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The Elephant in the Room

THE AUTHORS OF THE EXCELLENT SYNODICAL REPORT ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE made it clear they felt hampered by synod's prohibition on revisiting *earlier* synodical decisions on homosexuality (1973, 2002). I don't think the issue of same-sex marriage can be thoroughly evaluated without dealing with the larger issue of same-sex relationships. We still have an elephant in the room.

I suspect that this prohibition stemmed from an understandable fear that we simply cannot discuss this issue without tearing apart our denomination. After all, look at what has happened to other denominations like the Presbyterian Church (USA).

But the issue won't go away. A surprisingly widespread discussion of same-sex relationships and marriage is going on right now all over the denomination, around kitchen tables, in the living room with family or friends, in small groups, and in church councils. Many older adults are realizing that their children and grandchildren have very different views on the subject. Pastors and councils are discovering that their congregations are not of one mind about it.

A friend compared our reticence on this issue to what sometimes happens in a marriage. Discord arises—perhaps it's as ordinary as who does the housework or as fraught as one spouse's wandering eye. The couple has a choice to make. Do they talk about it? Of course, it may lead to a disagreement that may explode into other areas. So they say, "Let's just not talk about it."

We all know what happens. Disagreements get stifled, but they don't go away. They grow in intensity, fostering more distrust and resentment.

The same things can happen to denominations. As a denominational family, divisive issues are bound to boil up. They always have and always will. A mark of the health and vitality of a denomination is whether it can work out serious differences with respect and love.

As I see it, hiding from the discussion of homosexuality under the guise of maintaining unity may actually cause the fissures to widen and denominational vitality to decline. More and more people feel left out, cut off, unheeded. Like a tension-averse marriage, we could sink into a malaise of distrust, distance, and lack of passion for our common ministries.

Some claim that synod said it all in 1973 and 2002. The Bible is clear and the confessions demand obedience to its clear teachings. What is there to discuss?

The issue of same-sex relationships and marriage is indeed rooted in serious questions of biblical exegesis and has broad social ramifications. Our answers should not be rooted in what we see in TV sitcoms or in societal shifts but in the gospel. That's the very discussion we need to have.

It won't be easy. It will take respectful listening and, above all, patience on all sides. Our churches should be safe places for people to air their stories, questions, and concerns. Thankfully, it's happening already. Classis Grand Rapids East adopted a helpful study report, written by a committee representing a spectrum of views on the issue, that fairly articulates the alternative viewpoints in order to facilitate that discussion.

I suggest that instead of closing off discussion, we should close off decisions for a time. Accept all reports for information while we continue to listen carefully to each other. ■

Churches should be safe places for people to air their stories

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



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Slowing Up

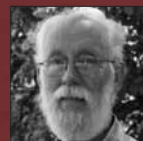
As the years quicken, I find
I am rushing from slow to slower . . .
slow of foot, slow of mind,
slow of hand, slow of art.
I'm no longer up to speed.
The fable of the tortoise
and the hare
doesn't really compensate
for the fact that the opposite
of quick
is dead.

Still,
there is restfulness in the notion
of slow food and slow motion,
or not being on the go at all.

Maybe God invented turtles
to remind us
that he is often slow . . .
slow to anger,
and, to my surprise
. . . and dismay . . .
slow to speak.
He needs, I surmise
to keep that pace
to stay with his flock.

But for all that,
God, the first responder,
made the rabbit too.
Quick to listen
and swift to keep his promises,
he holds fast to his word.

Lord, be my pacemaker
that I, neither
hasty, nor slow of heart,
may be quick
to follow.



Joe Veltman is a retired pastor and sometime artist. He served several CRC and RCA

congregations in Canada and the U.S. He and his wife attend Geneva Campus Church in Madison, Wisc.

Ministry Shares

The decision to trust God's abundant provision and pay our Ministry Shares obligations was an important step in freeing our church for further growth.

IT'S BEEN SUGGESTED that Ministry Shares be cut in half to encourage congregational growth (“More Dreaming,” Dec. 2015). This proposal seems to me to arise out of a fear that our shared resources are scarce and insufficient, rather than from the confidence that we have been abundantly blessed. Does the payment of Ministry Shares really hold congregations back? Must we choose between efficiently funding denominational ministries or growing our local congregations?

In my opinion, such a cut would result either in a proportional cut in the scope and impact of our denominational ministries or an increase in fundraising costs to make up the difference. We've prided ourselves in having a very efficient way to fund denominational ministries, so why decrease that efficiency? Let's be creative in communicating and funding our vision so that congregations don't have to resort to cutting effective denominational ministries in order to accomplish their local vision.

Here's an example from my own church, a small congregation in upstate New York.

For much of its life, my congregation struggled to pay even the reduced Min-

istry Shares for small churches. We would budget for an amount below that reduced share; whatever surplus funds were available at the end of the year went toward paying our Ministry Shares. That was an approach based on fear and a belief in scarcity.

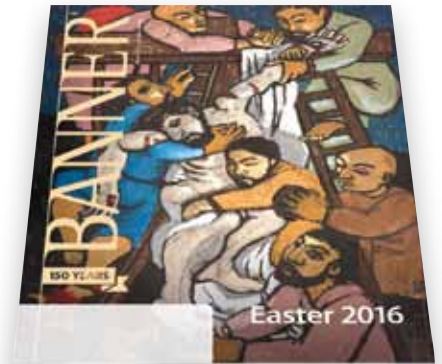
Two years ago we decided to budget and spend from a perspective of abundance. We committed to paying 50 percent of our reduced Ministry Shares midway through the year and the remaining 50 percent in December. We decided to trust that God would provide rather than worry that we wouldn't have enough left over at the end of the year to meet our commitment. Both years we've met our Ministry Shares obligation to the denomination as well as being able to fund our local ministries. And we've left fear and scarcity behind.

At least two other factors have likely contributed to my congregation's ability to meet its Ministry Shares commitments. First, our moderate level of indebtedness (interest payments are under 7 percent of our annual budget). Second, nearly one-quarter of our budget income is received consistently each month through electronic funds transfer, allowing us to more accurately project income and plan payment of expenses.

While each congregation likely has different factors that may affect its ability to pay its Ministry Shares, I hope that my congregation's experience will encourage others to rethink their attitude toward funding denominational ministry. ■



Terry Woodnorth is a member of Valley Christian Reformed Church in Binghamton, N.Y.



Ash Wednesday

As a denomination we have learned much from Evangelical churches. It is time to return the favor. The more traditional churches have much to offer as well. Ash Wednesday belongs to that category (“Ash Wednesday,” Feb. 2016). Back in 1989, Grace Church, the church I was pastoring, was invited by St. Timothy Anglican Church to celebrate Ash Wednesday with them. I still see one of our elders walk toward the altar. After the priest applied the sign of the cross in ashes to the elder's forehead, the elder returned to his seat with hands clasped in prayer, devoutly, serene. This is still one of the highlights of my pastoral journey. Thanks be to God who through the cross of Jesus Christ became the light of the world. In his light we become light.

—Simon Wolfert
Surrey, B.C.

Death Penalty

The argument that capital punishment is contrary to Christian teaching (“Rethinking the Death Penalty,” Feb. 2016) is an indication that theology has become uncoupled from the words of Scripture. The assumption is that modern sensitivities are a necessary and appropriate advancement on what the Bible states. Leaving aside the specific instances in the Old Testament regarding the application of the death penalty and the fact that our

TTERS

Lord never included it in any of his denunciations of the sins of Israel, the apostle Paul clearly stated that God had committed to human government the power of the sword (Rom. 13), a symbol of capital rather than corporate punishment.

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I believe, who coined the term “cheap grace.” I believe that what Mr. Maly is promoting could be called “cheap justice.”

—Wayne Nelson
Rockford, Mich.

Prayer

I realize the “poem” on the February cover (2016) is from a novel [by Frederick Buechner], but the last line really bothers me: “and sometimes, by God’s grace, a prayer is heard.” Do we not believe that all prayers are heard? Reading it without explanation is unsettling.

—Barbara Wiebenga
Byron Center, Mich.

Religious Persecution

Some comments on Gayla Postma’s fine news report (“Synodical Report on Religious Persecution Calls for Prayer and Mobilization,” Jan. 2016):

First, it is excellent that the committee is instructed by synod to study religious persecution in general. Contrary to popular opinion, Christians are not the only people subject to such persecution—Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims have all experienced persecution. Second, we must never identify the biblical message about the kingdom of God with the political and economic platforms of North American and Western European powers. Third, in addition to the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C., we in Canada have our own Citizens for Public Justice in Ottawa. I suggest the committee send a copy of the report to CPJ Canada for feedback.

—Simon Wolfert
Surrey, B.C.

The Business of Worship Music

Thank you for the insightful editorial (“The Business of Worship Music,” Jan. 2016). You point out an aspect of music writing and selection that many of us are unaware of. I have never really reflected on how we “absorb” theology seemingly unconsciously. But I agree that Christian radio, YouTube, Facebook, and the like can be strong influences in our choices. We must plan worship with musical and theological sensitivity. Popular selection and what will sell are not good standards for our church music.

I heartily endorse your statement that it is a terrible mistake to leave behind the riches of the past. I very much want my grandchildren to know and enjoy many of the great psalms and hymns my generation grew up with.

—Bruce Nikkel
Pella, Iowa

Learning How to Talk

Wendy Gritter’s article about dialoging on matters of sexual ethics (“Learning How to Talk,” Jan. 2016) is similar to the study committee report she helped author for Synod 2016 (Pastoral Guidance Re Same-Sex Marriage). Dialogue is valuable for mutual understanding, yet it tends to heighten human authority at the expense of God’s. Why does the dialogical method shy away from passages such as 2 Timothy 3 and 1 Corinthians 5, where love for God and his people reveals a sharp antithesis between right and wrong?

—Rev. Daryl DeKlerk
Jarvis, Ont.

More Dreaming

I agree that centralizing the efforts of our denomination is not always to my taste (“More Dreaming,” Dec. 2015). But the alternative is that we become more individualistic. I would hope for a balance. If we didn’t do things together we would

not be a denomination as much as a club of somewhat like-minded churches.

What makes us Reformed? Simply, I think, theology and a worldview; not missions, and certainly not worship. To suggest that our efforts should be directed to a Christian Reformed way of worship is, in my view, not a serious solution.

—Evert Vroon
Edmonton, Alta.

Real Love Lost

In response to “Real Love Lost” (Dec. 2015):

A simple review of literature as well as the testimony of many gay Christians reveal that same-sex couples have an identical capacity as heterosexual couples for deep emotional connection, virtue, fidelity, selflessness, sacrifice, self-control, and “a willingness to hold the beloved in high esteem.” On the flip side, human sciences and general human experience reveal that selfishness, abuse, infidelity, and a relationship based on “mere sexual impulses” is not contingent on one’s sexual orientation but rather upon the state of one’s heart.

A peek into church history reveals that speaking and acting from a place of willful ignorance leads to deeply unChristlike actions.

—Grace Deunk
Leduc, Alta.

“Real Love Lost” implies that the recent U.S. same-sex marriage legislation was a victory only for sexual permissiveness. Truth is, the high standard of “real love” Cumings advocates is the same standard of love Christian same-sex couples venerate for their own marriages.

—Roger Gelwicks
Chicago, Ill.

[MORE ONLINE](#)

NEWS

Calvin College Offers Ministry Degree Program to Inmates



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Inmates at the Handlon Correctional Facility in Ionia, Mich., can now earn a fully accredited undergraduate B.A. in Ministry Leadership through Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

The medium-security prison, about 30 miles from Grand Rapids, Mich., houses about 1,300 inmates. Codirectors of the five-year program Todd Cioffi and Christiana de Groot believe it will contribute to other programs at the facility such as building trades, welding, and dog training for special needs. "We wanted to make sure that inmates had access to a good liberal arts curriculum," said Cioffi. "They could personally grow in a variety of ways and become tutors and mentors for other inmates as they pursue educational opportunities."

Cioffi explained that serving God's kingdom is not meant for only outside the prison, but that God reigns inside the prison's walls as well. "Prisoners who will not get out of prison benefit from

thinking about their general calling and serving God within a prison. For instance, one of our students who will never get out of prison, given the sentence he has, wants to work in hospice care in a prison some day."

"We live in an environment of low expectations. This program has high expectations. It demands more of us than the system does, so that's liberating," said David, a student in the program. "When you are denied something for so long that you desire so badly, when an opportunity like this comes along, it's difficult to overestimate how important something like this is."

David is a part of the first cohort of students who began this past September taking classes through Calvin. He's hoping to be a Calvin College alumnus in 2020.

All instruction is done at the facility in person. The faculty travel to Ionia once a week to offer a three-credit course. Students at Calvin and Calvin Seminary also travel to the prison to offer tutor-

ing. "We believe that this is a clear Christian calling to serve prisoners, and education goes a long way in serving," Cioffi said. "Our hope is that education, especially theological education, will transform our students, who in turn will have a positive impact on other inmates, corrections officers, and prison staff, which in turn will ripple out into the Michigan prison system."

"We want them to know their Michigan Department of Corrections number is not what defines them," said de Groot. "They know they're a child of God. That's good news! We reinforce it by saying you are now a member of this learning community—that's meant hope to them. They are very grateful."

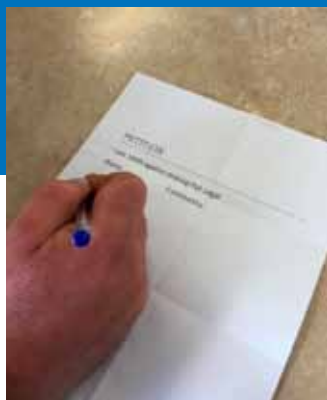
—Callie Feyen

Petitioning against Pot Legalization

One islander is taking a stand against the legalization of marijuana. Mitch Reid, a member of Charlottetown (Prince Edward Island) Christian Reformed Church, has launched a petition against a proposed policy to legalize marijuana in Canada.

Reid plans to submit his petition to his Member of Parliament, Sean Casey. As he canvasses the island with a few hundred signatures already collected, Reid hopes his petition will gain support across the country.

Canada's newly elected Liberal government campaigned on a promise to remove consumption and incidental possession of marijuana from the criminal code. In December it announced plans to design a new system to legalize,



regulate, and restrict access to marijuana.

"Once it is legal, local stores will carry it, and marijuana will be easier to access," said Reid. That access, he said, will bring greater problems.

Reid is actively involved with helping those who suffer from addiction. Three years ago, he began "Take the First Step," a ministry in his church to spread a message of hope in Christ to people with addiction and to their families. Working with organizations such as Teen Challenge and Solomon's Porch and also ministering on the streets, the ministry

connects people to agencies that provide help.

"A common thread through [the stories of] those who struggled with drug addiction has been that it was marijuana that started it, and then they wanted something more," explained Reid.

Reid has experienced positive responses but also backlash to his petition. "If you speak with any 10 people, you could get 10 different opinions," he explained. "A petition creates debate instead of ignoring this issue. As a church, I think we can [lead] others to think about their opinion and talk about it."

For Reid, this petition is about providing those with firsthand experience of addiction with the space to protest. Their desire to sign confirms for him the importance of his petition. "It makes me want to work harder," he said.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Paul Edward Bakker 1929-2016

For the past 20 years, Paul Bakker and his wife, Margery, spent their winters in Mesa, Ariz., where he was the unofficial "park pastor." Bakker preached his last sermon on January 10. On February 5 he died of leukemia at age 86.

After graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary in 1954, Bakker served eight Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan, South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota.

