gave me comfort and the courage to be. I also learned that not only is it important to belong to God, it is also important to belong to people—a family, a community. Having my family and friends praying and caring for me made me realize that my life mattered. I was loved. I belonged.

Unfortunately, this is not true for everyone.

I have worked with people who are homeless. I had no training for this job: I was told to simply hand out food. Over time, I realized that while food is important to people, what was just as important was my being with them. I discovered that people who live on the street do not necessarily have friends. Often homeless

people are very lonely. They do not feel loved; they have no sense of belonging.

I remember someone in particular—a man I’ll call Pete. Pete was in his 60s. He was obese. He made sexist and racist comments. It was hard for me to like him. Pete told me he had been an only child to parents who had owned a successful restaurant. Eventually he was married and had a child. They belonged to a church. In time, his parents died, and when his wife demanded a divorce, Pete’s life fell apart. After a bitter divorce, estrangement from his son, and feeling abandoned by his church, Pete was totally alone. He felt unlovable. He did not belong to anyone.

When I was able to get beyond how Pete looked and his manner of talking, I learned to listen, and I heard his pain of not belonging. Soon a pattern developed. Every Monday morning, Pete would show up for our visit. He would be upset when I went on vacation. Toward the end of his life, Pete was hospitalized. He listed me as his next of kin. Through God’s grace, Pete had felt a sense of belonging.

When I was pregnant with our oldest son, I read a book written by a psychiatrist

who believed that in every child there is an emotional “love tank” that needs to be filled. He believed that a child needed to feel loved, that he belonged. I took those words seriously and worked on filling our sons’ “love tanks.” And if they would object and say that I had already filled their love tank the day before, I would tell them that their tanks had emptied during the night as they slept.

It’s not just kids who need to be loved and to belong. We all have those needs. We were made by a loving God for loving relationships. Whenever we fill the need for love and belonging in others, or are blessed to have our own needs filled, we are extending the embrace of our loving God.

Knowing that I belong to Jesus and am loved by my family and friends gives me comfort and enables me to live my life to the fullest. ■



Adriana Sybenga is a retired CRC minister who has lived in Arcadia, Calif., for the past 19 years. She co-pastored at Hope International Church, along with her husband, Sid.



GARRY KNIGHT/FLICKE

Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.

— MOTHER TERESA

Proof of God

I went in for a burger, but it was my soul that was fed.



HOW DO I KNOW THERE IS A GOD?

Today I was given another reason to be sure.

I was at McDonald's. Just wanted a snack and a moment to sit down. Shortly after I sat down, in walked an elderly man and his wife. That is, the man walked in. He wheeled his wife, who was lying on some sort of wheelchair/bed device, to a table. This was no powered chair, and the man, who was short, could barely see over the top.

The whole time, he talked to her. He stroked her hair and doted on her, wiped her chin and held her hand. I never saw her move, not even her eyes. Except for one moment when he put some ice cream in her mouth—she may have reacted to that for a second. But he never rushed her. Never looked bored or distracted. He was just there with and for her.

This was love. Such love doesn't just happen at the whim of an unfeeling universe. There is no logic to it, no profit or personal benefit. Just continuous service and sacrifice. It's the opposite of successful behavior for survival.

How do I know there is a God? Because there is no way such love can exist without him.

I'm not really sure why this couple produced such a strong reaction in me.

Perhaps because I live in a world where our heroes are men and women reaping their own rewards and honor, and we celebrate celebrity for celebrity's sake. Or perhaps because we are taught that love is an abstract quality—that emotions like love and hate are not part of the physical world; they are just concepts.

But that's wrong.

We are also taught that humans are driven by survival instincts. That we are motivated by the need to succeed and survive.

But that's wrong too.

How are we, as Christians or even just as humans, supposed to react to such a momentary glimpse into others' lives? I'm not entirely sure. But it does call for some sort of reaction. And if the reaction is to be reminded of the nature of love, that's not a bad thing. But what about love was I reminded of? Three things come to mind.

1. God does not tire of me in my broken state. In my helplessness, God's grace is sufficient.
2. Love *is* tangible. It was right there making itself known in the quiet of the scene I witnessed at McDonald's.
3. God is real. Such love comes from God.

I don't know if I can love like the man at McDonald's loves his wife. Such sacrifice and selflessness are goals to reach for. But I am grateful, now and forever, that God can and does love *us* like that.

I went in for a burger, but it was my soul that was fed. ■



Peter Claus is a long-time resident of Woodstock, Ont. He attends Covenant CRC in Woodstock and works in human resources in the automotive industry.



Marriage as Covenant

Thank you for the solidly biblical article "Marriage as Covenant" (Nov. 2015). "The church must call people to holy living" is something we need to hear and take seriously. I'm reminded of Ephesians 4:22-24 ("... put on the new self...") and Leviticus 20:7-8 ("Consecrate yourselves and be holy...").

The Bible is very clear about the meaning and purpose of marriage. Will we submit to the divine authority of Scripture?

—Carmen Reitsma
New Sharon, Iowa

Preaching

Thank you for Scott Hoezee's fine article ("The Future of Preaching," Nov. 2015). But there is a significant lack in Hoezee's analysis. Preaching is vital for the church to be strong. Period. But we forget that when we ordain men and women we say they are "ministers of Word and sacrament." In reality, they preach each Sunday but give the sacrament of Holy Communion ("the means of grace") much less often, though most churches are doing better than the four times a year of former times.

In John Calvin's view, the Word gives context for the sacrament, even as the sacrament gives culminating fulfillment

TTERS

for the Word. The two are meant to be together, like two sides of a coin.

So my suggestion to my friend Scott Hoezee is that he see the art of preaching in the larger context of the whole drama of worship, that is meant to disclose God's grace to the people of God.

—Ronald A. Wells
Maryville, Tenn.

Lessons of Liberation

The memorable article "Lessons of Liberation" (Nov. 2015) deteriorated into a partisan political diatribe after asking the question "Have we learned anything?" Every issue selected was clearly intended to show that because of [U.S.] President Obama's actions and policies we haven't learned anything. President Bush's questionable actions and policies are conveniently ignored. This partisanship has no place in *The Banner*.

—Ronald M. Leistra
Tigard, Ore.

Love That Cover



I was mesmerized by your front page image on the October 2015 issue. Never have I been so affected by a painting [Rick Beerhorst's *Birds Eye View*]. I love it. Already framed one and sent it to my son. I will be framing more and giving them as gifts. Thank you so much.

—Jacob De Boer
Buena Park, Calif.

Holy Catholic Church

The editorial "Holy Catholic Church" (Nov. 2015) quotes the Apostles' Creed as saying "I believe in the holy catholic church." The creed does not say that.

It does say, "I believe *in* God the father . . . ; *in* Jesus Christ . . . ; *in* the Holy Spirit."

The creed goes on to say "I believe the holy catholic church, the communion of saints. . . ."

The word "in" is left out because we do not have faith "in" the rest of the statements. We believe those statements to be true, but they are not a matter of faith.

Perhaps it would be more correct to say, "I believe that there this is *a* holy catholic church. . . ."

—Robert W. Lubbers
Spring Lake, Mich.

Theological Keys

Thanks for your editorial "Doctrine Still Matters" (Oct. 2015). I grew up in a contemporary evangelical church that focused heavily on Scripture but did little formal theological instruction. So I grew up knowing the Bible but wasn't able to see the big picture or to really make sense of it until I was taught Reformed theology. As you write, I needed those "theological keys to open up the treasures of the Bible."

Your idea to use the Contemporary Testimony for catechesis is worthy of further consideration. I say that because I used it recently for a pre-Profession of Faith conversation, and the young adult student expressed appreciation for this contemporary expression of our faith.

Thank you for encouraging us to rediscover our common identity as a denomination.

—Leon H. Johnston
Lacombe, Alta.

I read the October editorial ("Doctrine Still Matters") with hope and excitement. I believe Len Vander Zee has hit the nail on the head. These "keys" he mentions

are indeed missing in large part because of what we as youth and adults have and are being taught. I applaud his willingness to point this out, and I encourage the Faith Formation team to pin this editorial on the walls where they meet as a reminder of the significance of these theological keys in the lives of Christians. The Bible clearly indicates that for lack of knowledge, God's people die. We live in a world where we so desperately need this knowledge to help shed light onto an increasingly dimly lit path.

—Jack Toornstra
Edmonton, Alta.

In the editorial "Doctrine Still Matters" there is a sentence that troubles us: "But the Bible is not enough." We see the danger that Reformed theology is used as a template over the Bible: what fits in the theology is accepted; what the theology does not address is disregarded. Theology is human work. The Bible is sacred: God's unchanging Word, which we are not to add to or take away from (Rev. 22:18-19).

Is not the Holy Spirit able to explain God's Word?

—Jan and Jacoba Voorbij
Lacombe, Alta.

Correction

We apologize for incorrectly identifying the man on page 24 of the November issue. While the testimony of Luis is accurate, the photo above the caption was used in error. The man in the photo is Eliberto Juarez, who lives in El Salvador.

[MORE ONLINE](#)

NEWS

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Michigan Church Celebrates 150th Anniversary

Exactly 150 years to the day from its first church service, Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church gathered for a special service of celebration on November 8. Located in the heart of Holland, Mich., the congregation spent much of 2015 celebrating its sesquicentennial.

Guest preachers throughout the year included former pastors and pastors who grew up in the church. "Having eight Central Avenue pastors stretching back to the 1950s as part



Above: (L-r): Current and former pastors: Chad Steenwyk, James Scholten, Ronald Noorman, John L. Witvliet, Tom Vanden Heuvel, and Thea Van Halsema, widow of Richard Van Halsema.



Left: Cousins Carolyn Bareman and Jim Bareman, both in their 90s, have been members of Central Ave. since birth.

of the celebrations has been humbling," said current pastor Chad Steenwyk. "God has us here for a time to serve him and his people, but he is the one who builds his church generation to generation."

The first CRC in the City of Holland, Central Avenue is a daughter church of Graafschap CRC, located just outside the city. It was known as Market Street CRC until 1903, when the street was renamed. It was the largest congregation in Holland until the 1960s, and "helped

birth a dozen new congregations," according to Robert Swierenga, chair of the anniversary committee. Central Avenue also started Holland Christian School, which met in the church's basement during its first academic year, 1901-02.

Swierenga published a 526-page history of the congregation entitled *Faithful Witness: A Sesquicentennial History of Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church, 1865-2015*. Supported by donors, each household in the church received a copy of the book, which Steen-

wyk said has helped unify the congregation. "Many members are new in the past decade, and only a minority are lifelong, generational members," he said. "Celebrating together has anchored us together in the diligent ministry of Christ's church here throughout our entire history and far beyond."

—Susan Vanden Berg

Texas Congregation Brings Trash to Church

It may seem unusual for a church to ask people to bring their trash to a Sunday service. But that's exactly what Sunrise Community Christian Reformed Church in Austin, Tex., does on the last Sunday of December.



The church's pastor, Mark Hilbelink, helped develop the idea. "The concept of Throw-Away Sunday is a confession-based service [encouraging us] to leave things in the old year," he explained. "Everyone

brings their Christmas 'trash' to church with them—wrapping paper, bows, and boxes—so that at the end of the message we can write down confessions and throw them away." The sanctuary is lined with a number of trash receptacles to hold all the garbage.

The church also offers four "confession booths" where current or former elders or pastors are available to listen and pray with church members who want to talk to someone in person.

Sara Sythoff acted as a confession hearer last year. "So often our new year's resolutions are very trite," she said, "but the holidays can be very hard for people who are grieving or dealing with family issues. A lot of these problems are out of our control or things we can't resolve ourselves. Giving these issues over to God is a very valuable experience."

The first few years of Throw-Away Sunday included watching part of an episode of the TV show "Hoarders" to demonstrate how people often hold on to too much emotional baggage.

A church member who was going through a difficult family situation several years ago shared his experience of Throw-Away Sunday. "I received a warm, grace-filled welcome at Sunrise CRC, which I know was God's provision. My confession hearer, at the end of that year, was also warm and accepting, and has become one of my best Christian brothers."

—Tracey Yan

Former *Banner* Editor Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven Dies



Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven

Andrew Kuyvenhoven, editor of *The Banner* from 1979-1989, passed away peacefully on December 1. He was 88 years old. His son Rev. Leonard Kuyvenhoven said he encouraged others and remained a teacher of the gospel to the very end.

As *Banner* editor, Kuyvenhoven pastorally and evenhandedly led the church in discussions of pertinent issues. "And he could do it (mostly) while retaining a sense of humor," Leonard said. "He loved the gospel and he loved the church."

Kuyvenhoven also authored several books. Perhaps the best known and loved of those are *Comfort and Joy: A Study of the Heidelberg Catechism* and *Daylight: 366 Daily Devotional Readings*.

The Banner's In Memoriam for Kuyvenhoven will follow in print and on our website at a later date.

—Gayla R. Postma

Banner reporters at synod:
front (l-r): Lillian Grissen and Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven;
back (l-r): Rev. Harvey Smit, Bob Rozema, and Malcolm McBryde.



Former *Banner* Associate Editor Dies



Lillian Grissen

Lillian Grissen, 93, passed away in Grand Rapids, Mich., on October 31. Grissen was *The Banner's* associate editor from 1982-1989 under the editorship of Rev. Andrew Kuyvenhoven. Her service came after a long career in education.

Grissen's career did not come easily, a story she chronicled in her book *A Path Through the Sea: One Woman's Journey from Depression to Wholeness*, published in 1993. Her long battle with depression forced her family's return from the mission field and kept her from pursuing her dream of higher education until she was 37 years old. After teaching in both elementary and high school settings, she was 57 years old when appointed as assistant professor of English at Dordt College in 1979.

Grissen will also be remembered for her support of women's ordination in the Christian Reformed Church. She edited *For Such a Time as This: Twenty-Six Women of Vision and Faith Tell Their Stories*, a collection of profiles of women in leadership. She also authored *Firstfruits: Managing the Master's Money*.

Grissen was predeceased by her husband, Ray, and survived by four children and their spouses and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She was a member of Grace CRC in Grand Rapids.

—Gayla R. Postma

NEWS

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Raymond Slim

1945-2015

Raymond Slim, a Navajo theologian, wise counselor, powerful prayer warrior, and longtime Native American leader for the Christian Reformed Church, died on August 25 after being hit by a truck in a Farmington, N.M., parking lot. He was 70 years old.

