

# BANNER

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the Church Fathers

<sup>38</sup> Baptizing Babies

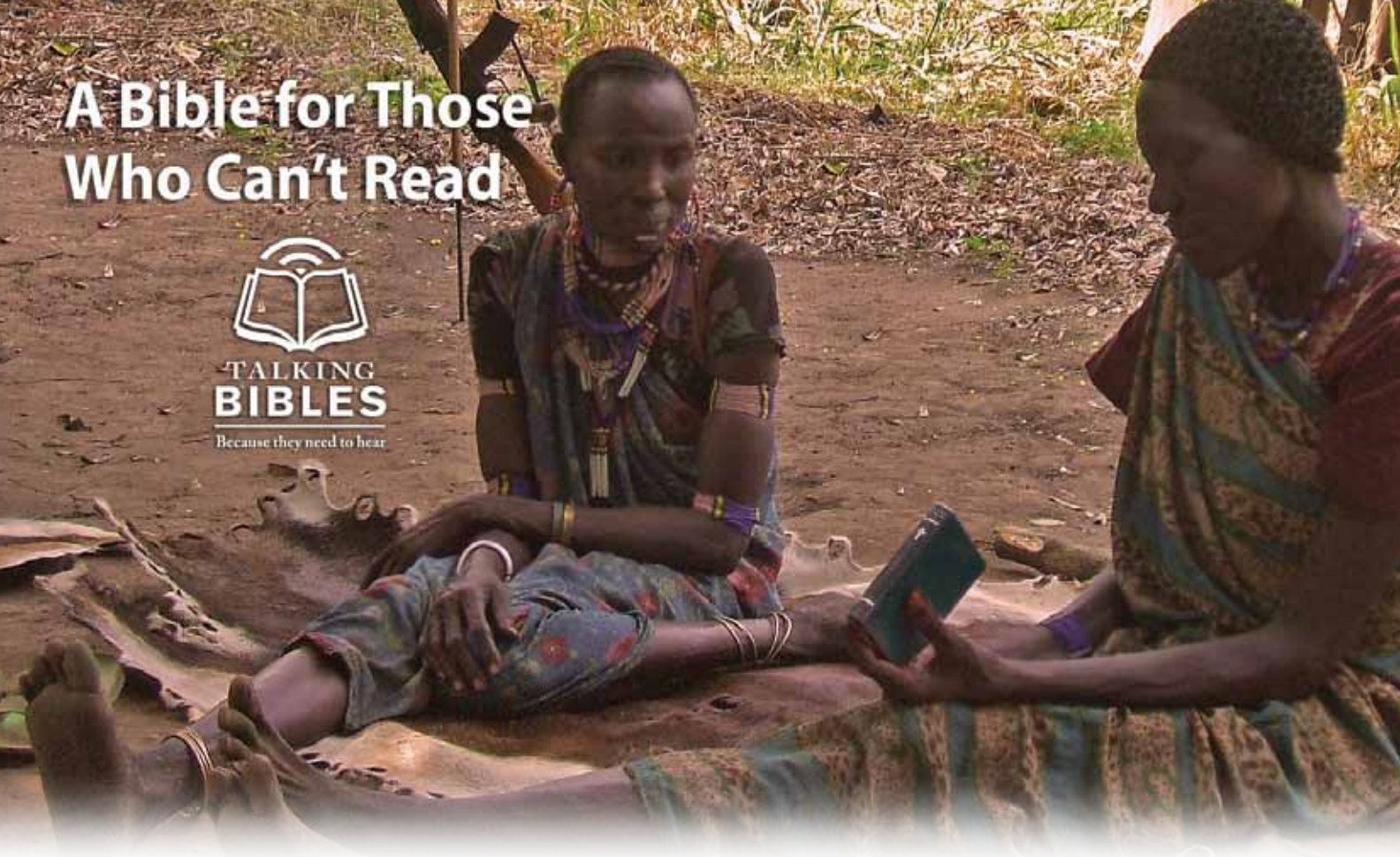
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# BANNER

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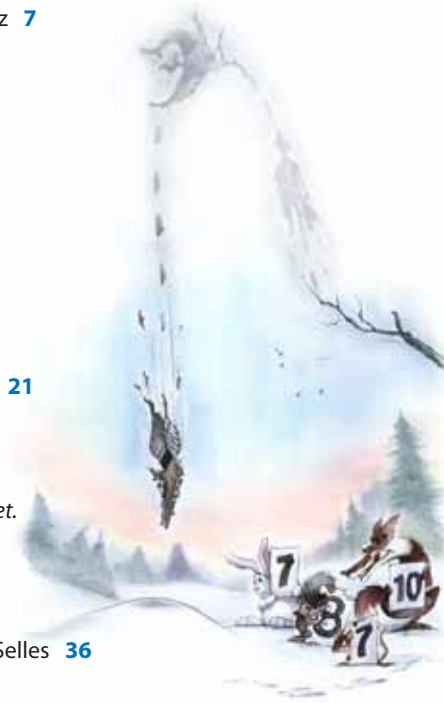


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# Power-With

**AS A FATHER OF THREE LOVELY DAUGHTERS**, I have made my fair share of parenting mistakes. I remember occasions when they were little and I tried to get them to do something they refused to do. This battle of wills often ended up with me putting the proverbial foot down, resulting in tears and anger. Other times, I acted wiser and gave them choices. Instead of “my way or the highway,” I offered two choices that I could live with. Sometimes the choices were pretty heavily stacked in my favor. But overall, this method tended to resolve conflict peaceably. The difference was that my daughters had some power to choose the outcome.