Always quick with a joke or story, Bakker was well-liked in all of the churches he served. He also served on the Board of Trustees for Dordt College. He was a delegate to synod (the church's general assembly) eight times. After retiring in 1994, he continued to be active in preaching and pastoral visitation.

In his spare time, Bakker liked to golf and spent many evenings playing cards with friends.

Bakker is survived by Margery, by five children and their spouses, and by 14 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his grandson, Shane De Jong.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available at thebanner.org.

Body of Rev. George Vander Weit Recovered

Two-and-a-half years after George Vander Weit went missing, his body was found about a mile from the Rochester, Mich., condo he shared with his wife, Bonnie, according to a post by his son Randy on Facebook. Vander Weit was a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.

On July 5, 2013, Vander Weit disappeared shortly after being released from a mental health facility. He was considered a danger to himself. Extensive searches by police, family, and friends for months afterward turned up no leads.

Randy Vander Weit's post said that dental records confirmed that the human remains were



Rev. George Vander Weit at Synod 2010.

those of George Vander Weit. He was 70 years old at the time he went missing.

Randy requested that the family be upheld in prayer. "My mom is feeling overwhelmed with decisions she now needs to make," he wrote. "We, George's

children, are dealing with guilt for not having searched more thoroughly, considering his remains were found a mile or so from my parents' condo."

George and Bonnie were members of Han-Bit Korean CRC. Prior to retirement, Vander Weit served churches in Michigan and Ohio. He was a frequent contributor to *The Banner*.

He attended the annual synod (the CRC's annual leadership meeting) many times and was particularly well-known for his outspoken support of women serving in ecclesiastical office. *The Banner* will publish an *In Memoriam* for Vander Weit at a later date.

—Gayla R. Postma

NEWS

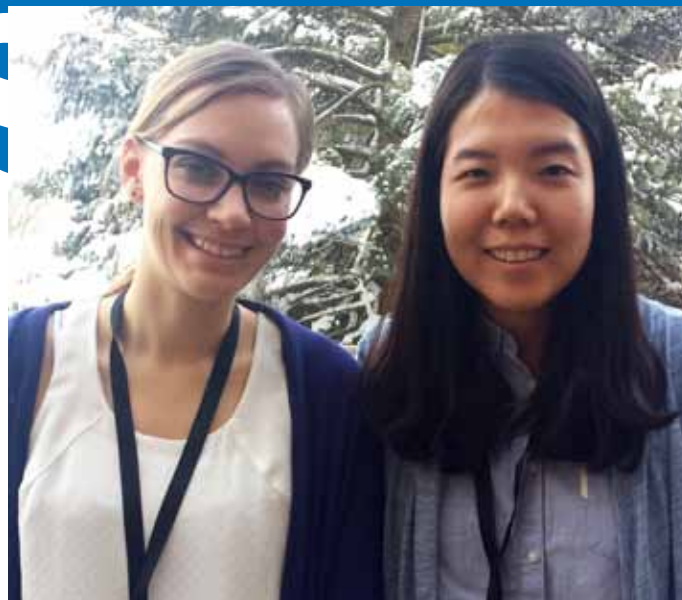
Budget, Name Changes and More: News from the Board of Trustees

"It's not pretty." That is how Christian Reformed Church executive director Steve Timmermans described the budget planning process for Fiscal 2017 in his report to the Board of Trustees. Director of finance and operations John Bolt said that after initial review, some aspects of the budget planning are going back to the drawing board. "We need to get to a balanced budget," he told the trustees when they met at the end of February. "We are looking at all aspects. Nothing is off limits. We're trying to be very prudent, making sure new ministries get a chance to blossom."

The Canadian CRC offices are being enlarged and enhanced. Canadian ministries director Darren Roorda said that at the current facilities, located in Burlington,

Ont., employees are sharing work stations and parking on the lawn when paved spaces run out. The renovation will substantially increase parking, work space, and meeting space at a projected cost of \$2.1 million. Existing facilities will also be brought up to code. Terry Veldboom, controller for the Canadian office, said that while they remain open to receive designated capital donations, funding will come from the Canadian CRC's pooled cash management program with its bank (CIBC), effectively borrowing from itself. The project is expected to take a year.

Board members were also introduced to a number of name changes. The new denominational ministry plan has been renamed "Our Journey 2020." The five streams around which the minis-



The Board of Trustees includes two young adult representatives, Ashley Bootsma (l) and Yuri Lee. They will serve a two-year term. For more information about them and their role, please visit thebanner.org.

try plan is organized are now referred to as "Our Calling." The board is recommending that Synod 2016 rename Pastor Church Relations as Pastor Church Resources because the original name "has acquired some unintended negative consequences," including "implicitly suggesting that the ministry's primary reason

for being has been to address 'problems.'"

Additionally, the specialized ministries, which includes Safe Church, Disability Concerns, Race Relations, and more, will now be collectively known as Congregational Services.

—Gayla R. Postma

Indiana Church Builds Fitness Trail for Community

For 15 years, 15 acres of wooded land owned by Community Christian Reformed Church in Roselawn, Ind., had gone mostly unused. Now it is attracting neighbors every day, thanks to the fitness trail built by church members.

The trail winds through trees and a meadow and is open to the community all day, every day. Donations helped cover the cost, and many local volunteers and church members also donated their time and talents to create the trail. One young man who spent lots of time riding his dirt bike through the woods behind



A path through the woods behind Community CRC is a popular fitness trail.

the church used his days off to map out and clear a pathway. A personal trainer set up workout routines for each piece of equipment built by four young men from the church.

"This project has been healthy for our church," said Thriesa

Hubers, the church member who organized and managed the project. "It required a variety of talents and volunteers, took coordinated effort, and resulted in strong ownership of the project."

Hubers explained that the trail serves as outreach, a place for

anyone to exercise and enjoy God's creation. "A primary purpose of the trail was to bless the community around our church with a venue for healthy, outdoor, family-friendly activity. The church is salt in the community, and this is an opportunity to share the flavor of Christ in a nonthreatening way. We're letting our actions pave the way for future conversations," she said.

One evening as Hubers was leaving the church after praise team practice, she stopped to observe four teenagers working out on the trail by the light of the security light. "Noisy teen sounds and loud music to motivate them. I'm so glad it's being used by the neighborhood!"

—Callie Feyen

Michigan Churches Provide Positive Sports Experience for Kids

Christian Reformed churches in West Michigan have partnered with Upward Sports to provide a positive sports experience for children. Providence CRC, Heritage CRC, Corinth Reformed Church, and High Pointe Community Church are all involved in the local basketball league for kids from kindergarten to 6th grade.

"We want to give kids and parents a positive experience with sports," said Providence outreach pastor J.B. Wernlund. It's for families who may view kids' sports as requiring too much of a time and travel commitment and yet want their kids to have an opportunity to excel mentally, ath-



letically, spiritually, and socially.

At the beginning of each season, which runs from December through February, players are evaluated and placed on teams designed for even competition. Teams hold one practice and compete in one game per week. Each child receives an equal amount of playing time and is encouraged and coached on the fundamentals of basketball and a relationship with Jesus Christ.

"At every practice, the coach leads a huddle with a lesson and memory verse. It's an opportunity for the coaches to connect with the kids," said Wernlund. "At half-time every game there's a devotion that the church leads at their site. Each church that's involved has an opportunity to reach out in different ways. At the end of the season there is a celebration for the whole league."

"The opportunity to partner with other churches helps us to break out of our own bubble and cross denominational lines," Wernlund noted.

"We can see and understand that we're all serving the Lord and God's kingdom."

Wernlund values the ministry as a way to build relationships with people who aren't



otherwise connected to the church. "Over 200 of our 850 kids don't have a church home, according to the information they gave us," he said. "Upward Sports is a way of planting seeds. I love to hear testimonies of how it has played a part in our players' and families' journeys."

—Lori Dykstra

News Digest

Canadian Planned-Giving Charitable Organization Celebrates 40 Years



Christian Stewardship Services, a planned-giving charitable organization in Canada, is celebrating 40 years of realizing its mission—"assisting Christians in planning, giving, and managing their God-given resources to accomplish his work." CSS was founded in 1976.

Edmonton Students Raise \$10K for Syrian Refugees

Students at Edmonton Northeast Christian School raised \$10,000 for Syrian refugees after discussing the refugee crisis in social studies class. Over a span of a month, they canvassed neighborhoods, donated their own money, gave presentations in church, and organized fundraising events. The money was donated to World Renew.



Grade 9 students from Edmonton Northeast Christian School and teacher Brady Van Ry.

Skip's Place Offers Inclusion for Kids with Special Needs



Children with special needs in Red Deer, Alta., now have a brand new ministry available to them. Skip's Place is the brainchild of Caleb

Cameron, a member of New Life Fellowship Christian Reformed Church. Launched in January, Skip's Place is held Saturday mornings at Knox Presbyterian Church. It combines a traditional Sunday school model with a variety of adaptations tailored for special needs kids, including accessible lessons, hands-on, multisensory learning, a calming "Snoezelen" tent (for sensory stimulation), and lots of family support.

For more on these and other stories, please visit thebanner.org.

—Banner Correspondents

NEWS

CRC in Canada Weighs in on Assisted Suicide



The Christian Reformed Church in Canada made a submission to a parliamentary special joint committee on physician assisted dying (PAD) to press its concern regarding involuntary euthanasia and protection for medical care providers to follow their conscience. The submission was prepared by Darren Roorda, Canadian ministries director of the CRC, with an ad hoc group that included medical practitioners, policy experts, and ethicists.

In 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) struck down the law that prohibits PAD in Canada and charged the federal government with drafting new legislation. At that time, the CRC urged its members to write to their Members of Parliament to encourage them to craft legislation that emphasizes palliative care and aggressive pain management and strongly protects vulnerable people.

There are recent indications that the government may be considering expanding the right to PAD beyond people who are gravely ill to include those with mental illness and minors.

In February, a submission to the joint commission noted

that the CRC does not favor medical intervention with the deliberate intent of ending life. "However, we recognize that the SCC Carter decision requires a legislative response," the submission reads. "Failure to respond to these concerns in new legislation is likely to result in a legal vacuum with unknown consequences." Since PAD is now deemed a legal right in Canada, the CRC wants it carefully regulated.

Among the regulations, the CRC wants to prevent euthanasia without consent. "This is most certainly a concern for disabled people and other vulnerable communities," the submission stated. The prohibition of administrators, physicians, and family members from overriding the decision-making power of an individual will be critical.

The submission also urges protection for medical care providers and institutions. "Care providers with ethical objections to PAD must not be compelled to provide PAD services. However, conscience-bound care providers must not exercise their power in the medical system in a way that restricts the moral agency of a patient to seek PAD ser-

VICES from another practitioner," the submission said.

The submission suggests that there be a high priority on enhancing palliative care.

Given the short time frame given to the government to draft new legislation, the CRC is asking that any new legislation include a formal three-year review.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, of which the CRC is a member, is also engaging in the public debate. Mike Hogeterp of the CRC's Centre for Public Dialogue said the EFC approach is a little more combative than the CRC's approach. "Our position is a little more proximate, recognizing the reality that the government has been forced to address this by the court."

Kathy Vandergrift, president of the CRC's Board of Trustees, said that EFC is campaigning and mobilizing people but has not appeared before the joint commission. "We chose to engage to make it as positive an approach as possible, rather than using it to polarize the public."

—Gayla R. Postma



Aaron Baart addresses parents at an evening seminar about the struggles of youth and pornography.

Iowa Church Hosts Youth Pornography Awareness Event

"I'm sick of seeing college students eight years into porn addiction." That was Aaron Baart's message to more than 200 parents at a youth and pornography awareness event in First Christian Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Baart is dean of the chapel at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. "The only way to combat that is to reclaim the learning curve," said Baart. "The Bible has so much to say about healthy sexuality. Why has the church been so silent?"

The event was sponsored by the Sioux City County Task Force for Sexual Wholeness and is supported by several community organizations, Christian Reformed churches, colleges, and schools.

Baart's aim was to create awareness among parents and provide education about pornography. Sean Baccam, a youth leader at First CRC who helped host the event, said, "I thought the meeting was very informative. I wasn't aware of how serious [this issue] was until I heard all of the statistics and stories. I appreciated [learning about] resources they have available for help."

Following the evening seminar, 250 students from Western Christian High School in Hull and 150 junior high students attended a chapel in which speakers talked about pornography and a healthy view of Christian sexuality. Baart has conducted similar seminars at area Christian schools and colleges for both parents and students. "A lot of data was offered, as well as how we can create a grace-based culture within our communities that allows those who are struggling under the weight of pornography to be able to come forward and seek help without being shamed," said Baart.

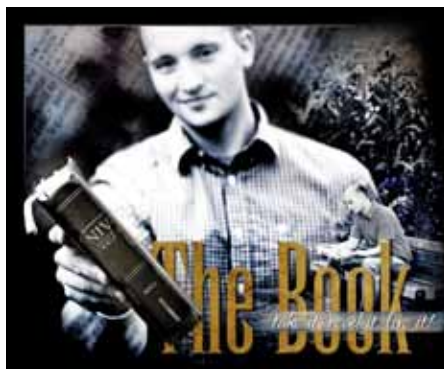
—Amy Toornstra

Hamilton Photographer Creates Inspirational Photo Collection

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then each photo in photographer Hank Rintjema's new collection "The Book: Take It, Read It, Live It!" is worth more than 741,000 words. Rintjema, a member of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ont., created a collection of portraits of individuals reading their Bible in various times and places. Each week during the month of January, a new image was displayed at Immanuel CRC.

Rintjema wanted to find a way to use his gifts to further God's kingdom. Through these images, he depicts how the Bible is an intrinsic aspect of the subject's daily life, whether at work, sitting in a park, on a bus, or at home. "The idea just popped into my head. It was so simple but powerful," said Rintjema.

Rev. Anthony Elenbaas, pastor of youth and discipleship/outreach at Immanuel, saw



Anthony Elenbaas with "The Book: Take It, Read It, Live It!"

the project as a great opportunity to encourage others to engage with God's Word. "Pastors often encourage Bible reading. Hank's project gives that encouragement in an earthy and compelling way," said Elenbaas.

"This project has captured the imagination of the congregation. On Sunday mornings, I hear a constant refrain outside my study of 'Who is it this week?' as people pause to inspect the new portraits on the wall on the way to the sanctuary," said Elenbaas.

Rintjema loves capturing people through his work and has specialized in portrait photography for 26 years. When this collection is complete, Rintjema hopes to feature the portraits at a local art crawl.

"This is a way to capture, through images, that God is in everything we do," explained Rintjema. "I hope that people will look at these images and wonder about the Bible."

—by Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Free for the CRC

Free stuff! Discounted stuff! And not just a one-time sale, but all the time if you are a Christian Reformed Church member buying for your church.

What stuff? Hundreds of resources from Faith Alive Christian Resources. Why? Because the ministry shares dollars that helped pay for the resources came from CRC members. "We

want to maximize the impact of these CRC-produced resources throughout our churches," said Steve Timmermans, executive director of the CRC.

The products include Bible studies, children's curriculum, devotionals, worship resources, and more. If it is for your church use (including small groups) you get print discounts or free digital products. The digital library doesn't include everything—such as hymnals—because of copyright restrictions. And digital products may not be printed.

"We recognize that in some cases, digital is best. In other situations, print copies are best. This new pilot program helps churches with both," said Tim Postuma of the CRC's Ministry Support Services department.

If CRC members like and use the digital library, Postuma said, developing new resources in a digital-first format becomes a possibility.

