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God's Story and Us

I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN MALAYSIA, though I'm ethnically Chinese. Just don't ask me to speak, read, or write Chinese, as I am not fluent. English is my medium, and English literature was my major. I am a son, a brother, a husband, a father. These are all facets of my identity, and behind each lie the stories that define them. But all are woven into my identity in Christ.

In the past I have struggled with my cultural identity, as I did not meet the "normal" standards: neither speaking Chinese nor living the culture. There's a term for people like me: *banana*. Yellow on the outside, white on the inside. More Western than Chinese, I didn't always feel I belonged.

I thank God that my cultural identity is not the most important facet of my identity. I may have struggled to find a place in the Chinese cultural story, but I rejoice in being found by God within God's grand biblical story of salvation and reconciliation. My spiritual identity, shaped by the biblical narrative, is my core identity. It's the one story that shapes and defines all my other stories, whether those of being ethnic Chinese, son, brother, husband, or father. In God's story, I find that "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

God created us to be storymaking and storytelling imagebearers of a storymaking God. As Christian psychologist James Olthuis wrote in his book *The Beautiful Risk*, "Stories-R-Us. Stories shape and form who we are, who we have been, and who we are becoming." We are the only living creatures that tell stories.

My spiritual
identity, shaped
by the biblical
narrative, is my
core identity.

We all have unique, multifaceted stories that shape who we are. But our different stories, our different identities, do not divide us as Christians because, like so many subplots woven into a grand narrative, God's story unites us. On the first Sunday of October, All Nations Heritage Sunday reminds us that God has woven all our different cultural stories into his story of salvation. Disability Week (Oct. 10-16) reminds us that people with disabilities are part of God's story too. The Protestant Reformation we celebrate on October 31 extends the church chapter of God's story. These are just a few ways in which we are all part of God's diverse and unified family.

I appreciate that the fourth desired future of the Christian Reformed Church's ministry plan, Our Journey 2020, (see this issue's special section) is about our identity. It is an identity rooted in God's story of grace and reconciliation. Being transformed by and living out of that story, we are to tell it to the world.

Our world needs God's story. That's because the world is shaped by other narratives—religious, political, social, and more—all vying for supremacy. And unlike God's reconciling story of love, the world's stories tend to divide and rule. They tend to reduce those who are "not us" into a single simplistic story that can easily be dismissed (see Heidi De Jonge's "A Single Story," September 2016). In contrast to the world's stories, which foster control, fear, and hatred, God's story fosters faith, hope, and love.

Therefore, let us humbly immerse ourselves in the Word, submerging our multiple stories into God's grand story so that we can emerge as God's unified but diverse children. ■



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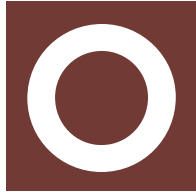
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The Bridge



ONE DAY my family and I were walking with friends in a wooded park when our two-year-old daughter fell into a stream. My husband jumped in to pull her out. In a nutshell, that's the story. But here's what really happened.

It was a gorgeous, fragrant spring Saturday—the kind of day on which it's a crime to stay indoors. The only thing on our calendar was to take a hike in a wooded park with friends.

At that time our kids were 2 and 5, so we rounded up their sneakers and sweatshirts, the bug spray, some snacks, and a few juice boxes. We were ready.

We met our friends at the park, entered the woods, and hiked slowly along, watching for trillium, spring beauty, and cowslip. We stopped every now and then to prod a toad or pick up a rock or point out a tree. It was peaceful. And lovely. And short-lived.

As we followed the path, we came to a large stream spanned by a rickety, waist-high wooden bridge. We stopped halfway across the bridge to play Pooh-sticks. For

the uninitiated, the game involves dropping a twig off the upstream side of a bridge and running to the downstream side to watch it emerge.

When most of us were on the downstream side looking for a twig, we heard a loud splash. The sound was too loud to be a rock thrown in by one of the kids. It took a few seconds to realize what it was.

Our 2-year-old, Abby, was no longer on the bridge. She was in the water.

Her arms and legs were moving, but she didn't know how to swim. Her eyes were open, but she couldn't see. She was face down, and because the water was flowing rather swiftly, she couldn't get up on her own.

We saw all this in slow motion. I froze, but in a flash my husband leaped off the bridge into the water, heedless of the rocks on the riverbed. He scooped Abby up and lifted her from the water, shocked and dripping.

We wrapped Abby in a dry sweatshirt and calmed her when she caught her breath and started to cry.

Abby clung to her dad for a while. Her brother, David, patted her back to comfort her while we carried her down the trail

to the car. But when she stopped crying, Abby lifted her still-dripping head and testified with a mixture of solemnity and awe and relief: "Daddy saved me!"

Those three words have stuck with me. They're an expression of the kind of faith I would like to have. A childlike faith—a simple, trusting, grateful faith. The kind of faith that acknowledges that the act of salvation is completely and utterly an act of God.

In the Christian community there are endless questions and debates and opinions on topics of importance. There are many different interpretations of doctrinal and philosophical matters. But there is one simple truth that knits us together and compels us to reach out to others.

Our Daddy—Abba—saved us. ■



Sandy Swartzentruber is the resource coordinator for Faith Formation Ministries. She attends Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Children of the heavenly Father
safely in his bosom gather;
nestling bird nor star in heaven
such a refuge e'er was given.

— CAROLINE SANDELL BERG



Immigrant Blessings

LE

IMHO



I keep wondering what would have happened....

MY HUSBAND, Phil, suffered a ruptured cerebral aneurysm earlier this year. We were told that 60 percent of folks who experience an event like that do not survive. My heart is filled with gratitude for our doctors, without whom Phil's outcome could have been different. Many of them are immigrants. I keep wondering what would have happened if these folks had not been allowed into the country.

Let me introduce you to some important people on Phil's health care team.

Dr. D. is from India. He moved to Grand Rapids only a few months ago from Chicago. He is the vascular neurosurgeon who "glued" the bleeding aneurysm. I was immediately impressed with how meticulously he described the procedure before he had me sign the permit. He made his rounds early in the day, and if I was not in Phil's room, he made a point of returning or even looking for me. The day after surgery, he spent about 15 minutes showing me the CT scans of before, during, and after the procedure, explaining what was happening in Phil's brain.

Dr. R. is a neuroscience critical care intensivist from Turkey. He works seven days on and seven days off. He was very attentive, often visiting two or more times a day. He had to make critical decisions, especially during the first week when Phil's brain was swelling. I told him there were lots of folks praying for wisdom for him.

Dr. S. was on call for neurosurgery the second weekend when the difficult decision was made to reinsert Phil's ventricular drain. He is from Poland. He had not met us before that weekend and spent lots of time making the decision of replacing the tube and where it should be inserted. Two days later he visited us, dressed up in a suit. I remarked about that because everyone wears scrubs. He explained that he was not working, and this was not an official visit, but he wanted to know how Phil was.

During those three weeks of critical care, I often thought about our country's current attitudes about immigration. And then I thought about the text of a recent worship service: "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

I am so grateful for each of these folks and their excellent care. ■



Jan Quist, a retired hospice nurse, attends Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Making Room

After reading the editorial "Making Room" (Jul/Aug 2016), I am frustrated. How can we not require that people adhere to the CRC's biblical position when appointing a new study committee? Are we going to look to culture for guidance on human sexuality? While a biblical theology of human sexuality may not be popular, we need to follow Jesus' example in John 4 with the woman at the well. He showed her love while calling her out of her sin. I believe the courageous thing to do is to follow what the Bible teaches.

—*Bryan Boersma*
Frankfort, Ill.

The editorial "Making Room" spoke of being ruled by fear—a fear of change and social anxiety. I disagree that the decisions at synod were ruled by that type of fear. Much prayer and searching God's Word was done, with the realization of how important these decisions are to the foundations of our fear. Rather, I experienced a biblical fear as described in Deuteronomy 10:12-13: "Fear the Lord your God. . ."

It is my prayer that our church continue to be guided by this holy, reverent fear.

—*Keith Dick*
Falmouth, Mich.

TTERS

Re “Making Room”: As the mother of a gay son, the information in this editorial makes me angry. Where is the love and acceptance for everyone that Jesus so forcefully demonstrated? Synod needs to come off of their legalistic “high horse.”

—*Carolyn Vrieling
Salmon Arm, B.C.*

The editorial “Making Room” brands “unnecessarily harsh and invasive” synod’s adoption of a minority report recommendation on same-sex marriage. Interim editor Vander Zee questioned whether synod assumes there is room for only one biblical and acceptable response to issues of marriage and same-sex attraction when such issues concern personal conscience. I believe Vander Zee is not merely asking for others’ views to be heard but rather that others’ interpretation of Scripture should become acceptable faith teaching.

—*Joe A. Serge
Oshawa, Ont.*

It is not very helpful when the editor of *The Banner* points out his disagreement with synod rather than help direct the denomination to the adopted minority study report (“Making Room”), which says, “It cannot be repeated enough that all people are to be welcomed into participation in worship and other aspects in the life of the church.” Let’s build on that statement when we worship and are being convicted of our brokenness and plead for God’s mercy. The good news is that he will pardon those who come to him with repentant hearts.

—*Hans Visser
Taber, Alta.*

Many of us share Len Vander Zee’s concern that binds officebearers in the CRC to choose between accepting synod’s new rules or actively participating in blessing a son or daughter at his or her same-sex wedding

in defiance of those rules (“Making Room”). Perhaps the need for such rules is rooted in a legitimate fear of another schism within our denomination. I share that fear. However, I also know that Christ does not call us to be afraid but rather to trust that he is more than capable of cleansing his body. All of us are offered unconditional acceptance, whatever our sins.

I hope next year’s synod will see fit to undo this prohibition on officebearers. We need our same-sex-attracted brothers and sisters to be part of us. I pray that all can feel welcomed to any CRC and be who and what we are, without feeling we have to hide from each other in order to belong.

—*Judy Cook
Ancaster, Ont.*

Doctrine of Discovery

I was glad to hear synod rejected the Doctrine of Discovery as heresy (“Synod 2016 Rejects Doctrine of Discovery as Heresy,” Jul/Aug 2016). But I want people of the CRC to know that not all Native people agree that we were invaded and abused. [Missionaries at Rehoboth] shared the gospel and love of Christ. I am a Christian, I am Navajo, and I attend First Navajo CRC in Thatchi, New Mexico. I know that I am forgiven and will rejoice with Christ one day because of the love shared by God’s disciples that came to the reservations.

—*Tabitha Manuelito
Tohatchi, N.M.*

Boarding schools, Christian and government, were the only way to educate Navajos from 1868, when the U.S. government promised to educate them (“Synod 2016 Rejects Doctrine of Discovery as Heresy”). Then and now, Navajos live in extended “camps” scattered over an area the size of Ohio. None were literate; very

few could speak English. As a teacher/administrator at both Zuni and Rehoboth schools, I witnessed the difference—only proximity. Zunis are village dwellers, so kids could easily walk from home to school and back. Boarding schools are costly and difficult to operate. As dean of students at Rehoboth in the 1980s, I and others worked to gradually phase out dorms. There have been no dorm students at Rehoboth for more than 25 years.

—*Thomas Weeda
Grand Rapids, Mich.*

What I Heard . . .

Dr. Timmermans laments an attitude of distrust between denominational leadership and local churches (“What I Heard at Synod,” Jul/Aug 2016). He cites several causes for this mistrust but neglected to mention a key dynamic.

Several years ago a number of churches hosted a “Listening Forum” related to the Belhar Confession. A member of senior denominational leadership stated that he wanted to hear our thoughts and then talked for over an hour, leaving only 15 minutes for our input.

The next year our church hosted an event with one of the denominational offices to discuss how churches should do justice. But as the group shared their opinions, the leaders ended discussion, choosing instead to tell us what they felt we should know. In both cases, people left feeling that the denominational leadership felt they had all the answers and we simply needed to be instructed.

Rebuilding trust and working together is vital. Yet it goes both ways. Churches must learn to trust the leadership, but the leadership must recognize that it exists to serve the church.

—*Robert Toornstra
Salem, Ore.*

[MORE ONLINE](#)

Michigan Church's Pumpkin Walk Draws Thousands

At Second Christian Reformed Church in Allendale, Mich., October means it's time for the annual Pumpkin Walk. For 10 years running, the church is welcoming its community to an all-ages pumpkin display through a wooded lot on the church grounds.

The church has seen the event grow from about 800 visitors in its first year to more than 6,500 guests during the three-night event in 2015.

"The goal is a simple one," said the church's pastor, Harold Veldman. "There are several haunted houses and scary options during the Halloween season. [We] wanted to provide a family-friendly alternative. The intent is for the church to serve the community for those few days, nothing more." This year's directors are Mary Veldman and Rachael Windemuller.

On October 20-22, visitors can stroll along the quarter-mile (400 m) path arranged with hundreds of carved masterpieces with cartoon favorites, animals, and typical grinning faces—just nothing scary.

Church members spend two nights preparing the pumpkins. Veldman said they form an assembly line with four or five volunteers "gutting" the pumpkins in the parking lot while the "artists" do the intricate work inside the ministry building. More volunteers bake and prepare hot chocolate and coffee. "This is a very labor-intensive week," Veldman said.

or so pumpkins bought wholesale from a local farmer, hay bales, and other necessary supplies. In the first years, Veldman said "people got angry with us for not having a donation bucket out . . . they wanted to show appreciation."

The idea for a Pumpkin Walk first came from Windemuller after she attended a similar event in another state.



Second Christian Reformed Church's Annual Pumpkin Walk.

"The appreciation makes it all worthwhile."

Donations accepted during the Pumpkin Walk go towards expenses of the event—the 500

"There was nothing like it in our area. It was as simple as a mom's motivation to want a better option for young families," Harold Veldman said.

—Alissa Vernon



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Char Bulthuis with Kites & Candy game.

Fighting Dementia with Fun and Games

Char Bulthuis, a member of Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., has come up with a way to help dementia patients hang on to their abilities as well as connect with their families.

“Kites & Candy’ is a game that brings out the abilities [people] hold on to as they progress further into dementia,” Bulthuis explained. “It is an excellent intergenerational activity that a grandfather might play with his grandchild.”

Bulthuis’s game uses flashcards to maintain the patient’s current working memory. The cards have questions such as “What are activities children do?” The possible answers on the card are “fly kites, eat candy, play with toys.” The cards help patients access their own memories as well as use them in a current context. The game can be used also for remembering sequences, patterns, and reading practice.

Bulthuis graduated from Calvin College as a therapeutic recreation specialist and spent 20 years working at Pine Rest Christian Hospital in Grand Rapids. It was while working with older patients there that she came up with an idea to help her dementia patients.

Bulthuis is now youth and education director at Calvin CRC.

—K. Schmitt

Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation Visits Remote Aboriginal Community

For a week in the middle of July, a Christian Reformed Church contingent of four—church members Israel Cooper and Thea deGroot and CRC staff Bernadette Arthur and Shannon Perez—participated in the fourth annual Reconciliation Trip to the Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) First Nation, a fly-in community in northwestern Ontario roughly 200 km (124 miles) from the Ontario-Manitoba border. The experience was the initial piece in a Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation Program designed by Arthur and Perez for the Canadian Ministries’ Office of Social Justice and Race Relations.

“I’ve been looking for experiential ways to share information and for people to consider reconciliation. In my search for that, I found out about the [KI] trip,” said Arthur. “I connected with Shannon [who serves on the Canadian Aboriginal Ministries Committee] . . . and then we talked about not just going on a trip and kind of feeling warm and fuzzy, but coming back and actually applying what was learned.”

The program Arthur and Perez developed would see young adults in CRC communities volunteer to become ambassadors of reconciliation, beginning with this visit to a First Nations community and continuing with the creation of a context-specific reconciliation action plan.

For 2016, they had about a dozen inquiries but in the end, only Cooper, a member of Meadowvale CRC in Mississauga, Ont., participated. DeGroot, a senior citizen member of Redeemer CRC in Sarnia, Ont., also went along as an active justice seeker to be an advocate for the program.

“Some of the lessons I learned [on the trip] have made me more empowered in how I can change,” Cooper said. “Sometimes here we are



The CRC contingent on the KI Reconciliation Trip (l-r): Israel Cooper, Thea DeGroot, Bernadette Arthur, and Shannon Perez.

prevented or stalled in making changes because it’s not logical at the moment or you have to think about it so much. But maybe if you just focus on what you have in your heart and what you feel God is pulling you toward, it might be easier to change.”

Cooper will take that new outlook and other lessons learned into account as she develops a plan to continue relationships already begun between Meadowvale CRC and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

This year’s Reconciliation Trip included treaty education, drum making, an infrastructure tour, and a fishing derby. The group also screened the film *3rd World Canada*, telling the story of one KI family in the aftermath of three suicides.