We all have power, to some degree—even those we often regard as powerless. Some, of course, have more power than others. If power is defined as the ability to achieve an outcome or goal, then power is an inescapable part of our creational lives, necessary for living, for serving God, and for doing good! But we know too well that power can also corrupt us and be used for evil.

In his book *The Beautiful Risk*, James Olthuis uses the terms *power-over* and *power-with* to describe two basic forms of exercising power. My parenting experience illustrates those two forms of power, albeit imperfectly. When I tried to force my children to do things my way against their wills, I was engaging in power-over. Power-over is primarily about control and manipulation.

Power-with, however, emphasizes collaborative sharing of power, coming alongside others as partners or even servants. When I gave my children choices, I was delegating some power and responsibility to them. Although both forms can potentially be self-serving, exercising power-over is more likely than power-with to fall into that trap.

In this sin-tainted but wonderfully created world, we probably cannot do without both forms of power. But power-with seems to me a spiritually better option when it comes to working with our fellow human beings. I find that it is more consistent with the love command and with God’s own ways of dealing with us.

If we are to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31), imposing our wills or coercing people against theirs seems like a poor way of doing so. If anyone has the right to coerce us into obedience, it is God. Yet God delegates power to us by giving us dominion over creation (Gen. 1:28). God chose to carry out his mission of reconciliation, not through coercing sinners into belief, but through fallible human ambassadors who implore and persuade people to “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). Furthermore, the image of Jesus on the cross is far removed from being a symbol of coercive power. There are many other biblical examples of God choosing to exercise collaborative power-with, rather than coercive power-over, when it comes to us human beings.

If God’s own primary use of power with us is power-with, then how about us? How have we exercised power in the church and in the world? Are our church structures and rules designed to control people or to empower them? Are our sermons geared for manipulating parishioners or equipping them? Are our outreach ministries primarily about doing things to and for people or aimed at ministering alongside people?

This new year, I encourage us to strive for power-with in all our relationships with family and friends, with our online and in-person neighbors. Let us seek to empower rather than to be powerful. ■



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

When I gave my children choices, I was delegating some power and responsibility to them.

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# This Rhythm Is Gonna Get You

**F**OR THE FIRST TIME in my life, I opened a Dutch dictionary. But I struggled to find equivalents for two of the most important words from my part of the world: *fiesta* and *siesta*. These two words have shaped how I approach my entire life. My Dominican parents embedded them in my soul from the time I was born in the States. I can still remember as a little child going to bed because I was too tired to stay up until midnight on *Noche Buena* (Christmas Eve). As I lay there in my room, I could hear my family in the distance, dancing and laughing while Latin music played in the background.

You need to know that I'm writing this article from way down in "the bottom"—the place where everything is an occasion to party. Down here in Miami, the "Magic City," music from the rapper Pitbull is pounding and horns are always honking. Banquet halls are on every corner, competing with each other like they're gas stations. We have South Beach, Calle Ocho, La Carreta, and Little Havana in

Miami. This city knows how to get together and celebrate.

I long for the day when we can all say the same thing about our personal, congregational, and denominational life: "That person—or church—really knows how to put on her dancing shoes."

Life is exhausting. Our backs are going to ache and our feet are going to hurt. We have to realize that we are either going to wear ourselves out because we have spent all day focusing on what's wrong with the world and ourselves, or we are going to need a break because we've spent the day dancing with Jesus for what he is making new. Sure, we can have a serious conversation—but let's have it while sipping on a cup of Cuban coffee and playing a game of dominoes together.

The great news is that after the fiesta comes the siesta. Please keep in mind that you are supposed to take siestas in the middle of the workday, not at night. And taking a siesta doesn't mean you are lazy. It actually means the opposite. It is an indicator that you have worn yourself out attempting to build something transformative for the glory of God in this world.

Siestas are best utilized by those who take their work seriously but who also understand the secret of contentment. Consider how many naps a newborn infant takes during the day. Perhaps this is part of what Jesus meant when he said we need childlike faith to enter his kingdom. When we find our rest in Jesus, he goes to work on behalf of his people.

The rhythm of the Christian life is simple: after the fiesta comes the siesta, and after the siesta it's time to fiesta again! Let's put dancing shoes on our feet and place a pillow under our arm as we prepare to cha-cha our way toward the future God has prepared for us together. ■



**Felix Fernandez** is pastor of South Kendall Community Church in Miami, Fla.

*You do not always have to be  
producing, creating, harvesting.  
Learn to be idle. Learn to rest.*

— JOYCE RUPP



PHOTO BY PIXABAY.COM

## Discerning the Body

EDITORIAL

Communion is about my relationship with the body of Christ.

**PAUL TOLD THE CORINTHIANS** that “those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves” (1 Cor. 11:29). Sober words indeed. No one wants to eat and drink judgment on themselves, which means that everyone should desire to discern the body. But what does that mean?