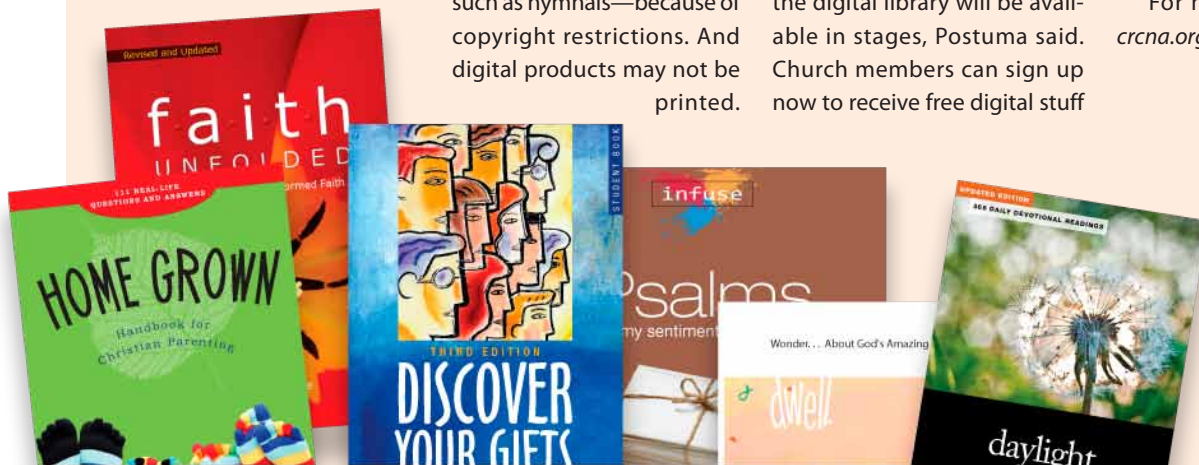
To ensure a smooth rollout, the digital library will be available in stages, Postuma said. Church members can sign up now to receive free digital stuff

starting in mid-April. The 20 percent discount on print materials takes effect in June. Postuma said that the response has been great. "We had 600 signups in the first 24 hours and 1,500 in the first week. But we need each church to spread the word."

Not a member of the CRC? You're among the half of Faith Alive customers who will have to pay full price for resources except for specific sale items.

For more information see crcna.org/library.

—Gayla R. Postma



Netflix Introduces Televangelist Shows

Alongside programs like “Orange Is the New Black” and “House of Cards,” Netflix offers users another type of content: Christian sermons. The online video streaming service added lectures by four popular Christian pastors in early December.

“I believe if Jesus were on planet Earth today in the flesh, he’d be on Netflix,” said Ed Young, one of the pastors, in a phone interview.

Young spearheaded the effort to get Christian talks onto Netflix. He said he believes, like Jesus, he should find ways to appeal to the masses. It’s that attitude that makes the partnership with Netflix an unsurprising, if unprecipitated, convergence of evangelical faith and popular media.

“It fits with patterns that are long-established,” said Stewart M. Hoover, director of the Center for Media, Religion, and Culture at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Hoover pointed out that evangelical churches have been quick to adapt to radio, then television and other technologies as they have developed.



A promotional image for a streaming televangelical show on Netflix.

Young’s “Fifty Shades of THEY” Netflix series includes five episodes. The pastor paces a colorfully lit stage, offering jocular interpretations of Christian teachings to an audience of hundreds. The three other series have similar formats.

In “#DeathToSelfie,” young T-shirt-clad pastor Steven Furtick talks about identity. Georgia pastor Andy Stanley addresses working through challenges in “Starting Over.” And in “Winning Life’s Battles,” evangelical icon Joyce Meyer preaches to a massive auditorium.

Young said he and his team started dreaming of Netflix about a year ago. Netflix was receptive to the idea, he said, and it was not hard to bring other Christian pastors on board with the plan either.

Paul Huse, executive director of marketing for Joyce Meyer Ministries, said Meyer’s team was pleased to take part.

“More and more people are cutting the cord,” Huse said. “Even though we’re on six or seven cable networks, more people are moving away from that, and we want to be where they can still access us.”

Netflix did not provide many guidelines in terms of content for the episodes but did ask that the programs avoid product promotion or invitations for viewers to make donations, Huse said.

For Young, the goal is clear: he plans to continue bringing Christianity to popular media in whatever forms technology provides.

“Jesus was the most creative communicator in history,” Young said. “If we’re taking a page from his playbook, the church should be the most creative entity in the universe.”

—Religion News Service



Handmade necklaces and bracelets from Higher Ground in Nepal.

More Than a Jewelry Party

The evening before Valentine’s Day, several women from Silver Spring (Md.) Christian Reformed Church gathered for drinks, snacks, and shopping. They circled tables filled with sparkly necklaces and bracelets, held nifty bags, and slipped on hand-knit gloves.

But this wasn’t just any home-based party. This night out was held to support Higher Ground, an organization that aims to end human trafficking and restore the lives of the people of Nepal.

Bimala Pokharel, a graduate of Calvin College, founded Higher Ground. Raised in a Hindu culture, she became a Christian while attending Calvin under the mentorship of Susan Byker, wife of then-president Gaylen Byker. Their daughter Gayle is a member of Silver Spring CRC and helped organize the jewelry party.

“A lot of people come to the [U.S.] and don’t return [to their own country],” explained Byker. “But Bimala and her husband have a heart for Nepal.”

While her husband went into ministry, Pokharel developed Higher Ground, starting with a bakery in Kathmandu in 2007. While selling pastries, coffee, and meals, the bakery provides on-the-job training for people who might otherwise become sex workers.

In 2008, the crafting component began. Necklaces, earrings, bags, aprons, and handmade gifts are sold at parties like the one the Silver Spring women attended. With the funds from the bakery and crafts, Pokharel set up a community development operation to support the people of Nepal.

Byker explained that Pokharel wants to provide another option for the people of Nepal and tries to get to families before they go into sex trafficking. “Sometimes she’ll go to nightclubs and tell women, ‘I have something better for you.’”

Pokharel was recognized by the United Nations in 2015 for creating sustainable jobs for women. “She is a Mother Teresa type of person,” said Byker.

The women’s purchases that evening were wrapped in white tissue paper and slipped into brown paper bags including cards with more information on Higher Ground. As they left with their purchases, they knew they were carrying more than just jewelry.

—Callie R. Feyen

FAQs

Relationships

Q I watch sports on TV most evenings and weekend afternoons. Is that wrong? My wife says it is too much, which makes me feel guilty. But I find watching sports helps me relax best after a busy day.

A Watching sports is not wrong. But your guilt connects to the marriage relationship, and if watching sports has become more important to you than your primary relationship, something is askew and needs to be addressed. Take inventory, together with your wife, about what you value and what might be missing in your marriage. Be open and honest, and avoid the desire to win your partner over to your point of view. Acknowledge that you have different needs, and talk about ways both of your needs for closeness and/or distance can be met best. Coming to agreement will likely require compromise by both of you. It will also require more than one conversation and include concrete steps for change. If the two of you feel you are making no progress, consider seeing a marriage counselor for help and accountability.

Be aware that watching sports lends itself to addictive potential, much like shopping or eating does. In our culture, where sports hero worship is rampant, and winning is often seen as the highest good, sport addiction is not usually diagnosed. Perhaps relaxing with sports works so well because identifying with players *feels* relational, without actually *being* relational. Don't be fooled.

There is always a cost to any addiction. No relational investment may equal no stress, against maximum "good feelings" gained by the efforts of others (sport heroes), but it may also mask loneliness and relational poverty.

Christ invites us to live abundantly and joyfully when we choose to identify ourselves with him. Hopefully you are clear that watching sports, or anything else, doesn't stand a chance against such a promise.

—Judy Cook is a family therapist and a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster, Ont.

Only Christ can reconcile us to God and give us life.

Church

Q Now that deacons will be going to synod, I worry that fewer than half of the delegates are theologically trained. Might this adversely affect the life of our denomination?

A On the contrary, I think having deacon delegates will enhance what synod does. When this year's deliberations take place, we will have an office that has been missing since 1868 fully represented. It occurs to me that almost all the issues synod touches have a diaconal dimension. I never want to underestimate the theological expertise many deacons have even if they haven't gone to seminary. The same is true of elders. Many of them wax eloquent on thorny issues and are blessed with great biblical vision.

But is your assumption true? Yes, synod once rejected the delegation of deacons, since the proposal was for each classis to send a minister, elder, and deacon—thereby reducing the size of synod as a whole and trimming minister delegates from approximately one-half to approximately one-third of the total number of delegates. It didn't surprise me that your concern was quickly brought to the table by those with the vested interest.

The decision of Synod 2015 is different. We keep four delegates from each of the 48 classes, including a minister, an elder, a deacon, and one other officebearer. This could be a commissioned pastor, a deacon, an elder, or a minister. We'll soon find out what classes will do. It would not surprise me if, for quite a few classes, the "other" turns out to be a minister. But it wouldn't scare me if the majority of them turn out to be well-versed elders or deacons.

—Henry De Moor is professor of church polity emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich. He's the author of *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary (Fath Alive)*.

Ethics

Q Does God hold psychopaths responsible for their actions, since they don't have a conscience? If yes, isn't that unfair? Should we hold psychopaths responsible?

A Your question suggests that we are sinful only because we disobey God's moral laws. And since psychopaths lack empathy and conscience, they cannot help but disobey moral laws. If God still holds them responsible for their sins, even though they cannot stop themselves, this seems unfair to you.

Let me first suggest that from a Reformed perspective, sin is not simply reduced to disobedient actions. Rather, the whole human race is under a condition or state of sin. It is "a corruption of all [human] nature" (Belgic Confession, Article 15), and every human is "corrupt from conception on" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 7). Our disobedient acts are the symptoms, the manifest expressions of this disease of sin that has infected us all, psychopaths included.

This sinful nature, not simply our sinful acts, is what alienates us from God, and, hence, puts us under spiritual death. Only Christ can reconcile us to God and give us life. This holds true equally for psychopaths and for the rest of humanity, regardless of the nature of our sinful acts.

As to whether we should hold them responsible, we need to first realize that not all psychopaths commit evil. Studies show that many psychopaths function well in society, having various employments, including CEO, lawyer, police, and even clergy! (From "The Top 10 Jobs That Attract Psychopaths" at www.forbes.com). Being psychopathic does not mean you cannot obey laws. Therefore, psychopaths who do commit crimes and violence should be held responsible.

—Shiao Chong is a chaplain at York University in Toronto, Ont. ■



RELATIVELY FEW PEOPLE UNDERSTOOD the Terrence Malick movie *The Tree of Life* when it came out a few years ago. That's too bad, because it is a deeply theological movie that in the end shines with more hope for God's restoration of all things than perhaps any other film ever made. The hint as to what the movie is about comes in the very first thing you see on the screen. Against a black background these words appear: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation . . . while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7).

The movie is clearly built on the chassis of the book of Job, replete with wrestling with the big question of why there is evil in the world. In the film, as in the biblical book, the answer to that vital question comes not when God gives a long theological lecture on the whys and wherefores of bad things happening to good people. No, God's answer comes through a whirlwind tour of creation's splendors.

Job asks, "Why do I suffer?" God replies with donkeys and storks, storehouses of snow and magnificent lions, hippos and the twinkling stars of the Pleiades. In *The Tree of Life*, Job 38-42 gets depicted by a wordless 15-minute sequence in the middle of the movie that displays God's creation of the universe. On either side of that long sequence of majestic cosmic images is the story of a Texas family that wrestles with the sorrow and suffering they have endured. At least in part, the answer to their questions is contained, as for Job, in what we can see in God's creation, in the glory theater of God that—as John Calvin reminded us—surrounds us daily.

Job is the Bible's premiere example of something that happens frequently in Scripture; namely, the physical creation of God comes to the forefront when we were perhaps not expecting it. In the psalms, in the prophets, in the parables of Jesus, in the writings of the apostle Paul, and in the Bible's final book of Revelation, creation keeps popping up. Apparently creation is an integral part of God's Story, and nothing that happened in God's redemption through Christ was ever

meant to eclipse that creation or its central importance in the heart of God.

Strangely Dim

Through a lot of church history, the importance of creation may have been more obvious than it seems to be in more recent times. Perhaps that is why St. Francis of Assisi could write lyric odes to the creation like his “Canticle to the Sun” and not be accused—as some worship planners and I were accused some years ago when we used that canticle in a worship service—of succumbing to New Age worship of the goddess earth.

There are doubtless many reasons why after the Reformation many church traditions began to associate salvation in Christ with the redeeming of *only* human beings—and sometimes of disembodied human souls at that. Partly this can be attributed to the fact that when the key Reformed confessional documents were written in the 16th and 17th centuries, concerns about the physical creation were not prominent. Air pollution, species extinction, industrial chemicals in rivers, and carbon emissions were not remotely on anyone’s radar as a topic of theological or biblical reflection. Thus, although the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession do not ignore the value of God’s creation, neither do they spend much time celebrating it or recommending it as something believers should ponder and preserve and delight in.

After the Industrial Revolution, when concerns about ecology and the environment did become more prominent, some in Reformed circles chalked such a focus up to a more liberal theology, perhaps more “Social Gospel” in nature—and, as such, something to be avoided. Instead we sang songs that suggested that if we turn our eyes upon Jesus, the things of earth would “grow strangely dim.” We sang “fair are the meadows,” but we countered that sentiment with “Jesus shines fairer.” Meanwhile, some derided efforts to clean up oceans or save the spotted owl by likening such work to rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*: the ship is going down, but that’s OK since we are all bound for heaven (and this earth just isn’t our home). So let it sink.

In the last half-century much has changed. We have come to see that the Bible depicts God as taking a deep and abiding delight in creation. We have come to believe the line from the traditional Christian prayer that says to God, “you hate nothing you have made.” And even deeply Reformed theologians like Anthony Hoekema remind us that if we conceive of “heaven” as anything other than a new creation that will include tadpoles and tiger lilies and Lake Michigan, then we concede defeat to the devil, because it has all along been Satan’s goal—not God’s—to destroy and sully God’s good work.

A Chorus of Praise

Creation is where the Bible begins. A New Creation is where it ends. In between that beginning and that new beginning, God’s

Word again and again returns our thinking to delighting in the physical world. The psalms naturally praise God for the wonders God fashioned, even as those same psalms (and many passages in Isaiah and the other prophets) see the creation itself as forming a part of God’s ongoing chorus of worship. In God’s way of viewing things, clacking tree branches and clapping human hands form their own harmony of praise to him (see Isa. 55). Human choirs sing beautifully, but so do howling winds in snowstorms (Ps. 148). Majestic pipe organs can be used to praise God with glorious toccatas, but the Bible says God’s praise receives a giant exclamation mark when there is a deafening clap of thunder too (Ps. 29).

CLACKING TREE BRANCHES AND CLAPPING HUMAN HANDS FORM THEIR OWN HARMONY OF PRAISE.

The creation, it seems, is never far from the mind of God. Maybe that is why when God filled the minds of prophets like Isaiah, the images Isaiah reached for over and over again when describing God’s promised redemption included mountain streams, myrtle, and feasts from earth’s bounty.

And as all of God’s purposes for creation and redemption came together in Christ Jesus, people like the apostle Paul could not help but see the big picture that included a focus on creation. Romans 8 may be the New Testament’s finest chapter of human hope: there is now no condemnation to fear, we have been set free. Even in the face of hardship we can know that nothing separates us from the love of God, and all things work together for our good. This is the gospel at its finest!