“I went in with book knowledge but now that there are faces I can put to it, [it] just makes it more real. And maybe because it’s more real for me, it will be easier to share than before,” Cooper said.

—Alissa Vernon

NEWS

Muslim Neighbors Come to Church in Guelph

For Rev. Ed Den Haan and the Bridging Group of First Christian Reformed Church in Guelph, Ont., it was an exciting day when “our neighbors came to church.”

The Bridging Group is an informal group of members of First CRC and of the Guelph mosque across the street from the church. Together they are working to create understanding and build relationships between Christians and Muslims.

Earlier, representatives of the Muslim Society of Guelph had attended a worship service at First CRC, treated the congregation to samosas and baklava, and stayed to enjoy a lunch of soup and buns. “We had wonderful conversations, a time of sharing our lives and hopes,” said Den Haan.

According to Den Haan, the Bridging Group serves as a catalyst



in developing goodwill. “The group develops jointly sponsored activities such as barbecues and a community garden. This group of Christians and Muslims also discussed theology and traditions,” he said.

The relationship started about two years ago when Den Haan and his campus ministry colleague, Iftechar Sheikh, began the Bridging Group and worked to find ways to bring their communities together. Den Haan was a CRC

Members of the Bridging Group of First CRC and the Muslim Society of Guelph, Ont.

campus chaplain at the University of Guelph for many years. “Both of us, Muslims and Christians, insist upon the integrity of our expressions and practices of faith. We . . . will not water down or deny our faiths. God wants to be seen in truth, not primarily for what is palatable,” stressed Den Haan. “We are trying to be relational with truth.”

The church and mosque share a community garden on the church property, which Den Haan said is growing vegetables as well as friendship by association. The Muslim Society hosts meetings, services, and barbecues to which neighbors are invited. Den Haan said, “The Muslim Society of Guelph is eager to relate with us for good.”

—Anita Brinkman

Lugo Resigns from Race Relations



Rev. Esteban Lugo

Rev. Esteban Lugo resigned as director of the Race Relations ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, effective July 22, after serving in the position for 12 years.

Although Lugo declined to comment, Colin Watson, the denomination’s director of ministries and administration, said Lugo decided to consider other ministry opportunities following a short leave of absence. “We want to express our appreciation for Esteban’s 12 years of service as director and wish him the best in his future endeavors,” Watson said.

Watson said he anticipates a search for a new director later in the year. CRC Communications announced that a proposal related to that will be discussed by the CRC’s Board of Trustees.

Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollemaans and Rev. Reggie Smith will provide leadership for the Race Relations ministry in the interim.

—Gayla R. Postma

DANIEL J. COOKE PHOTOGRAPHY

Regional Gathering Plans Changed

Plans for some of the regional gatherings announced by the Christian Reformed Church have changed, according to CRC executive director Steven Timmermans.

The gathering centered on servant leadership and discipling has been changed to February, rather than being held in November as initially planned. It will still be held at Sunlight CRC in Port Lucie, Fla., but the dates are now February 3-6, 2017.

"The Church Renewal Lab from Calvin Seminary also has an event at the church, which will have two days of overlap," Timmermans said. "Folks may wish to do both."

Moving this event to February may preclude a fourth gathering initially planned for late winter in California. Timmermans couldn't say conclusively if there will be a California gathering.

The gatherings are part of a series that will culminate in a binational gathering in Detroit in August, 2017. Two events have already been held: a Canadian national gathering in Ontario in May and a regional event with a multiethnic focus in Michigan in June.

The gatherings are intended to be different from synod (the general assembly of the CRC), more focused on ministry than governance.

—Gayla R. Postma



Grace Valley CRC in German Valley, Ill.

Illinois Church Celebrates 150 Years

Grace Valley Christian Reformed Church in German Valley, Ill., spent the summer celebrating its 150th birthday.

The oldest German Christian Reformed Church in North America, Grace Valley CRC is the mother church of many of the CRC congregations that were German-speaking when they were planted in central Iowa and south central Minnesota.

Surrounded by corn and soybean fields, Grace Valley is home to people from more than 13 communities within a 30-mile radius.

Being in such a rural location might be a disadvantage for some churches, but Grace Valley makes the most of it through good, old-fashioned hospitality. Rev. Jake Ritzema has served Grace Valley for 16 years. "This is a really proactive congregation," he said. "They're not afraid to try new things and are extremely welcoming. That has been a huge blessing. It's not 'What are you doing in my pew?' It's 'Where are you from? That's cool! Have some more to eat!' We have quite the feed after church on Sunday."

As a church that is and has always been surrounded by farms and farmers, food plays a big role in how members connect with and minister to their community. For the last 11 years, they have hosted a free community corn boil that features food, petting zoos, horseback rides, inflatable bouncy houses, and music. The event attracts upwards of 500 people each year.

"To be a part of a church that is still, after 150 years, thriving and growing, is so much about God's grace," Ritzema said. "That many years is a lot of people doing a lot of good work and caring a lot about their faith. We plan to continue to make a greater impact in our community because in the end, it's not about us, it's about [God] and them."

—Krista dela Rosa

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Ik Chang

1930-2016

Rev. Ik Chang, 87, was a gentle husband and a wise mentor to many fellow pastors and colleagues.

Chang graduated from Chong Shin Seminary in Korea in 1955 and earned a Th.D. in 1984 at Southern California Theological Seminary. He served as a pastor and chaplain and as general secretary of Christian Campus Crusade of Korea (KCCC). He was also a mission director for a Korean Presbyterian denomination.

In the U.S., Chang served many Korean churches and was one of the Christian Reformed Church's pioneer Korean pastors. He also authored a book called *Together-ness Life*.

Many of the younger Korean CRC pastors said that Rev. Chang was always gentle, wise, and deeply devoted to the Lord and to his family and friends. Rev. Paul Im, clerk of Classis Hanmi (a regional group of CRCs), said, "Rev. Chang always encouraged young pastors in positive ways and was a wise mentor for churches in Korea and the U.S."

Chang is survived by his wife, Whaik, and several children.

—Jonathan Kim

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

NEWS

Laarman Appointed Director of Disaster Response Services

World Renew has appointed Bob Laarman as director of Disaster Response Services (DRS), its program for responding to natural disasters in North America. He will officially begin his new role on October 3.

Laarman will draw from the variety of skills and experiences gained through nearly 30 years with World Renew in addition to other roles in mission work. "When my wife and I were first married in 1983, we decided that we wanted to spend our first year of marriage in some sort of dedicated ministry," Laarman said. "We found a year-long internship in Honduras and came back [home] eight years later." Ever since, mission work has been part of their lives.

Laarman participated in World Renew's (then CRWRC) initial program implementation in Ecuador. He responded to a volcanic eruption in Colombia and to Hurricane Andrew in Miami, Fla., and worked as volunteer coordinator and self-help program manager with Home Repair Services of Kent County in Grand Rapids, Mich. In 1998 he returned to World Renew, holding positions in church relations, constituency relations, and, most recently, donor relations.

DRS responds to domestic disasters, working closely with local organizations. "The first thing we do is needs assessment, going door to door to see what kind of home repair needs there are," Laarman explained. "We give those to the local organizations to take



Bob Laarman

over, and one way they respond is to invite our construction crews."

Many volunteers come on board throughout the process. The strong culture of church and volunteer involvement is one aspect of DRS that excites Laar-

man most. "It's unique. It's a real opportunity for people in church to take what they hear on Sunday and put their faith into action," he said.

"Bob brings relational strength to the job and embodies the vision and values of the organization," said Carol Bremer-Bennett, director for World Renew-U.S. "We are confident in his leadership and look forward to how he will lead the DRS team for the future."

Laarman succeeds the program's interim director and former director of World Renew-U.S. Andrew Ryskamp, who has held the DRS role temporarily since May 2016.

—Lori Dykstra

Christian Student Residence Expands Ontario Campus Ministry

Son View House, a residence accommodating student leaders and other Christian students attending Brock University, began its first year as a ministry venue for Brock Campus Ministry in September with the arrival of its eight student residents.

The Brock chaplaincy is a ministry of the Christian Reformed churches in the Niagara region of Ontario. Son View House, located in Thorold, is envisioned as a home for students, with some common spaces available for outreach such as group Bible studies or welcoming gatherings. It is similar to Geneva House, a CRC campus ministry at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont.

Chaplain Andre Basson had been in discussion with supporters over the past several years. The



vision came to fruition after reaching out to a local CRC member with a background in property management.

"They called me because I have experience with student housing," said Ron Mulder, a member of Trinity CRC in St. Catharines, Ont. "It was on my heart because Andre had preached at Trinity a number of times, and he expressed that

he often feels like an island without a lot of support. We didn't know what to do to help, so when this came up, it was really neat."

Mulder found a house and purchased it with the help of two other supportive individuals' loans. At the moment he is "the keeper of the house," which is operating as a nonprofit, using the students' rent to pay off the

mortgage. The hope is that eventually the house will become an asset for the ministry.

"It will grow into its role," Basson said, noting that he looks to the students to create the traditions of the house. "Campus ministry can become a kind of refuge [for Christians], but if it's only that, it doesn't impact the whole campus. I want my student leaders to be equipped to address the situations they face," Basson said. This off-campus home on the bus route to the university can allow the ministry to "connect with Thorold and be a hub for missional activity in the neighborhood."

Four female students and four male students, including those in their first, second, and third years of study, are occupying the house this year.

—Alissa Vernon

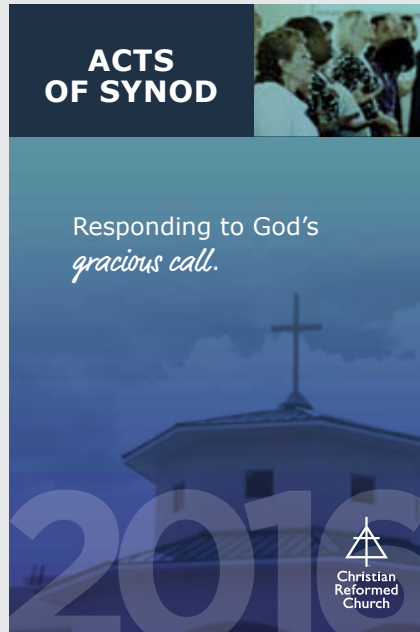
What to Watch for Post-Synod 2016

Synod 2016, the general assembly of the Christian Reformed Church, is a few months past. Now the denomination's executive director, Board of Trustees (BOT), and other committees will start fulfilling the many tasks given them by synod delegates.

Some developments to watch for:

- Appointment of a committee to investigate ministry partnerships with Koreans in Korea, building on relationships already formed by staff of Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary.
- Recommendations from the Candidacy Committee regarding commissioned pastors, including provision for an "emeritus" status for retired commissioned pastors; more help for classes (regional groups of churches) when the work of a commissioned pastor is terminated; and possible ways the office of commissioned pastor could in some circumstances be a "bridge ordination" toward ordination as minister of the Word.
- Creation of a website of resources and information for continuing education for pastors.
- Appointment of a task force to address the inequity in classis funding for seminary students and the financial challenges facing Canadians who desire to attend Calvin Theological Seminary.
- Evaluation by the BOT of every existing ministry and program, including charting which synod established the ministry and what the current funding allocation is, and seeking input from the churches on prioritizing those ministries.
- Plans (from the BOT) to help classes encourage their churches to do their share financially.
- "Reimagining" (by the BOT) of the ministry shares system that funds ministries at agreed-upon levels and simplifies calculations of ministry shares dollars asked of each church.
- Expanded efforts from the Office of Social Justice and several other ministries to raise awareness in the CRC of the injustice of persecution, to distribute up-to-date information about religious persecution, and to urge congregations to participate in the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church.
- Consideration of a denomination-wide annual Day of Justice to recognize the plight of those who are oppressed and marginalized, to confess, lament, and listen to the stories of those who have suffered at the hands of others because of racism.
- A study of the feasibility of developing new Sunday school and catechism material for children in the CRC led by Faith Formation Ministries.
- Appointments to the Synod Review Task Force and to the synodically-appointed Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality.

—Gayla R. Postma



IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Leonard Sweetman, Jr.
1924-2016

A complex man of deep conviction, Leonard Sweetman, Jr., believed that striving for justice is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. He participated in the civil rights and anti-war movements in the 1960s and in South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. He died on July 31 in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Sweetman was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 1951 and subsequently received his doctoraal degree (Drs.) from the Free University in Amsterdam in 1962.

His ministry included pastoring churches in Montana and Illinois and serving as a missionary in Japan and as a campus chaplain at the University of Illinois.

In 1964, Sweetman was appointed to the religion and theology department of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich. He demonstrated hospitality to the many students he met. He retired in 1989.

Sweetman was predeceased by Clara, his wife of 67 years. He is survived by three children and their spouses, seven grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. He was predeceased by one granddaughter.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Religious Freedom Seriously Lacking for Three-fourths of World's Population, Ambassador Says



The U.S. State Department warned that religion-based terrorists as well as some governments across the globe are threatening the liberties of religious minorities.

"One of the best ways to deny these murderers their victory is by ensuring that those they have sought to destroy not only survive, but thrive," said Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken, announcing the 2015 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom in August.

Though the report has often focused on serious violations of religious freedom by governments across the globe, Blinken said it also details the "major threat" by groups like Daesh (or the Islamic State group), al-Qaida, al-Shabab, and Boko Haram.

"There is, after all, no more egregious form of discrimination than separating out the followers of one religion from another—whether in a village, on a bus, in a classroom—with the intent of murdering or enslaving the members of a particular group," he said.

The document, in its 18th year, includes details of how almost 200 countries are faring in protecting the religious liberty of their citizens.

David Saperstein, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, said 24 percent of the world's countries—in which 74 percent of the world's population lives—have serious restrictions on religious freedom, based on government policies or hostile acts by individual organizations or societies.

He highlighted the report's emphasis on laws around the globe about blasphemy and apostasy: "No one region, country, or religion is immune to the pernicious effects of such legislation."

Saperstein cited the example of a boy who was playing soccer in Syria, "said a bad word out of his frustration," and was detained by the Islamic State for cursing God.

"In a matter of days he was marched out into a public square and murdered by a firing squad in front of a crowd of hundreds, including his parents," said Saperstein. "Chilling stories like this show how terrorist organizations have committed by far some of the most egregious abuses when claiming individuals have engaged in apostasy, blasphemy, or cursing God."

State actions based on blasphemy charges include Iran's executions of prisoners of conscience for their beliefs, Pakistan's arrests of Muslims and Christians, and the fining of an avowed atheist in Muenster, Germany, for bumper stickers that challenged Roman Catholic beliefs.

Saperstein, who has visited 25 countries in the year-and-a-half he has held his State Department role, said the U.S. is working with governments and other organizations to press for changes in the laws.

But he also credited those outside government for taking action to fight blasphemy laws as well as working to protect religious minorities in other ways. He praised groups, including Muslim youths, who formed human rings around synagogues facing anti-Semitic threats and Muslims who attended Masses in France in solidarity with their communities after the recent beheading of a Catholic priest.

—Religion News Service

Voter Registration on Faith Groups' To-Do Lists

Religious groups ranging from black Protestants to Latino evangelicals to Reform Jews are gearing up for massive voter registration activities to boost turnout on Election Day in the United States.

PICO National Network, a faith-based organizing network, announced its "Together We Vote" plan to work with allies to seek new voters who are especially concerned about racial justice.

"We're going to be talking to over a million voters in conver-



sations with people who have regularly been bypassed by conventions and parties and candidates," said Denise Collazo, leader of the initiative and PICO's chief of staff, at a news conference at the National Press Club.

The campaign will focus particularly on issues such as police brutality, improved wages, and keeping immigrant families together.

"We will work to withhold federal dollars from cities and states that refuse to hold police accountable for how they are treating black and brown bodies in this country," said Bishop Dwayne Royster, PICO's political director.

Rev. Jose Arce of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition said many of the children of deported immigrants are now citizens with voting power.

"They're coming of age and they're ready to vote," he said. "And we're ready to register them."

In addition, activists hope their efforts will counter so-called voter suppression laws they believe have reduced voting opportunities in many states. Appellate courts across the country have recently invalidated many of those restrictive voting laws.

"No matter what our faith is, all have some of the same concerns," said AME Church Bishop Adam Richardson Jr., who is working on voter registration in Florida. "One of the things that we all are striving for is to do something to ameliorate voter apathy, 'cause voter apathy is, in my opinion, worse than voter suppression. . . . So we have to make sure that people are mobilized to go vote."