Contemporary commentators agree that “the body of Christ” refers primarily to the church, the fellowship of believers. The Corinthian church to whom Paul wrote was notoriously divided, even at the Lord’s table. The early church probably celebrated the Lord’s Supper within a larger love feast, something similar to today’s church potluck. The problem in Corinth was that the wealthier members of the church arrived early and ate their lavish spread, while the poorer members who arrived later went hungry.

Paul accused the wealthier Corinthians of “despising the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing” (11:22). They did not discern the body of Christ, which, in the context of 1 Corinthians, means to recognize and receive one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, especially at the Lord’s table. “When you gather to eat, you should all eat together,” Paul said (11:33). Other

translations tell us to wait for and welcome each other.

What might that look like today? A few years ago, our elders learned that some members of our congregation were gluten-intolerant, and that, as a result, at least one of them had not participated in the Lord’s Supper for several years. They decided that in our context, discerning the body means celebrating communion with gluten-free bread so that when we gather to eat, we might all eat together.

Through trial and error, we have settled on a brand affectionately referred to as “the least-poor-tasting” available, which I must admit still tastes something like play-dough. In this case, discerning the body means that my brother’s or sister’s ability to participate in the sacrament takes precedence over my personal taste preferences. If there is any place where I should “in humility value others above myself” and “look not only to my own interests but also to the interests of others,” surely it is at the Lord’s table (Phil. 2:3-4).

Celebrating communion with gluten-free bread has become an important spiritual discipline for me. It reminds me that communion is not just about my relationship with Christ; it is also about my relationship with the body of Christ, the church. It forces me to die to myself for the sake of another, and it strengthens my sense that though we are many, we form one body, for we all share the same (gluten-free!) loaf. I wouldn’t want it any other way. ■



**Ryan Faber** is pastor of worship & administration at Faith CRC in Pella, Iowa.



### Our Journey

Thanks to all who were part of creating the “Our Journey 2020” insert (Nov. 2016). The board of directors has been listening to churches and has responded with this piece. My prayer is that the CRC will go forward in unity and love.

In John 17 we hear Jesus praying for us (followers who believe without seeing him), and he asks that we may be one as he and his Father are one. He also asks that we may share the kind of love they share between them. In each case he adds the phrase “I in them and you in me.” In that phrase rests the empowerment to be and do just that. In Colossians Paul speaks of it as the mystery now revealed among the Gentiles, which is “Christ in us, the hope of glory.”

If there have been disappointments or hurts in the past, let them be just that—in the past. As we focus on Jesus, our hope of glory, may the barriers of “us and them” crumble as we yield to the spirit of love and unity for which Jesus not only prayed but makes possible.

—Blanche Vander Bent  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Little Wisdom

A splendid issue! The editorial “A Little Wisdom” (Nov. 2016) . . . very helpful.

—Louis Tamminga  
Grand Rapids, Mich.



# TTERS

## Peace for the Persecuted

Thank you for the informative and much needed article by Kevin den Dulk (“Peace for the Persecuted,” Nov. 2016), especially for directing our attention to the plight of our persecuted sisters and brothers around the world.

Persecution of believers is a consequence of spiritual warfare. Den Dulk is on target in asking us to pray for and with the persecuted and to address shalom. Prayer is the most important activity in our battle with the forces of darkness.

Most persecuted believers pray for peace in the shape of the cross. That is why Peter and John (and believers today) find joy in their trials for the sake of those who need to hear the good news about Christ.

—*Dave Stravers, Mission India Grandville, Mich.*

## More Psalms

A big thank you for the article “A Memoir in Psalms” (Nov. 2016). A dear friend lost his mother and two brothers in one year. He told me that Psalm 77 gave him much comfort. I’m eager to discuss your article with him.

—*Ethel Brunger Grand Rapids, Mich.*

I appreciated your memoir of Psalms (Nov. 2016). I too have memorized many psalms (including six of your list) and other portions of Scripture, both OT and NT. Some other psalms I have memorized are 8, 46, 91, 96, and 148.

What I have discovered is that my understanding of a passage is so much richer when I memorize it. I discover phrases and ideas I had missed when I simply read it.

I often recite Scripture on my early morning walk or if I happen to be awake in the middle of the night. A type A person, I had always been very impatient if

I had to wait for anyone for any reason. Now I use that time to recite Scripture passages to myself.

—*Shirley Matheis Sioux Center, Iowa*

Thank you for inviting us to respond to the article “A Memoir in Psalms.”

Dust storms blew long and strong over the plains of Kansas in the early 1900s. My paternal grandfather contracted dust pneumonia, from which he later died. On his deathbed in his farmhouse, he sang the Dutch version of Psalm 42: “As the hart longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God.”

I was probably 5 or 6 at the time and I remember when, after his funeral a few days later, the adults met in his and Grandma’s living room. My young sisters and girl cousins crept into the kitchen, where we saw the pies that were waiting to be served. To our consternation, we saw that the meringue on the lemon pies had become covered with dust while the relatives were attending the funeral!

—*Trudy Vander Veen Denver, Col.*

Our favorite Psalm is 46, verse 10: “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations” (“A Memoir in Psalms”). When our son died, this was our comfort.