But smack in the middle of all that, Paul says we are not alone in yearning for redemption; the whole creation is doing that too. Indeed, in Romans 8:19 Paul employs a vivid and colorful Greek word not found anywhere else in the whole Bible: *apokaradokia*. It means “to crane one’s neck.” Paul says that the entire creation is standing on its collective tiptoes and craning its neck forward—the way we do when watching for a loved one to come off an airplane after a long absence—because the creation is *that* eager to see the coming of its own liberation from pollution and decay and suffering. »

Ta Panta!

The same thing happens in Colossians 1:15-23, where Paul's exuberance over the breadth of Christ's saving work all but gets away from him. Paul goes on a verbal tear so infused with enthusiasm that he writes one single sentence with over 270 words in it! Like an excited child describing a day at an amusement park, Paul gushes on in such a way that he cannot find the end of the sentence.

Tripping over his words to convey how grand Jesus' salvation is, Paul repeats multiple times the Greek words *ta panta*, which mean "all things." Jesus created *all things* in the beginning; Jesus infused *all things* with meaning; Jesus has now saved *all things* in his death and resurrection. And so now *all things* hold together in him alone. Colloquially phrased, Paul is saying that the whole kit and kaboodle, the entire creation from A-Z, was made by Jesus and has been saved by Jesus.

The more the writers of the New Testament meditated on and thought theologically about what God had accomplished through Christ, the more it became clear that although human beings were saved in Christ, so was everything else God had made in the beginning. By the time you get to John's vision in the Book of Revelation (and especially in those first songs from heaven that John heard in Rev. 4-5), it is no longer surprising to read that the *first* song John heard from the hosts of heaven was not the song that praised God for saving people.

No, the #1 song on the heavenly hit parade was the one that began, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, *for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being*" (Rev. 4:11). The song that declares the Lamb worthy on account of redeeming persons from every tribe and nation comes next, of course, but praising God for his work of creation was the first order of business, even in the heavenly throne room!

Lovers

When Neal Plantinga was my systematic theology professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, his lectures bristled with lots of memorable lines and striking insights. One thing I will never forget was the lecture in which he said that the upshot of the first and great commandment ("You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind") is that we are, finally, lovers of God. When you have a human lover in your life, you are naturally interested in whatever brings your lover joy and delight. Is your spouse an art history buff? Then you go to art museums too, and you take joy in what your spouse tells you about Rembrandt or Monet.

The Bible says God loves all that he has made, that the creatures of God's hand are a source of unending delight to him. As lovers of God, we are, therefore, invested in paying attention to and caring for those creatures too. Stewardship of creation,

preserving a species when we can, soaking up creation splendors (and doing so more often than we soak up the wonders of some new website or the latest viral video on YouTube): these are all part and parcel of what it means to be lovers of God.

What's more, reveling in wildflower-dotted alpine meadows and giving money to organizations that preserve wetlands are not vain efforts like tending to deck chairs on a sinking ocean liner. True, people without faith—including some of the louder voices of the New Atheists—see only a universe on a crash course with entropy. That is, things keep winding down as the centuries and millennia pass, and the day will come when stars will burn out, whole planets will wink out of existence, and just maybe the entire fabric of space-time will collapse and disappear.

But as disciples of Jesus, we do not buy that bleak picture of creation's future for the same reason that we refuse to see no future for the loved one whose body we just committed to the earth: the Bible tells us differently. We lay a loved one's body into the soil of earth but then recite a Creed that ends with our belief in "the resurrection of the body," including this body. So also we look at a planet with lots of problems related to climate change, species extinction, and pollution, but we refuse to believe all of that has the last word. Only God has the last word, and that word goes something like this: "Behold, I make all things new!"

True, fighting to preserve the habitat of a wood thrush or recycling a plastic milk jug will not in and of itself "save the planet" or bring God's kingdom to bear, just on account of our efforts. We act as stewards of songbirds and coral reefs for the same reason we give money to inner-city soup kitchens and volunteer to spend time with a homeless person: not because we're saving the world but because God in Christ *already* saved the world. And so our actions mirror our faith and how we believe God sees the world and homeless people and mountain streams and clownfish on a reef.

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth . . . while the morning stars sang together?" The answer is that we were not there to see that. Yet even when confronted with our most urgent of questions—as God was with Job's questions—God's mind still goes back to those singing stars. And he wants us to remember creation too. Because somehow the wisdom of God, the mighty power of God, and the truth that in Christ all things hold together such that all our deepest longings really will be met—all of that and so much more is visible in that majestic creation.

That is worth pondering today and even forevermore. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Scott Hoezee is director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Where's Home?

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

LAST SUMMER while driving down a paved prairie road, fields of glowing canola rushing past us, I turned to my husband and said, "I'm homesick, but I don't know where I'm homesick for."

"Today I told someone that I was looking forward to being home," he replied. "Wherever that is."

As a transient seminary couple, over the last four years we have lived in three countries on two separate continents and have been involved with five different congregations. It has been exciting, certainly—a whirlwind of exploration and new experiences. Our web of contacts and friends reaches farther than we thought possible when we left the rooted foundations of our childhood homes. But it is a horizontal web, not particularly vertical. We meet; we relate; we say goodbye and promise to keep in touch. It is like being terribly thirsty and wanting to drink a whole glass of water but only taking a tiny sip before moving along elsewhere.

We are in some places for longer stretches than others, but even then, there are reminders scrawled across dates on calendars, warning us of impending expiration dates for passports and visas. We are guaranteed a peevish questioning period when going through a border crossing, trying to get closer to that place that we think is probably home.

Lord willing, within the next year we'll find a place to settle down. But for now, we live a nomadic life. When I am curled up on a couch and tired from making new friends, or when I wake up and am groggily unsure of where I am, I am sharply reminded

of the fact that I am a wanderer. And yet, as I look back over the last four years, I am OK with this.

Because I think it can be good to feel displaced.

Part of me welcomes that deep longing for home—not just a home I can decorate for Christmas but one that is not of this age. It helps me understand what Peter means when he addresses his letter to the exiles, or sojourners (1 Pet. 1:1)—those who understand that their real citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). It is right to enjoy the blessings of homes and communities, but it is important to realize that the misleading "permanency" of a job and a mortgage and a nice garden is not the end of the line. It is important to realize that none of this is here for good; that clinging too tightly to earthly things will result in a dependency that will only disappoint and crush. Fear of and aversion to change will stunt our growth, keeping us from stretching and maturing into more faithful followers of Christ.

We do not know what the future holds. It is possible that we will settle down and grow some roots, but it could be that we will always be nomads. That would be hard, but it would also be OK, because why should we expect any different? The world is a shifting place; only "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). With this in mind, we will dig some roots into the very solid, never-changing ground of the King of all kings. We will grow where we are planted, wherever that may be. ■

Suzanne Veenstra is an Ontario native who calls Grand Rapids, Mich., home (for now). She and husband Wayne, a student at Calvin Theological Seminary, attend Shawnee Park Christian Reformed Church.

NEXT



We meet; we relate;
we say goodbye
and promise
to stay in touch.

Discerning What the Future Holds

by Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

Grace Jung, a public health and pre-medicine student at Calvin College, recalls arriving in Kenya, not knowing what the future might hold for her after she finished school.

Each time she talked to someone about her plans and grad school, she felt weighed down by a “suffocating heaviness” in her heart, she said.

Jung’s struggle to make decisions about her future is one that generations of young people have faced as they gain independence and begin to make their own decisions about faith, purpose, and calling.

A growing number of young men and women are choosing to tackle these decisions by doing acts of service. By reaching out beyond themselves, they are making a difference in the world as they learn about themselves and their potential.

That is exactly what Jung did.

In the summer of 2014 she traveled to Kenya and Uganda as a volunteer intern with World Renew and spent 2½ months helping the agency and its local partners with health programs. This included training young mothers in nutrition and assisting at a public hospital.

Jung says that seeing the conditions at a hospital in Kenya—where there is only one doctor on staff, and patients resist going because they are unsure how they will pay the bill—opened her eyes to the inequalities in our world. It also made her want to tackle the systems and structures that seem to value some lives more than others.

One of her most memorable experiences, she says, involved training Ugandan migrant fishermen about HIV prevention.

“After talking with the fishermen and hearing their stories, I realized just how strong a hold our culture and surroundings have on us,” Jung said, noting that the fishing communities had a culture of



Grace Jung in Nepal.

drinking and promiscuity, without regard for marital fidelity or sexually transmitted diseases.

That struck a nerve, making her think about challenges people face in North American culture.

“I am no better than these fishermen,” Jung commented. “We are all broken. When it comes to changing behavior, it is equally difficult for me and often requires sacrifices that I don’t want to

make. We all need to be empowered and transformed if we want to truly let go of our old habits and change.”

The experiences during her internship renewed Jung’s passion for public health and deepened her faith in God. She became confident that God could use her.

“Each of my experiences was so perfectly tailored for me, down to the smallest detail, that it gives me goosebumps when I think about it,” she said.

“I felt as though God had put me in a time machine to show me a glimpse of what my future could look like.”

But young men and women don’t have to go overseas to serve God and others. There are many ways of volunteering within Canada and the United States—some as close as your local congregation.

In 2013, for example, World Renew, together with Christian Reformed World Missions and the Office of Social Justice, started a three-year project called Linked Engagement Action Programs (LEAP).

LEAP was started as a way to help youth and young adults to better engage in ministry. One aspect of the initiative was to offer internships in local churches.

After her volunteer work in East Africa, Jung returned to North America and was asked to consider doing a LEAP intern-

Grace Jung with women who are part of the Mwanzo Mwema—“good start”—project, intended to improve maternal, newborn, and child health in Kenya.



“ I am excited to see what God can do in my future. ”

ship at her home congregation, Madison Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

She said that at first she was hesitant at the prospect of committing such a large chunk of time to the church. But after some prayer and thought, she decided to give it a try for 10 weeks.

During this time, she helped the church make the transition from having an emergency food pantry for its neighbors to running a community food cooperative where those who receive resources from the food bank also have the opportunity to give back by donating their time.

Jung also helped to organize an advocacy group. The experience was so rewarding that she decided to extend the internship until she graduates in May of this year.

“I grew up as a missionary kid in India and attended a boarding school through middle and high school,” Jung explained. “Due to the frequent moves, I never quite felt like I belonged to a church.

“I was raised to believe that the church was an important part of my relationship with God, but it was not until my involvement with Madison Square Church that I began to understand what that means.

“Through my volunteer experiences, church has become an inextricable part of my spiritual walk and growth.”

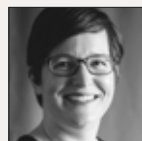
As for her future, Jung said she is convinced that God is calling her to a life that involves working with communities in the fields of public health and medicine. After graduating, she plans to attend the Medical School for International Health



Grace Jung (second from left) and World Renew staff member Nema Aluku (second from right) with staff at an HIV-prevention project in Kenya.

in Beer Sheva, Israel, and hopes to go into primary care or family practice.

“I have felt more alive than ever over the past few months, because I believe God was showing me that this is the kind of work he is calling me to do,” she said. “I am excited to see what he can do in my future.” ■



Kristen deRoo VanderBerg is communications manager for World Renew.

Volunteer Opportunities Available

Are you a young person exploring options for your future? Do you know someone who has a heart for service?

The Christian Reformed Church and its agencies have service opportunities available for young people each year. Here are a few:

1. Calvin College calvin.edu/slc/programs/
 - A variety of service-learning opportunities
 - Spring break service learning trips
 - Bible studies
 - Internships
 - Fellowships
2. Christian Reformed World Missions cwm.org/go
 - International work teams
 - International service and learning teams
 - Individual opportunities
 - Cohort opportunities
 - Momentum
3. Safe Church Ministries calvin.edu/broene/groups/sapt/
 - Sexual assault prevention teams
4. Service Link crcna.org/servicelink
 - Opportunities for individuals and groups in the United States, Canada, and internationally
5. World Renew worldrenew.net/volunteer
 - Serve With a Purpose (SWAP) program
 - International internships
 - International work teams
 - North American disaster response groups
 - College/university semester internships and interim opportunities
 - Co-op placements
 - Gap year opportunities
 - Discovery tours
 - Justice mobilizers
 - Office opportunities
6. Youth Unlimited youthunlimited.org/serve/
 - Serve

Project Aims to Help Youth Leaders ‘Do It Right’

by Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

“When I first started as a youth worker, I feared I was ‘doing it wrong.’ The program I was offering looked different from other youth groups in the city,” said Ashley Patton, children and youth coordinator for Victoria Christian Reformed Church in Victoria, B.C.

“Although I was experiencing growth and success, I still questioned if I was doing it right,” she added.

“The Canadian Youth Ministry Project is showing me that success as a youth worker is figuring out what works best for your group of youth and faithfully making that happen.”

Launched last spring by Faith Formation Ministries, the Canadian Youth Ministry Project is designed to help youth



Ashley Patton

leaders do their work in more meaningful ways. It is overseen by Syd Hielema, team leader for Faith Formation Ministries, and Ron de Vries, youth ministry consultant for Classis Alberta North.

To equip people such as Patton, the project provides webinars, blogs, Facebook postings, various events and retreats, and regional gatherings.

“We see our job as giving support to those in the trenches,” said de Vries. “We provide a range of resources and best practices—both for those who are volunteers and for those who are on staff doing youth ministry.”

To Patton, who literally lives on an island, the project has been an important resource for overcoming the isolation that youth work can entail. By connecting with other people who have similar positions and share similar challenges, she has found a sounding board, received support, and gleaned best practices.

To help others receive similar benefits, Patton agreed to serve as one of the project’s regional champions. In this role she connects with and provides help to other youth ministers and ministries in her region.

“We aren’t youth ministry gurus looking to fix or critique other people’s youth groups,” Patton said. “Our hope is to hear each other’s stories and learn about where God is working.”

“For those who have questions, we want to come alongside you and help find an answer that fits your unique setting and situation.”

While the Canadian Youth Ministry Project started as a pilot project in Canada, its leaders say they hope it will develop strategies that can be transferred to churches in the U.S. as well as Canada. ■

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg



Ashley Patton with her youth group from Victoria, B.C.

You add.
God multiplies.

Fighting for Flint

by Matt Kucinski

When Calvin College senior Martin Cervantes first learned about the water crisis in Flint, Mich., it hit him hard. Maybe because that reality was once his reality.

“I lived in Mexico for 13 years before I moved here [Leland, Mich.],” Cervantes said. “We were never able to drink out of the faucet in Mexico, always had to buy water.”

Cervantes said he was wary about drinking from the faucet when he first moved to the United States in 2007, but he slowly became accustomed to it.

“That [experience] has always been present on my mind when I hear about people locally, less than two hours away, having this issue.”

“While I can’t completely comprehend what they’re going through, I can somewhat relate, and I don’t think it is fair in any way.”

Acting on Conviction

Flint’s water had been tainted by lead after the city shifted from using the Detroit system to another water source, and its residents have seen increasing lead levels in children. Flint recently returned to using Detroit water again.

In late January, Cervantes was moved to take action. He started an event on Facebook called the Flint Water Drive & Distribution, an invitation to the community to donate bottled water and filters, deliver the water to the American Red Cross in Flint, and then work alongside the organization going door-to-door delivering water to families in need.

Fifty volunteers made the trip to Flint, taking 300 cases of water bottles and 80 gallon jugs of water.