—Religion News Service



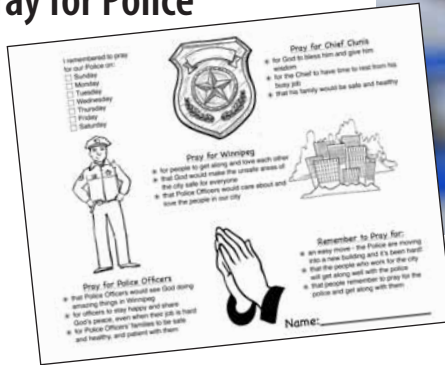
Winnipeg Churches Pray for Police

In Winnipeg, Man., just as in many other North American cities, racism, gang activity, and crime have driven a wedge between the police force and civilians. Church members across the city have responded with prayer.

Good News Fellowship Christian Reformed Church members have joined an interdenominational prayer campaign called 365 Police Prayer Watch to pray specifically for the city's police force.

Over 50 churches in the city of Winnipeg are assigned a week of the year to focus on praying specifically for the needs of the police force. Good News Fellowship recently concluded their week of prayer.

John Parsons, a member of Good News Fellowship, heard about it. "It was a real opportunity



The children's prayer guide for the prayer campaign.

for a city-wide initiative of prayer," he said.

Churches representing different races and socioeconomic backgrounds have been able to come together and pray for a reduction of crime, the justice system, victims, and the personal lives of police officers. John's wife, Linda, said, "The main thing that

Over 50 churches are praying for the police of Winnipeg.

encouraged me is being able to work with other churches. Not being a stand-alone church . . . really boosts our faith."

The children of Good News Fellowship received their own kid-friendly prayer guide and were encouraged to pray for the police officers in their own way. The prayer guide was created by Sunday school teachers at Good News Fellowship and has been used by other churches participating in the prayer campaign. "The chil-

dren have a heart to pray for the police force," Linda said. "Even after we finish, the children want to continue praying."

Those who prayed for the Winnipeg police have witnessed a steady decrease in crime since the campaign began in 2013. "That has been encouraging to see our prayers having an effect," said John.

The 365 Prayer Campaign was started by Devon Clunis, recently retired chief of police in Winnipeg.
—Amy Toornstra

Multicultural Bible Study Brings ESL Students Together

Reading Scripture in English and conversing about it with others is difficult for non-English-speaking immigrants who attend Bible studies. Corinne Bosch, a member of Oak Hills Christian Reformed Church in Beaverton, Ore., understands that. She hosts Bible studies for men and women who are enrolled in ESL classes at the local community college.

Using the *Discover Your Bible* series from Faith Alive Christian Resources, Bosch has taught many books of the Bible to people from Korea, China, Mexico, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Indonesia. "Last year we started the book of John. We are going very slowly because at least a couple of our students find it very difficult," said Bosch.



ESL Bible study includes people from many countries. Back row: Holly (Hong Kong), Jane (Singapore), Hyein (Korea), Leng (Malaysia), and Karina (Mexico). Front row: Evelyn (coleader), Michelle (Taiwan) and Corinne (coleader).

As part of their weekly Bible studies, attendees also sing songs and hymns together, pray for one another, and share about their lives. "We teach the class in a way that we are more [like] facilitators. We are here learning together.

Some of the insights we gain from each other are beautiful," said Bosch.

As attendees have continued to meet, they have celebrated birthdays together and walked with one another through trying

times. Some part ways when they must return to their home country. "We have been able to create and develop [friendships] with people from other cultures. There are some things that are very different but really we have much in common," said Bosch.

Bosch has also been able to help some of the women develop practical skills as they seek employment. Along with basic tutoring, she helps them write resumes and practice interviewing for a job.

Bosch's group changes each season depending on what the men's and women's needs are. "I feel like God is saying, 'Here is something you can do.' God put it right in front of me," she said.
—Amy Toornstra



BY PETER JONKER

B L E S S E D

A R E T H O S E

W H O M E E T

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

This proposal pleased the whole group. —Acts 6:1-5

THE DISCIPLES were more than two hours into their executive committee meeting when someone finally made the motion to appoint the seven. The meeting had started normally enough. Peter had opened with devotions and called the meeting to order. James had presented the minutes from the last meeting, which were approved. Matthias, the new treasurer, had gone over the financial statements for the quarter, and those looked really good. Despite that unfortunate incident with Ananias and Sapphira, membership was increasing and giving was up. Things were really going well in the church.

The clerk's report was where things got complicated. James, who was clerk that year, reported on correspondence received during the previous month. "I got a long letter from the Widow Onassis

gone. "All that is left for us is a little dry bread and maybe some of yesterday's fish. This must change!" she said. All around, her widow friends nodded vigorously.

That was bad enough. But then Widow Abraham decided to respond. She said it was only natural that the Jewish widows should get first choice of the food. After all, they were the charter members. "I set up that food network myself and chaired the committee for 10 years before my beloved husband died! If the Hellenist widows want food faster, maybe they should start their own program!" Things kind of went downhill from there.

Widow Onassis's letter was read, and the disciples spent the next hour-and-a-half talking about the food distribution committee. Who should chair? Should they blow everything up and change the program completely? Did it only need tweaking? Should they get Mrs. Abraham

up too easily on this story. There is a lot to love here.

First, this story shows that tedious meetings have always been part of the work of the church. We sometimes romanticize what the early church must have been like. Signs and wonders and the Holy Spirit moving like wind and flame. How wonderful! It's true that Acts is filled with spectacular happenings. But the early church also faced problems and complaints and long meetings. The tedious stuff was there from the beginning. Every person who has ever served on a church council or a church committee has found herself in a meeting, leaning forward, massaging her temples, and wondering, *Why is this so complicated? Is this really necessary?*

The simple answer is yes. The work of the kingdom has always involved tedium. If you are a tired committee member, you

SYSTEMIC CHANGE IS AN INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT PART OF BUILDING GOD'S KINGDOM.

yesterday," he began. And before he could say another word, an audible groan went up from the Twelve. John leaned forward at the table and started massaging his temples. Thomas slumped down in his chair and looked at the ceiling as if he were imploring the heavens.

The Widow Onassis. They all knew what was coming. You see, last month she had made her concerns known at the congregational meeting. She had been sitting at the head of a group of Greek widows, and when the chair recognized her she got up, drew herself up to her full 4'11", and spoke. "Mr. Chairman! There is injustice in this room!" she boomed.

With great forcefulness, she went on for 10 minutes describing how when the daily food cart went around, it always stopped at the homes of the Jewish widows first, so by the time it came round to the Greek widows, the good food was

and Mrs. Onassis together and try to iron things out? After two hours everyone was tired and cranky. Then Andrew suggested the appointment of the seven deacons. "We can't be spending all our time on this sort of stuff," he said. "We have preaching and pastoral care to worry about." The motion passed. The seven were chosen, and the weary disciples went on to the next item on their agenda. There were still lots of items left.

The Real Issue

In many ways, Acts 6 is a strange passage. Acts is a book full of signs and wonders and great movements of the Holy Spirit. But here, in the middle of all that, you get this passage that reads almost like the minutes of a council meeting. Compared to the fire of Pentecost and the midnight shaking of the Philippian jail, this story seems rather dull. But we shouldn't give

are part of a great cloud of faithful witnesses who have been attending meetings since the time described in Acts 6.

Second, this story shows us how administrative decisions about matters that seem tedious on the surface can end up touching on matters that go to the heart of the gospel. The issue in Acts 6 is not primarily one of food distribution. That's the surface issue, but underneath there is something more serious. The real issue here is central to the gospel and central to the book of Acts.

Who are the two sides in this dispute? On one side are the Hellenist widows. *Hellenist* means they are Jews but they speak Greek and are culturally Greek. They would be newer members in the church. On the other side are the Hebraic widows. *Hebraic* means they are traditionally Jewish. They speak Aramaic, and they hold tight to the old Israelite ways. ►

These two sides—the Hellenist Jews and the Hebraic Jews—are old, old rivals. They have looked at each other with suspicion for hundreds of years.

You see, by the time of Acts 6, Israel had been under the occupation of Greco-Roman culture for more than 200 years. And when these Greek masters took over and introduced their culture, the Jews took two paths. Some remained Jewish but adopted Greek habits and customs. Others saw everything Greek as an abomination and kept the ancient Hebrew culture. These two sides lived together, but they didn't like each other much. They looked at each other with suspicion and told nasty stories. "Those Hellenists are backsliders!" "Those Hebraic folk are trapped in the past!"

Now both Hellenists and Hebrews were coming to Jesus, but the old angers, the old stories, the old suspicions were all still there—and that's the problem. On the surface Acts 6 looks like an issue of distribution and logistics, but underneath it's an issue of dividing walls. Underlying the Widow Onassis's letter is a massive question that comes up throughout Acts and the whole New Testament: Can the gospel overcome the old dividing walls of hostility? Can we—Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free—all be one in Christ Jesus? Or will the walls of race and class and culture finally be too thick, too high, too strong?

The disciples clearly understand the deeper issue. Just look at what they do. They move forcefully and boldly against the old suspicions. Their proposal is a sledgehammer made to knock down the old walls of division. How so? Look at the names of the people they appoint. Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas (Acts 6:5)—all of them Greek. All of the new leaders are appointed from the minority group. They're all "outsiders."

Systemic Change

What might this be like in our own context? Imagine a historically white congrega-

tion that has started to change. Some African American neighbors have joined, and this new group now comprises almost 20 percent of the membership. The council, however, is still all white and European. Imagine that, in order to remedy the situation, the leadership put up a whole slate of nominations for the next year, and every single one of the nominees was African American. Not just one, not just a couple—the whole slate. That would be a forceful move.

That's like what's happening here. The disciples don't just come up with a meal schedule to address the surface problem; they change the whole system. Systemic change is an incredibly important part of building God's kingdom. It's also the hardest kind of change. Systemic change moves slowly, and the process is often tedious. Meetings are tools for systemic change.

Which teaches us something about the way the Spirit moves. Maybe you've heard of "God glimpses." They're a big thing right now—especially in youth groups. It's a practice where people in a small group get together and share the places they've seen God moving in their life. It's a great idea. It teaches holy attention.

If you've been a part of a group where people are sharing their God glimpses, you know that certain sorts of things get mentioned: surprising encounters and conversations, sudden bursts of beauty, miraculous events, unexpected coincidences in the midst of a busy day. But no one ever testifies about a God glimpse at a committee meeting. No one ever gets up and says, "I saw the Spirit when the council nomination procedure passed" or "I saw the Spirit move when the new worship schedule was approved."

Acts 6 reminds us that the Spirit is in those moments too. A group of men and women getting together on a weekday evening and patiently, diligently working through the work of the church—that's a picture of the Spirit moving. Blessed are those folks! Blessed are the church administrators, for they shall inherit the

kingdom of God. Blessed are the committee chairs, for they shall see God. Blessed are those who make the nursery schedule, for they shall be called children of God. Blessed are the minute-takers, for their names shall be written in the book of life. Blessed are all those who do the small tedious acts of planning and policy making. Blessed are they, because the Holy Spirit is moving in them. It's not just the miracles; it's the meetings.

Luke gives this pro-meeting message a little extra push right at the end of the passage (v. 7) by reporting that the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. That's something of a refrain in Acts. Six times Luke reports the church's growth and expansion. It's his way of reminding us that the Spirit is at work. Usually these growth spurts come after one of those more spectacular moves of the Spirit: the disciples speak in tongues at Pentecost, and "three thousand were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41). But in Acts 6 the growth spurt comes after a congregational meeting. Because God uses those too.

There is actually one interesting difference in the report on growth in Acts 6:7. This time the new members included a large number of priests. Why priests? Could it be that the way these disciples handled the widow controversy—decently and in good order—so impressed these institutional men that they wanted to join? Could it be that the Spirit of decency and good order flooded their hearts with holy joy? Anything's possible. In the end, I don't know whether it was the miracles or the meetings, but I do know it was the Spirit. Because the Spirit is always moving in both places. ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Peter Jonker is minister of preaching at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Letting Go

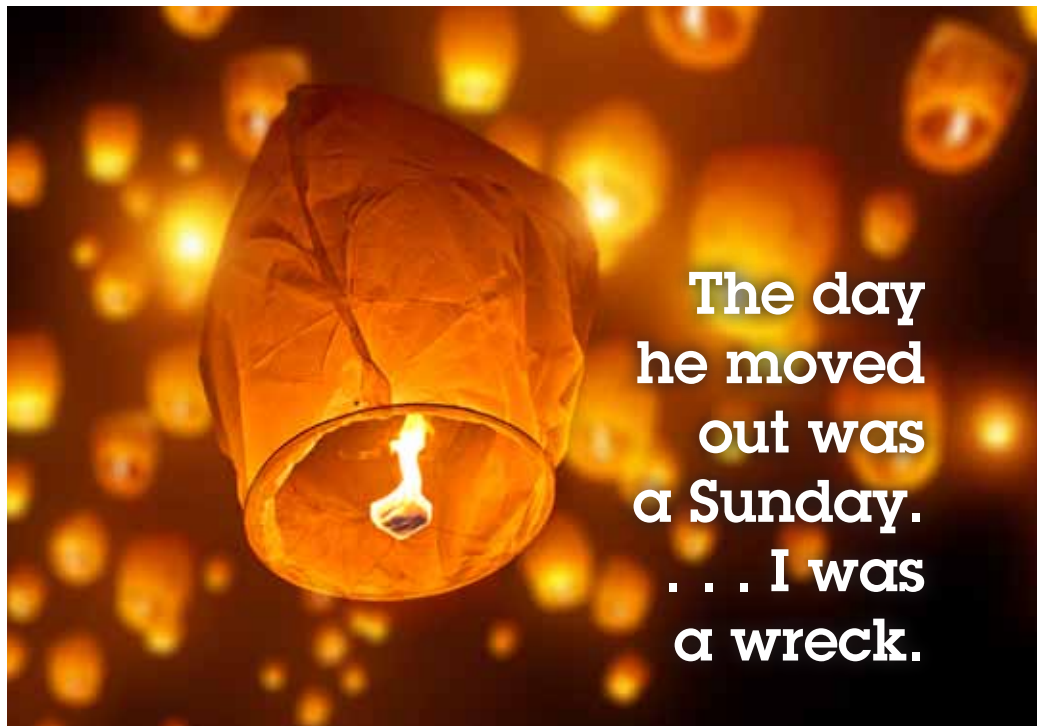
FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, I said goodbye to my son. He'd only been with us for 11 months, but he was part of our family. My husband and I were foster parents to Paul (not his real name), a refugee from Sudan. He was among the so-called Lost Boys who were victims of their country's civil war. At the time, our oldest child was 3 and our middle child was a toddler. The youngest wasn't even a thought yet.

Birthdates were among the vast losses in his young life, but Paul was likely 15 or 16 when he started experiencing the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, finally remembering some of the horrors he'd lived through at a very young age. After quickly becoming a warm and enthusiastic member of our family in the first few months, he became depressed. Much of his frustration was directed at us. He was angry all the time, and we didn't know how to help him. He couldn't even hear us anymore. Just as we were hitting the lowest point, I had an early miscarriage. The social worker decided the time had come to move him into an apartment with a few other Sudanese men who were just a bit older.

I was terrified on Paul's behalf. How would he navigate the rest of high school with so many burdens, so many obstacles to overcome? I knew that we had done what we could, and that we had at least helped him learn English and become accustomed to American culture, but it didn't seem possible that he would make it on his own.

The day he moved out was a Sunday. He sat next to me in church that morning, stiff and defensive, and I was a wreck.

Our minister preached from Hosea that morning. Hosea's wife Gomer had left him, and she was making a fool of him with unfaithfulness and debased



The day
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. . . I was
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living. God told Hosea to be patient, to leave her in God's hands. Pastor Roze related this to parents who had adult children who were wandering spiritually, assuring them that sometimes they need to let go and leave them in God's hands.

I knew that God was speaking to me through her words. I had a sense of peace through the difficult events of the rest of the day, as we folded towels and sheets into laundry baskets and piled them with extra toothpaste, soap, and food. As we drove him to the apartment, as we helped him make the bed, as he averted his eyes from us, as we drove away.

Of course I worried. For the next couple of years, however, Paul was assigned a mentor who was able to walk beside him in a way that he wouldn't let us, an invaluable blessing. We didn't hear from Paul for a while. But when he graduated from high school, he asked us to come. The next fall I helped him pack again and moved him into a dorm room

at his university. Letting go did not mean he was lost. It meant that God was in control, not us.

Fifteen years later we again have a child moving out. Our oldest biological son is starting college. I have all sorts of mixed emotions about this transition, in spite of the fact that Andrew has had the benefit of a safe and healthy life, a supportive and nurturing church, and family who has always been there for him.