—*Henry & Grace Kamp Tinley Park, Ill.*

Psalm 119 is one of the psalms that speak about David’s love and dedication to the Law of his creator (“A Memoir in Psalms”). He realized that God gave us his laws for our own well-being. A way of life that brings stability and peace.

I realize that it is not fashionable, nor politically correct anymore, in many Protestant churches, to say that we have

to keep the law, but we see the devastating effects of lawlessness in our society.

—*Jan J. Berg Belwood, Ont.*

For more Psalms responses, check out “Readers Respond to ‘A Memoir in Psalms’” at [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).

## Dropped Stitches

God does not screw up when he creates us (“God’s Dropped Stitches,” Oct. 2016). However, he can and does turn what looks like a mistake into something good. Jim was our director when we were on the mission field. Because of what he went through as a child, he did not want our child to go through the same frustrations and encouraged us to seek professional help. He gave us hope for a better future. We praise God for putting Jim in our lives at the time when it was needed most.

—*Eva Miedema Calgary, Alta.*

## Bible Stories You’ve Never Heard Of

Bryant Russ writes, “Accepting these ‘broader stories’ means admitting that the Bible isn’t primarily God’s letter to you . . .” (“Bible Stories You’ve Never Heard Of,” Oct. 2016). What does this mean for some of the “promises” given to specific people in the Bible? One example would be Jeremiah 29:11: “I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to give you hope and a future.” This promise was obviously given to the Israelites who were in captivity. But many people like to quote and believe this verse is a personal promise from God to themselves today. Can we accept such promises for our own personal promise?

—*Joyce Steen Suttons Bay, Mich.*

[MORE ONLINE](http://thebanner.org)

# NEWS

## Women Married to Pastors Find an Oasis of Grace

**O**n Nov. 8-10, women married to pastors found an oasis of grace in San Diego, Calif., at the annual Pastors' Wives Conference. The gathering is underwritten by the Christian Reformed Church's Sustaining Pastoral Excellence program (SPE).

This year's theme, "An Oasis of Grace," resonated with many of the almost 100 women who attended. Elizabeth Nanninga, from Ottawa, Ont., married to a pastor for 33 years, said, "Days felt like they went on way past 24 hours. There seemed ample time to breathe and just be."



Conference attendees

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Women from all over the United States and Canada came together to worship, learn, and grow together through panel discussions, conversations, and reflection. Plenary speaker Rev. Heidi De Jonge was a highlight for many attendees. As a pastor in Kingston, Ont., married to a pastor, from a long line of pastors, De Jonge spoke out of ample experience. She encouraged participants to find God even in the wilderness, to "wallpaper our minds with images of hope," and then to enter the promised land that God is calling us toward.

Shelley Norman, who ministers with her husband, Reggie, in a multicultural congregation in Fontana, Calif., said of De Jonge, "If you close your eyes and listen to her voice [you will] recognize spiritual superpowers at work. I soaked in the blessing of her message."

The conference ended with a time of worship and communion. "We celebrated the Lord's Supper together at the end of the conference, and the moving of the Spirit of God was a beautiful thing to experience," said Keri Fernandez, who serves with her husband in church plants and established churches in Florida.

A common theme among most wives was the amazing fellowship and safety to be found among fellow pastor spouses. Nanninga said, "The conferences are a safe and inviting place to be honest and be heard. Traveling and getting away for a time of refreshment is a great way to 'catch up to your soul,' as an African saying goes."

Monica Groothof, married for 12 years to a pastor serving churches in northern B.C. and Iowa, is one of a few women who have attended every pastors' wives conference offered by the

denomination. She said, "I attended this conference knowing I'd be meeting up with a special group of women who share a common bond, some whom I've never met and some who I deeply looked forward to reconnecting with. These women understand each other in a way that many others are unable to."

The SPE office has surveyed husbands of pastors and found little interest in the conferences, so the office continues to focus on programming for wives of pastors.

—Heidi Wicker



## Sierra Leone Refugees Reunited in Michigan

After 25 years of separation, Tamba Biango and his mother, Sarah Mani Chanibue, were reunited at the airport in Grand Rapids, Mich. Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids had sponsored Biango as a refugee in 2001 and was instrumental in Chanibue's November 14 arrival

someone in the refugee camp in Africa and was now pregnant. The man she married was Tamba Biango. Woodlawn worked to reunite Anti with her husband, and since then Biango and other church members have sponsored more of their family members with the church's support.

move to Grand Rapids. When she arrived at the airport, each was unrecognizable to the other. "She didn't recognize me that I'm her son," Biango said. "She didn't know me until I greet her in her language."

"[The reunion] was pretty special," said Lin Hoeksema, a



**Tambo Biango was reunited with his mother, Sarah Mani Chanibue, after 25 years.**

as well. On that day, the two embraced for the first time since the Sierra Leone civil war tore them apart in 1991.

Biango recalled the day they were separated. "I woke up early in the morning with the gun sound. The rebels start attacking. I ran to my mom's [house] and nobody was there. They said Mom went to another village."

Biango searched for his mother but eventually had to give up and leave the country. Both assumed the other was dead. Chanibue even held a funeral ceremony for her son.