Cervantes stressed the importance of building relationships with the people of Flint by delivering the water in person. At the time of this writing, he was working on a proposal with the college’s student senate



PHOTO: CALVIN COLLEGE

Martin Cervantes, a senior at Calvin College, organized the Flint Water Drive and Distribution.

that would empower the student-led initiative to be more than a one-time event.

“When things like this happen, you tend to see a big movement at the beginning and then it kind of wanes,” said Cervantes. “The idea is that this model will hopefully continue on, and we’ll continue to gather water and have volunteers go over there for months.”

Living Out the Mission

“For students, there is importance in being boots on the ground,” said Ethan DeVries, student senate president.

“You are creating a relationship, which is an important concept in creating change.”

“You can’t help solve anything from standing afar; you won’t understand, won’t grow relationships that are beneficial down the road.”

College administrators agree. And they are delighted to see a student’s passion intersecting with a need in the world.

“It’s a blessing to see our students embodying the college’s mission,” said Sarah Visser, vice president for student life.

“Calvin is a place that fosters curiosity in students as well as a sense of agency. When our students see evidence of injustice and brokenness in the world, they respond with compassion and action.”

Cervantes says his actions reflect the heart of the Calvin community.

“I wake up every morning, take a shower, get a glass of water—that’s something they can’t do every morning.”

“We always talk about being stewards of creation, doing what we can. I think if there’s one thing I’ve seen here at Calvin and just learned, it is the amount of pas-



PHOTO: JAMES LI

A group of 50 students, staff, and community members volunteered in Flint through The American Red Cross.

sion and drive that people have and care for others,” he said.

“We see a city like Flint, an hour or so away from us, lacking this basic need of water and we know that we can and should do something about it.” ■



Matt Kucinski is media relations manager for Calvin College.

Forming a Deep and Abiding Faith

We plan for and pray for the development of a deep and abiding faith in Christ among all—but particularly for our young people.

I'm not an expert when it comes to faith formation, but as a parent of seven and having been engaged in the college scene for many years, I've come to some conclusions.

First, it's about relationships more than programs. Catechism didn't exactly work for our son with Down syndrome. But faithful mentoring by a wise elder in our church led to Paul's profession of faith. In front of the church he gave the answer to the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism—that he is not his own but belongs to his faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Second, it's about events. While we know that mountaintop experiences are hard to sustain, Barb and I were so grateful for the service project our youngest experienced in Sioux Falls, S.D., last summer.

That trip occurred at a time our family was dealing with loss. That week Fekadu learned about prayer and developed his ability to voice his faith. His testimony, given in church the following Sunday morning, was an answer to prayer. Our eyes teared up as he said, "Being adopted means that I've been chosen—chosen by God, I've been chosen by my family."

Third, it's about new cultures and places. I believe the Holy Spirit uses situations where we experience new things, causing us to reflect on our typical ways. We've had wonderful opportunities to be in off-campus study with students from Calvin College and Trinity Christian College.

Imagine the conversations and discussions that emerge when staying in a wing of an AIDS hospice in Johannesburg, South Africa, or learning about the Long Walk forced upon the Navajo people in 1864 by the U.S. government.

Such learning—especially in the context of dedicated Christian inquiry—lasts for a lifetime. Recently I asked some former students to reflect upon the impact these experiences had. Here are some of their comments:

"I'll never forget my first day driving into the dusty campus, feeling anxious about the mistake I was making! But as we toured the stunning countryside, met fascinating new people, challenged ourselves, and grew roots together as a group, I learned the joy of creating a family from friends and the deep importance of community."

"God used my experience to teach me that there is not one bit of creation that God cannot redeem, whether it's a person, a building, or even an entire city. That experience, along with many others, has shaped my approach to ministry and the way I view God's kingdom and the job that all Christians have to build his kingdom here on earth."

"This experience pushed me in my faith and allowed me to dig deeper and have a closer relationship to God. What I learned is something that could never be taught in a classroom. I will be forever grateful for this experience!"



The Spirit can use relationships, events, and places in powerful ways to form hearts and minds. So what's our job as the church? Put simply, it's this:

- to make sure that caring, wise adults (besides parents) step into the lives of our children and youth.
- to support events that might provide a mountaintop experience for young people, and then keep walking alongside them after they descend from the mountain.
- to make sure that we step out of our comfort zones—as families, as groups of youth, as congregations—to confront the reality next door and far away and find the certainty of God's promises.

For God is making all things new—including the lives of the young people we love. ■

“The Spirit can use relationships, events, and places in powerful ways to form hearts and minds.”



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

The Right Message at the Right Time for China



As the Christian faith gains momentum in China, the Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) Chinese team is strategically situated to provide leadership.

“Reports show that up to 5 percent of the Chinese population identify themselves as Christians,” noted Pastor Jerry An, BTGMI Chinese ministry leader. “In the next few years we will know if the Christian church will continue its rapid growth.”

Christian media is crucial to the growth of the church in China. “People spend up to four hours a day on their smartphones and social media,” said An. “Any ministry that is not available on a smartphone will not be relevant.”

In 2015, the ministry launched a mobile app called *Be Thou My Rhythm* that provides high-quality, bibli-

cally sound content integrated with current issues.

“We work in partnership with more than 80 Christian organizations and individual ministries that are feeding quality content,” An explained.

Most users access the content through social platforms. “Because of the viral nature of today’s media, our content needs to be strong, up-to-date. Our goal is to provide the right message to the right people at the right time for the right effect,” said An.

BTGMI not only provides quality content for *Be Thou My Rhythm*; its Chinese team has also become a leader in the new media movement in China.

In January 2016, BTGMI organized a media conference in Taiwan, pulling together more than 100 media ministry leaders from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Korea. Attendees also included

Pastor Jerry An (far left) with keynote speakers at the 2016 BTGMI media ministry conference in Taiwan.

Christians from secular companies whose leaders are interested in advancing the gospel in China.

The conference featured a report by Peter Zhao, a leading Chinese Christian economist. With a BTGMI grant, Zhao has researched language that resonates with new believers and seekers in China.

“The report is invaluable for all media ministries developing content and strategy for new media outreach,” noted An. “This event helped us build bridges for advancing the gospel in China.” ■

—by Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministries International

SHORT TAKES



Participants sing during Worship Symposium 2016.

Worship Ministries Brings Learning Groups to Symposium

The Worship Ministries office of the CRC is supporting learning groups who meet in North America and Ukraine to study worship in times of change, conflict, or crisis.

With Pastor-Church Relations and the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, the office brought members of these groups to the 2016 Symposium on Worship to learn, network, and be inspired.

“Worship Symposium 2016 is finished, but what happened there will live on for a lifetime,” said one of the participants. ■

—by Diane Dykgraaf,
Worship Ministries

Children Rally for Change

On a December day, Pramilia Ghale joined a throng of other children walking up and down the mountains of Nepal to share messages about toilets.

“They walked through beautiful rice paddy fields and across several small villages,” explained Rubash Tamang, World Renew’s water, sanitation, and hygiene educator.

“They shouted for two to three hours unceasingly to help make the community aware that they should stop open defecation and start building toilets.”

The child rally was part of World Renew’s disaster-response program in Nepal, where an earthquake killed more than 8,000 people and caused millions of dollars of damage in April 2015. World



Pramilia Ghale is a small girl with a lot of passion.

Renew provided emergency food supplies and has also been helping people rebuild.

As part of this effort, World Renew has started clubs that help children cope with trauma but also teach messages

about health and hygiene through games and songs. They have been trained about the importance of having and using latrines, washing their hands with soap, and drinking only clean water.

As a next step, the children wanted to share their knowledge with the adults in their communities. They decided to hold a rally, planned a route, wrote slogans, and invited their friends to join.

“It was an overwhelming experience to observe how children were so enthusiastic and motivated to help their communities,” said Tamang. “Children really can make a difference.” ■

—Kristen deRoo Vanderberg,
World Renew

South Korean Teachers Visit West Michigan Christian Schools

A group of 16 teachers from South Korea spent a week of their winter break getting a firsthand look at seven Christian schools in West Michigan.

The visit was a part of Christian Reformed World Missions’ Educational Care (EC) program, which seeks to improve Christian education around the world.

“We found that students in South Korea are taught very well how to recite, but not how to apply what they learn,” said Al Persenaire, EC’s project manager. “They also express a desire to learn how to better integrate their biblical faith with their curriculum.”

Regular EC training events take place in South Korea. Since Christian schools there have only been growing for about 15 years, Persenaire and other EC program members believed it would help teachers to visit schools with a longer history.

“We were so encouraged as we witnessed Christian education at the classroom level,” said Ma Byong Shik.

Ma once worked at a South Korean public school but was discouraged by the



Teachers from Korea and CRC staff visited Grandville Christian School and six other Christian schools in West Michigan.

fierce level of competition and pressure to succeed the school placed on students.

Several years later, Ma has been working hard to develop his country’s emerging Christian school scene, taking on leadership roles in one of the nation’s largest Christian school associations.

Ma and the others were especially impressed at seeing the high level of

involvement of parent volunteers in the schools. They hope to encourage parents at their own schools to do the same.

“We will return to South Korea with many practical insights that we can use right away,” Ma said. ■

—Brian Clark,
Christian Reformed World Missions

You add.
God multiplies.



Talking theology after sharing slices of pizza.

Theology over Pizza

Campus minister Shiao Chong was inspired to host discussions about faith and theology by the “pub theology” trend, but pizza—not beer—is the perk of his relaxed meetups at York University in Toronto.

Theology Over Pizza (TOP) meets weekly and brings people of all ages, races, and religions in to discuss theology, said Chong.

Students appreciate the opportunity to ask questions and wrestle with them together, even if there are no final answers. They are encouraged by realizing that fellow Christians, as well as people of other faiths, struggle with the same questions, said Chong.

Christian Reformed Home Missions funds over 30 campus ministries where ministers like Chong help students discover what God has in store for their lives.

Chong emphasized the need to create a safe space in which to ask questions. “The best questions come from non-Christians,” he said.

He related the story of a non-Christian student who asked one day, “What makes the Bible God’s Word? Why not the Quran?”

This question spurred a rich discussion for the Christians in the group. They had to step up and share their faith in a way that many hadn’t before.

“In these groups, people are free to ask difficult questions and confront contradictions between what they thought about Christianity and what is written in the Bible,” said an alumnus of TOP. ■

—by Annemarie Byl,
Christian Reformed Home Missions

Pastor’s Wife Keeps Shelves Stocked

Lidia Silva never imagined she was also “called to serve” at Calvin Theological Seminary when she and her pastor husband, Thiago, left Brazil for his theological studies.

Although she is a trained and licensed nurse-midwife in Brazil, Silva is still improving her language skills and is not yet ready to seek licensure in Michigan.

So she was happy to accept the coordinator position at the Idema Food Pantry while she continues to strengthen her English speaking and comprehension.

Silva, who is analytical and friendly, draws from her gifts as both a nurse and a pastor’s wife. The shelves are logically organized, product is neatly arranged, and student preferences are carefully tracked.

She offers students recipes for items such as banana preserves as well as samples to entice them.

Silva has also introduced them to quail and venison donated by hunters.

Students appreciate the pantry. While it may be surprising to think of Calvin Seminary offering a food pantry, students qualify for free food if they are below 200 percent of U.S. federal poverty income guidelines.

Most students in seminary today are sacrificing jobs and incomes in order to complete their studies and follow their ministry callings. Students also want to stay out of debt as much as possible.

Food comes to the pantry from different sources, and donors help to secure food supplies.

Silva explained that fresh fruit and vegetables as well as milk are the most desired food items.

“When we run low, especially on milk, we pray and God provides.” ■

—by Jinny De Jong,
Calvin Theological Seminary



Lidia Silva shows off items in the Idema Food Pantry.

SHORT TAKES



Pastor Jack Roeda (center) shares a meal at a Grand Rapids-area mosque.

Congregations Hold Interfaith Meals

Seeking to build better interfaith relations, two West Michigan Christian Reformed congregations sat down for dinner with members of local mosques.

“This evening was such a powerful blessing for all who attended,” said Jerry Koning, pastor of Trinity CRC in Grandville, Mich., of the December dinner.

“It was a wonderful event. I look forward to ways we can join and continue to build a relationship in the future,” said Jack Roeda, pastor of Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, of the January gathering. ■

—by Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

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

Spring into Gardening

If you live in a place where the weather is warm most of the year, then you've already seen many different types of plants and flowers this spring

season. If you live further north, now may be the perfect time to think about planting a garden. Here are a few tips to get started.



Cool Kinds of Gardens

Gardens can grow just about anywhere!

Rooftop Gardens

Since some places in large cities do not have much extra land for gardening, many people use the rooftops of buildings to plant gardens. This is a great way to use the extra space on roofs for a very special purpose.



Container Gardens

All you need to create a container garden is a bag of potting soil, a package of seeds, and regular watering. Container gardeners use everyday containers such as buckets, old gutters, and wheelbarrows to grow all sorts of flowers and vegetables. An adult may need to drill holes in the bottom of the container to make sure that water drains through. These kinds of gardens are fun to look at, and they're a great way to recycle old things you have at home!



Yes, Grandpa is old, but no, you cannot use him for a container garden!



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Cool Garden Creatures

Bees are a garden's best friend. Bees love to buzz from flower to flower to collect pollen and nectar. As the bees travel to each flower, pollen from the bees lands on a special part of the flower that helps the flowers produce fruit and more flowers. Without bees, plants would not even exist!

Earthworms may be squiggly and squirmy, but they can help your plants grow. These underground creatures create tunnels in the soil as they squiggle and squirm. The tunnels create spaces for air and water to get to the roots of plants. Earthworms also eat things in the ground like dead leaves, grass, and yes, even dirt! After an earthworm's yummy meal, it produces waste called "castings." This adds great nutrients to the soil to help plants grow even healthier. The more worms in your garden, the better!





How to Plant a Garden

Step 1: Ask an adult for permission.

It is probably not a good idea to start digging in your backyard without asking a parent first! If you are not able to plant a garden in your backyard (or if you live in an apartment or condo), you could make a cool container garden instead.

Step 2: Choose the type of garden you will grow.

Decide what you want to grow in your garden. You could grow vegetables or flowers—or both! If you choose a vegetable garden, find out which vegetables grow well in your area. Ask a parent to help you buy a few packets of seeds. Here are some seeds that grow quickly: sunflowers (unless your garden is big, plant just one or two of these since they take a lot of room), leaf lettuce, radishes, cherry tomatoes, and snow peas (these last two are fun to eat right off the vine!).

Step 3: Choose a good spot with lots of sunshine.

Plants need plenty of sunshine, so be sure to choose a space that gets lots of sun. Your garden will thank you!

Step 4: Prepare the soil.

Once you find a good gardening spot, use a shovel to break up and loosen the dirt. Remove rocks and sticks. Ask a grownup to check your soil; you might need to add some compost, manure, or other organic material. Soil that is too hard is not good gardening soil.

Step 5: Plant the seeds!

Ask your mom or dad to help you follow the planting directions on the back of your packet of seeds.

Step 6: Water your garden regularly.

Make sure your garden gets plenty of water. Some gardeners say that your garden should get about 1 inch of water each week. Unless it rains, you'll need to use a watering can, hose, or sprinkler.

Step 7: Wait, wait, and wait.

Now it's your job to wait! Within a few weeks you should have a spouting garden.



Make Your Own Egg Carton Garden!

Here is a fun way to make a garden right in your home! It's best if you do this activity outside, since you may get a little dirty.