Slim was a child when he first heard the gospel from a CRC missionary in Red Mesa. Years later he graduated from Reformed Bible College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

Slim served five Christian Reformed congregations in New Mexico. He retired in 2010 but continued to preach in churches throughout Classis Red Mesa. He sat on many denominational committees and boards and attended synod (the CRC's annual leadership meeting) several times.

"Our dad really enjoyed his grandchildren," said one of Slim's sons. "He would talk about them and pray for each and every one of them." He enjoyed watching NFL games, watching boxing, and traveling.

Slim is survived by his wife, Carole, and by seven children and their spouses and 10 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available on The Banner's website.

Special Treasures Get Special Care

It all started with a little boy whose family could no longer attend church on Sundays because of his severe autism. For Shannon Mulder, now special needs coordinator at Covenant Life Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich., that was a tragedy.

Mulder asked the church to dedicate an unused room in the building and to outfit it with special needs equipment, such as a swing. Mulder had a passion to see that this little boy, and others like him, would have a place to go on Sunday mornings.

That place is called Special Treasures and is part of Sunday morning programs for youth and young adults. Many children in the program are fully integrated into the regular Sunday school



Kylee in the designated sensory room for youth and young adults.

program and are paired up with adult or peer buddies. Others use the Special Treasures classroom and sensory room as a safe and quiet space.

"Throughout my years working in [speech therapy], God drew me



Courtney participates in a game during Treasure Camp; she attends Sunday mornings and Regatta as well.

to want to support the parents. I found God pulling me from the speech therapy field more to doing ministry alongside families who have children with special needs," Mulder explained.

There is now a second program at Covenant Life designed to minister to people with special needs and their families.

Two years ago, Mulder started up Regatta, an after-school program where youth and young adults from the entire community can hang out with friends, do fun activities, and learn about God together. Participants, called "Sailors," are paired up with adult or peer buddies, called "First Mates." They share a snack, work on a craft, relax with games like pool, foosball, or Ping-Pong, and then have an opportunity to hear a Bible story.

Kylee VanTol, a participant in both programs, said, "The best

part about Regatta is that it's a club where I'm not scared of being judged. I can just be myself and everyone loves me! I also love that we build great friendships and we explore God's plans for us. The best part of Special Treasures is that we continue to grow deeper in God's Word. I just read and studied the book of Matthew."

Kylee's mom, Lyn VanTol, also happens to be the director of family ministries at Covenant Life. She said, "It has been pure joy to see our ministry to families with children with special needs go from a dream to impacting our whole community. We attract many of the top student leaders in our local high schools to serve as First Mates. A few volunteers have chosen to major in special education in college because of the relationships they've developed. The authentic friendships my daughter Kylee has developed have blessed our entire family in immeasurable ways!"

—Krista dela Rosa



Snacks and socializing are key parts of Regatta.

Building on a Foundation of Love

A plaque at Mwase Day Secondary School in Lundazi, Zambia, reads: "In loving memory of Kyndra ReAnn Poelman 10-04-1990 to 19-02-2013." Above Kyndra's name is inscribed this verse from 1 Corinthians 3:11: "For no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. . . ."

Kyndra died in a car accident at age 22. Two weeks later, her parents, Jerry and Michelle, decided to honor her memory by building a school in Zambia. "God gave us a way to do something positive with the tragedy," said Jerry, "and it has also been a healing process for us."

The Poelmans live near Fort Macleod, Alta., where they operate Poelman Apiaries Ltd., a family-owned beekeeping business. Kyndra, their youngest child, struggled to find her way in the world after graduating from Immanuel Christian School in Lethbridge. In 2011, her left hand was severed in a farming accident. After the hand was successfully reattached, she spent two difficult



Kyndra Poelman (center) in the Dominican Republic.

years in rehab to restore her strength and range of motion. A year after her accident, Kyndra testified at Granum Christian Reformed Church, telling parishioners God was there through it all. "There is a reason why stuff happens, and God has a reason for everything," she said. During her rehab she resolved to enroll in Lethbridge College in the Child and Youth Program. She was just

beginning her second semester when she passed away.

Jerry and Michelle contacted EduDeo ministries, which works in partnerships to provide Christian education worldwide. They had previously gone on an EduDeo mission trip to the Dominican Republic with Kyndra. The Poelmans formed "Kyndra's Foundation of Love" and began raising money for schools in Zambia.

They have traveled to Zambia twice in the past two years with volunteers in tow and plan to go again. They helped build Mwase High School and Hoya Secondary School.

"It was all pretty emotional, still can be," Jerry said. "It's an ongoing journey. We go back to show encouragement to the people of Zambia because they showed encouragement to us that first year. Ultimately, we want to honor God by using our skills to help those who need it most."

—Pam de Jong

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. George Dale Vanderhill 1920-2015

George Vanderhill, a man whose engaging personality, sharp intellect, and love of his Lord Jesus endeared him to family, friends, and parishioners, died on October 5 in Holland, Mich. He was 95 years old.

Vanderhill served Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan and Illinois.

Vanderhill's strong and steady leadership provided direction for a racially charged classis in south Chicago in the 1970s. He attended synod (the annual leadership meeting of the CRC) eight times and served on denominational boards. He retired in 1988.

"My dad," said one of Vanderhill's sons, "was a people person. He was genuinely interested in others." Vanderhill had an amazing ability to recall people's names and their stories in detail. An avid reader, he would often quote passages from poetry. He exhibited a vibrant faith and engagement with life to the end.

Vanderhill was preceded in death by Eleanor, his wife of 64 years, and a grandson, Micah. He is survived by three children and their spouses, and by eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Not Following *The Banner* on Facebook?

Here's some of what you're not seeing!

- The touching story of a Calvin College soccer player's display of sportsmanship.
- A photo of Jordan Francis's cool tattoo of the Christian Reformed Church's logo.
- A moving testimony from Rev. Shaio Chong on what being pro-life means to him.
- Posts for and against selecting refugees based on religion.
- A stunning photograph of a brilliant rainbow over a West Michigan church.

Check it out at facebook.com/crcbanner/!
We're also on Twitter @crcbanner!



Successful Jersey City Program Partners with Local School

If you walk through the doors of New City Kids, you'll notice three things: kids hard at work, music, and a caring staff. Those are hallmarks of New City Kids, a Christian Reformed ministry in Jersey City, N.J., and more recently in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Now that program is expanding to Jersey City Public School #22. New City Kids is partnering with Fountain of Salvation Church to create Lafayette After School Center. "This partnership is an example of a community coming alongside each other for the benefit of our children," explained Gabriel Stiritz, development director for New City Kids. "We are addressing issues that deeply affect the communities we are in."

These issues include the need for quality after school care and doing something about the high

school dropout rate. Oscar Velez, the principal of PS #22, knows this. He has been an advocate and supporter of New City Kids for several years. New City Kids submitted a proposal to collaborate with PS #22 to the Jersey City Board of Education, and it was approved last fall.

The collaboration allows New City Kids to do more of what they do best. Stiritz explained that "children receive small group assistance with their homework each day. They also learn performance and music theory through music class in bass, guitar, keyboards, drums, and vocals." This sort of investment makes a difference in the direction children will grow.

Stiritz told the story of Mia, a young lady who has been with New City Kids since she was 9



Anna learns bass during the after school program.

years old. Despite her struggles with attitude and authority figures, the staff made a commitment to her and helped her see her potential. Of the 10 colleges and universities she applied to, she was accepted by eight and is now attending The College of New Jersey on a full-ride scholarship.

"Our program is an incredible experience because adults and teenagers not only act as role models but love and invest in the children. Hope emerges when children are immersed in this community," Stiritz said.

—Callie Feyen

Panhandling: Seeing Past the Signs

What should Christians do when passing a panhandler? What would drive someone toward panhandling? Providence Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., tackled these and other questions at a panel discussion on October 28. The discussion encouraged participants to think about how they should respond to panhandlers as Christians. It addressed issues such as the increase in the number of area panhandlers, preconceived ideas about them, and circumstances that might result in people begging on the streets.

Sue Prins, director of adult discipleship, and Braden Stradley, director of ministries at Providence CRC, organized the well-attended event as a part of STRETCH, a ministry that aims to educate and

engage the congregation with issues in their community.

Panelists included Sergeant Larry Matzen of the Holland Police Department; Todd Krygsheld, senior community life advisor at the Holland Rescue Mission; and Peter Vander Meulen, coordinator of the CRC's Office of Social Justice.

Brenda Nyhof appreciated hearing the panelists' varying experiences and viewpoints. "It was a very safe atmosphere to have a discussion and listen to different opinions without the pressure of proving right or wrong. We need each other's wisdom to help respond in love to a broken world."

The discussion offered multiple suggestions that allowed each individual to figure out what they were comfortable with and how they would respond as a Christian.



Peter Vander Meulen (r) responds to a question during a panhandling discussion.

Some respondents decided to give money directly to existing missions and shelters and not feel guilty about not giving cash. One woman said she would take the time to pray and follow the Spirit's leading to try to reach out to the person and possibly share a meal. Another participant decided to dedicate some time to volunteer

in the shelters to learn more about the people. Even with differing perspectives, all agreed on the need for empathy and compassion. "We need to see the people holding these signs," said Stradley. "They are children of the living God, lovingly created in his image. He values them, and I need to as well," said attendee Debra Lappenga.

Vander Meulen agrees with the importance of discussions on this real faith formation issue of how to live compassionately when confronted with requests for help. "I think having these kinds of conversations in a church community is the way faith is formed. It is also where faithful action is born. It takes local church organizers to do that well. Providence really did it well."

—Krista Dam-Vandekuyt

Reaching Out for Christ at the 76th Street Truck Stop

Chad Roedema did not grow up in the church, and he's never driven a big rig. Yet through God's grace, today he is the lead chaplain in Grand Rapids, Mich., for Transport for Christ International, an organization that reaches out to the trucking community in Canada, the U.S., and several other countries.

Roedema said, "The things [some] truck drivers struggle with, God has freed me from. So I can say I've been there and I know the things, like porn and booze, that they've been going through."

Roedema's childhood was rough. His uncle led him to church, but Roedema later fell back into drinking and drugs—until one Sunday, he recommitted his life to Christ. Roedema attends First Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Mich.

While job-searching, Roedema visited Transport for Christ as a volunteer. The chaplains were about to meet in Muskegon, Mich., for a retreat, and they asked Roedema to accompany them. At the retreat, a chaplain from Africa approached him and said he'd been praying for someone for six years. The chaplain said that as soon as Roedema started talking, the Lord showed him that Roedema was the one he'd been praying for.

Since then, Roedema has been helping truckers. On a typical day, the chapel at the 76th Street Truck Stop in Byron Center opens at 7 a.m. Roedema sits and waits for truck drivers to come in. He estimates that there are probably 90 visitors a month, on average. If a driver comes in, Roedema witnesses to him. He likened his



chapel experiences to the movie character Forrest Gump's box of chocolates. "You never know what you're going to get," Roedema said.

Roedema said that 11 truckers accepted Christ in 2014, and six in 2015. "God's not calling me to

A Transport for Christ chapel service.

be successful," he said, "but to turn the open sign around and turn the light on. He's going to do the rest."

—Rachel Baarda

Craft Brew Aficionados Enjoy Bibles and Beers

When Grand Rapids, Mich., was voted Beer

City USA, Matt Wiechel thought of combining Bible study with beer. "Bibles and Beers came out of a brainstorming session we had a few years ago when we were going through some Healthy Church exercises," said Wiechel, a member of Princeton Christian Reformed Church in Kentwood, Mich. "I personally enjoy craft brews and figured that it would be fun to put them together."

Once a month, Wiechel and attendees meet at a local restaurant or brewery. For two hours, the group meets to talk about their lives and get to know each other while sipping their favorite brew. Attendees include church members and others from the local Grand Rapids community.

Bibles and Beers offers a new and different way for people to connect with the church community. "I think having a bit less formal setting and tying in with a shared interest makes it an easier place to invite someone," said Wiechel.

—K. Schmitt



IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Gordon T. Stuit

1928-2015

Gordon T. Stuit, long-time missionary to the Navajo people, passed away peacefully on October 19. He led a quiet, disciplined life and listened more than he spoke. "It is hard to capture the real man," said Stuit's daughter Lori. "The words *servant, loving, gentle, dedicated, studious, kind, and disciplined student of the Word* come to mind."

After serving with the U.S. military in Korea, Stuit graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1957.

Stuit began his ministry as a field pastor for the Christian Reformed Church's Rehoboth Mission in New Mexico. He learned to read Navajo and taught many people to read Scripture in their own language. Stuit reached out to the outlying areas, preaching three or four times every Sunday. He taught Bible classes to the children at boarding schools.

Stuit served churches in New Mexico, Iowa, and Arizona. After retiring in 1993, he served as a hospital chaplain.

Stuit is survived by his wife, Sylvia, by four children and their spouses, and by 14 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his son, Marcus, in 2008.

—Janet A. Greidanus

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

Denzel Washington Preaches Gratitude at Pentecostal Convention

Hollywood star Denzel Washington, the son of a pastor, preached a sermon of gratefulness to hundreds of members of the Church of God in Christ at their annual Holy Congregation in downtown St. Louis.

"I pray that you put your slippers way under your bed at night, so that when you wake in the morning you have to start on your knees to find them. And while you're down there, say thank you," he told the crowd at a \$200-a-plate banquet at the Marriott St. Louis Grand Hotel to raise money for the denomination's charity work.

"It is impossible to be grateful and hateful at the same time," he said. "We have to have an attitude of gratitude."

The acclaimed actor grew up in the Church of God in Christ. He, along with his wife and children, still attend the denomination's West Angeles church in Los Angeles.

His father, Denzel Washington Sr., was a pastor and, according to his son, a good father. The actor talked of the comfort he got in hearing his father's car pull into the driveway every evening. It gave him a sense of stability.

A church woman also gave him a hint of his career to come, he said.

Washington remembered sitting in his mother's beauty shop as a young man. He was flunking out of college with a 1.7 grade point average. "I had no future. I was sitting in the chair looking in the mirror," he said, when he heard a woman speak from under a hair dryer.

"Young man, you're going to travel the world and speak to millions of people," she said. "You are going to preach."

"I guess she was right," said Washington. These days he is trying to go beyond speaking through his movies by speaking more often to groups about his faith and "what God has done for me."