Meanwhile, Woodlawn was sponsoring a refugee named Anti. They found out she had married



**Sarah Mani Chanibue met her grandchildren in November for the first time.**

After arriving in the United States, Biango started the process of finding out where his mother was or if she was alive. "When I was in Africa, did I think I would see my mom again? No," he said. He called relatives in Sierra Leone and sent money to hire someone to locate her. Weeks later, they found her.

Biango called his mother, who didn't believe she was speaking with her son. "She asked me my name, where did I grow up, what is the name of my uncle, how many brothers and sisters did I have," Biango said. At that point, she believed the unimaginable. Her son was alive.

Biango then worked on arrangements for Chanibue to

member at Woodlawn present at the reunion. "It was the first time she could meet her grandchildren. To be able to witness the whole thing has been a blessing."

"God gave me the opportunity to come to the U.S. and the responsibility to help other family members," Biango said. "The blessing God gave me is a blessing for my entire family."

Along with their four children, Tamba and Anti have become part of the Woodlawn church family. Tamba has also served as a deacon. "It's been a mutual blessing," Woodlawn pastor Mike Abma explained. "We've been a good support system for them, and they've enriched our church."

—Lori Dykstra

### IN MEMORIAM



#### Rev. Timothy Lee Koster

1961-2016

Thoughtful, compassionate, and kind, Tim Koster served his church and community with love, respect, and integrity. He had a heart for missions, helping those in the church to "look outside of ourselves," as one good friend put it. Koster had twice successfully battled brain tumors and this time, myeloma. However, on September 21 Koster died as a result of Graft vs. Host Disease, a complication of his stem cell transplant. He was 54.

Koster was ordained in 1987 and served Christian Reformed congregations in Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan.

In Sauk Village, Koster led the congregation to start a food pantry, thrift store, addiction recovery groups, and more. He co-wrote the book *Take Your Church's Pulse* and contributed to *Planting Healthy Churches*, a seminary-level textbook on starting new congregations.

As well as fishing, Koster enjoyed playing guitar, woodcarving, camping, reading, and spending time with his family.

Among those left to mourn his loss are Mary, his wife of 33 years, and three children and their spouses.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Further information on recently deceased ministers is available at [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org).

# NEWS

## Climate Witness Project Moves Focus to Congregations

**A**fter focusing on the Paris Summit on climate change (COP21) and sending a delegation there, the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice is continuing its creation care work. The Climate Witness Project (CWP) is part of that broader effort.

Corenna Roozeboom of Hope CRC in Oak Forest, Ill., is a member of her church's creation care committee and is one of 210 climate partners in 35 congregations in the CWP. "We received daily news-

It was COP21 and all of the other events around COP21 that we leveraged to draw the attention of CRC members to this issue," he said. "The charge I sometimes hear of an OSJ team 'junketing' to Paris at denominational expense is particularly galling and unfair because this group worked so hard and lived so frugally."

Since the Paris meeting, the CWP focus has been on congregations. Phase 2, which runs until June 30, 2017, includes doubling the number of churches participat-

(churches, members, and denominational bodies) to reduce individual and collective carbon emissions. It called on members and churches to advocate for public strategies that reduce carbon emissions. And it called on everyone to advocate for governments to take action to assist populations that are bearing the brunt of the negative effects of climate change (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 804-806).

The Climate Witness Program is not without its detractors. One

to pick which CRC members are correct about the Paris Summit."

Vande Griend said when the denominational level of the CRC starts making too many non-ecclesiastical decisions on behalf of its members, some will agree with those decisions and others will say, "Who are you to speak for me, especially when you're wrong?" The OSJ Climate Witness Program, he said, substantially represents the denomination doing just that, and it's divisive.

Vandermeulen said that OSJ promotes citizen advocacy, but, he noted, climate change hurts the people who are poor with whom World Renew and World Missions work. "Our mission to [them] lacks integrity if we cannot institutionally raise their voices and needs to those in power."

Roozeboom said her congregation will continue to be engaged with the project. "Our creation care committee feels that it's really important that members of the CRC are thinking about climate change and our responsibility to those most vulnerable to changing climate. For us it is a moral, faith-based issue."

—Gayla R. Postma



letters [from COP21], participated in online video chat, and visited legislators in Illinois. [We] told them who we are and why we support legislation actively fighting climate change," she said.

Peter Vander Meulen, director of OSJ, reported that the total budget for the delegation to Paris, production of video and education materials, website and communications, and stipends and salaries came to approximately \$54,000. About \$23,000 was raised outside denominational ministry shares.

"The four-person delegation to COP21 was central to our entire CWP phase 1 organizing project.

ing in the CWP to 70. Climate partners in each congregation will be enabled to take steps to make their buildings more energy efficient, continue to educate their congregations on the damage caused by climate change using materials prepared by the CWP leadership team, and discuss climate change with their legislators. Roozeboom's church recently received an Energy Star rating from the U.S.'s Environmental Protection Agency for its energy efficiency.

Organizers of the CWP point to a mandate by Synod 2012 (the annual leadership meeting of the CRC) as their marching orders. That synod called on the CRC

of them is Doug Vande Griend, a member of Sunnyslope CRC in Salem, Ore. He agrees that a synod can declare that Christians should be stewards of creation. But, he said, neither synod nor its agencies, including OSJ, "should decide for CRC members what conclusions they should come to as to creation care issues."