Here's what you'll need:

- Styrofoam or plastic egg carton
- Potting soil
- A spoon
- Seeds of your choice
- Water
- A pen or pair of scissors

Here's what to do:

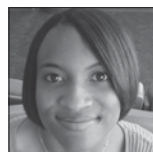
1. Carefully cut off the flat top of the egg carton. Put it aside for later.
2. Poke a small hole in the bottom of each egg space with a pen or a pair of scissors.
3. Using a spoon, carefully fill each egg space with soil.
4. Make a small hole with your finger in the dirt of each egg space.
5. Plant three or four seeds into each hole and cover with soil.
6. Place the cut-off top of the egg carton under the soil-filled part of the carton. This will catch any water that drains from the holes.
7. Pour just enough water into the carton to dampen the soil. Do not add too much water—that can make it hard for the plant to grow.
8. Take the egg carton inside and put it in a warm, dry place in your house where it will not be disturbed.
9. Watch your garden grow!

Sun
Water
Seeds
Soil



Depending on the type of seeds you plant, the seeds should sprout within a couple of weeks. Keep the soil moist while you wait. After your plants begin to grow, place your garden on a windowsill where your seedlings will get more sunlight. When the weather outside is warm with no more days of chilly frost, you can plant your seedlings outside.

Enjoy watching your garden grow!



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

BY NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF



A FRAMEWORK FOR PASTORAL GUIDANCE

THE REPORT of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance Regarding Same-Sex Marriage is among the most pastorally sensitive, theologically sure-footed, and analytically acute Christian Reformed Church synodical reports ever written. The committee has thought for itself and thought deeply, mining the resources of Scripture and the Reformed tradition, at no point mimicking what others have said.

A Daunting Mandate

The mandate given to the committee by Synod 2013 was daunting. In 2005, same-sex marriage became the law of the land in Canada; in 2015 it became the law of the land in the United States. The task assigned the committee was to give pastoral guidance to the members and clergy of the CRC on how to deal with this new situation. The committee was instructed to frame the guidance it offered within the context of the synodical report of 1973 on homosexuality and the synodical report of 2002 on pastoral care to homosexual members.

The 1973 report declared that whereas homosexual orientation is not sinful, and persons of such orientation are to be welcomed within the church, sexual relations between persons of the same sex are sinful. The newly formed 2013 committee was not to discuss the pros and cons of those declarations. Taking them as a given, it was to offer guidance on how to

“apply the biblical teachings reflected in the Acts of Synod of 1973” in light of the legality of same-sex marriage and also to provide guidance on “how to communicate these teachings in a truthful and gracious way within North America.”

Synod 2013 further instructed the committee to follow the “shepherding model” pioneered by the Faith Formation Committee, a synodical committee established in 2007. It was “to consult extensively with pastors in Canada and the United States, members of different ethnic minorities, and others who have a broad range of experience and expertise . . . to both inform and provide feedback regarding the work of the committee.” The committee carried out these instructions by convening dozens of listening sessions in Canada and the U.S. and by commissioning the Calvin College Center for Social Research to conduct surveys. Information gleaned from these surveys is included in the committee’s report.

Among the many striking things one learns from the surveys is that only 65 percent of CRC ministers, only 44 percent of CRC students, and only 41 percent of CRC members generally embrace the official CRC position that “gay Christians are called to lifelong celibacy” (Report, p. 49). There is a serious disconnect between the official position of the CRC on homosexual relations and the convictions of the majority of its members. It is my view that this situation makes it

THE STATE HAS THE AUTHORITY TO ESTABLISH THE CRITERIA FOR A CIVIL MARRIAGE; THE CHURCH HAS THE AUTHORITY TO ESTABLISH THE CRITERIA FOR A CHRISTIAN OR ECCLESIAL MARRIAGE.

imperative that the denomination revisit the argumentation and conclusions of the 1973 report.

Establishing a Framework

The committee does an admirable job of establishing a framework for the pastoral guidance it offers. I judge that that framework, that way of thinking about the issues, is at least as important for members of the church as the detailed advice the committee offers; accordingly, I will devote most of my response to presenting that framework.

The committee emphasizes that marriage is both a civil and an ecclesial institution, and that these two are distinctly different. Civil marriage is a legal status conferred on a couple by a duly authorized civil official. Ecclesial or Christian marriage is a covenantal relationship sealed by a minister. Typically both members of the couple declare themselves as Christians. Two atheists can be joined together in a civil marriage; they cannot be joined together in an ecclesial or Christian marriage.

What makes things complicated and confusing is that we use the term “marriage” for both the civil and the ecclesial institution, and that, in North America, a minister when marrying a couple typically acts both as an ecclesiastical official and as a civil official; he or she performs both a “church wedding” and a civil marriage.

The legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada and the U.S. means that the state in both of these countries has removed one of the conditions traditionally required for a civil marriage to be performed, namely, that members of the couple be of opposite gender. The committee emphasizes that this change in the criteria for a civil marriage does not imply that denominations have to change their criteria for performing an ecclesial marriage.

At this point many of us want to ask whether, from a Christian perspective, it was right for Canada and the U.S. to legalize same-sex civil marriage. Though it was not part of the committee’s mandate to address this question, and though it refrains from offering an answer, it does give some helpful suggestions for those who locate themselves within the Reformed tradition to think about the matter.

Think in terms of the Kuyperian concept of principled pluralism, the committee suggests. In our society there are distinct authority structures operating in different spheres of society, each possessing distinct God-given rights, tasks, and authority within its sphere. Church, state, and family are three such spheres. In the case before us, the state has the authority to establish the criteria for a civil marriage; the church has the authority to establish the criteria for a Christian or ecclesial marriage.

So how should those who are Reformed Christians think about whether or not it was right for the state in Canada and the U.S. to change the traditional criteria for civil marriage by

legalizing same-sex marriage? The committee suggests that we think in terms of justice. Nobody today disputes that justice requires that the state marry two atheists. Does justice also require that the state marry persons of the same gender who want to be married? There will be differences of opinion among us as to how that question should be answered, but that’s how the issue should be framed.

Pastoral Advice

I have spent my time up to this point explaining the framework that the committee establishes for the pastoral advice it gives on how to deal with the many issues that the legalization of same-sex marriage raises for members of the CRC, and for members of a good many other denominations as well. What about attending a same-sex wedding? What about participating in a same-sex wedding? What about providing services for a same-sex wedding?

Those issues are important. But given the 1973 report on homosexuality, the most difficult issue posed to members of the CRC by the legalizing of same-sex marriage is this: what does a CRC congregation say to a same-sex couple who have been married in a civil ceremony and who want to participate in the life of the congregation?

The 1973 report requires that the church say to them that to be members in “good standing” they must be celibate. I personally doubt that there will be many same-sex couples who accept this condition. But if there are some who do, they are in good standing and are to be treated as anyone else in good standing.

What about those who do not accept the condition but still want to participate in the life of the congregation? The committee wisely resists propounding hard-and-fast rules at this point, or at any other; instead it offers pastorally sensitive advice on how to exercise the love of Christ in this complex and painful situation. ■

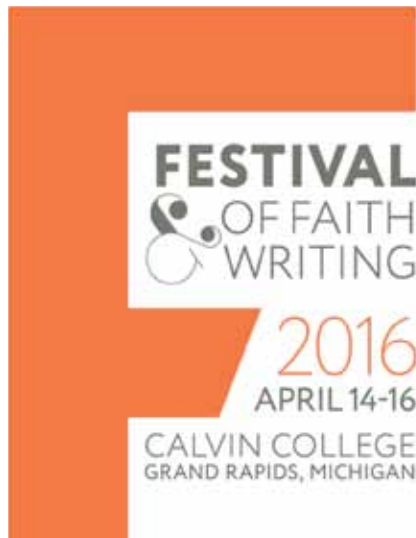
Those who want to know the committee’s advice on the sizable number of issues it considers can access the report in the Agenda for Synod 2016; it is also posted at crcna.org/sites/default/files/same-sex_marriage.pdf.

Those who want a summary of the committee’s advice can find it in the News story “Pastoral Guidance for Churches Regarding Same-Sex Marriage” by Gayla R. Postma (*Banner*, Feb. 2016, p.14).



Nicholas Wolterstorff is Noah Porter Professor Emeritus of Philosophical Theology at Yale University. He taught philosophy at Calvin College from 1959 to 1989, and was a member of the faculty of Yale Divinity School and the Yale philosophy department from 1989 until he retired at the end of 2001.

A Feast of Words



FESTIVALS OFTEN INCLUDE MUSIC, street dancing, and lots of food. The Festival of Faith and Writing serves up music through words singing from the page, action by way of imagination, and abundant food for thought. The biennial celebration will soon blanket the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. Since 1990 this unique festival has invited a diverse group of writers representing many countries, religions, regions, and races whose faith informs their writing.

Book lovers join writers and publishers at presentations of fiction, memoir, nonfiction, and poetry. As the late Dale Brown, former festival director, put it: “Let’s celebrate words from all kinds of directions.” Previous festivals have featured such luminaries as Maya Angelou, Frederick Buechner, Annie Dillard, John Updike, and Eugene Peterson.

This festival celebrates the many ways authors grapple with faith and life.

There was a time when imagination was suspect in religious circles; this festival celebrates the many ways authors grapple with faith and life through imaginative writing. As longtime attendee and speaker Luci Shaw writes in *Breath for Bones*, “If our lives are centered in God’s reality, we can risk working out from the center in new directions, each of which may hold the excitement of a fresh adventure.”

Noted authors will deliver plenary sessions that are open to the public: George Saunders (short story: *Tenth of December*, *Persuasion Nation*); Zadie Smith (fiction: *White Teeth*, *NW*); Tobias Wolff (memoir: *This Boy’s Life*, *Pharaoh’s Army*) and Nadia Bolz-Weber (see Otto Selles’s review here of *Accidental Saints*). Among new voices this year are screenwriter Paul Harrill, artists/authors Makoto Fujimura and Arree Chung, and young adult writer M.T. Anderson.

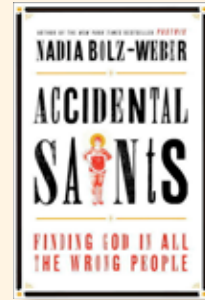
For those who have anticipated Festival for two years, this year’s lineup is especially intriguing: a mother and daughter of different faiths (the Raybons), a teacher and mentor turned colleagues (Wolff and Saunders), and the writer of a modern parable, Chigozie Obioma. Festival goers will have opportunity to hear the authors of works about discrimination (Chris Hoke and Kelly Brown Douglas), the gay Christian experience (Wesley Hill), and lament (Scott Cairns and Christian Wiman).

Veteran attendees and newcomers will enjoy abundant music, action, and food for thought—perhaps enough to last the 730 days until Festival 2018.

Festival runs April 14-16, 2016. To register go to ffw.calvin.edu. Tickets for public events can be purchased at the Calvin box office. ■



Carol J. Rottman is a teacher of memoir and author of *A Memoir of Parting*. She is a member of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People

by Nadia Bolz-Weber
reviewed by Otto Selles

As the pastor of House for All Saints and Sinners in Denver, Colo., Bolz-Weber is not what you might expect of a Lutheran pastor. She swears, has the temper of a tiger, and sports multiple tattoos. Despite the nonconformist exterior, Bolz-Weber is touchingly sensitive in her portrayal of the “accidental saints” she meets in her pastoral work. She includes herself in that group, admitting her own foibles. While some will be put off by her raw language, Bolz-Weber demonstrates a rooted faith and offers great spiritual wisdom. (Convergent)



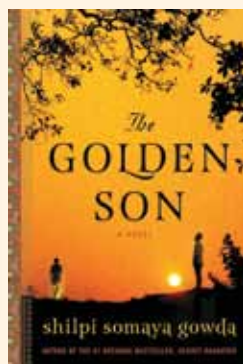
Float

by Daniel Miyares

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



In this wordless picture book for very young children, a boy and his father make a newspaper boat. Outside, cloudy skies promise rain and possibly puddles on which to float the boat. When a puddle materializes, the boy floats the boat on its surface. *Float* captures the love and emotional support of a father for his son, as well as a child's adventurous dreams—dreams that enliven and bless the lives of many young children. (Simon & Schuster)



The Golden Son

by Shilpi Somaya Gowda

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Shilpi Gowda weaves the stories of two childhood friends, Anil and Leena. Born in the same rural Indian town, they spend their early years blissfully unaware of their differences. By the time they are teens, their friendship feels the strain of the distance between them as the caste system, education, and economics lead them down different paths. Anil's privilege takes him to the U.S.; Leena's family gives her in marriage to a man who can provide for her. Family loyalty, traditions, and expectations are tested in this novel that is hopeful even as it is heartbreaking. (William Morrow)

Dear Wormwood

by The Oh Hellos

reviewed by Robert N. Hosack



On their second full-length album, The Oh Hellos have crafted a sprawling soundscape that offers a blend of atmospheric folk rock, mixing bright and exuberant instrumentation with ethereal lyrics that wrestle with the struggles of life in a fallen world. *Dear Wormwood* is inspired by C. S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*; many of the songs are written as missives to an antagonist. The title track's repetitive refrain, "I know who you are now," is a haunting reminder of innocence lost and the ongoing struggle between the believer and the world, the flesh, and the devil. (Elektra)

Meet the Patels

reviewed by Kristy Quist

Ravi Patel is almost 30, and his parents despair that he will ever marry and start the family they've been waiting for. Ravi agrees to try the modern version of the arranged marriage, meeting a number of Indian young women over a year's time. Ravi's sister, Geeta, who is also still single, films his quest in a sweet and entertaining documentary that illuminates the hard-to-navigate road to love as well as the particular Indian culture to which the Patels belong. On disc now. (Alchemy)



THE LOWDOWN



Dear John: What would it be like to worship with John Calvin? Karin Maag's book, *Lifting Hearts to the Lord*, explores how Calvin and his fellow Genevans looked at worship. (Eerdmans)



Jordan's River:

The River, the debut album from Christian folk

rocker Jordan Feliz, is due in stores on the 22nd. (Centricity)



Reel Reboots:

This month two very different classic children's

books get big-screen treatment; *Clifford the Big Red Dog* and *The Jungle Book* are both coming to theaters near you.



Irresistible Force:

Star Wars VII: The Force Awakens will be unleashed on the home-viewing

public on April 5. Find our reviewer's take on the movie at thebanner.org. (Walt Disney)



MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

How Weekly Communion Is Shaping Our Church

EIGHT YEARS AGO, six families left Boston Square Church for a variety of reasons. Any church feels the loss of a single family, but for a church our size, where some of those who left taught Sunday school, baked cookies, ran the sound system, and served on council—that calls the future of the congregation into question.

The council began to discuss and research different options. Folks gathered every Sunday after church to pray for wisdom and discernment. At the end of a year of prayer and conversation, we realized we had two choices: make significant changes or close.

As we prayed and talked and worried and mourned together, a vision began to emerge. We decided to emphasize two pillars—passionate community and spiritual transformation. The first we did well already—we are a friendly, welcoming congregation with a strong commitment to Christian community. The second, spiritual transformation, was not as strong. We had filled out church health surveys showing that it ranked near the bottom of our church's gifts.

But we wanted that to change. And we wanted that change to drive us into mission, which we defined very broadly as building the kingdom of God.

Embracing a New Vision

The more we talked about how to achieve those goals, the more the practice of weekly communion captured our imagination. It

brought both pillars together in a way nothing else could. Almost by definition, communion builds community. As the Heidelberg Catechism declares: “through the Holy Spirit . . . we are united more and more to Christ’s blessed body. And so, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone . . .” (Q&A 76).