Washington, whose roles have ranged from civil rights icon Malcolm X to an Oscar-winning role as a corrupt police detective, led the church members in reciting the Lord's Prayer.

"Faith and optimism can add years to your life," he told those at the banquet. "A bad attitude is like a flat tire. Until you change it, you're not going anywhere," he said, urging the audience to "use the power of prayer in everything we do."

The Church of God in Christ is the largest African-American Pentecostal denomination, with about 12,000 congregations.

—*Religion News Service (St. Louis Post-Dispatch)*



Actor Denzel Washington speaks during the Church of God In Christ charities banquet on November 7.

PHOTO BY ROBERTO RODRIGUEZ, ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH.



More than 150 people attended the Dutch-language service in Ancaster CRC.

Last Dutch Service in Hamilton?

After years of meeting to worship in their mother tongue, what had been intended as the last scheduled Dutch-language service in Hamilton, Ont., was held on November 15. But because of all the interest expressed and a high turnout that was double the usual number of attendees, organizers are reconsidering their decision.

Members of Ancaster Christian Reformed Church had organized the monthly services for the past 27 years so local immigrants could worship in their native language. The services were also a place of social interaction. The only service of its kind in the area, worshipers came from all over the region.

For this final service, the pews were filled. Over 150 worshipers sang songs from the Johannes de Heer hymnal and filled the sanctuary with laughter as Rev. John Klomps told stories of certain words in English and Dutch/Frisian that were easily confused by early immigrants.

Phil and Freddie Muys have been the primary coordinators of the services. "I made so many friends over the years, from Dunnville and Simcoe to Burlington. It's been a real blessing," said Phil Muys.

Declining attendance, a smaller number of available pastors, and fewer organizers to do the planning contributed to the decision to end the services. But when the announcement of a final service was made in September, organizers received calls expressing people's disappointment. In response, organizers may plan a few services for the coming year.

—*Krista Dam-VandeKuyt*

Noteworthy

The **Barnabas Foundation** appointed James Bakke as its executive director, succeeding Henry Doorn.

Abe Visser of Calvin Christian High School in Grandville, Mich., won the Michigan high school Division 3 boys' cross country individual championship, posting a time of 15:34.8.

The **Calvin College** chapter of the National Student Speech-Language Hearing Association won a Knowledge Bowl *Jeopardy*-style competition at the American Speech-Language Hearing Association.

Christian Studies International celebrated its 20th anniversary and changed its name to **Global Scholars Canada**. Global Scholars Canada partners with Christian Reformed World Missions.



The Church and Religious Persecution is one of the resources produced by committee members Kevin den Dulk and Robert Joustra.

Synodical Report on Religious Persecution Calls for Prayer and Mobilization

The Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty has delivered its report, and it does not mince words. It called the Christian Reformed Church's efforts to date "admirable but insufficient."

The authors of the report wrote that the denomination's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) has not addressed persecution directly: neither the church's Office of Social Justice (OSJ) or the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue (CRCPD) in Canada has placed religious persecution or religious freedom near the top of their agendas. The denomination itself has provided few materials that highlight religious persecution as a matter of concern for public worship, and *The Banner* has addressed the problem of persecution only half a dozen times per year on average since 9/11 "with no serious framing or context."

The authors noted that there is "an ominous quickening of the pace of religion-based persecution" over the past decade. "One of the most agonizing facts about religious persecution today is that Christianity is facing near eradication in many areas of the Middle East, the birthplace of the faith."

"We call the denomination and its churches to refocus on this problem," the report's authors said.

The committee's mandate came from Synod 2013, which appointed the committee to, among other things, propose individual and group action to "intercede on behalf of those who are subject to religious persecution or denied religious liberty at home or abroad."

The committee laid out a framework of biblical, historical, and confessional perspectives and noted that their common message is quite clear: "Even if our sovereign God uses

persecution for his purposes, we must still view the experience of persecution as a real evil that we have an obligation to confront as a church and as individuals."

What is less clear is *how* to confront the problem. The committee recommended two main approaches: that the CRC orient itself around the problem of religious persecution and that it mobilize the church to act.

"We emphasize prayer—more specifically, prayer as part of public worship—precisely because it is a key starting point in building a faith-based movement against persecution," the authors said. "The process of prayer, of naming suffering and the people who suffer . . . is deeply formative." It recommended that Synod 2016 encourage every congregation to appoint a prayer coordinator to keep up on religious persecution issues, advise officebearers about developments, and foster regular prayer for people suffering religious persecution.

Additionally, through worship, Bible study, and adult education, churches should focus congregational life around stories of persecution that are often lost in the busyness of church life. "The denomination has done relatively little along these lines," the committee said. It noted that OSJ has highlighted the International Day of Prayer with resources, but said that "these resources are not extensive and need updating." So it is urging synod to instruct the CRC's Board of Trustees to instruct OSJ to expand the practice of urging congregations to participate in the International Day of Prayer.

Beyond that, the study committee urged the denomination to develop its own internal resources for supporting the church in confronting the issue of persecution. The committee produced original resources for adult education and Bible study. Those can be found at a website the committee created as a companion to its report: crcna.org/persecution.

The committee noted that the CRC's wider ecumenical engagement offers more possibilities for churches to hear the stories behind

the statistics on persecution. Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) provides ongoing contact with Reformed churches around the world that are faced with interreligious conflict or persecution. Global Christian Forum, which held a 2015 conference dealing with the themes of the study committee report, offers possibilities for the CRCNA to disseminate much more information.

The study committee said that the church also needs to mobilize members to act. "Church members as Christian citizens can and should be engaged at both the broadest and most specific levels. But churches as institutions should shape the moral vision of their members and speak prophetically to the larger society while refraining from the technical and specific work of public policy."

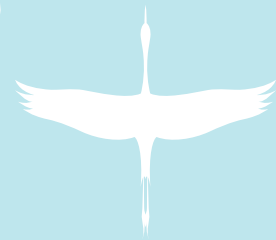
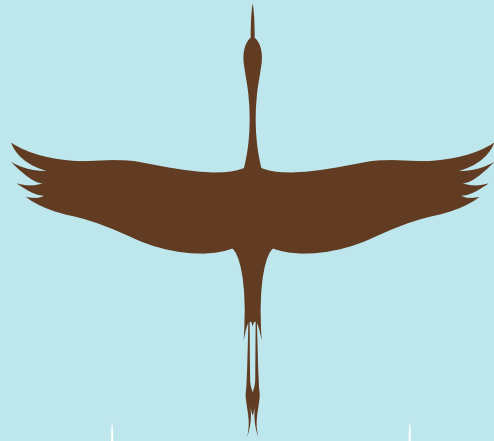
To that end, the report calls OSJ and CRCPD to help mobilize the denomination around this issue by making religious persecution one of their top three priorities. The report specifically recommended devoting more staff resources to provide up-to-date information about persecution to CRC congregations. One way to do that is by collaborating with other groups, such as the Henry Institute at Calvin College, the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C., and Voice of the Martyrs, which already focus attention on issues of religious persecution and religious liberty.

The authors conclude with the acknowledgment that religious persecution is one of the great moral challenges of our time. "While we should be concerned about doing more damage than good, we ought not let that concern paralyze us. We are called to act—all of us."

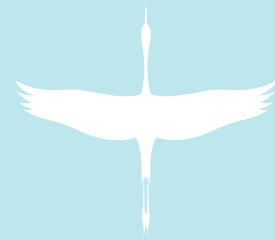
The full text of the committee's report can be found at crcna.org/persecution. Synod 2016, the CRC's annual leadership meeting, will discuss the report when delegates gather in June in Grand Rapids, Mich.

—Gayla R. Postma

BY MARY S. HULST



THE
ART OF
FOLLOWING



A **YOUNG FRIEND OF MINE** is joining the Marines this summer. He'll head to San Diego for 13 weeks of boot camp. To help recruits imagine what awaits, the Marines show them short videos of what happens each week of camp. The videos are intimidating and inspiring. What is very clear is that recruits are told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it for every moment of their lives for those 13 weeks.

In one of the videos that highlights hand-to-hand combat training, a recruit gets knocked down by another man and loses the contest. Standing inches from the recruit's face, the drill sergeant yells: "YOU DID NOT FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS, AND YOU LOST!"

That drill sergeant didn't begin with tips for next time. He didn't see if the recruit was embarrassed. The first thing he said to him was, "You did not follow." Boot camp is all about learning how to follow. You do things exactly as you are told. You go where people tell you to go. You do what people tell you to do.

In the video of the final week of training, the recruits have become Marines. They speak of the transformation that has happened to them. They talk about being part of a family, of understanding what they are capable of, of their eagerness to use their skills to serve their country. They are proud. They are ready. They are . . . followers.

The Marines have perfected the art of training followers. After 13 weeks, recruits can rappel down walls, fire weapons, and run for miles while carrying heavy loads of gear. But their most important skill is following. In a combat situation, only one person leads. Following gets the mission accomplished.

Following isn't a skill that most of us are encouraged to develop. If you want to learn how to lead, there are books and conferences galore. Workshops, classes, seminars, and videos abound on the topic of leadership. But what if your most

important job is to follow? Not all of us are called to lead. But each of us—every last one of us—is called to follow.

And you know what? We don't want to. That's why there aren't any conferences on following. Because no one wants to follow. That's why it takes 13 weeks of 24/7 discipline to train a Marine. Following is not appealing. Following is doing what someone else wants you to do. If we are straight up honest, we don't want to follow.

This, however, is Jesus' first invitation: "Follow me." It was the invitation of a rabbi to potential disciples. And not unlike Marine boot camp, a rabbi expected his disciples to follow him in the way he ate, slept, walked, prayed, and

TO FOLLOW IS TO LOVE ANOTHER MORE THAN YOURSELF.

thought. A disciple was to follow his rabbi so closely that he would be covered in the dust of the rabbi. The disciples were supposed to imitate the life of the rabbi. This is why Jesus says in John 13, "Now that I, your Lord and Rabbi, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet." Now that I . . . you also. That's the essence of following.

While we don't always want to follow Jesus, we know that we should. We should follow him. We should follow him in the way we deal with our anger, our money, and our sex lives. We should pray as Jesus taught us to pray. We should care for children as he cared for children.

Jesus is our Lord. So even if we don't always want to follow and we don't often follow very well, we do know that we should.

But what about following others? What about following human beings?

What about following the church council when they decide to move from one morning service to two? What about

following your sibling about what to do for the family reunion?

What about following your child when he chooses to major in something that you don't understand?

Why is this harder? Well, those people aren't Jesus. But there is something else afoot here. With Jesus, we know that he knows best. We do. But with other people? We aren't so sure. Following other people is hard because most of the time we are fairly certain that we know better than they do. And most of us aren't in the Marines, so our following or not following doesn't appear to affect the mission. We aren't in combat, so it's not like anyone is going to die if we don't follow. Right?

Wrong. Paul writes: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

We are in combat. We have an enemy. And that enemy likes it very much when we tear down those who have been raised up to lead. That enemy loves it when we tell ourselves that we could do better than they are doing. That enemy is especially happy when the lack of following kills churches, communities, and families. Does our lack of following affect the mission? Most definitely.

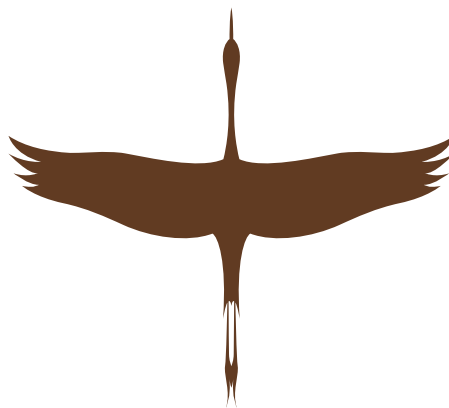
Marines learn to follow for the sake of the mission and for the good of the corps. Recruits learn to rely on each other and trust each other. This is called "unit cohesion." It's not metaphorical that people who serve together in the military call each other "brother" and "sister." Their loyalty to those with whom they serve runs deep. They know that a breakdown »

in the unit will result in a failure to achieve their objectives. A cohesive unit leads to a completed mission. Likewise, when we refuse to follow, or grumble against our leaders, or abandon our “unit,” the mission is compromised.

Take the example of a church council that has decided to move from one morning worship service to two. Are there costs involved in this decision? Yes. Musicians, nursery attendants, preachers, ushers, and greeters all have to be found to cover both services. Many members of the church might no longer see each other, as some will go to the early service and some will attend later. Rehearsals, church school classes, and fellowship times all need to be altered.

Why would a council make a decision that costs so much? Because they are committed to the mission. They have seen the ushers scrambling to set up extra chairs; they have heard about people leaving because there wasn't enough room; they have served in nurseries that are overflowing with babies. The mission of the church is to welcome anyone who wants to come so that they can hear the Good News, and right now, that mission is compromised by lack of space. While they are aware of the sacrifices that will have to be made, the council is committed to the mission.

It is so tempting in an instance like this for people in the congregation to assume that the church council has not thought through all of the angles. It is tempting to think that they are making a big mistake. It is tempting to consider leaving. But following, in this case, means that for the sake of the mission you may sacrifice the comforts you've had, such as greeting the same people in worship, easily making a nursery schedule, or playing with the same band week after week. The council is committed to the mission, they have prayed about this decision, researched it well, and listened to the Lord. To follow means we sacrifice—just as the leaders are—for the sake of the mission.



Or take the example of a family reunion. Your sister has a vision of everyone gathering for a week at the shore. There are large houses to rent that can hold everyone. The beach is a short walk away. There are cute shops and trails to hike and even an amusement park within driving distance. She has a plan. She also lives just an hour from the shore. For you, it's a 10-hour drive in a minivan with twin 7-year-olds and a toddler.

But you can hear your sister's excitement as she talks about taking your kids to the ocean for the first time, and showing you her favorite places, and booking the restaurant for Mom and Dad's anniversary dinner. This is the sister who came your way last time and slept on the futon in the basement. The twins snuck downstairs and crawled in with her every night, ensuring that she got no sleep for four days. So you listen to her joy, and you remember how much you love her, and you follow. To follow is to love another more than you love yourself.