But there is one thing I know. I can let go and leave him in God's hands. God has proven himself faithful throughout human history and in our tiny little family history. As much as I love him, God loves him more, and those are some strong hands to hold onto. ■



Kristy Quist is the Tuned In editor of *The Banner*. She attends Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Changing Stories of Poverty

by Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

Kanke Kuptong loves to quote Psalm 34:18: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Kuptong knows a thing or two about a crushed spirit. When she was just a child, the young Nigerian woman contracted polio and had to drop out of school. Where she had once been a boisterous young girl, dancing and running with her friends, she was now weak and unable to move freely. Eventually she was only able to get around by crawling on her knees.

Other people saw her as a cripple, and she began to feel that way herself. If no one saw potential in her, she wondered, what kind of future could she have?

Through God’s grace, Kuptong’s story doesn’t end there.

World Renew’s local partner, Beautiful Gate Handicapped People Center, began a new project in Kuptong’s community that was specifically geared toward people with physical disabilities. The project helped people in the community better understand disabilities and how to talk about them. They also encouraged people to see those with disabilities as equal members of society.

In addition to sensitizing the community to disability issues, the project also worked with men and women to help them recognize their worth and value. Through the project, Kuptong received a wheelchair and vocational training. Over the past year, she has started a successful weaving business in her home.

The type of change that has taken place in Kuptong’s life is something that World Renew sees every day in places of poverty across the globe.

“World Renew has been tasked by the Christian Reformed Church to be Jesus’



Kanke Kuptong’s creative weaving designs have helped her develop a thriving business despite her physical disability.

hands and feet in situations of poverty, disaster, and injustice around the world,” said Ida Kaastra Mutoigo, co-director of World Renew.

“In our 50-year history, we’ve learned that often one of the first things we have to do in this ministry is tackle the stories that exist—and that people believe—about those in poverty.”

Mutoigo explained that while North Americans could go in and provide hand-outs to people in distress, this assistance would have no long-term impact if donors and recipients continued to believe that these communities were weak and in need of aid on a continual basis and not just for a short-term disaster response.

“A mindset of dependence fosters more dependence,” she said. “When out-

siders don’t believe in a community’s capacity to overcome its poverty, and when that community can’t believe in itself, change is hard. But when people recognize their inherent worth as children of God, realize that they have gifts, assets, and talents they can use to build a better future and are given that chance, the possibilities are endless.”

Stories We Tell about Ourselves

Concepción Ich is a 51-year-old woman living in the remote community of San Martín Sayaxché, Guatemala. She has been poor her whole life. With nine children to care for, she and her husband have always struggled financially and were unwilling to take big risks in the hope of a better future.

In Guatemala, the word *cuchubal* is used to describe a savings group in which every member contributes a certain amount of money for each savings period.

“Eventually she was only able to get around by crawling on her knees . . .”

Each time the group gets together, one member is given the total of the group's contributions to invest in new, income-generating activities. Because they take turns receiving the money, each member eventually gets an opportunity to improve his or her life.

When Ich was invited to be a member of a *cuchubal* in a women's group supported by World Renew, she initially turned it down. Having lived her whole life trying to just get by, she didn't believe that she could save money to contribute to the group.

World Renew's local partner, the Christian Integral Development Association from El Petén (APIDEC), encouraged her to reconsider. Ich's husband helped her raise the 15 quetzals (about \$2 U.S.) she needed for her first contribution. At that very first meeting, Ich was surprised to

be selected as the first person to receive the money.

“In that moment she realized that she had a way to develop her family's income,” said Sadoc Aguilar, a World Renew staff member in Guatemala. “She decided to invest in buying two little pigs.”

Ich raised the piglets and will soon sell them for a profit. Today, she tells others in her community that it is possible to improve their conditions by saving their own money.

Stories We Tell about Others

But it isn't only people in poverty who have to adjust their mindsets.

“Leaders, aid organizations, and those outside of the community also have to recognize the inherent worth and abilities of those in need,” explained Mutoigo.

Te Keo [not his real name] is a young Laotian man with a powerful story of »



Through a small amount of savings and the purchase of two piglets, Concepción Ich has found a way to improve her family's income.

Fun Facts about World Renew

- World Renew has been serving those in need on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church and in the name of Christ for more than 50 years.
- World Renew changed its name from Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) to World Renew in 2012.
- World Renew works in 1,841 communities to help more than 800,000 people who live in 40 countries.
- Compelled by God's deep passion for justice and mercy, World Renew joins communities around the world to renew hope, reconcile lives, and restore creation. This ministry is threefold.
 - Community Development: World Renew staff and volunteers, together with partners and local leaders, are able to address major issues including illiteracy, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, HIV/AIDS, child mortality, and injustice.
 - Disaster Response and Rehabilitation: When disasters strike, World Renew responds to urgent needs in North America and internationally. World Renew's ability to respond to disaster is enhanced and greatly supported by a number of strategic partnerships and alliances.
 - Peace and Justice: World Renew reaches out to people around the world in an effort to connect them to ministry, deepen their understanding of global issues, and encourage them to act and advocate on behalf of those in need.
- World Renew has two co-directors, Ida Kaastra Mutoigo in Canada and Carol Bremer-Bennett in the United States.
- You can follow World Renew on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest.
- World Renew's 37th Annual World Hunger Campaign materials, entitled "Changing the Story," are now available. To learn more, visit worldrenew.net/worldhunger.



World Renew believed in Te Keo's potential; now he encourages people in Laotian villages to believe in each other.

» what can happen when people are given a chance to succeed. He had to drop out of school after eighth grade to help take care of his family. With a love of learning, he hoped to one day return to school and become a teacher. But by the time he was able to afford to go back to school, district officials told him he was too old to continue his studies. With only an eighth grade education, he found it difficult to find other meaningful work.

Keo knew he had potential as a leader and educator but was thwarted from reaching it. Instead, he began using his gifts to volunteer in his village and hoped that one day things would change.

In the fall of 2014, World Renew staff members met Keo and were impressed by the skills he demonstrated as a volunteer leader. They hired him to help with their new preschool project in remote mountain communities. He learned how to use a camera to take pictures and videos to help produce education materials. He also learned how to use a computer for desktop publishing and video editing.

Within five months, Keo was applying these skills to produce culturally relevant

children's picture booklets. On his own initiative, he also took video footage of traditional art forms and composed an introductory speech encouraging elders to pass on their unique traditions to the next generation.

When Keo presented the video in the community, many villagers came to see it. Before watching the video, most of the elders assumed that their young people had little interest in learning traditional customs. After watching the video, however, they saw how the younger generation was attracted to what they were seeing. A women's group gathered young women together and dressed them in traditional costumes. And, for the first time in many

well. Keo explained that he wanted to challenge the belief that the poorest people are not capable of special skills or achievements. People had believed in him, he said; now he wanted to help them believe in others.

Reaching Our God-Given Potential

As for Kanke Kuptong, her story has also taken a positive turn. While she had once been "crushed in spirit" by people's perceptions of her, she is now a vibrant part of her community.

"Kanke Kuptong is keen, responsive, and creative," said World Renew Nigeria staff member David Tyokighir. "Many in the community appreciate her creative



A presentation of Te Keo's video about traditional art forms was well attended.

years, young and old started practicing dances and songs together.

The morning following the viewing and dance practice, one of the elders told Keo: "I do not want to die yet, because there is still so much to teach to these young people, and I want to see that our culture is passed on."

Another of Keo's ideas was to encourage a very poor woman from his village to sing a harvest song on video while she was harvesting rice. He hired her to help with his rice harvest and recorded the video while she sang.

When Keo showed the video to other villagers, they were very impressed. No one knew that this woman could sing so

weaving designs, cheerful spirit, and modest charges for quality jobs."

Kuptong plans to save money from her small business and return to school. She explained that it is never too late to pursue a decent education and move on in life. She knows that, wherever life takes her next, the Lord is close to her and will use her potential for his kingdom glory. ■



Kristen deRoo VanderBerg was part of the World Renew communications team from 1999-2016. She now serves as director of communications and marketing for the Christian Reformed Church.

Encouraging Students through ‘Meal on Monday’

For most students, Mondays are accompanied by groans and hurried wishes for the day to be over. The students at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, also wish for their Monday classes to speed by—but for a different reason. For students of the campus ministry at Dalhousie, Monday evenings are met with excitement for the ministry’s Meal on Monday program, which brings encouragement and nourishment to students at the campus Multifaith Centre.

Attending university or college is an exciting opportunity to further develop faith and discover the ways in which God is sovereign and at work across all areas of study and endeavor. On campuses across North America, including Dalhousie University, students, faculty, and staff involved in Christian Reformed campus ministries seek to follow God and grow in their faithful pursuit of calling and vocation. These are places where students like Ali can make friends, find mentors, and get connected with a local church and broader community.

Ali, a Sunni Muslim refugee from Syria, found himself alone in Nova Scotia as his mother and sister remained in a Palestinian refugee camp and his father and brother remained in Syria. While grieving the separation from his loved ones, Ali also faced a troublesome year at Dalhousie. A fellow student was murdered, the school faced a mass shooting threat, a student died as a result of binge drinking, and Ali lost a peer to cancer. Confronting these sorrows, Ali found himself needing a safe space to grieve.



Students at Dalhousie University’s campus ministry enjoy food and fellowship at a Meal on Monday event.

Not only did Ali long for a community with which to grieve, he longed to quench his curiosity about Christianity. He started attending the Christian Reformed Campus Ministry’s Meal on Monday program, which was started by campus minister Rev. Dan Brown.

The program provides college students with two forms of nourishment. First, students are nourished physically through a delicious home-cooked meal. Second, students are nourished spiritually through discussions on faith and college life. Students like Ali experience encouragement, prayer, and shalom. Through this program, Ali and his peers gained a community with whom to grieve as well as the opportunity to dig deeper into Christianity.

The Meal on Monday program not only nourishes the students eating the meals but also those serving the meals. The program relies on volunteers from nearby churches to cook for the students, enhancing the community of faith throughout Halifax. Bonnie, a widowed senior with restricted mobility who lives 50 km away from the university, asked to cook a meal for the 25 students. Because she could not drive, Brown delivered the meal for her. This provided Bonnie the chance to glorify God through service. Brown observes: “It was also important—and this is perhaps the old parish minister in me—that there was this opportunity for someone with limited range

and mobility to serve in the kingdom in such a wonderfully giving way.”

The Meal on Monday program is one example of how campus ministries connect with students, faculty, and staff on over 35 campuses in North America. Support of these ministries is a partnership between Home Missions, local classes, and churches. These ministries have been a part of the Christian Reformed Church’s greater mission to facilitate Christian community on university campuses, and with those living in surrounding communities, for over 75 years. ■



Brooke Bonnema is a communications intern for Christian Reformed Home Missions.

Pray with us

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds . . . encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

Please pray for campus ministries across the United States and Canada:

- for students and others discovering God’s call in their life;
- for pastors and church planters working in challenging places;
- for congregations and church members who are joining God’s mission.

Shifting, Not Drifting

Church leader George Bullard posted this in his blog last month: “Look at your denomination and at those around you, and you will notice a lot of drifting and shifting. Drifting is generally unintentional and shifting is generally intentional.”

That’s an important distinction.

When we ask CRC members about what the denomination does, the international ministries are often what they think of first. But an intentional shift is underway—not to diminish the good work God blesses in places far away but to focus locally as well.

The CRC’s new ministry plan, *Our Journey 2020*, represents an intentional knitting together of our varied resources in order to support and resource the ministries of congregations.

A few years ago, the Strategic Planning and Adaptive Change Taskforce listened to CRC church leaders and members across Canada and the United States. They discovered great commonality among the challenges churches voiced. From those challenges emerged the five “desired futures” named in the pages of *Our Journey 2020*.

I’d like to draw your attention to two important features of the plan.

First, it is based on the conviction that a primary task of this denomination is to support, serve, and enhance the ministries of congregations. In each of the desired futures, the role of congregations is central.

Second, by offering many different ways of connecting local goals with local and denominational resources, the plan is a sort of buffet. Congregations can identify and select the things most helpful to their own ministry goals and challenges.

Let me tell you a true story that happened many years ago in a local congregation. The pastor and I and a few others were deeply engaged with a group of unchurched teens in our urban neighborhood. None of the teens had any biblical background. Yet they kept coming to our gathering every Thursday night.

We needed resources: Bible study material, coaching. We turned to the CRC for resources, but we didn’t find much for unchurched teens. Here’s the all-important question: Would it be different today? Would *Our Journey 2020* have made a difference?

Take a look through the special *Our Journey 2020* section in this issue. You will find goals such as: “Our congregations will explore their communities, learning from neighbors . . . , discover where God’s Spirit is moving . . . , discern how lay and ordained leaders can offer the good news of faith in Christ in

ways that connect to the needs our neighbors express and to their cultures.” I think if we made the same request today, we would find much more assistance.

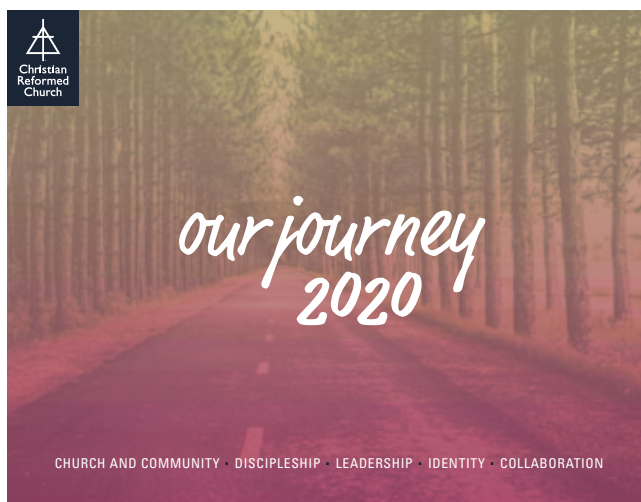
I also think that our church missed an opportunity back then. We as congregational leaders were on a quest of which the rest of the congregation was not always aware. We should have engaged the entire congregation as a first step. Today, we would find resources like the *Our Journey* “Church and Community” video, which I encourage you to view.

You can find it (and much more) online at crcna.org/journey.

I believe that churches looking for ministry assistance today would be well served by the denomination. We’d quickly be connected to people in the denominational or regional offices who would link us to others who are also doing urban youth ministry and who would help us to identify the resource materials that we desperately needed.

So yes, we’re shifting intentionally—believing that the desired futures of *Our Journey 2020* are the desires that God has laid on all of our hearts, as we seek through the power of the Holy Spirit to bring others to Christ—even right next door!

I hope and pray that *Our Journey* is also your journey, as together we seek to serve our Lord in faithful ministry. ■



“We’re shifting intentionally.”



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

You add.
God multiplies.

Charting a New Course for Plaster Creek

Calvin College, along with several partners, is taking an interdisciplinary approach in improving the health of a polluted watershed in West Michigan.

Plaster Creek Stewards (PCS) is a collaboration of Calvin College faculty, staff, and students along with churches, schools, and community partners working to restore the health and beauty of the Plaster Creek Watershed.

Thanks to a \$629,178 grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality—the third in a series of grants from MDEQ—and a \$178,837 grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, that work continues to expand.

The newest MDEQ grant supports all three PCS focus areas: providing opportunities for education, research, and restoration at three sites within the watershed.

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant will involve a partnership with Grand Rapids Christian High School in restoring wetlands at a local golf course.

Since 2011, PCS has generated nearly \$3 million in grants.

Gail Heffner, director of community engagement at Calvin College, emphasizes the importance of taking an interdisciplinary approach to this work.

“We have engineers helping with hydrology modeling,



historians helped collect info about time periods—what happened at this neighborhood, or at this farm, and its impact on the creek,” said Heffner.

“Chemists care about what toxins might be in the water, GIS (geographic information

system) [people] help us do the mapping stuff, as well as microbiologists looking at E. coli and invasive species,” added Dave Warners, a professor of biology at Calvin.

Warners and Heffner said that when you see a real-world problem such as this that is

Biology professor Randall DeJong conducting research with students in Plaster Creek.

multi-faceted, it’s important to gain an understanding of the broken relationship: “The key is to address the relationship, get people to care for the creek, and start to develop an affection for it.” ■

—by Matt Kucinski,
Calvin College

Catechism Brings Muslims to Faith in Christ

Assétou, 17, lives in a remote village in Burkina Faso, 60 kilometers from its capital city, Ouagadougou.

She discovered a new radio program, “I Belong to God,” and listened intently to its messages.

There are no churches in Assétou’s village, but she wanted to know more about this God who touched her heart.

So she called the program’s producer, Rev. Marc Nabie, French ministry coordinator in Burkina Faso for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI).

“Assétou told me she wanted to be baptized,” said Nabie. “In fact, she insisted on it.”