He said CRC members will come to different conclusions about the Paris Summit and questions related to creation care, and that's okay. "What is not okay is that we have a CRC agency that uses both the dollars (ministry shares) and the name of the CRC





Jovita DeJong (on stage) dancing in worship at the conference's inclusive worship service.

## Conference Celebrates Ability, Belonging, Community

A conference exploring the intersection of faith and disability held in Niagara Falls, Ont., brought together 250 people to explore ability, belonging, and community. "Life to the Full" was presented by Disability Concerns, a ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in partnership with the Reformed Church in America, and Christian Horizons, a Canadian organization serving persons with exceptional needs.

The conference included workshops, keynote addresses, a concert, and an inclusive worship service that tied together all that had been learned and experienced.

"There were powerful times of connection and sharing, and communion together on the final day was a true expression of our unity as the body of Christ, regardless of the countless traditions and denominations represented there," said Keith Dow, manager of organizational and spiritual life at Christian Horizons.

Paulina Bouwman, a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines, Ont., who uses a wheelchair for mobility, was one

of the attendees who looked forward to a time of reconnection that she first experienced 20 years earlier at "At the King's Table," a conference that partially inspired "Life to the Full." At the conference she said she felt normal. "Most congregations have a few members with a visible disability. At [the conference], I was in the majority," she said. She also enjoyed the "chance to see my buddies again—the person who drove me [to the conference] saw that I got probably 10 hugs in 10 minutes."

Beth VanStaalduinen, a member of Providence CRC in Beamsville, Ont., attended with two other members of her church who recently formed a disabilities team. She said, "I'm really glad that I decided to go because I feel like I have a lot to bring back and share. We have some ideas for starting points and some great tools and resources to help us."

Christian Horizons and Disability Concerns partnered for a larger conference to reach more people. "One of the things that's a real challenge for people involved in disability advocacy is that their work can feel kind of lonely," said Rev. Mark Stephenson, director of Disability Concerns.



Friendship Ministries provided materials and hosted a workshop during the conference.

"When they can get together with all these other folks, that networking component is the most important of all."

—Alissa Vernon

### IN MEMORIAM



#### Rev. Kenneth Prol

1951 - 2016

Kenneth Prol was a man with a passion for bringing everyone he met closer to God. His favorite hymn, sung at his funeral, was "I Love to Tell the Story." Prol died as the result of an accident while riding his bicycle. He was 65.

After operating his own business, he went into the ministry later in life, serving congregations in New York and Wisconsin.

Gifted with empathy and the ability to comfort others in their time of need, Prol became deeply involved as a hospice chaplain.

Although he lived with severe chronic neck and back pain, Prol's latest passion was bicycling. A great supporter of World Renew-Foods Resource Bank, Prol began the Randolph Growing Project.

Prol was also a man of many skills. "Anytime we needed something built, painted, or fixed, he was the guy to call," said his children.

He will be missed by Diane, his wife of almost 43 years; by four children and their spouses, and by three grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

# NEWS

## IN MEMORIAM



### Rev. Martin Stegink

1927-2016

Martin Stegink was a lover of nature who reveled in the beauty of God's creation. He instilled that same delight in his children and grandchildren, taking them camping, hiking, and swimming. He died on September 28 at age 89.

A World War II veteran, Stegink was ordained in 1954 and served Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan, Iowa, Minnesota, and New Jersey. He retired in 1989.

Stegink had a great love of music. He played the clarinet and the piano and sang both at home and during church services, particularly Handel's *Messiah* tenor solos during Christmas celebrations.

He enjoyed all things mechanical, including auto and air shows. When the Miracle Bridge at Mackinac was being built during the mid 1950s, he photographed the construction of this five-mile-long suspension bridge with great fascination.

Stegink is survived by Lois, his wife of 67 years; and by four children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his granddaughter, Anna Stegink.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Searching for the Chocolate Factory in Indiana

**T**oward the end of October, around 100 costume-clad kids in South Indianapolis were immersed in a world of candy at Center Grove Christian Reformed Church in Greenwood, Ind. But they weren't trick-or-treaters. Rather, they performed as cast and chorus members in a production of Roald Dahl's "Willy Wonka" TYA (Theater for Young Audiences), hunting down golden tickets to the legendary Chocolate Factory.

The production was a part of Center Grove's Fine Arts Academy (FAA), which put on eight performances. The sanctuary was transformed into another place and time with artistic set designs and lighting systems. "Our church really gets excited when they see it," said Mark Landis, Center Grove's worship and fine arts ministry director. "The community embraces it." Each performance nearly sold out, with a total of about 2,400 tickets sold.

Center Grove launched the FAA outreach ministry in 2014 for kids ages 9 to 18 and has put on eight productions since. The original group of 30 kids has grown to more than 200. "With 200 kids, we decided it's time to do a little more and reach further into the community," Landis said.

The program now offers a variety of semester-long classes in the arts, from dance classes to pencil drawing, voice lessons, and a comedy workshop.

"The purpose is to share the gospel," Landis emphasized. "We have devotions every week with prayer and a lesson about who God is and who he wants us to be



Emerson as an Oompa Loompa.