And what about your child who is choosing something that you do not want him to choose? He comes home for Christmas and announces that he's majoring in film studies. You think, “Film studies? Do people get jobs with that?” You ask him what he'd like to do after college, and he—your child who rarely speaks—is a flow of information. He chats about summer internships and a professor who can put in a good word with some people in New York. He mentions grad school and keeping his grades up so that an advanced degree could be an option.

As he talks, you notice that as much as you are fearful, he is joyful. You've never

seen him like this. The boy who was your student for so long is now your teacher, talking about lighting design and camera angles and the power of images with no words. And so you sit at the kitchen table and you follow his lead, asking about favorite directors and movies you should see. To follow, especially when it comes to our children, means that we are willing to learn, even from those who have learned from us.

To follow is to sacrifice your comfort for the sake of the mission, to love others more than you love yourself, and to allow anyone to be your teacher. These are hard things. These are things that we resist. We like our missions, and our own selves, and we like to choose our own teachers. This is why it is very hard to be a follower.

But just as young recruits speak of the transformation that comes when they are finally Marines, we go through the hard drills of “followership” because we believe that these drills transform us more and more into the image of Jesus himself. We empty ourselves of our pride and our egos and our own wills as we follow our Rabbi, who emptied himself, “taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:7-8).

The One we follow showed us how to do it: love others more than yourself. Love others more than your own life. “This is how they will know that you are my disciples [followers!],” Jesus said, “if you love one another” (John 13:35). ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Mary S. Hulst is chaplain for Calvin College and teaches at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Trusting Doubt

WE SAT in vinyl booths, eating from cheap plates at a nondescript diner. Swapping stories, we traded tales of ministry. And family. The restaurant's food was C+. Its atmosphere, B-. But the friendship was five stars. Over many years we had come to trust each other, walking through heartbreak and happy times.

My friends are wonderful, godly parents who have invested deeply in their children. They are thoughtful about educational options, careful about what television and movies they watch. They have gone on family camping trips, church youth retreats, and extended service trips with mission organizations. Soon after birth, each of their children was baptized, entering God's covenant promises.

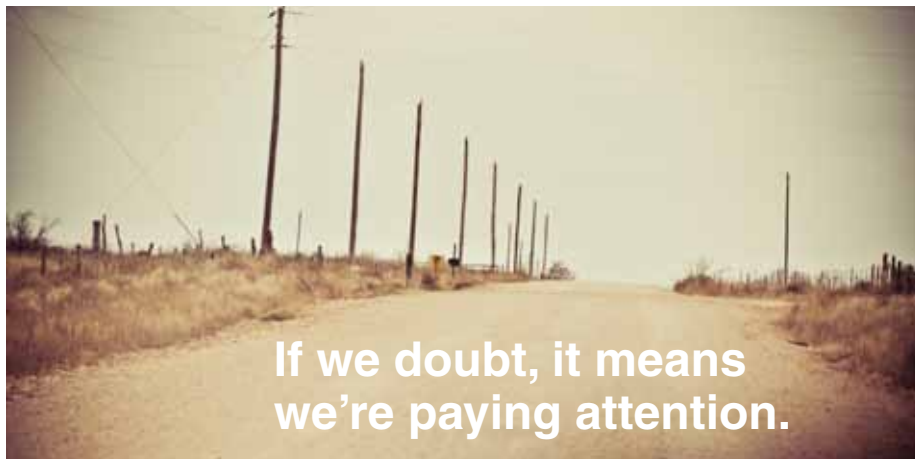
But that night at the diner, their daughter's baptism seemed a faded memory. Midway through high school, she was having serious doubts about her faith.

My friends were fearful and anxious. "Is this the beginning of the end of her faith?" they asked. "What can we do?"

Each person, each child, is a deep mystery. To be a parent is to begin an adventure without an owner's manual. There are no quick and easy instructions for parenting.

I suggested they give their daughter space to experience her own journey of faith. They'd like her to feel her faith deeply, to follow Jesus with joy and abandon. But she doesn't right now. And that needs to be OK.

Because God is in control, we don't need to panic or push or react with the volatile pressure of parental expectations. The road most biblical characters took to faith wasn't a straight highway but a backcountry lane filled with potholes, blind curves, and extended stretches of disorienting fog. As parents, we need to trust the God who journeys with our



children. Their faith needn't look like ours to be authentic.

And I encouraged them to pray the psalms. Psalms help us pray our fear and anxiety, echoing the words of Christians (and Christian parents) of every generation and language and culture who have gone before us.

In fact, any parent might ask that church leaders model psalm-shaped prayer in worship and youth ministry. Maybe we can help our congregations move past the common but unhelpful practice of giving adolescents a spiritual formation diet of high-caffeine events and "fun Christianity" in the hope that doing so will insulate them from doubts and wandering.

Perhaps, I suggested, your child's doubt is already more psalm-like and honest than some of your congregation's songs and worship patterns. Wise Christian parents and youth leaders teach and model doubt as a normal part of faith. Abraham doubted. Jacob doubted. Peter doubted. David's doubts fill the psalms.

All God's children doubt. If we doubt, it means we're paying attention. If your child doubts, it might mean she is taking her faith very seriously. Maybe she can teach us all to be more honest about our doubts and less judgmental to those who express them.

I also encouraged my friends to trust God's baptismal promises. Dying and rising with Christ in baptism doesn't promise doubt-free living. It isn't a tonic the church offers for extended and robust faith. But baptism does promise that our children belong to God and God's church, not just to us. As the Heidelberg Catechism says, "Infants as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation. Through Christ's blood the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them no less than to adults." To trust our child's baptism is to trust the God of baptism.

God makes promises. He makes them to the church, and to us, and to our children.

I'd like to say my friends found my comments in the diner that evening reassuring and wise. I think they left doubting my thoughts about doubts. But I'll trust them with enough space to write their own faith story, I'll pray a psalm for them, and I'll trust God's baptismal promises. ■



Kevin Adams is the senior pastor of Granite Springs Church in Lincoln, Calif., and director of the Church Planting Center of the

Newbigin House of Studies in San Francisco.

Journeying with Refugees

by Danielle Rowaan

“We had hoped for a Christian family who we could include and involve our congregants in welcoming weekly during our church service, but God had other plans for us,” said Gord VandenBerg.

Instead, VandenBerg and a small group at Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., welcomed an Iraqi Muslim refugee family to their community. Since then, they have tutored family members and provided transportation to doctors, grocery stores, and even a late-night job.

“I know, having been with (the father of the family) many times, that he loves us and what we have done for him and his family,” VandenBerg said. “Even though he has not participated in the life of our total church body, he knows and senses our Christian call for social justice and compassion.”



The Khai family was sponsored by Chatham area churches.



Members of the refugee committee from Christian Reformed churches in the Chatham area welcome the Muang family at the Windsor, Ont., airport.

“They have been a blessing to us in many ways,” he said, adding that one member of the committee had commented: “I don’t know what impact our work with this family has had on Calvin CRC as a whole, but I would like to think we have demonstrated a tangible example of Christian/Muslim cooperation and mutual respect.”

Calvin is just one of many Christian Reformed churches that have welcomed refugees. In 2015, 27 Syrian refugees were settled in Grand Rapids alone through the efforts of Bethany Christian Services, a Grand Rapids organization that receives funding from the CRC’s Office of Social Justice to resettle refugees in partnership with CRC congregations.

There are also refugees from other countries who have been welcomed and resettled in other parts of the U.S.

In Canada, from January through October 2015, 73 refugees landed on Canadian soil through World Renew’s Refugee Resettlement Office, and applications were made to welcome 158 more.

Denominational offices—including the Canadian Ministries office, the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue,

and the Office of Social Justice—report that the Syrian refugee crisis has motivated many CRC members to contact them for resources and support, both with advocacy and resettlement.

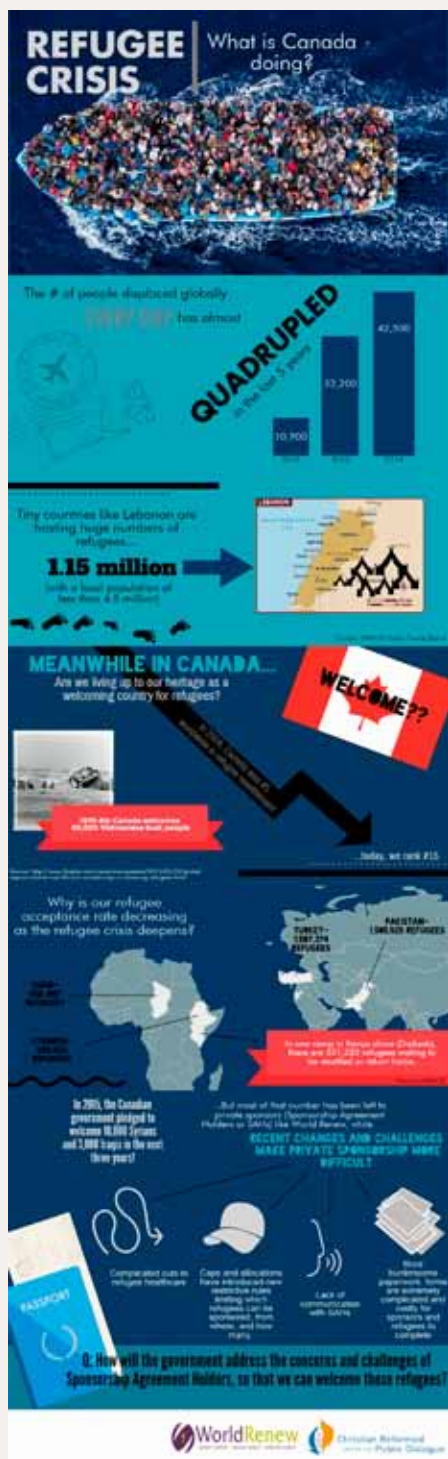
Two classes (regional groups of churches) in Ontario wrote letters to the Canadian Ministries director to encourage strong leadership on refugee issues.

Much of this work has been going on for years—or decades, in some cases.

Alice Van Stempvoort, a member of the refugee committee at Grace CRC in Chatham, Ont., said that a little over a decade ago, a deacon at Grace CRC learned about the situation of Ethiopian refugees in Egypt. “This sparked an interest in our church and other nearby CRCs in sponsoring a family of three refugees from Ethiopia. Thus began a series of refugee sponsorships with World Renew.”

Since then, four CRC churches in the area—Blenheim, Calvary, Grace, and First—have partnered to help refugees

*You add.
God multiplies.*



with everything from doctor visits to furnishing apartments, and from government paperwork to simple friendly visits.

“What a blessing this endeavor has been,” Van Stempvoort said. “We’ve gotten to know people we ordinarily would never have met. We’ve enlarged our circle of friends, we’ve learned a bit more of how God works in other people’s lives, and we’ve seen God meet all of our needs in some very desperate situations. That’s a win-win situation to me.”

Recently there have been concerns that Islamic State fighters or other extremist Muslims could use the refugee crisis as cover to enter Canada or the United States.

Kristine Van Noord, refugee resettlement and employment program manager with Bethany Christian Services, said such fears can be put to rest.

“Refugees go through the most intense screening process of any visitors to the U.S.,” she noted. “All the various stages, including interviews and background checks through the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security, take at least 200 days.”

Rebecca Walker of World Renew in Canada agrees. “After a refugee is referred to Canada by the United Nations Refugee Agency, Canada does its own interview, as well as medical and security checks, and makes its own refugee status determination decision.”

Advocacy is another key element of the CRC’s response to refugees. Last year, a workshop called “Journey with Me” launched in Toronto and Vancouver. It equips Canadian churches with knowledge about the challenges refugees face, particularly how they are affected by government policies such as cuts to refugee healthcare, and how Scripture calls Christians to respond.

“It challenged me to walk in the shoes of someone and try to imagine what that might be like,” said Judy Cook of Meadowslands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster.

During the recent Canadian federal election, the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue and World Renew released a voter guide on refugee policy in Canada with an infographic (see illustration). The guide explained the current policy environment and provided questions to ask candidates about their parties’ positions. The guide received huge, »

A History of Support

The Christian Reformed Church has a long history of helping refugees.

In the 1960s, CRC missionaries opened the Good Samaritan Refugee center in Miami, Fla., to provide refugee families from Cuba with food and clothing. Supplies were donated by CRC members all over North America and sent to Florida through World Renew (then known as the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee).

During the 1970s, Christian Reformed churches started to get involved in refugee resettlement in the United States and Canada on a larger scale, welcoming individuals and families from Vietnam. In Canada, CRWRC was part of the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program since its inception in 1979.

The CRC’s ministry of resettlement has continued ever since. Through World Renew and other Sponsorship Agreement Holders, CRCs have welcomed families from all over the world, including Cambodian refugees fleeing the Khmer Rouge in the 1980s, Karen refugees fleeing Thailand in the early 2000s, and, most recently, families from all over the Middle East, including Syria and Iraq.

To learn more, visit worldrenew.net/refugees or contact the Office of Social Justice about resettlement in the United States.

—Kristen Vanderberg, World Renew

“We’ve enlarged our circle of friends . . . and we’ve seen God meet all of our needs.”

» unprecedented traffic, said Mike Hogeterp, director of the centre.

“We’re all called to politics,” said Dena Nicolai, a member of the centre’s advisory board. “This is everybody’s calling. In many ways, voting is the beginning of, not the culmination of, exercising our democratic rights and responsibilities and working toward ‘the common good.’”

The Office of Social Justice has also been active in refugee advocacy, releasing four action alerts and a briefing on the American refugee admissions process in

Victoria and Cliff Shipmaker participate in a workshop.



Nell DeBoer, a member of Willowdale CRC, speaks during “Journey with Me” workshop.

recent months. The alerts cover topics from support for peacebuilding in Syria and Iraq, to Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar, to support for refugee resettlement in the U.S. and Canada.

The CRC’s efforts have drawn the attention of other church groups, said Rev. Darren Roorda, Canadian Ministries director. The Centre for Public Dialogue has received requests for the “Journey with Me” curriculum from denominations, such as the Presbyterian Church in Canada, and the refugee resource page at crcna.org/Canada been commended by

the World Council of Reformed Churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. [Find the “Journey with Me” workshop and toolkit at crcna.org/JourneyWithMe.]

“I’m proud that our cooperative agency approach produces such great resources for local churches to latch on to,” Roorda said.

At the “Journey with Me” launch in Toronto, Catholic refugee advocate Mary Jo Leddy told those attending that this is an opportunity for churches to “really become the Church of Jesus Christ.”