Nabie was pondering the best way to respond when the following Sunday, he received a call from Assétou. She had walked 14 km (8.5 mi) to board a bus to Ouagadougou, where BTGMI’s French language ministry is based.

Nabie picked her up from the bus station and brought her to his home, where the church fellowship meets.

That day, gathered with God’s people for worship, Assétou gave her life to the Lord.

Back in her village, Assétou continues to grow in faith as she listens to the weekly “I Belong to God” messages.

The BTGMI French team, in partnership with Timothy Leadership Training Institute



God is using the Heidelberg Catechism, radio broadcasts, and Bible studies to bring people in Burkina Faso to faith.

(TLTI), developed the broadcast series and coordinating Bible study based on the 52 themes in the Heidelberg Catechism.

The impact of these radio messages and Bible studies is growing as local church leaders are trained to disciple those who respond.

“Many of those who respond are Muslims seeking truth,” Nabie noted. “With their faith being challenged by world events, they turn to Christian broadcasts to find answers.”

Nabie added that he sees increased interest by Muslim women, who can listen to the program “out of the eyes of people” on their smartphones. ■

—by Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministries International

Pastor Church Resources Lives Up to Its New Name

Pastor Church Resources, the new name of what was formerly called Pastor-Church Relations, is expanding programs of healing and prevention for ministers, church staff, councils, and congregations.

With the name change, the ministry is better able to communicate the full range of what it does: from providing programs and education to pastors and churches to enhancing the work of classes throughout the Christian Reformed Church.

Synod 2016 officially made the name change. Before the change, the abbreviation for the office name was PCR, and so it remains.

The previous name explicitly or implicitly suggested that the ministry's primary or only reason for being was to address problems between pastors and

(l-r) Jeanne Kallemeyn, Derek Atkins, Jenna Dutton, Lis Van Harten, Denise Posie, and Norm Thomasma of Pastor Church Resources.



churches, said Norm Thomasma, director of the ministry.

"Making the change provides a way to retain the recognizable abbreviation and, at the same time, shift the accent in ways that will help churches access benefits from the ministry," said Thomasma.

Since it was founded by synod in 1982, PCR has seen significant growth "in its responsibilities, with proportionally more of its work directed toward resourcing church leaders, congregational staff, pastors, pastor spouses, and so on through increased efforts to generate helpful materials and provide educational events,"

according to material submitted to Synod 2016 (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 47).

Playing an important role in this growth have been two initiatives: Sustaining Pastoral Excellence, which works to enhance the ministry of pastors, and Sustaining Congregational Excellence, which seeks to build capacity in smaller congregations and support them in efforts to do ministry.

For more information, visit crcna.org/pcr. ■

—by Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

Loving Our Neighbors

A recent conference at Calvin Theological Seminary gave some of the seminary's new faculty members a chance to join a well-known Reformed theologian in connecting their areas of expertise to the ministry of the church.

The conference, called "Loving Your Neighbor Today: The Second Great Commandment in Today's World," explored different dimensions of hospitality and empathy in challenging situations.

Each speaker urged listeners to see their neighbors not as an abstract category or political issue but to look for the specific qualities in and humanity of their neighbors.

"We need to see around us real people with specific names, specific histories, specific hopes and fears," said keynote speaker Richard Mouw, a former professor at Calvin College and president emeritus of Fuller Seminary.



Cory Willson, associate professor of missiology at Calvin Seminary, speaks during the "Loving Your Neighbor Today" conference.

"To love God is to love what God loves, to take delight in what God delights in, to grieve what God grieves," Mouw said.

Joining Mouw were Calvin Seminary faculty members who addressed a range of topics, including reaching out to interfaith neighbors, neighbors with dementia, and neighbors suffering from trauma.

Speakers included Amanda Benckhuysen, associate professor of Old Testament; Danjuma Gibson, associate professor of pastoral care; Cory Willson, the Jake and Betsy Tuls associate professor of missiology and missional ministry; and Mary Vanden Berg, professor of systematic theology and

associate academic dean. Mariano Avila, professor of New Testament, preached on compassion in the gospels at the conference's worship services.

Video recordings of each session and additional resources are available at calvinseminary.edu/neighbor.

"I need to see my neighbor as a person who is like me, made in the image of God, with joys and disappointments and needs," said Benckhuysen, speaking on love and hospitality in the Old Testament.

Attendees came from six states in the U.S. and three provinces in Canada. Many said they were challenged and uplifted by the conference's theme and the way each speaker addressed it.

One attendee commented, "I found new zeal and encouragement to pursue challenging relationships, even though they take time." ■

—by Nathan Bierma,
Calvin Seminary

You add.
God multiplies.

Social Business Thrives in El Salvador



Wilfredis (center) has an entrepreneurial spirit that is helping to bring positive change to El Salvador.

When Roland Vanderburg prepared to serve in El Salvador, he was warned not to carry two of anything—because the people there are so enterprising that they would want to buy one of them from him.

Vanderburg now seeks to tap this entrepreneurial spirit with which God has blessed so many Salvadorans.

He serves with Christian Reformed World Missions at Seeds of a New Creation, a ministry training center in El Salvador's capital, San Salvador. Recently he has been helping leaders to develop social businesses.

"Social businesses are all about affirming local capacities," explained Vanderburg. "Some look like nonprofits and some look like for-profit businesses, but they are all mission-driven."

Vanderburg has helped to develop the "Social Enterprise Project Fund," which allows new or growing social businesses to obtain a loan to cover some of their initial costs.

Wilfredis, who lives in the coastal community of San Marcelino, a tourist hotspot, had been repairing bikes for many years. When his supervisor at the repair shop where he worked passed away, he no longer had the tools or parts he needed.

Thanks to a startup loan from the social business fund, Wilfredis is back to doing what he does best. He is also teaching at-risk youth to do bike repairs. So far, his business is thriving, and he is working on expanding it to include bike rentals.

"Every time I visit, he has more parts and more bikes to work on," said Vanderburg.

Wilfredis' bicycle repair business is just one of many that have developed from this fund, and Vanderburg has seen positive change that extends beyond the business leaders.

"Wilfredis knew that the nearby church was raising money to build a latrine, so he paid the bill himself," said Vanderburg. "This really shows the ripple effect of the businesses." ■

—by Brian Clark,
Christian Reformed World Missions

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

SHORT TAKES



Launching a New Prison Church

In 2007, the Michigan Department of Corrections allowed Christian Reformed Home Missions to launch a congregation at the Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility in Ionia, Mich.

That congregation expanded into Celebration Fellowship, which now meets at three sites—two at Bellamy Creek and one across the street at the Handlon Correctional Facility.

By this fall, Celebration Fellowship will likely become the second officially organized CRC prison congregation. Cornerstone Prison Church in Sioux Falls, S.D., is the other organized church. ■

Digital Library

With the fall ministry season in full swing, many Christian Reformed congregations are taking advantage of the newly launched CRC Digital Library to support their church's ministries.

The Digital Library has received an overwhelmingly positive response from CRC churches and members, with thousands of CRC members already using hundreds of titles available in the online library, including Bible studies, children's ministry curricula, worship resources, small group studies, youth resources, and more.

If you attend a CRC, sign up for free online access to all the resources in the Digital Library at crcna.org/Library. ■



Itsy Bitsy Spiders

It's October, and that means Halloween is coming soon. And that means you'll see lots of spiders: spider decorations, spider costumes, spider webs, spider everything!

Some people think spiders are scary. All those legs DO make them look a little creepy!

If spiders scare you, challenge yourself to learn more about them. They're interesting, useful, amazing creatures. And they have a very important place in God's world.

Bug Patrol

Ever walked into a spiderweb? It's really hard to get that sticky silk off your hands. It's even harder for bugs to get unstuck from spiderwebs after they fly in. And that's a good thing for you and me.

Why? Because if spiders didn't build their webs, then mosquitoes, flies, and other bugs would be everywhere!

One spider can eat up to 2,000 insects in a year. Some scientists say that if there were no spiders, bugs would eat all the crops that farmers grow.

So if you find a spider in your house, don't kill it. Gently cover it with a plastic container or a jar and slide a piece of paper underneath. Then set it free outside so it can eat more bugs!

How to Build a Web

Most spiders spin their webs at night, so it's hard to watch them at work. But take a look outside some morning: you should be able to find at least one spider web.

- The spider uses one of its legs to pull a long piece of silk from a part of its body called a *spinneret*. The silk floats on the wind and gets stuck to a branch or a piece of outdoor furniture or a railing. (Some spiders can even spin a web across a river!)
- After one end of the silk is attached, the spider attaches the other end. Then it has a "bridge" to climb on.
- The spider then makes the "spokes" of the web. They look like the spokes of a bicycle wheel.
- Then the spider works in circles to connect the spokes in a spiral pattern with sticky silk.
- Spiders can make different kinds of silk, depending on the job the silk will do. Some spiders can make seven different kinds!

Want to see a spider at work building a web? Check out this video at tinyurl.com/BannerWeb.



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

Best Spider Book Ever

Charlotte's Web, first published in October of 1952, is one of the best books ever. It's also the best spider book ever. The author, E.B. White, lived on a farm in Maine. One day, he saw a spider making an egg sac, and that's what gave him the idea to write this wonderful book.



FuN Facts

Scientists have identified **35,000** different kinds of spiders in the world, but there are probably many more that we haven't discovered yet.

Spiders have been around for a long time. There are even **spider fossils!**

Most spiders live about **two years**, but some live longer.

Spiders live on every continent except **Antarctica**.

Wherever you are, there's usually a spider within **10 feet** (3 metres) of you.

When a spider walks, **only four** of its legs touch the ground at a time.



PHOTO BY PAUL A. SELDEN



Up Close and Personal

It's hard to see a spider's face up close. But when someone takes a picture with a special magnifying camera lens, the results are amazing. Some spiders look like furry animals or creatures from a Star Wars movie. Pretty cool!



Spiders—Yum!

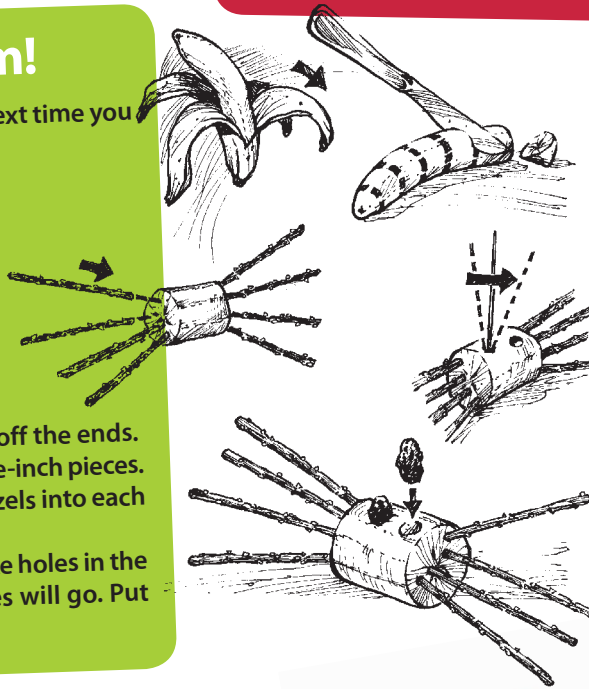
Make this spidery snack next time you get the munchies.

What you need:

- A banana
- A butter knife
- Small straight pretzels
- A toothpick
- Raisins

What you do:

- Peel a banana and cut off the ends.
- Cut the banana into one-inch pieces.
- Stick four straight pretzels into each cut side for legs.
- Use a toothpick to make holes in the banana where the eyes will go. Put raisins in the holes.



Spidey Senses

Do spiders have the same five senses you do? Not exactly.

Sight: Most spiders have eight eyes. But even with all those eyes, they don't have the best vision. Hunting spiders have better vision than web-building spiders.

Hearing: Spiders can't hear because they don't have ears.

Smell and Taste: Spiders don't have noses, and they can't really taste things. But special hairs on their legs can sense chemicals. That tells them if something is good to eat.

Touch: Spiders have an excellent sense of touch. Those tiny hairs on their legs help them sense vibrations in the world around them.



Sandy Swartzentruber is the resource coordinator for Faith Formation Ministries and a member of Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. Spiders give her the willies!

Bible Stories You've Never Heard Of



WHAT IF I TOLD YOU that there are important Bible stories you've almost certainly missed? And not just minor subplots buried in the middle of a genealogy, but stories that change everything we know about the Scriptures and how to read them? Though enormously important, these stories are also very subtle. So subtle, in fact, that you could read the Bible cover to cover and still miss them. The kind of stories I'm talking about are the broader stories that encompass a specific conversation between author and audience. In a sense, the books of the Bible are primary sources, offering a glimpse of what was going on behind the scenes.

This kind of thinking takes us beyond stories in the Bible and introduces us to the story *of* the Bible.

While we sometimes acknowledge an ancient conversation going on between author and audience when studying the epistles—Paul's letter to the Galatians, for example, is part of a broader story involving gentile inclusion into the family of God—we rarely stop to consider the various situations surrounding the other books of the Bible. But believe it or not, every one of the 66 books has an original intended audience . . . and that audience wasn't us. Put simply, when you read the Bible, you're reading someone else's mail.

The Broader Picture

In one sense, the Bible is timeless. But in another sense, the Bible is very much time-bound, each book having roots in

actual circumstances that influenced the telling. For example, a quick—or perhaps not so quick—read-through of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles will unearth a number of inconsistencies if we ignore the backdrop circumstances in play.

The Samuel/Kings' version of Israel's monarchy (Saul, David, Solomon, and others) is complicated and disheartening. These stories are filled with dismal details about King David's shortcomings, including his affair with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband in an attempt to cover up his sin. All of which resulted in a messed-up family situation that would fit nicely into a reality TV series.

Surprisingly, even though Chronicles covers the same time period in Israel's history, this author deliberately leaves out all the juicy details. According to Chronicles, David was the ideal king who set Israel on the path of covenant obedience. No scandal, no mess.

So what's up? These accounts seem to be in serious conflict . . . that is, until you consider their respective backdrops. If we zoom out to consider the circumstances in which the two accounts were given—the broader story—we find that each account serves a very important and very different purpose.

Samuel/Kings was almost certainly written during the time of Babylonian exile; it focuses on Israel's shortcomings as a way of explaining how they got there. Chronicles was written many years later after the Jews had returned to their homeland.

The purpose of Chronicles is to point the recently returned people onward in the covenant faithfulness of David, the one who brought the Holy Ark to Jerusalem so many years ago. In other words, the books of Chronicles is suggesting they pick up where David left off. It's no surprise, then, that the book of Chronicles ends in a place of hope as God's people are sent back to Jerusalem with hearts set on restoring the temple.

Though this particular example of a broader story may be slightly more apparent than some others, each book did in fact have an original audience and application—whether we know the full story or not.

The Bible and Me

So where do we fit into all this? If we accept that the books of the Bible have “homes” in the ancient world and that they were originally told and written with a specific purpose—to encourage, critique, rebuke, or explain—for specific communities of God's people at various points in their history, what does it all have to do with us today?

That's a very good question with a somewhat startling answer. The truth is, the Bible isn't all about you. Though the Bible is for you, it most certainly wasn't written to you. When you read the Bible, you are listening in on a conversation much older and bigger than yourself. You're a guest—and a late-comer, at that. This is what Old Testament professor Peter Enns calls “eavesdropping on an ancient conversation.”

Accepting these “broader stories” means admitting that the Bible isn't primarily God's letter to you, or an owner's manual for life, or even Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. These are all “me-centric” readings, and they must be shed if we are going to mature as Bible readers. This can be difficult at first—as challenging and upsetting as the discovery that the earth isn't the center of the universe was for 16th century scientists—but in the end we may just come to find our place as important, though peripheral, characters in God's story. Paradoxically, we must remove ourselves from the story in order to truly enter into it.

This does not for one second mean that the Bible isn't applicable or relevant for a modern audience—it most certainly is. In fact, the beauty of the Scriptures is that they depend on the Holy Spirit's activity in the hearts and minds of readers. In other words, though the Bible may not be addressed to you, God speaks to you as you listen in on these ancient conversations. And the good news is that God speaks whether we get everything right in reading or not.

Marco Polo

This diverse collection of books we call the Bible has changed my life. Not always as Bible verses speaking directly into the modern world, but more often as an invitation to leave here and now, and go back there and then.

I think of Marco Polo, the Italian merchant, who left the comforts of home and traveled throughout the continent of

Asia, then considered by most Europeans to be an entirely different world. He didn't speak the language, he didn't understand the customs, and he was completely unfamiliar with the culture. But as he spent nearly 25 years there, he acclimated to this new world and was transformed by the things he saw, the places he went, and, most important, by the people and the king he met.