Lincoln as Mike Teavee.



Jacob as Willy Wonka.



Anna as a Candy Kid.



Hannah as Mrs. Gloop

act annoyed whenever they did devotions. Further along she simply sat back and listened. "Then she did 'Willy Wonka' and she no longer sat back," Landis added. "She was sitting forward in her seat. She is still saying she's an atheist but starting to soften that heart."

Ann Cummins, a member of the church, sees this outreach as a way to bring the community and the church together. As an audience member, "It's a joyful thing to experience," she said. "People are encouraged by it and are really impressed with the growth of these kids."

—Lori Dykstra

in him. During the production week we have worship and a devotional every day."

Landis described the behavior of one student, who said she is an atheist, changing over time. At first she would roll her eyes and



## Sharing Word and Deed in Thunder Bay

The Gathering Place in Thunder Bay, Ont., has been reaching out in word and deed for more than 30 years by offering Bible studies, food hampers, clothing, school readiness programs, and other community-focused activities.

"We're very deliberately looking at balancing word and deed ministries," said executive director Yvonne Schenk. "We're not just diaconal, handing out food and clothing, and we're not just evangelizing [by] offering Bible studies. We're very deliberately trying to do both. There's a tension in that, but I think it's an okay tension."

The ministry has been supported by three Christian Reformed churches in Thunder Bay: First, Hope, and Bethlehem, as well as by Classis Lake Superior (the regional group of churches).

Pastor Robert Hoekstra of Hope CRC said, "The Gathering Place is a community where visitors, volunteers, and staff know each other, greet one another with smiles, tell life stories, shed tears of joy or pain, exchange warm hugs, pray for each other, share contagious laughs, and where a visitor may simply show up to have a coffee just to be there. We see here in a tangible way a glimpse of how [important] this ministry is to us at Hope church; it is truly a calling from God we take seriously."



Started in 1983 as a vacation Bible school in one of the poorer, more transient neighborhoods in Thunder Bay, The Gathering Place has grown steadily and become an important part of the community. Its

school readiness programs are funded in part by the Thunder Bay District Social Services Administrative Board.

"We have a large playroom with different play areas that focus on gross motor skills, fine motor skills, and other intentional areas for a holistic program for children," Schenk explained. "In the fall, we offer an eight-week program that focuses on reading readiness. In the winter, there's a seven-week program focusing on early math experiences, and in the spring, we offer a six-week program that focuses on resiliency skills in young children, building coping skills or what you can do to prepare your child for adversities in life."

"These school readiness programs are for both caregivers and children. We have staff who work with the kids. At the same time, Tammy VanElberg, coordinator of child enrichment, is teaching their caregivers how they can build these skills in their children."

Schenk, her staff, and volunteers are being intentional about taking their ministry outside their doors this year, connecting with their neighbors and inviting the community that doesn't usually make use of their services to come in and get to know them.

The Gathering Place is looking forward to making their current building, which they purchased two years ago, more accessible so that they can make better use of the space they have.

—Krista Dela Rosa

### IN MEMORIAM



#### Rev. Chester Marciel Schemper

1918 - 2016

Chester Schemper was a passionate, positive, hard-working man of faith whose love, joy, and gratitude profoundly affected those around him. For all of his 97 years he was blessed with a clear mind. He led a weekly ecumenical Bible study at his retirement residence in Oak Park, Ill., until just days before his death. Schemper died on October 30.

After serving congregations in Michigan, Illinois, and Alberta, he became a CRC missionary in Mexico. Schemper had become involved with The World Home Bible League (later called The Bible League) in a ministry to migrant workers.

He spent the rest of his career with The Bible League, working to publish Bible translations. Schemper visited nearly 60 countries. Even after he retired in his mid-80s, he kept up an active engagement with the global church.

Schemper will be missed by three children and their spouses and by 10 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife, Garrietta, in 2011, as well as by a son and a grandson.

—Janet A. Greidanus

### IN MEMORIAM



#### Rev. Henry B. VandenHeuvel

1937-2016

Rev. Henry VandenHeuvel was welcomed into the presence of his Lord and Savior on Sunday, September 25. He was 79.

After graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary, he served Christian Reformed congregations in Michigan, Iowa, and Illinois.

VandenHeuvel was well loved in the churches he served for his sound biblical preaching, the way he led Bible studies, and for the compassion he showed to members of his congregations. Over their years of ministry together, he and his wife, Nancy, formed many lasting friendships.

After retiring from full time ministry in 2000, VandenHeuvel served Graafschap CRC in Holland, Mich., as its interim pastor for three years. He served as its pastor of visitation until the time of his death.

Many hobbies occupied his spare time over the years. VandenHeuvel enjoyed gardening and spent many Saturdays and vacations boating and fishing.

VandenHeuvel will be missed by his wife of 56 years, Nancy; by four children and their spouses; and by five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

# NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

## Study Finds Churches with Conservative Theology Still Growing

Canadian researchers are revisiting a hotly debated sociological question: Why do some churches decline while others succeed?

Since the 1960s, overall membership in mainline Protestant Christian churches has been dropping in both the U.S. and Canada.