Mary Jo Leddy, founder of Romero House, speaking at “Journey with Me” launch in Toronto.

Leddy added, “This is not just for the sake of the refugees. This is for the sake of our country, this is for the sake of the church, of our faith that we all share as Christians.”

Gord VandenBerg echoed those sentiments. “Being a part of this ministry has made me more aware of the global need for justice in this broken world,” he said. “We look forward to a time of peace in the world where there are no longer any refugees.”

In the meantime, however, he said, “Our earthly conditions require us at Calvin CRC and all Christians to act as Jesus commands. ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” ■



Danielle Rowaan is Justice Communications Team leader for the Christian Reformed Church.

—Kristen Vanderberg, World Renew

Aid for Refugees Globally

At the end of 2014, there were 19.5 million refugees and 38.2 million internally displaced people worldwide.

A refugee is a person who, because of well-founded fear of persecution, is living outside his or her country of origin. Internally displaced people (IDPs) are those who have been similarly displaced from their homes but are still living within the borders of their country of origin.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said that 2014 had the highest levels of human displacement on record. In that year, conflict and persecution forced an average of 42,500 people every day to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere. The numbers haven’t decreased in 2015. This has placed a huge burden on the countries that host refugees.

In places like Lebanon, over 1.2 million refugees have arrived, which has caused the population to surge by 20 percent in just a few years. This surge has overwhelmed infrastructure and public services.

One way to help the large numbers of refugees and their host communities worldwide is to provide food, water, health care, and other humanitarian assistance to people living in temporary shelters, refugee camps, and communities for internally displaced people.

Currently World Renew is providing assistance to refugees and IDPs in Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan. To learn more, visit worldrenew.net.

You add.
God multiplies.

Open Hearts and Homes in Ukraine

After Natalia Bradarsky experienced an incredible loss in her own life, she opened her home to people from other parts of Ukraine who had been displaced by a rebel uprising.

On Pentecost Day 2014, rebels entered a church in Slavyansk, Ukraine, and abducted four worshipers, including Victor Bradarsky, a local Christian broadcaster. A month later, Natalia learned that her husband had been killed.

Earlier in the year, rebels had destroyed the Christian radio station from which Victor Bradarsky aired his biblical messages and Russian-language programs produced by Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI).

Station manager Victor Kurilenko, who had worked closely with Victor Bradarsky, said, “I am convinced that it [was] very important to rebuild the station so the Word of God [could] once again be on the air, because [eastern Ukrainian] people are going through depression, desperation, loss of faith, feelings of hate.

“Who else if not the church should be bringing peace and calmness and God’s blessings to the hearts of the people? Only God can heal the wounds of the soul left by the war,” Kurilenko added.

The BTGMI ministry team in Ukraine partners with local churches that created a hotline for people who have been displaced from their homes by violence. “We not only provide hope-filled messages, but also connect them with area churches for assistance,” said BTGMI Russian ministry leader Rev. Sergei Sosedkin.

“This year we plan to produce up to 10 one-hour live broadcasts on local Ukrainian stations and make the broadcasts available online. The programs are gospel-focused and also challenge local Christians to get involved in the relief efforts.”

The broadcasts offer information about sources of humanitarian aid, such as Christian relief agencies, government assistance, food pantries, and church events. For many, these connections with local churches are the first introduction to the Christian faith. BTGMI also provides Bibles and Christian literature for those who want to learn more.

Natalia Bradarsky and her children have helped dozens of families, noted Sosedkin.

“She shares her faith and the story of what happened to her husband. They feed the displaced citizens, give them a place to sleep, and present them with radios.”

Natalia said she feels called to honor her husband’s legacy through this ministry. “Victor loved people,” she said. “He had many ministries. He loved to be on the air telling listeners about God. Passionate and personable, he was a man of deep faith.”

—by Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministries International



A displaced Syrian woman with her children.

Muslim Refugees Seek the Truth

Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) works in partnership with Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) to bring hope to Syrian refugees in Jordan.

“Alice” (not her real name), a 50-year-old former civil engineer, volunteers with BTGMI’s Arabic ministry to disciple listeners wanting to know more about the Christian faith. Since the refugee crisis has increased, so has Alice’s passion to serve them. She uses her gifts and experiences to assist and follow up with Syrian refugees—especially Muslim women.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, more than 628,000 Syrians have fled to Jordan. Approximately 25 percent of them are women over the age of 18. “Many of them express a desire to know more about Jesus,” said Alice.

Alice refers these women seeking God’s truth to BTGMI Arabic online resources. In turn, the women have told others about Jesus and BTGMI’s ministry. “In contrast to the jihad mentality, they are attracted to Christ’s words to love your enemy,” Alice explained.

The BTGMI Arabic ministry leader reported, “As a result of Alice’s connections, at least 1,500 people are visiting our sites, and a vast majority of them are Muslim.”

Praise God for Alice and her courage in telling people about our Savior. Pray that the seekers she meets come to faith and build a long-lasting relationship with Jesus Christ.

—by Kristen Fergus Van Stee,
Back to God Ministries International



Natalia Bradarsky and her children have opened their home to refugees.

The Refugee, the Responder, and the Redeemer

The images are heart-wrenching, and the numbers are staggering. The *New York Daily News* recently reported that “the worldwide refugee crisis has displaced a record 60 million people from their homes—the most since the end of World War II. . . . People desperately fleeing death, destruction and abysmal living conditions . . . have sparked a global panic.”

Our future son-in-law, Sam, and his family were once refugees. They fled from Liberia twice during the civil war there. Soon after Sam was born, they fled to neighboring Guinea, and five years later they fled again to the Ivory Coast (Côte d’Ivoire). Sam said of the experience, “At the moment we left our home, we left behind more than just material goods. As a child, I remembered leaving behind one of the greatest comforts of all: loved ones and family—especially my grandparents.”

Sam’s father found a way to the United States in 1995, but the rest of the family wasn’t able to join him until six years later. His father worked at two jobs during this time, sending the majority of his pay to his family so the children could be in school and eat more than just the buckwheat rations provided in refugee camps by the United Nations.

Today Sam works as a refugee health specialist in the Chicago area. His testimony to all, regardless of faith background, is this: “Be encouraged, even through the difficult transitional/assimilation period. God has saved you from the grips of war and other uncertainties, and he will not neglect you now.”

Through the love shown by congregations such as those you will read about in the Together Doing More section, as well as many others, Sam’s testimony that God will not neglect the refugee is experienced in communities across Canada and the U.S.

One example is Trinity Christian Reformed Church in the suburbs of Grand Rapids, Mich., a church that has learned to respond to those seeking refuge. More than 50 years ago, Trinity helped Cuban refugees adjust to a new country, a new climate, and a new language. They responded again in the 1970s as refugees arrived from Vietnam.

Today Trinity is walking alongside people coming from East Africa and beyond. Members supply transportation, find furniture, provide English as a second language tutoring, assist with job hunting, and sort through messy credit histories. While they do some of this by means of refugee family sponsorship through Bethany Christian Services, they assist dozens of others in more informal ways.

Back then, peoples’ flight from communist regimes was easily understood. Today’s refugees are coming for more complex reasons, and the tensions in our world require great vigilance and sophistication on the part of our governments. Moreover, the Islamic faith of many creates greater barriers to acceptance—or at least seemingly so.

Trinity’s pastor, Rev. Gerry Koning, said such barriers are quickly broken down through relationships. People arriving as refugees, without a community of support, develop relationships with church members as they step into a network of caring Christians.

Koning also said that responding to the need of refugees opens the eyes of church members to the bigger kingdom of God. “As soon as you meet refugees, the opportunities for ministry expand,” he said. Trinity is now involved in planting a church uniquely suited to refugees, including some who were formerly Muslim.

In many of our communities there are children, young people and adults who, like Sam, have come to find new homes and new lives. Get to know them. They will transform your hearts.

What about us? We have fled the ravages of sin, found refuge in the love of the Father, been redeemed by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, and now are empowered with the gifts of the Spirit.

The psalmist said, “Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—those he redeemed from the hand of the foe” (Ps. 107:2). Individuals and families are arriving in North America daily, wanting to restart their lives and needing the assistance and witness of churches like ours.

We must tell our story by words and deeds, and opportunities to reach out to refugees await our response. The time is now. ■



“We must tell our story by words and deeds.”



Dr. Steven Timmermans is the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

You add.
Christian Missions.

Restoring Education in Ukraine

When Maggie Palatova moved to her husband's home country of Ukraine, the two planned to send their children through the public school system. But corruption in the schools and large class sizes quickly changed their mind.

At the same time, Palatova started working for an American-run school for children of missionaries—including the children of George and Sarah deVuyst of Christian Reformed World Missions.



“The foundation of the school was truly biblical, and it pervaded every part of the atmosphere and learning process,” said Palatova.

Palatova dreamed that other children in Kiev would

be able to experience the same kind of learning environment, and she began working to open her own school.

Although laws and restrictions made this difficult, many restrictions were lifted early in

Maggie Palatova (far right) with students and parents on opening day of New Generation Christian School.

2015. Now people like Palatova have more opportunities to begin turning their dreams into reality.

With this opportunity for Christian education came a long list of challenges, said Palatova. “At the top of the list has been the challenge of finding teachers who understand how to carry out our goals.”

As Palatova wrestled with this challenge, she connected with George and Sarah deVuyst about Educational Care, a program developed by CRWM for Christian educators.

In August 2015, Palatova invited the de Vuysts to host the first Educational Care training in Ukraine.

Just one month after that first training session, the first bell rang at New Generation Christian School—the school Palatova now directs and serves as a first-grade teacher. ■

—by Brian Clark,
Christian Reformed
World Missions

CRC Receives Lilly Grant for Resourcing Project

Lilly Endowment Inc. in Indianapolis, Ind., has awarded the Christian Reformed Church a nearly \$1 million grant to fund a project that seeks to create an innovative model of coordinated regional resourcing for congregations.

The CRC's three-and-a-half-year pilot project is called Connections: Embedding Regional Resourcing in the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

“The grant is a gift to the CRCNA,” said Dr. Steven Timmermans, executive director of the CRCNA. “The CRCNA trusts that this effort will not only benefit our congregations but will also result in a model other denominations and congregations may find helpful.”

In an era in which the CRC, like other denominations, is faced with many changes and challenges, this project will help the denomination adapt and connect in new ways with its congregations through its classes, said Lis Van Harten, project director.

It will also help churches become more aware of and use denominational and other local and regional resources to assist them in their ministries.

An important focus of the Connections project, said Van Harten, will be to explore ways in which the CRC can support local churches as they seek to foster health in their congregations and to enhance the ministries they offer their communities.

“The collaboration and new opportunities offered through this grant will enable congregations to explore resources for ministry and projects that they're passionate about,” said Van Harten. “It will help generate creativity in congregations and their leaders.”

The Connections project, she said, will involve three regions, each of which will have participation from three or four classes. ■

—Chris Meehan, CRC Communications



Finding Common Ground

Five churches from the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America have come together to start Common Ground Church, a new congregation in Kalamazoo, Mich.

Through partnership between Christian Reformed Home Missions and the RCA, this model, called Luminex Collaborative, gets churches working together.

Chet Carlson, lead pastor of the church, arrived in August 2014 after moving to Kalamazoo with his wife and children.

He immediately began connecting and recruiting people



Church members prepare for worship at Common Ground Church.

from the five parent churches: RCA churches The Bridge Church, First Reformed Church, and Voyage Church, and CRC congregations Southern Heights and Westwood.

Common Ground Church is currently focusing on community outreach by leading small groups, networking through events, and holding worship services. So far, they've

been blessed with success, says Carlson.

At these outreach events, Common Ground has been able to connect and form relationships with those who may not be frequent churchgoers or even have a relationship with God.

In fact, one recent attendee stated, "Capture this moment, because this is the first time I have set foot in a church."

Carlson has observed the interest people have in the fact that churches and denominations are working together.

"People will say, 'Wow . . . this must be a big deal!' to which I respond, 'You're right, this is a big deal.'" ■

—by Annemarie Byl,
Christian Reformed
Home Missions

Learning Theology from a Distance

Ernesto Hernandez was living in Chihuahua, Mexico, and had just finished his undergraduate training to be a software engineer. But he felt a tug toward theology and ministry.

After attending a Bible school, planting a church, and preaching and teaching in his native Mexico, he and his family relocated to Texas, where he became heavily involved in an emerging Christian Reformed congregation called Valley Ridge Community Church.

"I always wanted to pursue theological education," said Hernandez. But he had a full slate: a family to support and a full-time job in Texas.

Enter Distance Learning at Calvin Seminary.



Chapel at Calvin Seminary led by Distance Learning students.

The Distance Learning program entails online readings, discussions, Google hangouts, and video presentations, in addition to five days of intensive on-campus class time each semester.

Along with 79 other Distance Learning students, Hernandez traveled to Grand

Rapids for the program's on-campus session, which included classroom instruction, corporate worship, and mentoring groups.

His classes included Forming Worship Communities with John Witvliet, Old Testament Narrative Literature with Arie Leder and Stan Mast, and

Systematic Theology 1 with Ronald Feenstra.

"We can cover our local ministries [during our] preparation in seminary, all to the glory of God," said Hernandez, who will graduate with his Master of Divinity in 2017.

Valley Ridge Community Church, an emerging congregation serving a primarily Hispanic congregation, has been part of Classis Arizona since 2009. ■

—by Amanda Smartt,
Calvin Seminary

Longer versions of these and other stories are online at thebanner.org/together.

You add.
God multiplies.

Student-Faculty Project Maps History of Dutch Immigration

For a data lover like Matt Raybaud, this summer job was perfect.

Raybaud, a geography and sociology double major from St. Clair Shores, Mich., landed a position through Calvin College's summer research program.

The job was mapping data for Calvin College emeritus professor Henk Aay's atlas project, "The Atlas of Dutch American History and Culture."

Over the course of 10 weeks, Raybaud took information from other researchers, U.S. census records, Dutch provincial records, and ship manifests, and turned them into 500 maps.

He then converted a series of punch cards created by researcher Robert Swierenga into Comma Separated Value files.

He made Excel sheets from the files, then took information from the sheets and

plugged it into Calvin's Geographic Information Systems software, which, he says, "is just a fancy term for cartography on the computer."