After a quarter of a century, Marco Polo returned home to Venice a changed man. And as a changed man, he changed his world. Stories abound of the remarkable perspectives, insights, and inventions Marco Polo brought back with him from Asia to Europe.

When you read the Bible,
you are listening in on a
conversation much older
and bigger than yourself.

What if this was at least one of the ways we are meant to read our Bibles? What if, instead of pretending that Paul or Solomon or the psalmist was writing to us, we were to leave home like Marco Polo and travel to a world in which we were the strangers? What if, by spending years in this unfamiliar place, in this unfamiliar time, even with this unfamiliar language, we were transformed as we saw and experienced a God who interacts with people in their world?

Like Marco Polo, we would return home as changed people. Changed by the things we've seen, the places we've been, and, most important, by the people and the God we've met on our travels.

This might sound like a strange and unfamiliar way of reading the Bible. But it is actually what happens in the process of exegesis and hermeneutics. Going there, and coming back changed.

By noticing and paying attention to some of the “broader stories” hinted at in the biblical books, we are led into a trust-based relationship with the God who has been at work in the reading of this book since its earliest compilation.

This invitation to read the Scripture as an outsider listening in to an older conversation is nothing short of a call to adventure. It's an invitation to journey beyond what is comfortable and step into the often unfamiliar terrain of the Scriptures.

Be prepared to be changed! ■



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

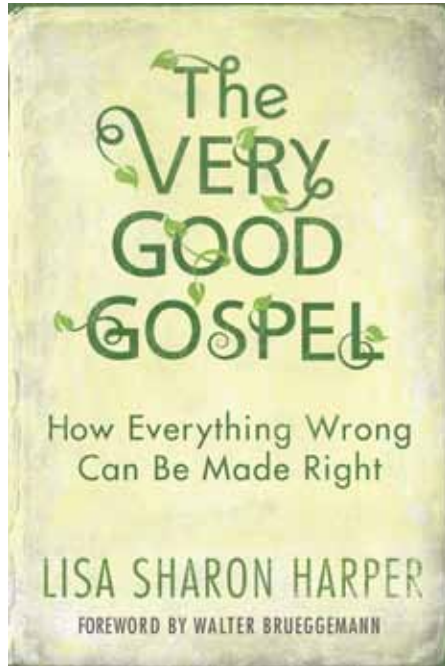
Good News!

DON'T LET THE GLIB TITLE PUT YOU OFF.

The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right by Lisa Sharon Harper is a solid primer on the sociopolitical implications of Christianity. Harper outlines a careful biblical argument for activism while maintaining an evangelical accent on personal salvation. In fact, she claims, emphasizing only one or the other of these dual impetuses of Scripture leads to a “thin faith.” To nurture a “thick faith,” she urges Christians “to study Scripture in light of the writers’ historic and cultural contexts, the original meanings of words, and the biblical text in the context of the teachings of church fathers and mothers.”

Providing a template for that kind of rigorous exegesis, Harper explains what it meant, exactly, when God called Creation “very good.” She reviews the Fall, the “hinge point of history,” as the crumbling of humanity’s relationships with God, each other, and creation itself. She then traces the subsequent arc of Scripture as the re-institution of shalom, a return of God’s peace to all that is broken.

Harper investigates the tensions that disrupt shalom.



Referencing examples from Scripture and contemporary life, Harper investigates the tensions that disrupt shalom within families and between genders, races, and nations. Drawing from her own experiences as a social justice advocate and as a single woman of color, Harper’s personalization of these issues is compelling.

Balancing that winsome authenticity, though, are a few of my reservations. Harper offers scant acknowledgment of the centrality of the church as the Body of Christ, omitting it entirely from her “relationship governance inventory.” She embraces public policy rather uncritically as a primary means to address poverty and oppression. Her idealism about the reestablishment of shalom is untethered to any discussion of theological eschatology. Some readers might legitimately wonder, along with me, whether everything can indeed be made right before the return of Christ.

Still, there is much to learn from Harper’s insider perspective on justice issues and from her clear delineation of a biblically-based hope for shalom. Reflective questions at the end of each chapter makes this book a fruitful resource for individual or small group study. (Crown Publishing) ■



Cathy Smith is a retired school teacher from Wyoming, Ont., and is a contributing editor at *Christian Courier*.

American Girls

Social Media and the Secret Lives of Teenagers

Nancy Jo Sales



American Girls: Social Media and the Secret Lives of American Teenagers

by **Nancy Jo Sales**
reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**

In *American Girls*, journalist Nancy Jo Sales sounds the alarm on what “it [really] feels like to be a girl in America today.” With smartphones keeping girls constantly connected to social media, we’re all a long way from Kansas. Sales interviewed more than 200 teen girls for her book, gaining access to their “secret lives.” She tracks not only ’tween and teen anxiety and self-identity issues but reveals an online world where sexting has replaced intimacy. One 16-year-old told her, “Social media is destroying our lives.” But a friend confessed that without social media “we would have no life.” Sales concludes with a simple but stunning observation: “The real world we inhabit together is the one that matters.” In the words of Matthew 11:15, “Whoever has ears, let them hear.” (Knopf)

Hard Love

by **NEEDTOBREATHE**
reviewed by **Micah van Dijk**

Hard Love, NEEDTOBREATHE's vibrant and mature sixth studio album, is characterized by musical excellence. Even though the band explores many new sounds and genres, they keep enough of their signature Southern rock sound to avoid alienating long-time fans. They offer a perspective on love that drips with life experience, revealing how hard, yet meaningful, it can be. The songwriting is creative and the production of the album is impeccable, with each vocal reverb, drum sound, and guitar tone tweaked to perfection. (Atlantic)



Outrun the Moon

by **Stacey Lee**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**



Fifteen-year-old Mercy Wong understands poverty and discrimination, having experienced both while growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown during the early 1900s. She manages to enroll in St. Clare's, a school populated almost exclusively by privileged white girls. When the historic 1906 earthquake demolishes San Francisco, barriers between Mercy and her classmates begin to crumble. Raised by a Christian father and a mother who worships the ancestors, Mercy's spiritual journey is complex as she wonders where God is in the middle of her losses. In this young adult novel, Stacey Lee skillfully, compassionately, and at times humorously, portrays a sad chapter in American history through the eyes of an ordinary girl who refuses to be defined by society's restrictions. Ages 12 and up. (G.P. Putnam's Sons)



A Brighter Summer Day

reviewed by **Phil Christman**

Edward Yang's four-hour epic has played to stunned audiences at film festivals off and on since its completion in 1991; this edition marks its first large-scale release in North America. It tells the story of a teenage Chinese immigrant and his family, refugees from Mao's China, living in Taiwan at the end of the 50s. Despite his own personal decency and his father's Confucian conservatism, the boy is inexorably drawn into the era's violent youth gangs. The four hours spent watching it feel no longer than four hours of passionate talk with someone you dearly love and can't save. Rated R for language and violence, it is on disc now. (Criterion)

THE LOWDOWN

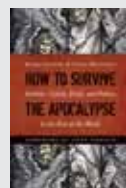


Re-Birth: *The Birth of a Nation*, this month's new historical film about the Nat Turner slave rebellion, repurposes and redefines the title of the controversial 1915 movie that revolutionized filmmaking at the same time that it stoked the fires of racism. (Fox Searchlight)



Making Gains:

Fans of the HGTV show *Fixer Upper* will want to know that star renovators Chip and Joanna Gaines will release their memoir, *The Magnolia Story*, on the 18th of this month. (Thomas Nelson)



Survival Guide:

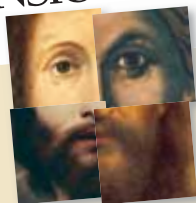
The Walking Dead is back on TV this month, which makes now the perfect time to read *How to Survive the Apocalypse: Zombies, Cylons, Faith, and Politics at the End of the World* by Robert Joustro of Redeemer University and film critic Alissa Wilkinson. (Eerdmans)

Small Groups Share

John Cook sent in this report from his small group at **Calvary CRC in Ottawa, Ont.:**

One resource that worked well for us was John Timmer's *Four-Dimensional Jesus* (Faith Alive Christian Resources). Timmer describes the unique way each of the four gospel writers reveals Jesus and helps us see who Jesus is. One of our members notes that she had many "Aha" moments while we studied it. The book is stimulating and well-organized for group discussion. It does not have specific questions for discussion, but we did not miss them. (Note: This book is out of print and may be found at used book sources like AbeBooks.com or Amazon.)

FOUR-DIMENSIONAL JESUS



Seeing Jesus
Through the Eyes of
Matthew, Mark,
Luke, and John

J O H N T I M M E R

**MORE REVIEWS
ONLINE**

God's Dropped Stitches

MONDAY MORNING. Fourth grade. Dreaded memory verse time.

The assigned verse, linguistically anachronistic in the requisite American Standard Version (as well as age-inappropriate for a child of 10) reads, "For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works! Thou knowest me right well. . . ." (Ps. 139:13-14).

Though I had spent considerable time miserably trying to memorize this verse, even reciting it to my mother the night before, I could not write it verbatim. I could recite a reasonable paraphrase, but my handwriting was mostly illegible and my spelling was wretched. This prompted a tirade of public censure from my teacher: "One must never change the Bible; after all, God wrote it. If you are imprisoned (presumably by the communists) without a Bible, you will need to know it by heart. Your spelling will need to improve if you are ever going to get a job that doesn't involve digging ditches." She then pronounced the punishment: "You must spend recess writing it legibly and correctly 10 times." This was later waived, which was good because I knewest right well that I couldst not carry it to fruition.

Now, over 50 years later, I would do little better with the same assignment. Genetically, as God knit my double helixes together, I was endowed with dyslexia exacerbated by some attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Dyslexia is a malady of the brain that manifests itself in difficulty processing or coding the input of information when seeing or hearing words and—equally frustrating—processing the output information. I find it difficult to write or even type in a coherent manner.

I see or hear words differently from a "normal" person. When I read I do not see words as a series of letters and syllables but as images or symbols formed mainly by consonants. The spelling corrector on my computer just spit up "malady" and "melody" when I typed "maledy," which, even after close examination, looks identical to me. I had to look up the meaning to correctly choose the word.

The order of the letters matters, but I often see them and write them in reverse order. Though "lemody" is unusual, I can easily see "melody" in it. And small words like "saw" and "was" are nearly the same to me, as are "sew," "sow" and "Wes." From a hearing standpoint, I also have trouble distinguishing "malady" from "melody." It is difficult for me to connect the sound made by a specific letter or decipher the sounds of combined letters to form a word.

My teachers never gave up on me.

A number of other issues also come with dyslexia: among them, differentiating left from right, transposing numbers, oral reading, evenly spacing letters in a line, learning a second language, taking notes, sequencing ideas, and drawing.

Aside from academia, these cause a host of real-life situations that are frustrating or embarrassing, if not funny—reading poorly in a Bible study, turning the wrong way during close order drill in the Army, misspelling at the white board during a major presentation at work, choosing the wrong word in an email blast, and giving people my address or phone number incorrectly. Others are much weightier—the effort to learn Spanish while working in Central America,

keeping a ledger, and writing major work documents. I live with the problems on a daily basis.

Not surprisingly, the most intense problems for a dyslexic person occur in education, with early elementary school being especially difficult. In the fourth grade I was reading poorly and could barely write or spell even my own name. Other subjects, like arithmetic, suffered as the result of my inability to write numbers, especially in usable columns. I scored at the very lowest level of my class on the standardized tests. My parents had to convince the school to pass me to the next grade several years in a row.

During the summer between fourth and fifth grade, my mother was determined to teach me to read, forcing me to spend several hours a day reading. I actually learned to read with some speed and considerable comprehension. I started to learn each word or group of words as symbols and was able to piece them together to make sense. For the first time, I could understand what was being communicated through words. I still was not able to read out loud very well and made little progress in handwriting, spelling, or memorization.

Reading with understanding and comprehension opened new windows for me. I went from scoring low on standardized tests to scoring quite high because they were reading-based with fill-in-the-bubble answers. But my classroom situation did not improve much. Even though I was no longer considered "dumb," I was perceived as not working to my potential. My problem was considered a moral issue involving some combination of sloth, carelessness, and indifference.

There were also emotional and self-image issues. My inability to write in a straight line or within margins made coloring, cutting, and drawing very difficult. I remember a third-grade teacher



holding up one of my art pieces and declaring that she could chew it more neatly than I cut it. Later in life, when I realized that my problem was a disability, I envisioned this poor lady spending each day of eternity, Dante-esque fashion, chewing a ream of foul-tasting red construction paper in perfectly straight lines. Growing up in a church-oriented subculture where memorization and writing were required in school, Sunday school, catechism, and even boys' club, I carried a stigma well known throughout the community.

Kathy, my wife—alas, also a fourth-grade teacher—cautions me that I am viewing my early life from the censorious, less-than-mature perspective of a frustrated child. This equally censorious view has validity. Much less was known about learning disabilities in the 1950s. My early teachers, who were not trained educators, had only a few years of college, and the culture of raising and educating children was much different. I am certain that many of the teachers, leaders, and pastors

wanted to do their job well, and some really cared about me.

I did receive two significant gifts. First, my teachers never gave up on me, and second, they emphasized the foundations of Christian faith. Unlike many people with disabilities, I did not get passed through a system with social promotions and minimal expectations. Though often faced with inappropriate demands that were impossible for me to achieve, and, at least from my perspective, brutal to my self-esteem, I was constantly pushed to not be satisfied with less than what the sovereign God demanded of me in life.

Did God screw up my genetics by some accident of fate? Did a few of the adenine and guanine dinguses slip through his fingers? Or worse, did God create me with a good intellect but with a set of disabilities so he could smile as the world delighted at my mistakes? How should I understand the dropped stitches in my knitting?

I see God's grace overwhelming my life in ways not of my own choosing. God gave me employment that was challenging, meaningful, and mostly fit my abilities. God put me on earth at a time when computers made me mostly literate. God gave me my wife, Kathy, who, mostly, enjoys me as I am, and is supportive of my glitches. God gave me his presence—from elementary school through retirement—making a way as I felt helpless and hopeless.

So here is the dreaded memory verse, paraphrased: "For thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. Thou didst knit my years together, day by day. Thou knowest me, everyone, and the world right well. I praise thee, even questioneth thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works!" ■



James Boldenow was manager of information services for the Christian Reformed Church in North America until his retirement in 2015.

Whatever Happened to the Ten Commandments?

The Ten Commandments reveal the moral grain of the universe.

PHOTO BY PATRICK FORE/UNSPASH

MANY OLD-TIMERS like me will remember when the Ten Commandments were read each Sunday in worship, usually before a confession of sin. Some churches still recite the commandments in worship, but many do not. Why is that?

To get at this question, it's best to step back and understand what the Ten Commandments mean for Christians—who, as Paul says, are “free from the law” (Rom. 8:2). John Calvin famously outlined three “uses” for the Ten Commandments. First, he said, the law is meant to point to our sinfulness by mirroring the perfect righteousness and holiness of God. Second, the law is meant to restrain evil. As Calvin put it, “by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice.” And third, to reveal the path of freedom and holiness to those who desire to please God.

It's that third use of the law that is particularly relevant for our lives. When the law is read we sometimes miss the all-important opening line: “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the land of slavery.” In other words, the whole Decalogue is an expression of the way *free* people live. It's not meant to restrict us or tie us down but to reveal

how things work best in God's world. Just as a woodworker needs to know the grain of the wood in order to bring out its strength and beauty, the commandments reveal the moral grain of the universe.

That's why the Ten Commandments are featured in the Heidelberg Catechism—and all other catechisms—as one of the essential things Christians need to know. And in the Heidelberg it comes under the rubric of thankfulness. It's the way we redeemed and liberated people show our thankfulness to God—by living in the freedom of God's children in the world God made. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment he replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-38). He understood that the Ten Commandments boil down to two essential mandates: how we are to love God and how we are to love our neighbor.

All three uses of the law Calvin describes are important. But we keep coming back to them over and over again because they so vividly describe the kind of liberated and grateful life to which we are called. They tell us how to live wisely and well in God's world.

They help us answer the daily issues we face. What does the Sabbath mean for us in our 24/7 culture? What does not using God's name in vain mean in a day when “OMG” is a common messaging punctuation and when politicians and businesses use God's name to pump their own platform or brand? How do we honor our parents when they are wasting away with Alzheimer's? What does “you shall not murder” mean for capital punishment, or warfare, or gun control?

With all that in mind, it might not be a bad idea at all to recite these timeless commandments regularly in worship, especially after the confession of sin, as a way to describe the kind of life in which we love God and our neighbor. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Leonard Vander Zee is a minister in the Christian Reformed Church. He attends Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich.

FAQs

Church

Q Does Scripture support the practice of limited tenure for elders and deacons?