But communion also brings spiritual transformation. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that, “as surely as I receive . . . the bread and cup of the Lord . . . so surely [Christ] nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood” (Q&A 75).

As pastors, we knew this from experience. We both attended Princeton Theological Seminary, where communion was celebrated every week at a chapel service. We both realized how much that weekly communion service, more than all the other activities on campus, became a spiritual highlight of each week and the foundation of our identity as a community together.

Finally we held a special congregational meeting. The choice was to close or to approve a vision that included weekly communion. By God’s grace, the congregation embraced the vision.

No one knew quite what to expect, and we were immediately met with a number of challenges. Celebrating communion weekly brought several issues to the forefront with a new urgency. Some folks were concerned that

celebrating every week would make communion less “special.” Others worried that our services would go too long. Still others wondered if unbelievers would feel welcome if we were celebrating the Lord’s Supper and they couldn’t participate. And what about children at the Lord’s Supper?

And then there were the logistical issues. Do we serve in the pews as we always had, or do we come forward to the table? Do we serve individual cups or dip the bread into a common cup? Do we pre-slice the bread or tear from a loaf? If we come forward, do people file through stations or form a circle together? What about germs if we touch the same loaf? What about folks with gluten sensitivities? We spent hours and hours in our elders’ meetings talking through these theological and practical questions, and we experimented with various methods along the way.

In the end, we settled on a pattern that seemed to fit best. Most Sundays people come forward for communion, processing through stations at the front of the sanctuary. There, a pastor or elder breaks bread from a loaf for each person, who then dips it into either a cup of juice or wine. (We also have a small table with gluten-free bread and a separate cup available for those who need it; an elder is available to serve folks in the pews who are unable to come forward or prefer to stay seated.)

Baptized children who have completed Children’s Worship at about second grade are

welcome at the table, at the discretion of their parents. We created a short class for children to help them better understand participation at the table. And we encourage anyone—adult or child—who is not ready to partake in the elements to come forward and receive a blessing instead.

Along with celebrating communion every week, we are able to vary our communion liturgy according to the church year. For example, during Advent we focus on communion as a foretaste of our future. In Lent our celebration is more penitential, and during ordinary time our emphasis is on being nourished in our faith. Repeating the same liturgy every week for a season allows the various themes to take root in our souls.

A Different Congregation

Change is never easy. After our vote, more people left. And after we decided to welcome children to the table without first making Public Profession of Faith, a few more left. We had to cut our overall budget by 25 percent, and for at least three years we were only able to make our operating expenses because of a sizeable bequest that came at just the right time.

But now, years later, we are a different congregation. Almost half of our current members joined after we voted to change. We're still small by Grand Rapids standards, and our budget is still bare-bones. But there is a new life and vitality in our church. Longtime members have been gracious about the changes, and some folks who were not sure about celebrating communion every week now say they can't imagine going to a church without it.

Most important, our practice of weekly communion is shaping us as a body in profound ways. We see the teachings of the Heidelberg Catechism coming to life. Experiencing God's love in the tangible form of the bread and the cup every week is connecting us more deeply to Christ and to one another and is nurturing us for ministry in our world. Folks at church talk

about their faith more now, about how they are growing in their relationship with God. As we gather around the table each week, dying and rising with Christ has become more of a theme in our worship and our spiritual lives and in our actual conversations.

Whereas before we generally liked one another, now there is a deeper sense of community and of praying for one another and bearing each other's burdens. Seeing folks come forward to the table each week deepens our bonds and reminds us to pray for each other. Experiencing Christ's sacrificial love for us each week as the bread is broken and the wine is poured spurs us to greater service and sacrificial giving.

Weekly communion is making the Christian life more down-to-earth real for us. Our faith is more than just a matter of words; it is a physical reality as we receive Christ not only in the Word, but in the bread and wine.

Our whole lives are anchored by the shared experience of finding grace at God's table. More than ever, we see members living their faith in their daily lives—reaching out to neighbors and strangers, giving generously, opening their homes to others. We have become much more of a "sending" congregation, with members involved in building the kingdom in our city and praying for and sending people on short-term and long-term travels to build God's kingdom as missionaries, students, and teachers around the world.

The new life we've experienced at Boston Square isn't only because we celebrate communion each week. But that has been central to what the Spirit is doing at Boston Square. "Do this in remembrance of me" is more than just a phrase carved in the communion table. It's the foundation of a community experiencing spiritual transformation. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)

Our whole lives
are anchored by
the shared
experience of
finding grace at
God's table.



Elizabeth and Jay Vander Haagen are co-pastors at Boston Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Eulogy

WHENEVER I DRIVE HOME from a funeral, I worry about my kids not being able to dig up enough honorable things to say about me once I've been dressed out in a coffin beneath the pulpit. My offspring, on the occasion of my death, will take turns at the lectern, scripts in hand. They'll clear their throats, and, like archeologists displaying pottery shards and fragments of burnished bone, present their findings to the gathered mourners. But what will they say?

Lord knows, I was too preoccupied with my work during my children's tender years. What have I done to encourage my little family—to help my daughter conquer her fear of algebra? To improve my son's tennis game or dry his tears when a bully belittled him? To explain to him the way of a man with a maid? To convince my kids that God loves them even when they can't figure God out?

I'm hardly a scoundrel. But in their last-minute preparations and hasty searching through outdated planners, faded photos, and the far recesses of their memories, will my kids be able to come up with a page of attributes to read before the solemn assembly?

Every funeral reminds me that yet another saint has been laid to rest. But why always a saint? What made the person such a shining light? I compare myself with friends and colleagues. Some, by all appearances, are beacons of piety and virtue. But others are a lot like me, their "halos" hardly glowing. And that thought brings comfort and reassurance. Maybe I'm not all that deficient in virtue after all.

At my funeral, the photo display will include images of the old man and the young man and the grinning baby, an aggregate of milestones in a long and well-lived life. The pet white rabbits will be there; the first bike; the family on a picnic; the graduation portraits showing confidence and no pimples. The honeymoon shot of a young man aglow with tentative triumph, radiant bride on his arm. The couple's children in advancing stages of maturation, always smiling and civil. A steady march toward successful aging. An exhibition of benign, if not virtuous, living. As if the old man had never been disappointed, had never in his life damned anything, had not clenched his fists or shed tears when things went terribly awry. Had not agonized over his doubts about God and fretted and fumed when his children frustrated him. Had never antagonized his forbearing wife or withheld his affection just to spite her. No, the visitors will ooh and aah over the photos and make comments about how well the deceased had aged and what a lovely family he had.



“Nothing but the truth” may sway a courtroom jury—but it tends to spoil a good funeral.

The point of a funeral service is to eulogize, to “speak or write in high praise of.” To extol. “Nothing but the truth” may sway a courtroom jury—but it tends to spoil a good funeral. Full disclosure has no place among mourners. The only funeral at which the whole truth would not cast a pall on the celebration of a life well-lived, had the dead man stayed in his tomb, was that of our Lord and Savior. But there had been no time for a eulogy, it being hard on the Sabbath when Jesus spoke his last words—barely enough time to wrap him up and deposit him behind a hastily rolled stone. By the time a service could be arranged for, the Subject had escaped.

Because of that great escape, I need not worry about my kids finding dirt on me, nor fear lest they come across mucky linens. The Risen One has swept away my dirt, clothed me in robes of righteousness. So I'm not all that concerned, after all, whether the minister's approbatory texts honestly describe my life. They will not. But that's okay. With those texts we eulogize not the casketed corpse but the living Christ. And give our kids permission to say good things while overlooking the shabby and the ignoble.

It's all good. ■



Hank Ottens is a retired orthopedic surgeon and an active gardener, photographer, and singer. He attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich.

ADS

Deadlines: May issue is 4/4/16; June issue is 5/9/16. 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

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER (U. S.) In May 1988 the President of the United States signed into law a bill establishing the first Thursday of May as a National Day of Prayer. This year the National Day of Prayer falls on Thursday, May 5. The synod of the CRC has urged churches in the United States "to observe faithfully any national day of prayer which the United States President publicizes to the nation" (Acts of Synod 1969).

"Our churches must be open to our congregations and our fellow countrymen on such occasions, when God in his providence leads those in civil authority to call our citizenry to pray. We must pray for and with our country" (Acts of Synod 1958).

Steven R. Timmermans, Executive Director

Calls Accepted

REVEREND DAVID CLARENCE GROEN from New Westminster CRC has accepted the call to Hope Community Church in Surrey, B. C.

Eligible for Call

REV. ALISON JONES was examined by Classis GLA and is eligible to serve as Minister of the Word and Sacraments. Rev. Alison has the gifts of intercession, drama, praise and worship. Contact: Alisonjonesajcc@yahoo.com; 2330 W. 115th Place, Hawthorne, CA 90250 or (home) 323-756-7566 or (cell) 323-877-9676

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, May 19, 2016, 4PM, at First CRC in Zeeland. Agenda deadline is April 6.

Rev. Ronald J. Meyer, S. C.

Available for Call

REV. RICHARD JONES The Council of Los Angeles Community CRC announces that its pastor Rev. Richard Jones is available for call as Minister of the Word and Sacraments. LACCRC can no longer employ a pastor due to budget constraints. Pastor Richard has a strong desire to reach the lost, exceptional skill on piano and organ and enjoys reading to grow in the knowledge of God to assist God's people. He has faithfully served as pastor of LACCRC the past 7 years. Contact: Richard.A.Jones@yahoo.com; 2330 W. 115th Place, Hawthorne, CA 90250 or (home) 323-755-7566 or (cell) 323-252-2930.

Retirement

PASTOR LARRY L. MEYER plans to retire as of June 1, 2016. His retirement will be marked with special worship services and activities on Sunday, May 22, at Christ Community Church (formerly First CRC), 428 Geele Avenue, Sheboygan, WI 53083. The morning worship service is at 10:00 a.m. All are invited to come on May 22 to recognize the Meyers and give thanks to God for their devoted service to church and

kingdom. For more information, contact the church office (920-458-3112 or christcommunitysheboygan@gmail.com). Soli Deo gloria

Congregational

Church's 100th Anniversary

HOPE CRC in Grandville, MI is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2016. Join us on April 24, 2016 as we "Rejoice in Hope!" Services at 9:30 am and 5:30 pm. If you have questions or stories to share, contact us at secretary@hopecrcgrandville.com.

Birthdays

100th Birthday



CORNELIA (DEKKER) GABRIELSE will turn 100 on May 4th, DV. Please join her children, Edward (Jane), David (deceased) (Judy), Bernard (Carol), her grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren in wishing her a very happy birthday. Cards may be sent to Pine Haven, 531 Giddings Ave, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085. God is faithful.



MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Senior Pastor
Delavan (WI)

Christian Reformed Church

Director of Worship & Outreach
Thrive Ministries
Morrison/Fulton, IL

Missional Onramp Director
Calvary Reformed Church
Orland Park, IL

For more information on opportunities from ChapterNext, the leader among pastor search firms serving RCA & CRCNA congregations, visit www.chapter-next.com or email info@chapter-next.com.



Seeking applicants for the position of

Director of Communications and Marketing

Provide leadership, strategy, planning and oversight in the communications and marketing of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), in conformity with the denominational ministry plan.

The successful candidate will have a commitment to the faith, vision, and mission of the CRCNA; a degree in communications or marketing; at least seven years' experience in communications and/or marketing including experience in a non-profit organization.

The position will be based in either Grand Rapids, MI or Burlington, ON.

For a full description or to apply go to www.crcna.org/jobs

Applications due **April 30, 2016**



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MINNIE DELEEUW STOLK will celebrate her 100th birthday April 30. Her family and friends thank God for her life of faithfulness to Him. Cards may be sent to the Laurels of Hudsonville.



WILLEM VANDERMEER With thanks to God, we hope to celebrate Dad's 100th Birthday An Open House will be held in Horizon Hall at Holland Christian Homes, Brampton, Wednesday April 20, 2-4 p.m. Cards may be sent to Holland Christian Homes, Hope Tower, Apt 713, 7900 McLaughlin Road, Brampton, Ontario, L6Y 5A7



HARRIET WIERENGA née Westra will celebrate her 100th birthday on April 10. Her family thanks God for her and for her long life. #205, 13425-57 St NW., Edmonton AB T5A 2G1.

95th Birthday



PEGGY KNOLL will celebrate her 95th birthday on April 23, 2016. Her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren thank God for her cheerfulness through her long life. She has blessed their lives with her strong faith, unceasing prayer, and care, love and acts of kindness to them and to so many others. Her address is, 2105 Raybrook Dr SE, Apt 5035, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.



LOUISE (CLOSING) VAN LONKHUYZEN will celebrate her 95th birthday May 1, 2016. Her family thanks God for her example of Christian living. An Open House will be held April 30 from 1-4 pm at Orland Park Christian Reformed Church, Orland Park, IL. Cards may be sent to: Louise Van Lonkhuyzen, 15233 S. 73rd Ct., Orland Park, IL 60462.

90th Birthday

FRANCES ENGEL (EHLERS) wife of Jake, of 999 W. 2nd St. The Manor #125 Ripon, CA 95366 will celebrate her 90th birthday on April 16. Thanking God for her life are her children: Charlene, Twyla, Randy & Janet Engel, and her grandchildren Janelle & Greg Mulder and Kelly.

GRACE MUSCH (4482 Port Sheldon St., Hudsonville, MI 49426) will celebrate her 90th birthday on April 24. She was married to Jack (deceased 2015) for 68 years. Thanking God for her life are her children: Laura & Doug Aldrink, Tom & Jill Musch, Ruth & Tim Dillon, Dave & Jan Musch, 10 grandchildren, and 17 great-grandchildren.

ARNOLD TOERING husband of Lillian (deceased 2009) will celebrate his 90th birthday with an open house on May 15 at Calvary CRC, Wyoming, MI, from 2-4pm. All friends and family are welcome. Cards also appreciated and can be sent to 5862 Bayberry Farms Dr., Apt. #10, Wyoming, MI, 49418.

Church Position Announcements

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRIES Faith CRC, Elmhurst IL, is seeking qualified person to direct its youth ministry. This position is full-time with primary focus on middle and high school and some responsibilities for children's and young adult ministries. To apply, send letter of introduction with resume to dymsearch@faithelmhurst.org or contact Ray Middel at 630-862-1861

PASTOR 1st CRC of Fremont, MI (50mi N of GR) is seeking a full time pastor to preach the Word and shepherd the 180 member congregation. Our church profile is at CRCNA.org. Contact Leslie Kolk at lskolk@yahoo.com or 231-924-3596

STUDENT MINISTRIES DIRECTOR Pillar Church is seeking qualified applicants for this full time ministry position. If you are interested please send a resume and cover letter to: Rob Housman at ministry@pillarchurch.com

PASTOR The CRC of Collingwood ON is seeking a pastor who desires to lead a small, dedicated congregation. We seek a spiritual leader who is gifted in preaching, meeting the pastoral needs of our congregation and mentoring us to reach out with love to the community around us. For more information, contact Jeff Beck at jandbeck@hotmail.com

YOUTH MINISTRIES DIRECTOR Moline CRC, Moline, MI. Do you have a passion for today's youth? Do you feel a calling to encourage, lead and develop faith while sharing God's love? Moline CRC shares your passion and needs YOU! We are in search of a part-time Youth Ministries Director to organize, conduct and effectively communicate meaningful spiritual and relational programs for High School-aged youth. For more information visit www.molinecrrc.org or contact Scott Van Wyk at 616.485.8325

LEAD PASTOR East Saugatuck CRC, a rural community near Holland, MI is seeking a lead pastor. We provide Biblical preaching geared toward new and established believers. ESCRC is a growing church focused on outreach and discipleship. Contact searchteam@espoint.org.