Aay's atlas project has been a multi-year endeavor, and he's enlisted the help of several students from Calvin and Hope College, where he is senior research fellow at the Van Raalte Institute.

Raybaud gets Calvin College credit for converting the Swierenga punch cards into useable data for mapping. His maps show counties of origin, numbers of immigrants and their destinations, demographics, occupation, location of churches, and more.

Aay said the maps are an important step forward in the atlas project.

"An atlas by its very nature begins to translate into a visual and more under-



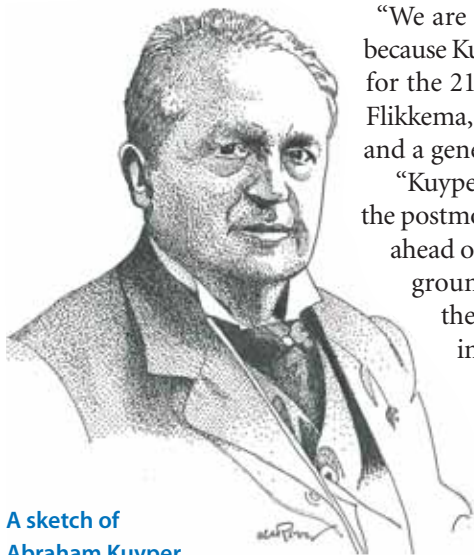
standable form the scholarship of academics," he said. ■

—by Rachel Watson, Calvin College

SHORT TAKES

CRC Scholars Play Role in Kuyper Translation Project

A number of Christian Reformed scholars are participating in translating and editing a new series of books and digital resources titled *Abraham Kuyper: Collected Works in Public Theology*.



A sketch of Abraham Kuyper.

"We are conducting this project because Kuyper is hugely important for the 21st century," said Melvin Flikkema, an ordained CRC pastor and a general editor of the series.

"Kuyper wrote for what is called the postmodern world. He was way ahead of his time. He did a lot of groundbreaking work in how the church should function in society."

Weddings and Recommitments in Brazil



For many couples attending BTGMI's Portuguese marriage conference in Brazil, it was their first time hearing the gospel. Invited by a friend and new to the conference, Humberto Gouvea Figueiredo and his wife testified with tears in their eyes, "God has spoken to [us] at this conference."

Feathered Flights

Does it snow at your house in the winter? If it does, then you probably know people who like to go to Florida or other warm places in the winter. Maybe you and your family have done that. But imagine if you had to pack up everything you own and move to a different state or province because there was not

enough food at your house. That's what some birds do every winter!

Many birds *migrate* to warm places in the fall. (*Migrate* is a fancy word that means to travel to another place.) They fly south to look for food to eat and places to nest. It's not just a vacation!



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Out-of-Towners

Look out your window. What kinds of birds do you see? If you live in the southern United States—including Texas, California, Louisiana, Arkansas, or the Carolinas—the birds in your back yard might be visitors from out of town! Birds that go to warmer places for the winter are called *migrant* birds. Many kinds of ducks, geese, tree warblers, gray catbirds, and brown thrashers fly south for the winter. These birds usually come from Canada, the Arctic, or northern states.



We never go anywhere! Every year the Redstarts go to the Caribbean. But do we? Noooo... "Let's stay in Michigan," you say; "It's such a long trip!" you say...

Tropical Travelers

People aren't the only ones who visit beautiful islands during the winter months. Blue warblers and American redstarts migrate to Caribbean islands—including Jamaica, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. These amazing birds don't need an airplane to fly south. Some birds can fly for days over open water! Other birds like Western tangers, hummingbirds, and orioles fly to Mexico and Central America. The scarlet tanager, Eastern kingbird, and some kinds of hawks travel from North America to places like Argentina and Brazil in South America.



Brrrrrr: Birds on Stay-cation

If you live in Canada or the northern United States, the birds you see through your window might be *resident birds*. A resident bird is a bird that does not migrate to warmer places. These birds can survive in very cold weather. They include pigeons, doves, bluejays, cardinals, sparrows, woodpeckers, finches, mockingbirds, crows, blackbirds, and bluebirds. How do these feathered friends live in such cold places? They usually eat seeds or find sleeping insects and spiders under tree bark. Their bodies grow thick layers of feathers to keep them warm during snowy winter months.

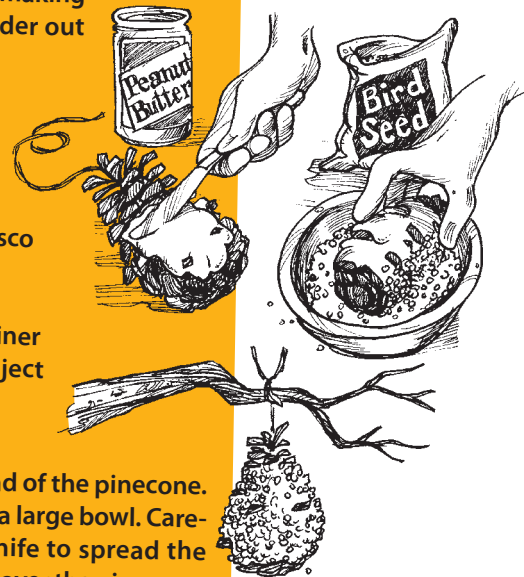


Feed the Birds!

You can keep the birds in your backyard well fed this winter by making a homemade bird feeder out of pinecones.

What you need:

- Pinecone collected from outside
- Yarn or string
- Peanut butter or Crisco
- Birdseed
- Plastic knife
- Large bowl or container
- Newspaper (this project can get a bit messy!)



What to do:

Tie the string to one end of the pinecone. Pour the birdseed into a large bowl. Carefully use the plastic knife to spread the peanut butter or Crisco over the pinecone. Try to cover the whole pinecone. Then dip the pinecone in the birdseed and use your hands to gently press the seeds onto the pinecone. Hang the pinecone on a low branch in your yard.

If you can't find a pinecone, use a piece of toast or stale bread. Poke a hole near the top of the bread and string the yarn through the hole. Spread peanut butter or Crisco on the toast and coat it with seeds—now you have an edible bird feeder!

Birds in the Bible

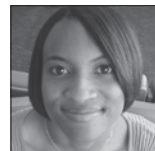
There are lots of stories in the Bible that talk about traveling birds!

- Noah sent a raven and later a dove from the ark to see if the flood waters had gone down (Genesis 8:6-12). These birds flew a long way to look for new land to live on.
- God sent the Israelites quail to eat in the desert (Exodus 16:13).
- God sent ravens to feed his prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:4).
- Jesus talks about how God takes care of even the smallest sparrow: "... not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care" (Matthew 10:29). If God takes care of the smallest birds, he will definitely take care of you!

Look up the following verses and draw a line from each bird to the verse that talks about it.

OSTRICH
HEN
EAGLE
FALCON

ISAIAH 40:31
JOB 28:7
JOB 39:13
MATTHEW 23:37



Christin Baker is a full-time stay-at-home mom. She is a member of Resurrection Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Three Steps to *Better* New Year's Resolutions

WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO READ might shock you. It might enrage you. It might even make you want you scribble a nasty letter to the editor. But know that I am writing this for your own good. So it might be best to sit down, take a few deep breaths, and heed my words:

You're making your New Year's resolutions all wrong. And you need to stop it right now.

I am serious. This is serious. New Year's resolutions are a big deal, and I am sick and tired of watching you people fail at them. Don't try to pretend like you don't fail at yours. A recent study by the University of Scranton's *Journal of Clinical Psychology* suggests that an alarming 92 percent of Americans (Canadians and others, I'm throwing you in here too) botch their resolutions—92 percent. Of the 8 percent that succeed, I suspect half are lying to cover their shame. Through my own research, I discovered that none of them are Calvinists. This is unacceptable.

Fortunately, I have developed a three-step approach to crafting the perfect New Year's resolution. Not only will these steps lead to creating successful resolutions for years to come, they will also make you a better Christian. I'm sure of it. If you've already made your resolutions, burn them. If you have yet to make one, prepare yourself for greatness. If you're one of those people who "don't make New Year's resolutions," now you will. Behold the fruit of my labor.

Step 1: Start with What You Lack

Write down all the ways in which you are inadequate. Perhaps it is your weight or your eating habits. Maybe it's your financial situation, the way you spend money, or your negative outlook on life. Yes, you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Of course, you are God's workmanship. A royal priesthood? Absolutely! But this is no time to respond as a grateful servant.

Now is not the time to consider sharing the gifts God has given you. This is a time to highlight all that you don't have but wish you did—like, maybe, a beautiful companion. Perhaps

your car is a piece of junk, or you just feel dumber than most people. These are all good. Write them down.

After filling a few notebooks, you may feel like you're done. You're not. Take a break and come back. You'll think of plenty more things to list while you're crying in the bathroom. I filled up six notebooks just the other day. When you're finally done, you'll notice a few gems that really sting. Congratulations. What's more, now you've got a whole arsenal of inadequacies on file. You can even plan ahead for 2017 and well into the next millennium.

Maybe you don't lack anything. That's great! I bet you want stuff, though. Jot everything down in your notebook. Want to run a marathon? Excellent. Climb Everest? Perfect. Buy an island? Now you're talking! I know Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." But that only applies to people on their deathbeds. That's not you. You, my friend, are not dying. You are seeking life.

When you've finally pegged a desire or two that makes you really salivate, don't ask God for it. Asking requires waiting, waiting takes time, and you've only got a year. Go ahead and take it. God's going to say yes, anyway, right? And trust me on this, he wants what you want. He wants you to be fully you in the world, and no one else. So go and take whatever you want as soon as you can. It may be helpful to start every day with this simple phrase, "Take, take, take, take, take." Then proceed directly to Step 3.

Step 2: Focus on the Finite

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus urges us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. In doing so, all our anxieties will fade and all our needs will be met. I couldn't agree more. However, I would posit that the kingdom of God is infinite. It will be around forever. In fact, Jesus is there right now making a place for you. And since he's the perfect carpenter, I bet it's going to be spectacular.

What won't be around forever are your fleshly desires in the here and now. They are the things you can't take with you. I can almost guarantee you'll miss them when they're gone—or when you're gone, whichever comes first. Remember, "you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." When it's gone, it's gone.

To avoid any regret, decide on the New Year's resolution that satisfies your flesh. Soon it will be a fleeting memory. Choose whatever makes you feel as powerful as possible and gives you the most control.

Top fleshly choices in years past include:

1. Lose weight/get fit.
2. Load up on retirement savings.
3. Learn something new.
4. Practice healthier eating.

With your final self-fulfilling resolution chosen, head on to Step 3.

Step 3: Take Everything Seriously

Now you are ready to embark on your New Year's resolution. It's important to start by remembering the only reason God created you: to be a radical, extraordinary, countercultural, freedom-fighting, superhuman force of nature. You were created for the sole purpose of changing the world. You need to become a famous, shining beacon of perfection for the whole world to see. Nothing less will do.

This is not something that magically happens. Oh no. This takes a change of habit that can only come through strict dedication to your New Year's resolution. Research from University College London shows that creating a new habit requires

You, my friend, are seeking life.

about 66 consecutive days of regimented attention. That's the time needed to rewire the neural pathways in your brain. You must take these first 66 days seriously. No compromising. No failing. No smiling or direct eye contact.

Why?

God needs you. I mean, he actually needs you. He cannot carry the weight of a broken cosmos alone. In fact, his plan for the salvation of the world hinges on your good deeds and promises as much as his own. When God knit you in your mother's womb, it was only because he needed your help uniting all mankind. So don't botch this up. Don't let God down. The fate of the soul and the world is in your hands. I mean, think about it, Jesus came here to save you. The least you can do is return the favor.

To keep you on task for those first 66 days, simply repeat at 90-second intervals the words Jesus will say to you if you blow this:

"I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoer!"
If that doesn't keep you motivated, nothing will.

* * *

At this point, I'm sure you can't wait to develop your 2016 New Year's resolutions. I'm feeling so confident in my new approach, I might even give it a whirl myself. In the meantime, I'm going to call someone over at the University of Scranton's *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. I can't wait to let them know about the big changes that are coming. Have a happy New Year. Remember, when it comes New Year's resolutions, every square inch belongs to us—and God—but mostly us. For that is what most New Year's resolutions are mostly all about. ■



Evan Koons is a writer, actor, and host of the small group series "For the Life of the World: Letters to the Exiles" (letterstotheexiles.com). He attends Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Learning How to Talk



SYNOCDICAL REPORTS FROM 1973, 2002, AND NOW 2016 all encourage churches to engage in dialogue about LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) matters. But where to begin? What resources should you use? Small groups are often the best place to start. The resources listed below may be helpful for your congregation.

Bridging the Gap: BTG is a downloadable video resource split into four segments for small groups. It both affirms the CRC's 1973 report and introduces some of the diversity among LGBT Christians. newdirection.ca/our-products/

The Colossian Way: A 10-session curriculum equipping Christians to navigate their disagreements about sexuality in a Christ-like manner. Attending to Scripture and the resources of faith, this resource invites prayerful listening with the expectation of transformation. Leader training is available. colossianforum.org/resources/tcw/

Living in the Tension: The Marin Foundation provides a free gathering guide for those wanting to launch their own Living in the Tension group. Gathering people from different faith backgrounds, different sexual orientations, and different gender identities, this resource may be particularly relevant for churches with good connections in their neighborhood. themarinfoundation.org/get-involved/living-in-the-tension-gatherings/

Generous Space Groups (GSGs): Intended to be ongoing small groups,

GSGs are centered around the values of humility, hospitality, mutuality, and justice. Differences aren't viewed as problems to fix but as spiritually formational as we grow in loving and serving one another in community. A staff member helps launch the group and connects other LGBT Christians in your area to your group. This is a great resource for congregations that work well with other churches in their area. newdirection.ca/dt_benefits/generous-space-groups/

In addition to these group resources, the following books are current contributions to the broader LGBT church conversation:

A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical Pastor's Path to Embrace People Who Are Gay, Lesbian, and Transgendered into the Company of Jesus by Ken Wilson. (Read the Spirit, 2014)

Oriented to Faith: Transforming the Conflict Over Gay Relationships by Tim Otto (Wipf & Stock, 2014)

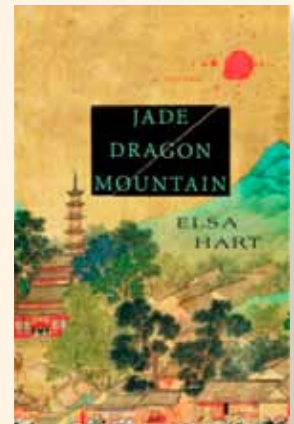
The Virtue of Dialogue: Conversation as a Hopeful Practice of Church Communities by Christopher Smith. (Patheos Press, 2012)

Generous Spaciousness: Responding to Gay Christians in the Church by Wendy VanderWal-Gritter. (Brazos Press, 2014)

For more resources see the Study Report, p. 56. crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex_marriage.pdf ■



Wendy Gritter serves as executive director of New Direction Ministries and is a member of Meadowvale Community CRC in Mississauga, Ontario.