A Not directly. Indeed, biblical evidence from the book of Acts and the Pauline epistles appears instead to lean toward permanent tenure. That is how the church decided the issue for centuries: once in office, always in office, unless deposed. Our sister denomination, the Reformed Church in America, still holds to this day that “the calling and election of God are without repentance” (Minutes, Classis Holland, 1848-1858).

But this does not mean that limited tenure is therefore unbiblical. The Swiss Reformation chose the practice as one way of ensuring that never again would the church be subject to the tyrannical rule of a hierarchically structured and self-perpetuating priestly caste. Was this a form of iconoclasm? An overreaction? Perhaps. But it did return the church to the New Testament practice of having members play a meaningful role in selecting their leaders in ministry. And there are definite additional advantages that may well be biblically motivated:

- all members with gifts of leadership serve, not just some, thus distributing the load over time;
- fresh insights are heard within the walls of the council room on an annual basis;
- a natural end to a term of office is in sight if work has been poorly done;
- elders and deacons for whom the work is an avocation can focus on other things for a time and recharge;
- oligarchy (rule by a few) is avoided.

Limited tenure is not unbiblical. Neither is permanent tenure. And if our synod should ever decide that permanent tenure is preferable, changing the rule, we would not have acted in disobedience to the Word of God.

—Henry De Moor is professor of church polity emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Limited tenure is not unbiblical.
Neither is permanent tenure.

Relationships

Q I don't know what to do. My wife died three years ago. Last year a friend's wife was widowed, and I feel drawn to her. I have asked her to marry me. My kids, who are in their 40s, are fine with it, but her kids are against it, so she said no. We go out together regularly, and she enjoys our time together. But I worry about being able to continue driving to pick her up since my eyesight is getting worse. She does not drive.

A It is healthy that after a period of grieving the loss of your wife you are now ready to embrace life more fully again. Your desire to move from friendship to again sharing your life fully with a loved person is also good. But do keep in mind that the task of grieving a significant loss usually takes between one and five years. Realize that your friend and her children are still in the acute stage of their grieving process. A significant death leaves a hole that can only be filled gradually with new relationships, new patterns of living, new activities, and new love.

But the impending limitations on your mobility (and hers) are real. Be realistic about what can be, versus what might have been if you were both in your 20s or 30s. For instance, if your friend is not ready to marry but enjoys your company, consider moving to within walking distance of where she lives.

Be open with your friend about your desires as well as your fears without making demands she may not be ready for. Talk together about how your relationship can grow—or not—while trusting God's desire to prosper both of you.

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

Ethics

Q What's wrong with imposing Christian morality on our society? God's laws are right and good for all. Should we let political correctness stop us?

A God's ethical laws are indeed right and good for all. However, the separation of church and state in the U.S. and Canada means we must avoid crossing the line into imposing our religion on others. The state must not promote one religion over others or jeopardize freedom of conscience and religious freedom, including Christian religious freedom.

Since it is never easy to divorce Christian morality from its religious roots, this should give us pause and make us tread carefully.

The answer is not either/or: either we impose our morality or compel others by legislating it, or we withdraw and keep our convictions private. Apart from imposing our morality or being indifferent, we can exert influence on society by educating, encouraging, building awareness, and persuading. Such influence can help us achieve the same goal while leaving people's freedom intact. Christians can do a lot of good without resorting to coercive measures.

God's commands to do justice (Micah 6:8), to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31), and to do to others as we would have them do to us (Matt. 7:12) should make us avoid coercing others into a morality they have not embraced.

There may possibly be issues and occasions where either legislation or indifference is appropriate. But since the former can deny people the respect and freedom they deserve as God's imagebearers, we should resort to it only carefully and rarely.

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

The Deepest Part of the River

ISAIAH 66:1 TELLS OF GOD giving “peace like a river.” I like that. I can easily picture splashing at the shallow edge of a stream, easing in for a swim, and wading through the rocks around the bend. But the peaceful, quiet part of the river is at its deepest, when the strong under-current guides vast volumes of rushing river, yet that power is barely discernible on the placid surface.

God’s eternal will, I believe, is the current that rules the mighty river of our lives. When it’s too deep and fast for you to swim, you must float, trusting the water to carry you along. That’s when you have no choice but to trust God.

My husband, Elbert, lived for 70 years. That, after all, is a good long life, and few people have even that. But he was unrecognizable at the end. I watched death steal upon him with a tighter grasp each passing day. He fell into unconsciousness on April 1, but his body didn’t give up for five more days. When he no longer responded to our voices or woke to complain of pain, I knew he was gone. His nurse, Jean, told me to keep talking to him. She said that he could hear me even if he didn’t respond. And so I did. I kept talking. I read Bible verses to him. But I knew he was gone and could no longer hear earthly voices.

I opened his eyes and looked into them. It was a wrong thing to do, a violation of something beyond my understanding. Because when I did that, I stared into his death. That was how I knew he was gone, how I knew nothing on this earth could draw his interest evermore.

I waited till the death I saw in his eyes prevailed against his stubborn beating heart and labored breaths. His emaciated

I remember a handsome boy from a small town in Nevada who swept a shallow city girl off her feet.



body struggled desperately to live. There was the ghastly yellowing of the skin as the organs failed, and the Cheyne-Stokes breathing pattern that Jean explained was part of the process and meant the end was closer.

And it was. In that little room, where hours on end I had stared out the window at the ethereal beauty of the Sedona desert, my husband's breathing finally stopped. It was sunset, early evening. People rarely die there, I am told, during the day. It almost always happens at night.

Jean spoke softly to me about this being "for the best." She thought I was grieving, but I was not. The grieving was over. The weeping, wailing kind of grief for the loss of my husband of 50 years to Parkinson's disease had occurred years before. All that grief had wrung out every tear in my heart long before that evening on April 6.

I called our sons. They too had passed beyond mourning to relief at his end.

Romans 8:28 tells us that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." I believe that. I find, however, that it is much easier to believe that verse when things are going well. Not that I ever doubted my favorite verse. I just couldn't reconcile the words on the page with my heart.

We got married at the Little Church of the West in Las Vegas, Nevada, on November 28, 1964. He had just turned 20. I was 18. The sun was still shining when we paraded from the chapel followed by teasing, joyful family members.

I remember a handsome boy from a small town in Nevada who swept a shallow city girl off her feet. I remember

taking our precious baby boy and leaving the vast empty desert of Nevada for Seattle for a better job. We bore the incessant gloom of Seattle's rainy months as a tiny family unit of three, then four, moving on to Eastern Oregon where our third son was born.

We struggled, we fought, we grew up. We built up our family and our lives. Along the way, we ran into such hard times that we were forced to abandon the loose, easy ways of Las Vegas to cling to something that was real. That was about the time we found out that God was not just another name for luck. The lights came on.

When Elbert was 59, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's. He changed almost immediately . . . maybe it was the neurological effects of the disease itself, as the doctors said, or perhaps the medications. Something unseen so profoundly affected his movement, facial expression, and moods that soon he faded away and was gone. Where, I never knew. He was there in front of me every day, moving ever deeper into confusion, dementia, and fury. Utterly helpless, he thought that if I would only find the right medication for him, that would be the answer. He lost everything of himself, as is common, I am told, with degenerative disease.

I can still find my husband of 50 years in the fragrance of the wheat fields of Eastern Oregon waving in the gentle breeze, awaiting harvest. In the memories of sitting together on our little wooden porch to listen to the wail of the wild geese echoing through the dusk. In the memories of our three sons sitting down to dinner with their father and me, laughing, accusing, teasing each other, always vor-

ciously hungry for food and for life, testing limits and rules, growing up.

If all things really do work for the good of those who love God and have been called according to his purpose, then this is what I can hold on to: memories of that day in 1964 when we walked out of that chapel into the bursting sunshine, that long journey from the desert to the rest of our lives, the times we laughed and cried and struggled and came to understand the truth of Jesus Christ.

Because in God's providence, these times in our lives led as surely to that little room in Sedona at sunset as those little baby boys led to upright Christian men with loving families.

I can understand that it was the current that brought me to the hard bend, through the deepest part of the river. For God's eternal purpose. And I am content with that.

In the words of Ecclesiastes: "Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider this: God has made the one as well as the other" (7:13-14). ■



Carolyn D. Gardner is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and of Prescott Presbyterian Church in Arizona.

ADS

Deadlines: Nov. issue is 10/10/16; Dec. issue is 11/7/16. 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.

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Denominational and Classical

Available for Call

REV. MARTIN MOBACH. Classis Alberta North heartily recommends Rev. Martin Mobach for consideration for a call as Minister of the Word and Sacraments. Rev. Mobach has faithfully served the Ottewell CRC in Edmonton for many years. He can be reached at 780-340-2862 or at mobach@shaw.ca.

Eligible for Call

We are pleased to announce that **ANDREW CARLSON** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

We are pleased to announce that **JESSE PALS** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

We are pleased to announce that **SHARON SMITH** has now completed her academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

We are pleased to announce that **YOHANES BUDHI** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

Congregational

Church's 50th Anniversary

COMMUNITY CRC in Baldwinsville, NY is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. Everyone who has participated in the life of the church is welcome to join us for the celebration of worship at 10:00 am on Nov. 6, 2016 followed by dinner (\$17/adult). Please RSVP to April at ahwarner@gmail.com by Oct. 12, 2016.

Church's 80th Anniversary

TERRA CEIA CRC will celebrate "God's Grace, Our Joy, and His Mercy" at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday, October 30, 2016. Worship service followed by potluck lunch. Please join us at 3298 Terra Ceia Highway, Pantego NC 27860.

General

PLANNING A TRIP to Southwest Florida this winter? Looking for a church home for the winter season? You are invited to join us at Bradenton Christian Reformed Church and to make us your "home away from home" while in sunny Florida. We would love to have you join us! If you would like assistance finding information about local housing (rentals) we can provide some contacts for you! Please contact bill@bradentoncrc.org for more information. We would LOVE to hear from you! We offer blended worship with Biblically based preaching along with congregational activities. You are most welcome to join us for worship, Bible studies, Coffee Break and more! We have an active choir which is very involved in ministry – (you may join whenever you arrive) and we offer multiple service times to accommodate your schedule! Come praise the Lord with us!

Birthdays

100th Birthday

ADRIANA (TIEMERSMA) DEKKER Congratulations, Mom, and thanks be to God, on 100 full and blessing-filled years in God's good world on October 24. In God's Grace you've made many lives good, not just for our dear, late dad, John, but for us children, Marilyn (Peter) Roeters, Betsy (Henry) Kluck and James (Rose), your five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, many nieces and nephews, friends and more. Send greetings to Ada at c/o B. & H. Kluck, 21 Lake Ridge Club Dr., Burr Ridge, IL 60527.

90th Birthday

JUD SMEELINK celebrated his 90th Birthday on August 5, with a family picnic at Gun Lake. His wife Elaine, 4 children and spouses, grandchildren, and great grandchildren thank God for His unfailing love and faithfulness.

ADA (VANDER GIESSEN) VOS will be 90 on October 12. Wife of John for 62 years (deceased 2009). Her kids who all live nearby (Jim & Melanie Vos, Alvin & Sherry Vos, Gary & Patty Braaksma), 9 grandchildren and 9 great-grandchildren, thank God for her physical preservation, pleasant wit and encouragement. Lynden Manor, 905 Aaron Dr. #236, Lynden WA 98264.



BOYD WITTINGEN of Allendale, MI celebrated his 90th birthday on September 26, 2016. He has four children and their spouses, 11 grandchildren, one dear granddaughter in heaven and 10 great grandchildren. We all praise God for the blessing he is to our family.



Dordt College is seeking applications for the following areas beginning August 2017:

Faculty Positions

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Farm Operations & Management	Philosophy
Manufacturing Technology	Physics
Mathematics/Statistics	Theology

Application reviews will begin immediately. Qualified persons committed to a Reformed, Biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to follow the faculty application procedure at the link below.

Dr. Eric Forseth, Provost

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provost@dordt.edu

www.dordt.edu/prospective_employees/faculty/

Dordt College does not discriminate as to age, sex, national origin, marital status or against those who are disabled.

Anniversaries

65th Anniversary

VANDER STELT Gerrit & Tracy (Zylstra) will celebrate their 65th Anniversary on Oct 24, 2016 at 337 E. Maberry Dr. Lyden, WA 98264. Children: Gary & Kristine Vander Stelt, Kevin & Jane Vander Stelt, Karen & David Bovee and Dale & Melisa Vander Stelt: 7 grandchildren & 7 great grandchildren.

60th Anniversary

BANNING, Will & Helen (Koopman) 9 Banning Dr. Whitinsville MA 01588. Celebrated their 60th Anniversary on September 4 with their 4 children, 12 grandchildren, 1 great-grandchild. God has blessed our family.

DOCTER, Bill and Tena (698 Gardenview, Byron Center, MI 49315) celebrate 60 years of marriage on October 5. Their four children and spouses, 13 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren join them in thanking God for a long and loving Christian marriage. We love you Mom and Dad!

DORNBUSH Gene/Hazel (DeVries) in Zeeland, MI, & their 5 children Linda/Warren Disselkoe, Kathy/Harv Roosma, Karen/Doug Riemersma, Jim/Nancy, Amy/Brent Sluiter, will celebrate their 60th anniversary Oct 18. They enjoy 18 grandchildren + 9 spouses & 20 great grand children. Praise God!

HISKES George and Audrey (DeHorn) of Munster, IN celebrated their 60th anniversary on September 29. They, with their children George/Elaine, Jayne/Andy Griffin, Mark/Carol, 9 grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren, thank God for His love and faithfulness.

NEUMANN Fred and Celeen (Lemke) of Kenosha, Wisconsin, will celebrate 60 years of marriage on October 13. The Neumann's have been blessed with 4 children, 18 grandchildren, and 2 great grandchildren. Fred and Celeen are members of Kenosha Christian Reformed Church.

TEKRONY Henry and Henrietta (Hoogwerf) 307 Davis Ave. E, Estelline, SD 57234 celebrate their 60th anniversary Oct. 19. They and their family thank God for His goodness through the years.

VANDERWOUDE Hugh and Eleanor, 2709 Mulford Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546, celebrated their 60th anniversary on Sept. 7. Their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchild join them in praising God for his faithfulness.

VOS Jack and Marlene (Kraai) of 175 Brush Hill Road #205 Elmhurst, IL 60126, celebrated 60 years of marriage on September 7. Their children Judy (Tom) Sytsma, Jack (Leanne) Vos, Jan (Larry) Persenaire, 12 grandchildren, 5 great-grandchildren thank God for their love and example.

Church Position Announcements

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 crna.org, visit our website at secondcrgandhaven.org, or contact Search Committee Chairman, Jeff Binnendyk at 2ndcsearch@gmail.com or 616-844-4144

SOLE PASTOR First CRC in Edmonton, Alberta Canada is seeking a full time Pastor. We are seeking a relational and creative leader who can walk with our congregation as we seek to follow Christ. The pastor will be a collaborative leader who encourages and coaches members to develop and express their faith. For more information please contact stsolte@gmail.com

PASTOR Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church, located in the heart of the beautiful Blackstone Valley, is seeking a pastor to shepherd our congregation in Whitinsville, MA. Fairlawn is a community of believers committed to Reformed theology and worship who embrace a traditional style of liturgy and music with organ, piano, brass, and/or strings accompaniment. We are praying for a man of God who will share our love for the gospel, as expressed in the historic Reformed confessions, and will be an effective communicator of that gospel to our multi-generational congregation, as well as to our larger community. The successful candidate will have a thorough grounding in, and commitment to, the Reformed faith, as well as relevant training and experience in preaching, teaching, leading worship, fostering spiritual formation, providing pastoral care, administrative oversight, and outreach to the community. M. Div. is a requirement. Please send a resume, references, and inquiries to: Search Committee, Fairlawn CRC, 305 Goldthwaite Rd., Whitinsville, MA 01588, or searchcommittee@fairlawnrc.org.

CHURCH SECRETARY Lakeside Church in Alto, MI is searching for a friendly and helpful administrative assistant. Professional experience and computer proficiency preferred. Position requires 20 hours per week, 9AM-1PM, Mon-Fri. Pays \$14.50/hour. For more information or to submit a resume, call 616-868-0391 or email pastordave@lakesidecommunity.org

YOUTH PASTOR Almond Valley CRC in Ripon, CA is seeking candidates for a youth pastor position. We are searching for applicants with a passion for mentoring relationships with our youth and engaging students in spiritual growth using God's Word. This position has a primary focus on middle school and high school youth, and combined with an additional role (worship leadership, preaching, community

outreach or education coordination) is a full-time position. For a complete job description and contact info visit almondvalley.org.