YOUTH MINISTRIES DIRECTOR Do you have a passion for today's youth? Do you feel a calling to encourage, lead and develop faith and share God's love? Moline CRC shares your passion and needs you! We are in search of a part time Youth Ministries Director to organize, execute and effectively communicate meaningful spiritual and relational programs for high school aged youth. Send a letter of interest and resume to: Moline CRC, PO Box 158, Moline, MI. 49335 or e-mail molinecrrc@gmail.com APPLICATION DEADLINE is May 1, 2016 For more information visit www.molinecrrc.org or call 616-877-4218.

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.

PASTOR: For a two-point charge: Hull CRC and Westfield RCA in southern North Dakota, near the Missouri River. These two small churches are working together and would be open to either a full-time pastor or a part-time pastor. To inquire email droog@bektel.com or call Ren at 701-336-7240 or Sheldon at 701-336-7398.

LEAD PASTOR: West End CRC in Edmonton Alberta is seeking a lead pastor. We are a large vibrant church with a wide range of ministries located in the heart of the West End in Edmonton Alberta. Information on our congregation can be found at www.westendcrrc.ca. For more details about the position and to view the church profile please contact Michelle Rooker at bmrooker@hotmail.com

GROWING OUTREACH CHURCH Living Water Community Church in NW Iowa is seeking someone with a passion for discipleship, community, and outreach to serve as **Campus Pastor** for their new Sheldon campus. LW is a young, vibrant, mission-minded church that seeks to follow Jesus by loving God and loving others. The campus pastor will be responsible for equipping ministry leaders, preaching, and connecting with new attendees at our Sheldon campus, as well as serving on council and working alongside the ministry team from the Orange City campus. If you feel that God may be calling you to this ministry, you can find a complete job description and apply online at livingwateroc.com/jobopenings/

NEW FAMILY PASTOR POSITION Living Water Community Church in NW Iowa is seeking someone with a passion for strengthening families and helping youth to discover who they are in Christ, to serve as **Pastor of Family & Youth**. LW is a young, vibrant, mission-minded church that seeks to follow Jesus by loving God and loving others. The Pastor of Family & Youth would serve both campuses and primarily be responsible for overseeing our junior high and high school youth programs by recruiting and equipping volunteer leaders, building relationships with parents and youth, as well as, overseeing the children's ministry, and preaching monthly at each campus. If you feel that God may be calling you to this ministry, you can find a complete job description and apply online at livingwateroc.com/jobopenings/

YOUTH DIRECTOR First CRC Red Deer, Alberta is seeking a highly relational youth director who will help our youth grow spiritually, as well as grow their sense of belonging in the church. This person will be self-motivated and self-directed; yet will be able to work well in a team ministry. Education and/or relevant experience will be considered. Visit our website at www.firstcrrcdreder.org for job description. To apply, please send your resume and 3 current references to firstcrrcrt@gmail.com

PASTOR: Second CRC is seeking an excellent preacher who will inspire, challenge, and guide us in transforming worship and lead us in becoming more missional in our community of Grand Haven, MI.

For more information, please access our church profile at crrcna.org, visit our website at secondcrrcgrandhaven.org, or contact Search Committee Chairman, Jeff Binnendyk at 2ndcrrcsearch@gmail.com or 616-844-4144

YOUTH PASTOR : New Westminster Christian Reformed Church in Burnaby, British Columbia, is looking for an individual to provide pastoral leadership for the Youth Ministries of our congregation. This position requires coordinating responsibilities and visionary leadership including: discipling youth, mentoring leaders, overseeing weekly youth gatherings and other events, and working successfully in a team ministry context. This 20 hr/week position, fairly compensated, requires an individual who: demonstrates a deep love for Christ and His people, is Gospel-centered, missional, and will work well in the Reformed tradition; is a servant-leader with strong relational skills; and possesses a college or university degree and theological training. If you wish to apply for this position, or for more details of the job, please go to www.nwrcr.ca/jobs. Application deadline is Apr 30, 2016.

FULL TIME PASTOR Vogel Center CRC is a body of believers dedicated to worshiping, reaching out, and serving in the name of Christ Jesus. We value Bible based teaching and worship. We love to fellowship and have a small town community that cares when someone is hurting. We realize the importance of nurturing our youth and strive to be of service in God's Kingdom. To that end, We are looking for a Pastor who is willing to lead us in sound doctrine centered on God's Word, and to encourage and inspire our congregation to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We look forward to hearing from you if you feel lead to contact us. Our contact info is winksdairy@hotmail.com or Jim Winkel at 231-920-7751

PASTOR: The Village Church, an 8-year old church plant in Thorold, ON, is seeking a full-time pastor. The person should have a heart for evangelism, strong leadership gifts and the ability to communicate to people beginning or growing in their walk with God. For more info contact: stevecollins631@start.ca

PASTOR : West Leonard CRC in Grand Rapids, MI is undergoing Renewal and is searching for an energetic and talented person to help lead the transformation. Contact Sue Lettinga at 616.456.1994 ext. 201 or email wlcrcsearch@gmail.com for a church profile and job description.

CHILDRENS MINISTRY DIRECTOR River Rock Church in Rockford, Michigan is seeking a Children's Ministry Director (25 hours/week) for our ministry which averages 100 children on a Sunday morning. This leader will be responsible for the overall vision of Children's Ministry (birth through 5th grade) and directly responsible for the K-5th ministry program. This person will join the GROW team that works together on the overall lifespan discipleship goals of River Rock Church. A detailed job description is available at RiverRockCommunity.com. We will be accepting resumes through midnight, April 10. Please submit questions or your resume to employment@riverrockcommunity.com.



PHYLLIS DENBRABER VANANDEL: Her children invite you to an Open House to be held in the Estates 2 dining room (2105 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546) from 2 to 4 pm on Saturday, April 23. Phyllis resides at #3035 of the same address.

ARTHUR VANDER AA, Pantego, N. C., turned 90 on February 20. Married for nearly 62 years to Grace (DeRuiter). Children Cyndie Van Dyke (Alan), the late Art, Jr. (the late Terry), Jennie Febus (Dave), Pam Kirkman (Barry). Nine grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren. WW II veteran, still plays the mandolin in Church. Thanks be to God for his faithfulness.

80th Birthday

LINDA ZWIER VAN TIL The children, grandchildren, friends and family of Linda Zwier VanTil together rise up to acknowledge the blessing she has been to us all.

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary

YONKER Wendell and Dorothy, 12447 S. Natchez, Palos Heights, IL 60463, celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on March 8. Their children, the late Cathy and Dave Larsen, Wendy and Eric Van Vugt, and Tom and Judy Yonker, nine grandchildren, and eighteen great grandchildren rejoice in Dad and Mom's example of faith and joyful living, and praise God for his faithfulness to them.

60th Anniversary

BAUM Neal & Ethel (Tanis) will celebrate their 60th anniversary on April 14, 2016. Formerly of Wyckoff, NJ, now at 2058 TreeRidge Dr SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Children: Janet & Craig Klamer, Jim & Karen Baum, Judy & Kevin Hoekman, John & Mayly Baum. 15 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. Mom & Dad, your family praises God for

blessing you with 60 years together, and for the love you give to everyone you meet. You are a wonderful example of Christ-followers for all of us.

DEJAGER Louis & Grace (Bosch) of Lethbridge, AB celebrate 60 years of marriage April 27, 2016. They and their children, grandchildren & great grandchildren praise God for His faithfulness.



NICHOLS Bruce & Gert (Bangma) of Lauderdale By the Sea, Florida will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on May 26, 2016. Our five sons, four daughters in laws, seven grandchildren are a blessing to us as we watch them grow in the Lord. We thank the Lord for 60 years, and His faithfulness and blessings on us and our family.

Obituaries

CHRISTIANS David K., 65, of Loveland, CO, entered heaven's glory on January 20, 2016. He is survived by his wife Donna, children Ryan & Leah, grandchildren Austin, Ashley, Sammie, his mother Evelyn Christians, brothers Stu (Jean), Bruce (Stephanie), Craig (Arlis), sister Lavaun (Ken) Wind, nieces & nephews Brandon (Kate), Kevin (Anna), Michele, Abby (Kurt), Jessica (Jordan), Brett, Jenna (Levi), Elliott, great-nephews Gavin, David, Paul, Liam, Eli, Harrison, Henry, & great-niece Evelyn. Preceded in death by father Henry in 2001. Funeral services will be held at Wright Christian Reformed Church, Kanawha, Iowa, in June.

DEVRIES Sadie (Eisma) age 100 and 7 months, peacefully went to be with her Lord on Feb. 15, 2016. She will be greatly missed by her son Curt DeVries!

HALMA Helen (Haringa), age 92, went home to be with her Lord on February 10, 2016 in Wayne, NJ. Formerly of Prospect Park. She was preceded in death by her husband Cornelius in 1992. She is survived by her children, Linda & Michael McCoy of MD, Ruth of Prospect Park,

Joan and Bob Vander Haak of WA, Barbara of Hawthorne, Edward and Debbie of East Hanover. Also 6 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. We thank God for her long life.



KOoy Dena (Withage) 95 of Lynden WA formerly of Nobleford AB Canada went to be with her Lord peacefully on February 8 2016. Dena is survived by her husband John of 71 years; 6 children, Wayne (Mary), Bea (Mike) Slavich, Brenda De Jong, Greg (Diana), Garth (Andrea), Ted, 13 grandchildren, 16 great grandchildren.

MACLEOD June, 83, of Sarasota, FL died on February 4. She was predeceased by her husband, the Rev. Farquhar John MacLeod. Dearly missed by her children Roderick (Karen), Douglas (Cathy), Kathryn (Mark) Elliott, Kevin (Cindy), 14 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren.

TERPSTRA John W., age 96, of Highland, IN went Home to be with His Lord on Jan. 6, 2016. John is survived by his wife, Audrey; 4 children, Lynne (Jim), Bill (Vicki), Fred (Kim), and Diane; 15 grandchildren, 36 great grandchildren, 3 step children, 5 step grandchildren, 3 step great grandchildren; 2 brothers, 2 sisters, and numerous nieces and nephews. John was preceded in death by wife Violet. Family and church shaped the focus of John's life. He will be dearly missed. "To depart and be with Christ is far better" (Phil. 1:23)

VANDER KAMP Joan, nee Heslinga, 94, went to be with Our LORD on February 17th, 2016. 1140 S. Prospect Ave, Elmhurst, IL, 60126. Beloved wife of the late John Vander Kamp; loving mother of Richard (Ruth), James (Elaine), Patricia (Glenn) DeVries, and John (Lora) Vander Kamp; devoted grandmother of 13; great-grandmother of 18; preceded by 5 brothers and 3 sisters; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools are appreciated.



Dr. Richard J. Mouw

Richard J. Mouw taught at Calvin College for 17 years and served as President of Fuller Theological Seminary for two decades. He is currently Professor of Faith and Public Life at Fuller. He is the author of 19 books, including *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport* and *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. His book, *Adventures in Evangelical Civility: A Lifelong Quest for Common Ground*, is due to be released in 2016.

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VOLUNTEERS URGENTLY NEEDED To work in the Lighthouse Store in Rolling Fork, MS for Miss Chr Family Services. April thru August. Would appreciate 2 weeks min. Good housing with AC. Contact Betty @662-873-9055 or MCFS117@yahoo.com

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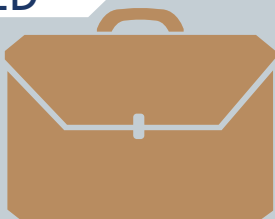


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Punch Lines

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!

We were attending a family baptism out of town, taking the great-grandparents along with us. Dad was 90 years old at the time. The service was wonderful, but it ran a lot longer than what we are used to.

On leaving the sanctuary, my father-in-law took his turn to shake hands with the pastor. Just as he stepped away, his pants started to fall down. Quickly he grabbed them and proceeded to tighten his belt.

Luckily it was over so quickly that few people had time to notice. Taking him aside, I asked, "What happened, Dad? Did your belt break?"

"No," he said. "I was in that service so long, I lost weight!"

—Annette Zylstra

On Christmas morning, I was offering a children's message. I brought along a small cake with a lit candle to celebrate Jesus' birthday. At one point I asked the children what they thought Jesus might wish for before he blew out the candle.

A 4-year-old boy raised his hand and answered, "That Satan would be nice."

The congregation responded with some snickers, but also some affirmation. To which the little boy responded with a fist pump.

—Bob Boersma

My daughter was reading the Bible to her 3-year-old son. When she started naming the disciples, James, John, Peter, and Thomas, he stopped her to ask: "Was that Thomas the Train?"

—Sandy Sall

Awoman telephoned a friend and asked how she was feeling.

"Terrible," was the reply. "My head is splitting and my back is killing me. The house is a mess, and the kids are driving me crazy."

Sympathetically, the caller said, "Listen, go and lie down. I'll come over right away and cook lunch for you. Then I'll clean up the house and take care of the kids while you get some rest. By the way, how is Sam doing?"

"Sam?" the complaining woman replied. "Who's Sam?"

"Oh dear," exclaimed the caller. "I must have the wrong number. I am so sorry."

There was a long pause.

"Are you still coming over?" the harried mother asked hopefully.

—Suzanne Lauritzen

Two silkworms had a race. They ended up in a tie.

—Herman De Boer

Dave and Kathryn, an older couple, were walking hand in hand at church. I said how nice they looked holding hands and walking together.

Kathryn responded, "He is my 'Cain' so that I am 'Able.'"

—Cyndi Boss

Ever noticed that when you put the words "The" and "IRS" together it spells "Theirs"?

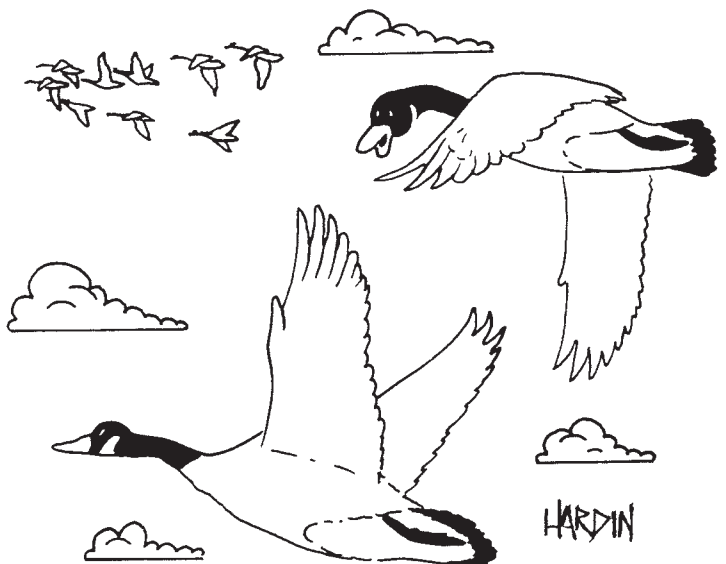
—Cornelius Peters

Couples who have lived together for a long time have developed their own method of communication. I remember one day my mother called upstairs to my dad, "What are you looking for in that closet?"

"Nothing," yelled my father.

After a moment, my mother called back, "Well, it's not in there. Look under the bed."

—Jan Veltkamp



"... and watch out for airplanes—they'll fly right into you if you're not careful."



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All across North America God is working to transform lives and communities, and Christian Reformed Home Missions is committed to helping local churches answer God's call to join his mission.

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