Jade Dragon Mountain

by **Elsa Hart**

reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

In 1708, exiled Chinese librarian Li Du arrives in Dayan, near the border of China and Tibet, preparing to leave his native land forever. Soon after, a Jesuit priest is murdered, and Li Du is propelled into the role of chief detective. *Jade Dragon Mountain* invites readers into a world of lush detail, portraying China's geography, culture, history, and relationship to the West in the early eighteenth century. Intriguing, well-developed characters make this combination mystery and historical novel an enjoyable, enlightening page-turner. (Minotaur Books)



Where to begin?



THE
GIVENNESS
OF THINGS
ESSAYS
MARILYNNE
ROBINSON
PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING NARRATOR OF CEEAAT

The Givenness of Things

by Marilynne Robinson
reviewed by Phil Christman Jr.

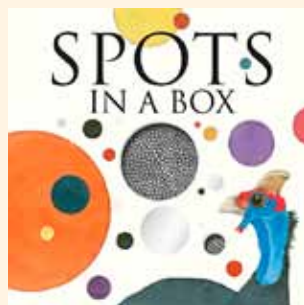
Robinson is America's foremost living Christian essayist and novelist—though I'd go further and call her the country's best living writer. This collection of speeches is the clearest single-volume statement of her theology, aesthetics, and politics. As such it is an essential purchase for anyone who cares about those topics, or Robinson, or, well, life. The talks, which take up many common threads (Shakespeare, grace, fear), offer a poignant glimpse of a writer whose intellectual and moral passion gathers force as she ages. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)



Servant of Love

by Patty Griffin
reviewed by Robert N. Hosack

Griffin's ninth studio album offers a robust contribution to her American roots music discography. The 13 diverse offerings explore themes of love and mystery set against the background of everyday life. These mystical musings are supported by travels through different musical terrains, as folk, blues, rock, and jazz strains conspire to reveal a rootsy sonic landscape. The record reveals an edgier Griffin, yet this introspective "servant of love" is able to gaze upon humanity, surviving, according to the title of one of her tracks, as "a rider of days." (PGM)



Spots in a Box

by Helen Ward
reviewed by Gwen Marra

What would you do if you were a guinea fowl without any spots? You would send away for some, of course! This is exactly what happens in *Spots in a Box*, but the surprise comes as each package is opened and the spots are not what was expected: some spots are too big, some spots cause sneezing, and some spots light up. The rhyme, rhythm, and fun illustrations keep the reader engaged on this journey. Which spots does the guinea fowl choose? You will have to read to find out! Ages 3 and up. (Candlewick Press)

Mr. Holmes

reviewed by Kristy Quist

Sherlock Holmes (Ian McKellan), now elderly and living by the seaside, finds that close observation and deductive reasoning make for a good detective but not necessarily a fulfilling life. He attempts to correctly remember the events that led to his retirement, even as his memory fails. The slow plot progression is rescued by wonderful performances. McKellan arouses in viewers both frustration with his rude treatment of his caregivers and empathy for his obvious isolation. Mournful and full of regret as Holmes looks back on his proud ways, there is a gentle beauty in this look at very late-in-life redemption. On disc now. (Lionsgate)

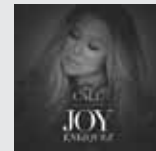
THE LOWDOWN



Reel Battle: From Alex and Stephen Kendrick, the creators of popular faith-based films *Fireproof* and *Courageous*, comes the prayer-focused movie *War Room*, now available on disc. (Sony)



Miss Maggie: Can't get enough of Maggie Smith on *Downton Abbey*? In *The Lady in the Van*, Smith stars in the real-life story of a homeless woman who lives in her van, parked "temporarily" in someone else's driveway for 15 years. In theaters this month. (Sony)



New Start: Actress and singer Joy Enriquez left a burgeoning

music career in the early 2000s to find what God had in mind for her; her new album *The Call* debuts this month. (Lifestyle)

Best of 2015: To see what some of our reviewers have chosen as their 2015 top picks in books, movies, or music, go to thebanner.org.

MORE REVIEWS
ONLINE

I Never Had a Chance to Say Goodbye

FOR MANY YEARS I have treasured one of Isaiah's proclamations about the servant of the Lord that is applied to Jesus in the New Testament. It involves two images well known to the prophet's audience: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isa. 42:3). These two metaphors exude tenderness and compassion for the hurting.

My dear wife, Judy, had many "bruised reed" and "smoldering wick" experiences, especially when she was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis when she was 35 years old. Each time, our Lord tenderly restored and strengthened her. The Good Shepherd led her through the valleys and comforted her.

In the spring of 2013, she went into the deepest, darkest valley of her life. She spent nearly three weeks in a psychiatric hospital after an emotional breakdown. Soon after, doctors diagnosed a back condition that caused tremendous pain. While preparing for back surgery, we also learned that she had a non-malignant brain tumor on her optic nerve. We were told that surgery on this would be extremely risky; the prognosis was dire.

All of this took a toll on her faith. As the bad news piled up, she felt like a smoldering wick. At one point, she hugged me and said, "I wish I could go to sleep and wake up in heaven." Sadly, it did not happen that way. Overwhelmed by all she was facing, she snuffed out the wick rather than waiting on the Lord to rekindle it.

Over the years, she had talked about suicide. There were times when I drove home wondering if she would still be alive. Yet, when it happened, the reality was shocking. By God's grace, I am comforted now to know that she is no longer suffering but rather is experiencing a peace beyond our comprehension.

I believe God did not cause Judy to end her life. Nor did God prevent Judy from taking things into her own hands. At the same time, I am convinced that God did not plan it.

This raises the question about the psalmist's claim that all our days are numbered or ordained for us. It brings to the surface the ongoing struggle of how to balance God's sovereignty and our human responsibility. I am learning to live with the questions rather than searching for explanations.

I used to think that suicide was the cruelest act one could do to those left behind. Many survivors experience severe anger. For me that has not been the case. Instead of rage, my reaction has been one of deep sadness that the human spirit can get so



low that everything seems hopeless. Along with sadness is the disappointment that I did not have a chance to say goodbye.

When Judy died, something in me died also. A vacuum was created that no one else can fill. Her special way of affirming me, the intimacy we shared, her wonderful smile, and our mutual care for each other are all memories now, no longer to be experienced. I miss the everyday things we

God has and continues to reach out to me through family, friends, and my brothers and sisters at church.

used to enjoy. She is no longer able to assist me when I am stuck with a crossword puzzle clue. She is not there to look over a completed jigsaw puzzle. I no longer hear words of appreciation about the flowers in the garden or share chuckles with her about our favorite comic strips.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “There is nothing that can replace the absence of someone dear to us, and one should not even attempt to do so. One must simply hold out and endure it. . . . But gratitude transforms the torment of memory into silent joy. One bears what was lovely in the past not as a thorn but as a precious gift deep within, a hidden treasure of which one can always be certain” (*Letters and Papers from Prison*).

For me, it has been extremely helpful to keep thanking God for the wonderful times Judy and

I shared together. By God’s grace, in spite of Judy’s suffering during the last 35 years of our marriage, the good times far outweighed the bad ones. It helps me to keep this in focus as I continue in my journey.

One does not “get over” the loss of a dear loved one. Gradually, you learn to live with it. One bereaved person put it this way: “The loss, the emptiness, the separation will subside to a dull ache you learn to live with.” Nearly seven months into the process, I am only beginning.

As the psalmist said, our God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (Ps. 147:3). But much depends on what we do. If we continue to wallow in the loss or remain bitter and angry, our woundedness remains. Difficult as it may be, we have a choice. In his book *Walking with God through Suffering*, Tim Keller writes, “So walking with God through suffering means that, in general, you will not experience some kind of instant deliverance from your questions, your sorrow, your fears. . . . There will certainly be progress . . . but in general it will be slow and steady progress that comes only if you stick to the regular, daily activities of the walking itself.”

I have no idea how my journey will continue to unfold. I pray that I will always be fully aware of God’s presence, love, grace, faithfulness, rich promises, and understanding. This is the solid foundation that enables me to cope with the adjustments of living without Judy.

God has and continues to reach out to me through family, friends, and my brothers and sisters at church. Among my blessings are nonjudgmental persons who listen to me tell the story repeatedly. Caring persons who pray faithfully for me. Patient persons who do not give up on me as I walk through the pain. Informed persons who understand that grieving is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith, but the price of love. Inspiring persons who encourage me to exercise, eat healthy meals, and get adequate sleep. Insightful persons who are aware of my vulnerability.

With God’s help and the support of the Christian community, I am letting go and reordering my life. And I am praying that at the core of developing a new identity, God will mold me more firmly into the image of his Son. ■



Robert Koornneef is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. He is semi-retired and serves as a minister to seniors at Calvin CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Endangered Revelation

Creation has been preaching ever since God called it good.

IMAGINE YOUR PASTOR taking the pulpit with a Bible in one hand and a lighter in the other. He or she tears a page from the Scriptures, and, with a flick of the thumb, ignites a small flame and sets the page on fire, watching as the words crumble and dissolve to ash on the pulpit.

The pastor burns another page, then another. People start whispering; a disapproving murmur spreads throughout the sanctuary.

Now imagine that this copy of the Bible was the only one left in existence. How would the congregation react? Would the pastor even have time to light a second page before a mob of angry Christians did something to rescue their precious book?

Believe it or not, this is happening. What's almost more concerning is that God's people are hardly stirring in the pews.

The Belgic Confession, a vibrant statement of Reformed faith written in 1561, states clearly, We know God . . . first, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God's eternal power and divinity (Art. 2).

According to this, creation is a kind of holy book. Just as God's Word reveals God to humanity, God's world too is actively pointing to him.

But sadly, creation is in danger. The book is burning.

Just last week I hiked along the shore of a river named after the passenger pigeon, a once plentiful species that is now entirely extinct. Along the riverbank I read on a plaque the words of a young Potawatomi leader describing his encounter with a flock of passenger pigeons: "I beheld moving toward me in an unbroken front millions of pigeons, the first I had seen that season. . . . I have stood by the grandest waterfall of America, yet never have my astonishment, wonder, and admiration been so stirred as when I have witnessed these birds drop from their course like meteors from heaven."

As I read, I imagined how my hiking prayers might have been different, infused with wonder and surprise, had I come across a flight of passenger pigeons along the way. How might the sights and sounds have directed my heart like the lines of a psalm, offering a new vocabulary of praise? The reality is that we will never know just what it is these birds have to show us about God. And if the trend continues, how much less of the beautiful book of creation will our children be able to read? What aspects of God's grandeur will forever be stunted in our understanding because of a marred revelation?

While I do not pretend to have the educational background needed to debate the validity of important environmental issues

such as climate change, I do know that Christians are called to care about creation, regardless of political affiliation. For me, it's enough to know that though the heavens declare the glory of God, the declaration is muffled in many cities because of smog. I know enough of my own harmful habits to say that we have walked the pages of this book irreverently, drilling into verses and leveling entire chapters, taking what we want and throwing away the rest. We've grown accustomed to using this book for our own purposes, a most terrible hermeneutic.

And yet Reformed Christians have an incredible opportunity. Believing that God's creation is a vital source of revelation, we have a chance to lead the ecological movement by committing ourselves to the service and protection of the planet. As people devoted to the message of God, let us not forget that creation has been preaching ever since God called it good. The Belgic Confession says it simply and clearly: this is how "we know God." It's time we rose from our pews to protect God's endangered revelation. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Bryant Russ is a Bible teacher at Holland Christian High School. He attends Faith CRC in Holland, Mich., and blogs at onehundreddangerussgifts.com.

FAQs

Justice

Q Is public shaming a just response to bad behavior?

A Exposing unacceptable behavior through social media is the modern equivalent of wearing a “scarlet letter” or sitting in stocks in the public square. I grew up in a church that forced women who were pregnant before marriage to confess in front of the congregation while other sinners looked on. I’m glad most churches now use forms of discipline that respect the dignity of the person. But I join public campaigns that shame companies who practice child labor, for example.

Public shaming can be an effective form of nonviolent resistance against social evils such as racism and exploitation. The possibility of being shamed acts as a restraint on antisocial behavior. When someone’s reputation is ruined for a small indiscretion, shaming is not just. It gives power to the powerless, and that power can be used for petty revenge or venting anger, both of which are not just. Tweets about a classmate’s dress, hair, or lifestyle, for example, create feelings of shame. But it is the sender who should be ashamed of such actions.

There are no established norms to guide the use of public shaming, but we need them. The following may be a start. Public shaming might be acceptable if

- the action being shamed is a serious violation of widely accepted norms.
- significant benefits will result from ending the practice being shamed.
- due process is followed, and care is taken to prevent harm to persons.
- a formal process to pursue justice is not available.
- motivation is conscientious choice, not venting rage or vengeance.

—Kathy Vandergrift is a public policy analyst living in Ottawa, Ont.

Believers of all ages share common spiritual needs and longings.

Outreach

Q Isn’t Christianity a psychological crutch? **People who believe in God do so because they feel a need to rely on something stronger than themselves and it makes them feel better.**

A First, just because my belief in God makes me feel good or gives me comfort does not prove whether God exists or not. My feelings about something may or may not reflect the reality of it. For instance, the idea of receiving an Apple Watch for Christmas may make you feel good. You may also feel good about having it delivered by Santa. You feel good about both ideas, but one of them is grounded in reality and the other is not.

Second, many atheists today admit that they do not want there to be a God or a creator of the universe. Their fundamental objection to theism is not so much a lack of evidence or proof as it is an expression of their deep wishes. They simply do not like the idea that they have to submit to a higher being. So it’s fair to ask them, “Isn’t your atheism a psychological projection of your wants and wishes? You dislike the universe with a creator in it so much that you have projected into your mind a world without God. Isn’t your atheistic view a psychological crutch?”