"PASSIONATE DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST making passionate disciples for Jesus Christ," of the Hebron CRC of Whitby Ontario, is seeking 2 Pastors. Hebron CRC is seeking a Full Time Pastor for Preaching & Teaching, a Part Time Pastor for congregational care. The two positions have overlapping duties. Send Resume or Pastor Profile to Tom Zekveld - tomzekveld@gmail.com

PASTOR The Rudyard CRC in the upper peninsula of Michigan (God's Country) is in need of a full time pastor. We are a somewhat conservative Rural Congregation with active programs in place for kids, youth and adults, with great leadership. We are looking for the person God has selected for us to lead us in our Worship services and any activities that time and ability allows. (Side note) Our area has been selected to host the 2020 Cadet Camporee the Good Lord Willing so we have lots of opportunity to Praise the Lord through Prayer, Worship, Work and Deed. Please respond to Monica Hoolsema at monisema1@hotmail.com and or Walter Bandstra at wbandstra@yahoo.com 906-248-5388

PASTOR Community CRC Dixon's Corners, a rural church south of Ottawa, is looking for a full time pastor. Please contact the Search Team at ccc.vacancies@gmail.com for more information.

FULL-TIME LEAD PASTOR Maranatha CRC in Cambridge, Ontario is a friendly and caring congregation with a strong sense of community and commitment to each other. Cambridge is a growing community situated in the heart of southern Ontario. We are seeking a full time lead pastor who, following Christ's leadership, will guide us into the next chapter of our ministry. Our congregation is in the process of discerning our identity and God's will for our ministry. Our pastor will help us carry out our vision, have leadership qualities and the ability to preach God's word in such a way that brings glory to our Lord and builds up the church. Our pastor will help us reach further into the community so that together we may proclaim and live the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Please send your letter of interest or profile in confidence to pastorsearch.maranatha.crc@gmail.com

THIRD CRC in Denver seeks a highly motivated Pastor of Congregational Life who has a passion for the ministries of pastoral care. This calling includes occasional preaching and other possible leadership ministries, depending upon the interests and skills of the candidate. Must enjoy a cooperative ministry with our lead pastor. Ordination required, a full time position preferred but other possibilities will be considered. Female applicants welcomed. Please send a letter of application to <<rjnydam@calvinseminary.edu>>



MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Lead Pastor

Bethany Christian Reformed Church
Muskegon, MI

Senior Pastor

Christ Community Church
Plainfield, IL

Senior Pastor

Second Christian Reformed Church
Pella, Iowa

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50th Anniversary

REV. ROBERT & CHERYL RITSEMA Congratulations on 50 years together. Thanks for your beautiful example of a Christian marriage. Love, Rob, Laura, Staci and families.

SPYKSMA Bill & Ko of Cobble Hill, BC celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on August 27. Their children, Kristie, Randy & Shari, Darren & Jaime and four grandchildren give thanks to God for His faithfulness and for their heart for ministry.

Obituaries

BROUWER Eva, age 88 passed away on Thursday, August 18, 2016. Eva is survived by Lester, her husband of 69 years, six children: Jean (Stan) Starckenburg, Wayne (Brenda) Brouwer, Shirley (Bill) Kuurstra, Evelyn (Jeff) Brouwer-Thomson, Ardie (Nathan) Elgersma, Lyle (Beth

Brouwer, and 15 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren. Address: 714 24th St. SE, Willmar, MN 56201

MARVIN B. COOPER (85) of Bradenton, Florida (formerly of Brookfield, WI) went to be with his Savior on July 28, 2016. Marv was born in Grand Rapids, MI. He served in the U. S. Air Force during the Korean War. He worked his entire career in the office supply industry. He was owner and President of the H. H. West Company in Milwaukee from 1972 to 1995. He then helped family in Bradenton FL start stores - Batteries Plus Bulbs. Marv was an active member of the Bradenton Christian Reformed Church and a supporter of Bradenton Christian School. He was preceded in death by his wife of 60 years (Joan Hoekstra), son Roger and a brother, Tom. Survived by sisters Mildred, Esther and brother, Jim and sister-in-law Doris Also survived by his children Bob (Susan), Carol (Keith), Craig (Jane), Steve (DeAnn), Marybeth (Matt). Marv and Joan were survived by 17 grandchildren and numerous great grandchildren

OOSTEMA Violet G. (Nelson) 96, of Hometown, IL went to be with her Lord on June 26, 2016. She was preceded in death by her husband Peter, son Peter E, grandson Gary, and great-granddaughters Lisa Marie O'Rourke and Heather Sienkiewicz. Survived by daughter Cynthia (Robert) Burnett, 3 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren, and 2 great-great grandchildren. Fond aunt of many nieces and nephews.

PETERS Theresa, age 87, Sheldon, IA, gloriously arrived Home on June 28, 2016. Beloved wife of the late Herbert Peters, her memories are cherished by her children: Cori & Jerry Vreeman, Jacki & Tom Vreeman, Bart & Debra Peters, Mart & Deb Peters, 15 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, sister, Melvina, and 3 sisters-in-law. Ps.118:14 The Lord is her song & salvation!

RIBBENS Douglas C. (Sioux Center, IA) died August 10, 2016 at the age of 89. He is lovingly remembered by Henrietta, his wife of 28 years; his children Wayne & Barbi Ribbens, Bruce & Carol Ribbens, Karl & Pat Ribbens, Tim & Linda Ribbens, Cindy & Arlan Nederhoff, Rob & Holly Ribbens; 19 grandchildren; 18 great-grandchildren; his brother Dennis (Harriet) Ribbens. He was predeceased by Ruth, his wife of 37 years; an infant daughter; his parents; 2 sisters; a granddaughter-in-law.

CORNELIUS "CORNIE" TOERING age 85, of Pipestone, MN, died Thursday, August 11, 2016 at the Pipestone County Hospice House. To view a full obituary go to www.hartquistfuneral.com.

VAN THOLEN Margaret, nee Oostema, age 95, went to be with her LORD on August 27th, 2016, 112 Penn Ct, Glenview, IL, 60026. Beloved wife of the late Henry; loving mother of: the late John (the late Alice) Van Tholen, Peter (Winifred) Van Tholen, Henry Jr. (Nancy) Van Tholen, the late Ronald (Christine) Van Tholen, Robert (Jo Ann) Van Tholen, Kenneth (Linda) Van Tholen, Grace (Robert) Dryden, Thomas (Valerie) Van Tholen, William (Ginny) Van Tholen, Margaret (Ronald) Cramer, James (Beth) Van Tholen, And George (Mary) Van Tholen; devoted Grandmother of 40; great-grandmother of 70; great-great-grandmother of 4; preceded by her brothers Theodore, Martin, Peter, Joseph, Bernard, and John, and her sisters, Ida and Grace. Memorials to Providence Life Services or Elim Christian Services are appreciated.

WOLFERT Simon, age 81, Surrey, BC, went to be with his Lord and Savior on August 6, 2016, following a lengthy illness. He was preceded in death by their daughter Raquel, and is survived by his loving wife, Jean and children: Robin Joy (Antonio), Mark (Mandy), Mark, son-in-law (Shannon); Opa of 5 grandchildren. Simon and Jean served the Lord faithfully in Brazil; Toronto (Scarborough); Vancouver, BC. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Employment

CAREGIVERS NEEDED Are you interested in working for the best living assistance services company in West Michigan? Visiting Angels is looking for people who can be excellent, not average; make a connection with our clients; be perfectly dependable; practice compassion and work with integrity. Contact Heather at 616-243-7080 or heather@vangels.com. www.vangels.com

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the institution into the next phase of its development. The Board of Trustees is looking for an individual who is motivated and drawn to the external aspects of the presidency and who will bring innovative thinking toward expansion of the college's mission and influence. Without question, the next Kuyper College President needs to be outgoing and personally engaging with all Kuyper stakeholders and the community. To view an introductory video about the search and download the full Opportunity Profile, see www.jobfitmatters.com/kuyper.

Real Estate: Sales and Rentals

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Miscellaneous

LECTURE Please join us for a lecture at Crete PRC 1777 Richton Rd in Crete, IL on October 28, 2016 at 7:30 PM. Professor Cammenga will speak on the topic The Tipping Point: Common Grace, Worldliness and the Growing Apostasy in the Church. This can also be live streamed from our website at prccrete.org.

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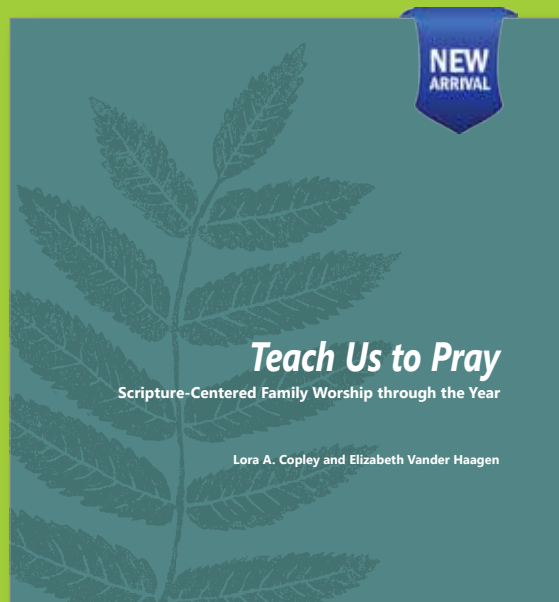
CALVIN INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Teach Us to Pray is a daily prayer book that guides families in both listening to and speaking to God through songs, scripture readings, guided action and quiet contemplation, organized to follow the life of Jesus through each season of the Christian calendar.

Teach Us to Pray reminds us that prayer involves both discipline and delight. Copley and Vander Haagen have poured their hard-earned wisdom as pastors and parents into these pages, inviting us to pray as a way of re-narrating our lives into the story of Scripture, as modeled in the Christian calendar. They have found a way to do so with grace, simplicity, attention to a wide range of human emotions, and passages from every book of the Bible. My family and I will be reaching for this cherished book every day for many years to come.

—Peter Choi, City Church San Francisco

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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!

While giving a lesson on fractions, our school's math teacher wrote an example on the chalkboard. He explained that the numerator was the top and the denominator was the bottom. Leaning against the board, he asked the class, "Are there any questions?"

When he turned back to face the board, laughter filled the room. "Mr. Alexander," one student giggled, "you have chalk dust all over your denominator!"

—Dawn Gebben

Atheists don't solve exponential equations because they don't believe in higher powers.

—R. Smit

It was the last day of vacation Bible school and my mother was discussing next year's theme—Galactic Blast—with the craft leader. My mother said, "Next year we need to cut down on the decorating. It's just too much work." So I added, "We don't need to do any decorating; we can just have space."

—Elly Schreuders

A group of Americans was traveling by tour bus through Switzerland. As they stopped at a cheese farm, a young

guide led them through the process of cheesemaking, explaining that goats' milk was used. She pointed out a lovely hillside where many goats were grazing.

"These," she explained, "are the older goats put out to pasture when they no longer produce." She then asked, "What do you do in America with your old goats?"

A sharp older gentleman answered, "They send us on bus tours!"

—David Hollander

My 8-year-old granddaughter came to me with a unique question: "How does a mermaid give birth?" She also had a unique answer: "By sea-section!"

—Rudy W. Owehand

It was the Labor Day holiday weekend. In church the children's story leader talked about what we celebrate on special holidays. Christmas? Everyone

knew. Easter? Again, the right answer was given. Labor Day? A little confused, the children looked at each other.

Then Amber piped up: "I know! On Labor Day we celebrate the day before the Queen had her baby!"

—W. Kamphuis

Our 4-year-old granddaughter, Paige, was flying her kite when the string ran out. Thinking she might be disappointed that it couldn't go higher, I made a comment about it. Her response was, "It is so high it is to Jesus!"

—Earl Holden

I was babysitting my two granddaughters, Kortney, 3, and Megan, 1½, at a relative's swimming pool. When Megan fell and hurt her knee, she didn't want to go in the water. I said, "The water will be good for your owie." Then Kortney said, "That is psychology!"

—Sandy Sall

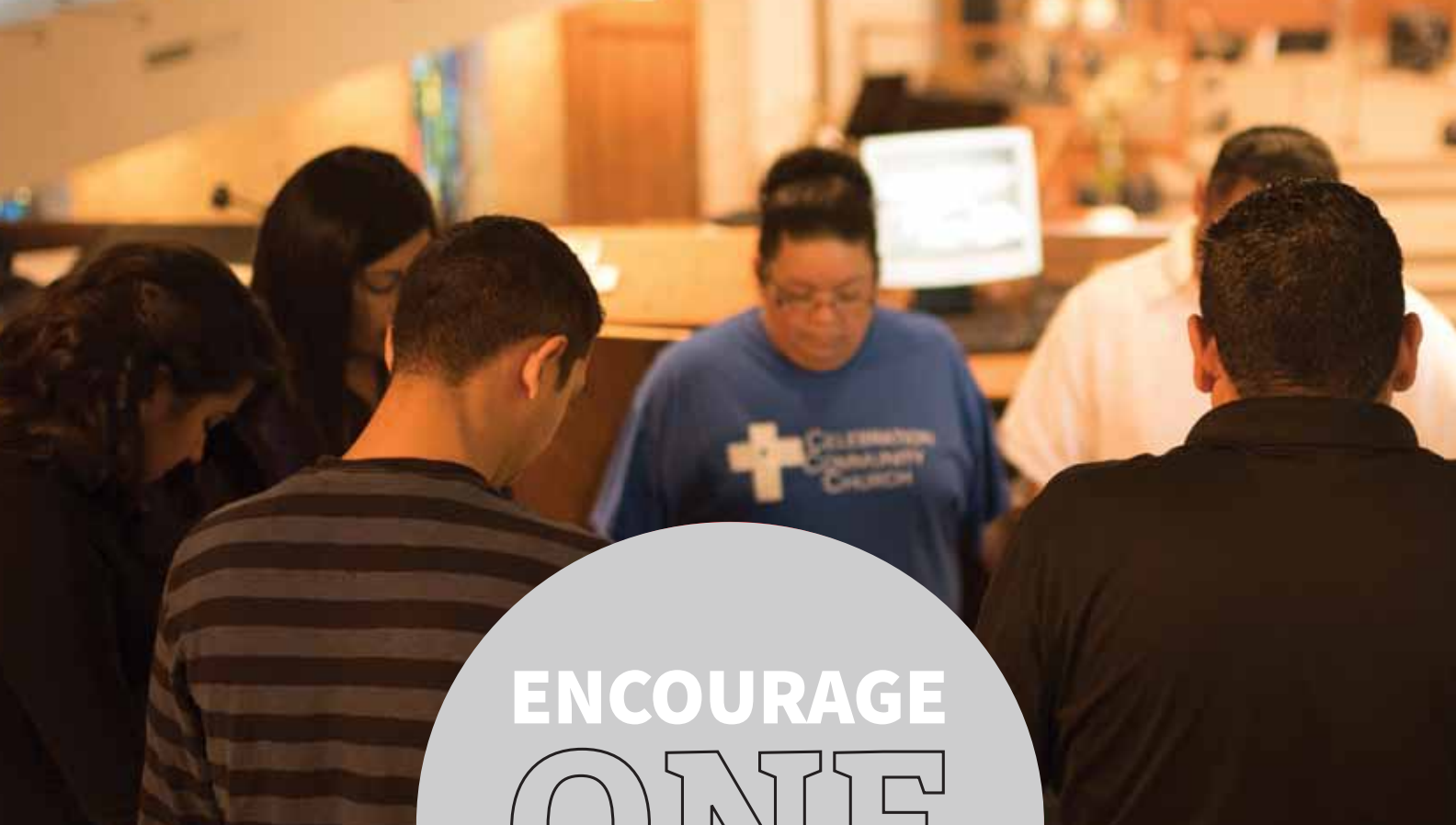
Golfers gathered at a prestigious country club for a charity golf outing on a bright sunny morning. A minister among them was asked to open with prayer. Overcome by the pristine setting and the beauty of the day, the preacher announced, "Please open your eyes, observe nature's beauty, and join me in prayer." Several golfers, including the preacher's son, skeptically looked at each other, wondering if the cleric was joking.

After the prayer ended, everyone expected a super tee-off from the minister. They were disappointed when he topped his golf ball and it rolled only a few yards down the fairway. His son grimaced. Quietly he said to a friend, "Can you believe it? My dad prays with his eyes open and tees off with his eyes shut."

—Frank Calsbeek



"... And to my faithful dog, Chester, I bequeath all my shoes."



ENCOURAGE
ONE
ANOTHER

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds . . . let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

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Photo courtesy of Celebration Community Church, a Christian Reformed church plant in Holland, MI