Third, if the God of the Bible were a projection of my wants and desires, then it would follow that my adherence to that God would bring about my own wants and desires. In other words, the God I created out of my own imagination would not transcend me. But the reality is that the God of the Bible demands me to sacrifice myself and serve him. I personally find following God the most difficult thing to do because he transcends me and demands of me things that run counter to my wants and desires.

—Victor Ko is a church planter with mosaicHouse in Edmonton, Alta.

Faith Formation

Q Has intentionally engaging all ages through worship become an important value in the CRC? **During Sunday dinner today, our 15-year-old commented, “It struck me that [this morning’s] worship and the message related beautifully to my life, and it seemed to me they related just as much to Grandpa’s life.”**

A I think so. Maybe it’s more accurate to say that it’s gradually becoming an important value. I’ve met some folks who are worried that we’re becoming an either/or church: we used to focus too much on adults in our worship and now we’ve swung to the other end to focus on children and teens.

I’m not worried about that. Faith development research tells us that believers of all ages share common spiritual needs and longings. Worship leaders and preachers can minister to these commonalities, drawing in people of all ages through invitational language, examples, and stories. In addition, every year there are more and more strong resources designed to equip us to be a church that engages all generations deeply.

Your teen’s observation warms my heart.

—Syd Hielema is a team leader for Faith Formation Ministries. He is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ont. ■

ADS

Deadlines: February Issue is 1/4/16; March issue is 2/1/16. Details online.

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

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

Denominational and Classical

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS HEARTLAND will meet March 5, 2016, at First CRC, Hull, Iowa. Agenda materials are due to the stated clerk by January 16, 2016. Rev. Robert Drenten, S. C., 1405 Albany Ave NE, Orange City, IA 51041. robert.drenten@gmail.com

Congregational

PALM LANE CRC in Scottsdale, AZ held its last service on November 22, 2015, celebrating 51 years of worshiping, praising and serving our faithful God. We are thankful for all that have served and been a party of our family.

MARANATHA COMMUNITY CHURCH CRC The Maranatha Community Church CRC will meet at Farnsworth Hall, 6159 University Drive, Mesa AZ from Dec thru 2nd Sunday in April at 10:00 AM Visitors are welcome. Please confirm and send billing to harlanram@gmail.com

LK ALFRED FLA MINISTRY- 140 Mallard Rd 33850 near Winter Haven & Orlando Rt 17/92. www.lakealfredministry.org, phone

863-422-6442. Preachers: Feb Rev John Witvliet; Mar 6-April 10 Rev. Ron Noorman.

Church's 50th Anniversary

NORTH HILLS CRC, TROY, MI will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2016. All friends, former members and others interested are invited to celebrate with us at a banquet on April 16, 2016 and a celebratory worship service on April 17, 2016. Please send us your contact information so that we can give you further information. Contact Rev. Randy Engle at randyengle@aol.com or his administrative assistant, Susan Ballard, at admin@northhillscrc.org. Telephone: (248) 645-1990.

General

VANDER ARK Saramae (Witt) celebrates 70 years as a church organist in January 2016. She has served in the following CRCs: Harderwyk and 16th St, Holland, MI; Trenton, Ontario; Immanuel Ripon, CA; Ideal Park, Wyoming, MI; and for the last 53 years at Covenant, Cutlerville, MI. Service of thanksgiving and celebration: January 17, 9:30 am, Covenant CRC, featuring organ, brass, tympani, and choir. Psalm 33:1-3

Birthdays

90th Birthday

BENNIE GROEN of Renville, MN celebrated his 90th birthday on November 2nd. Celebrating God's grace and goodness in his life are his wife, Adeline, children: Dave and Arlene Groen, Roger and Judy (deceased 2014) Groen, Mary and Kevin Koppendrayner, Carol and Carl Veurink, Steve and Karen Groen, Doug and Anne Groen, 19 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren.

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary

VANDENBERG John & Marian (Zylstra) 2121 Raybrook SE DV-364, GR, MI, 49546, mark 70 years of marriage on January 18, 2016. They and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren praise God for his faithfulness and blessings. Psalm 100:5

65th Anniversary

RUDENGA Edward J and Sylvia (Van Til), 401 E US 30, Apt 201, Schererville, IN 46375, celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary November 10, 2015. They, with their children: Jack & Liz Rudenga, Russel & Elizabeth Rudenga, Joan & Adam Wegner, 7 grandchildren, 5 great-grandchildren, praise God for the many blessings experienced during these years.

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Obituaries

DECKER Stephen Anthony Decker, age 65 is at peace with his Lord after victory in his year-long battle from cancer. 417 South Kenilworth Ave, Elmhurst, IL, 60126. He was a man of deep faith, gentle wisdom and good humor. Beloved husband of Dianne Decker, nee Murray; loving father of Jason R. Decker, Rachel D. (Robert) Baker, Nathaniel J (Jacque) Decker, Luke A. (Monica) Decker, Joanna R. (John) Redden; devoted grandfather of Alma, Anita, Vera, Lily, Naomi, and Elliott Decker, Noah, Jacob, & Rebekah Redden, and Matthew Baker; cherished son of Wanda and the late Anita and the late Louis Charles Decker; fond brother of Ann Loise (Keith) Decker Lyons, Patricia Lynn Decker, Louis Charles (Barbara) Decker Jr., and Barbara Ann (Daniel) Kirkham.

KOOY Richard, age 89, of Orland Park, IL, went home to be with the Lord on November 21, 2015. WWII US Navy Veteran. Beloved husband of Eleanor, nee Bloem, and the late Annette, nee Olthoff. Loving father of Doris (Paul) Boer, Jennifer (Timothy) Zoeterman, Richard J. (Karen) Kooy and the late Jo Ann Krepes. Dear step father of Beth Ann (Charles) Leensvaart and Keith (Joanne) Brink. Cherished grandfather of 13 and great-grandfather of 27. Fond brother of Johanna (late Marvin) Witteveen, John (Sue and the late Elizabeth) Kooy, and the late Peter (late Cornelia) Kooy, Jeanette (late Andrew) Van Dyke, and Ralph (Evelyn) Kooy. Retired from Chevrolet Division of GM with 30 years of service.

OPPEWAL Leona Grace, age 86, of Whitinsville, MA, went to be with her Lord October 21, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband Jacob Oppewal, and her sisters Jennie Hoving and Gertrude Cook. Lee is survived by her brother Herman Schutt and her children Faith (Henry) Lane, Tom (Sonda) Oppewal, Peg (Dan) Wierenga, and Cynthia (Steve) Mellema, seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

RITSEMA Marvin J, age 76, of Grandville, MI joined his siblings, Beth Noble and John Ritsema in glory on Oct 29, 2015. He was a Calvin College grad and a choral director for many years at Zeeland and Holland Chr schools. He was named teacher of the year by the Michigan School Vocal Assoc in 1987. He will be lovingly remembered by his sister, Lu, his children and their families, Cheri and Ken Dykhouse,

Kathi and Todd Hammond, Mary and Matt vanBuren, and their mother Dianne (Nagelkirk) Swierenga.

SCHULTZE William C. age 88, died Tuesday, November 17, 2015. Surviving are his wife, Mary; children, Daniel (Jill), Ruth (Patrick) Sicklesteele, Martha (Timothy) Slot, Timothy (Lori), Joel (Julie); brother, Gordon (Phyllis); 13 grandchildren; 6 great grandchildren; and 3 step great grandchildren.

VANDERGRIFT Laurens (Larry) of Ottawa, Ont. passed away on November 1, 2015, age 68. He is survived by wife Kathy, son Michael and wife Elaine, daughters Ellen and Andrea, 4 grandchildren, and six brothers and sisters.

VANDERKOOI, Lambert, 80, of Kalamazoo, MI went to be with his Savior and Lord on November 17, 2015. Surviving are his wife of 50 years, Agatha, children, Ray (Shari), Joel (Jackie), Glen (Kori), Beth (Greg) Rozeveld and 13 grandchildren.

VANDERLAAN Robert, went to be with his Lord on Sunday, Nov. 1, 2015. Preceded in death by his wife, Millie of 64 years; survived by his children, Linda and Dan Slotsema, Robert and Ann VanderLaan; grandchildren and great grandchildren; Paul and Pam Slotsema (Polly, Preston & Pierce); Nicole VanderLaan; Katherine and Luke Raymond, (Sarah Claire); Christine and Patrick Minor (Zelda and Adelaide); David Slotsema; Michael and Rachel Slotsema; Jane Slotsema, and Sarah Slotsema.

Volunteers

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Church Position Announcements

PASTOR: 2nd CRC of Fremont, MI is in need of a Pastor to share the good news of Jesus Christ to our congregation and community. For more information and our church profile, please contact Jason DeKuiper at jdekuiper@comcast.net.

WORSHIP/MUSIC COORDINATOR Graafschap Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan is seeking to fill a 30 hour per week position for Worship and Music Coordinator. This position requires a servant of Christ who understands the biblical concepts of worship and appreciates the emphases of Reformed theology in worship. The individual will be a vital part of Graafschap's life and ministry and should be able to love and empathize with her. Interested candidates can submit a resume with references or other inquiries to: Graafschap CRC, 5973 Church Street, Holland, MI 49423 attn: Worship/Music Search Committee or graafschapworship@gmail.com.

LEAD PASTOR: Cadillac CRC, a vibrant church in scenic Northern Michigan, is seeking a Lead Pastor. Please see our church profile at crna.org, visit our website at cadrc.org, or contact our search committee chair (Glen Van Antwerp) at vanantg@gmail.com or 231-829-3470 for more information about our congregation.

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PASTOR Kelloggsville CRC in SE Grand Rapids, MI is seeking a full-time pastor. KCRC is an increasingly diverse and contemporary congregation that is deeply rooted in our community and faith. For additional information please contact search@kccrc.org

PASTOR Rudyard CRC in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan (God's Country) is currently searching for a full time pastor. We are a solid, Loving and Faithful Church. We are kind of traditional with great youth and children programs. For information and church profile please contact Woody Bandstra at wbandstra@yahoo.com or call 906-248-5388



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PRESIDENT Words of Hope, an international media ministry headquartered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is seeking an outstanding leader to serve as its president. Words of Hope was founded in 1945 and over the years has become an international ministry seeking to be used by Christ in building His church in the hard places—those places in the world with the least access to the gospel and the fewest resources for media ministry. This work is accomplished by partnering with indigenous churches and ministries to help them equip and sustain Christian communicators who proclaim the gospel and teach the Word of God in the “heart languages” of their people. The next president of Words of Hope will be called upon to advance this mission by providing visionary, strategic, and effective leadership within the organization and in conjunction with our international partners. For more information, visit woh.org. Consideration of applications will begin January 15, 2016.

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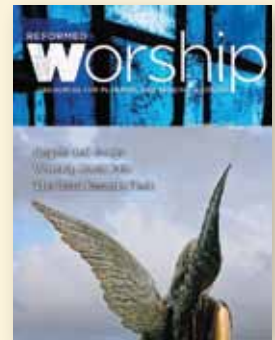
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Punch Lines

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. Thanks!

In the preschool Sunday school class, as an opening activity for the story of Abraham and Sarah and God's promise to make their descendents numerous, the children unrolled and counted 100 sheets of toilet paper to get a sense for Abraham's age.

We talked about Abraham's age and how LONG he had to wait for God's promise to come true. We continued with the story and talked again about God's promise to bless Abraham and give him a great family. "Finally," I said, "Isaac is born, and we see God's promise starting to be fulfilled."

As we wrapped up the lesson I asked in review, "What was God's promise to Abraham?"

An eager preschooler enthusiastically replied, "That he would always have plenty of toilet paper!"
—*Dawn Baker*

After church one Sunday, one of the parishioners asked the preacher to pray for his hearing. The minister laid hands on the man's ears and prayed.

Then he stepped back and said, "Can you hear me?"

The parishioner replied, "Yes. I could hear you before you prayed—my hearing isn't until Wednesday!"

—*Sylvia Hancock*

My 11-year-old son insisted that "shut up" is in the Bible, so it's OK for him to say it too.

I assured him that it is not in the Bible. Then he showed me Joshua 6:1: "Now Jericho was tightly shut up because of the Israelites."

—*Rosanne Eising*

The fattest knight at King Arthur's round table was Sir Cumference. He acquired his size from too much pi.

—*Dave Smit*

A second-grade teacher was telling the story of Lot leaving Sodom and Gomorrah. She told how an angel told Lot to take his wife and flee to the mountains. And they did. But Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt.

After a bit of thought, a little boy asked, "What did the flea turn into?"

—*Bob Lubbers*

A dog gave birth to puppies near the road. And was cited for littering.

—*L. Knoops*

A young lad was instructed to pay attention in the Sunday morning worship service.

"Be sure to listen so you can tell me what the preacher said

since I can't be there," his dad told him.

Following the service, his father asked, "So what did the minister preach about?"

"He preached about sin," replied the boy.

"Well, what did he say about it?" asked his dad.

"He said he was against it."

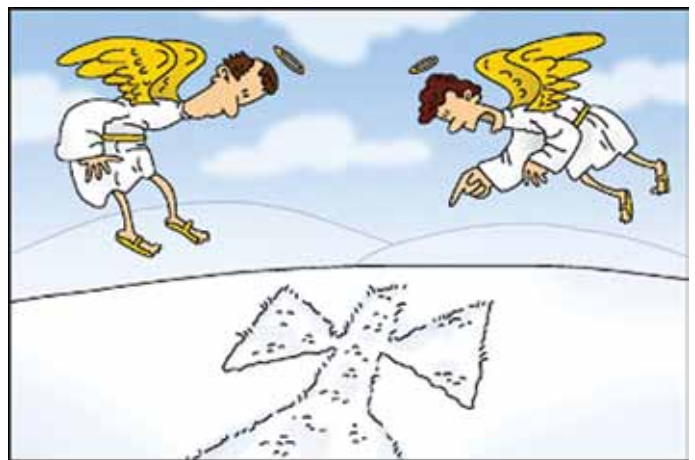
—*Walt DeRuiter*

What kind of car did the early disciples drive?

It was a Honda.

(See Acts 2:1, KJV: They were all [in] one Accord. . . .)

—*Chuck Lindemulder*



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12 Tuesday

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