But some congregations have continued to grow, and a team of researchers believes it now knows why. It's the conservative theological beliefs of their members and clergy, according to researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University and Redeemer University College in Ontario.

"The riddle of mainline death has been solved," said David M. Haskell of Wilfrid Laurier University.

The results of the five-year research project is published in the December issue of the *Review of Religious Research*.

The project surveyed more than 2,200 churchgoers from Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and United churches in Ontario, according to an executive summary. About half were part of 13 mainline Protestant congregations whose membership had declined at least 2 percent over the past decade, while the other half attended nine churches that had grown at the same rate.

Researchers attended services at all 22 churches, after which they asked congregants to complete a 40-question survey, Haskell said. They also interviewed all clergy and a number of congregants who had completed the survey.

In those interviews, most clergy and the congregants of the declining churches blamed changes in society for a drop in demand for religion.

But comparing the religious beliefs and practices of both the declining and growing churches, Haskell said more clergy and congregants of the growing churches held firmly to "traditional" Christian beliefs and were more diligent in practices such as prayer and Bible reading. That includes a more literal interpretation of the Bible and greater openness to the idea that God intervenes in the world, he said.

For example, 93 percent of growing-church pastors said they agreed with the statement "Jesus rose from the dead with a real, flesh-and-blood body leaving behind an empty tomb," compared with 56 percent of declining-church pastors, according to the summary.

And 71 percent of pastors at growing churches said they read their Bibles daily, compared with 19 percent of pastors at declining churches.

Conservative Christians long have maintained their churches have continued to grow, even as membership in more progressive denominations has declined.

In 1972, researcher Dean M. Kelley published "Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion." More recently, the trend has been noted by former Southern Baptist Convention President Albert Mohler, David Brooks of the *New York Times*, and Joe Carter of The Gospel Coalition.

But even studies that agree that conservative churches are growing still suggest there is no link between theology and that growth, Haskell said. Some have tied that growth to the age—and birth rates—of congregants or the age of the church itself.

"The strength of our study is we actually now can explain it: because theology matters," he said.

—Religion News Service

## More Online

If you haven't checked *thebanner.org* or *The Banner's* Facebook page ([Facebook.com/crcbanner](https://www.facebook.com/crcbanner)) lately, you've missed these stories!

### Edmonton Native Healing Centre Celebrates 25th Anniversary

Approximately 120 friends and supporters of the Edmonton Native Healing Centre gathered on October 27 to celebrate its 25th anniversary. Established in 1991, the center ministers to Edmonton's urban Aboriginal community. It is one of three Canadian Aboriginal Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. (<http://tinyurl.com/thebanner-edmontonhealing>)

### Women on the Margins Get Voice in New Play

"Our Lives: Voices of Westview Centre4Women" opened in November with two evening performances portraying the struggles, barriers, and victories of the women who access the Centre4Women community hub and resource centre in St. Catharines, Ont. The play was written and directed by Sonya Vanderveen Feddema, a member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church, in collaboration with the cast and center staff Jane LaVacca and Erika Klassen. (<http://tinyurl.com/thebanner-voices>)

### Reflections on Sexuality and the Gospel

Matthew J. Tuininga, assistant professor of moral theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, continues a respectful conversation with Nicholas Wolterstorff regarding same-sex marriage. Tuininga's primary area of research is human sexuality, and he is a member of the CRC's study committee charged with articulating a biblical theology of human sexuality. (<http://tinyurl.com/tuiningareflections>)

### Battling Pornography on Campus

About 140 people came to Geneva House for an "Open Talk about Pornography." Geneva House is the Christian Reformed chaplaincy at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont. CRC campus chaplain Steve Kooy said the ministry sponsors a public speaker on campus each fall. Speaker Daniel Gilman cited grim statistics, including that 88 percent of the most common porn sites show physical violence forced upon women. "Porn is rape," he said. (<http://tinyurl.com/thebanner-porn>)

### Trinity Christian College Wins Championship

The women's volleyball team at Trinity Christian College (Palos Heights, Ill.) won the the NCCAA Division I championship on December 3.



# FAQs

## Worship

**Q** My church's worship is too wordy and prescribed. Why can't CRC worship be more like Evangelical services that have a refreshing mix of contemporary praise songs, heartfelt prayer, and engaging sermons?

**A** Just like people, every church has a personality. The Reformed faith tradition has a history of valuing the life of the mind. Many people love it for that very reason. However, with that comes the tendency to downplay the emotions. This can lead to worship that feels like a liturgical to-do list, doing all the right things but leaving hearts unmoved.

In contrast, contemporary Evangelical worship can feel like a breath of fresh air. It is easy for the heart to engage with a familiar music style, colloquial language, and free-flowing worship. But every tradition has its liabilities. Extemporaneous, joyous worship often neglects important aspects of the Christian faith: confession, intercession for the world, and the psalms. The upbeat worship style that is first so refreshing may soon become mundane or merely entertaining.

What we want is worship that sustains robust faith over the long haul.

The good news is that these worship styles are not mutually exclusive. Worship is always some mix of form and freedom, head and heart. It sounds like your church's worship may be more cerebral and verbose than you'd like. Perhaps you could discuss this with your church's leaders. Would it be possible to keep the same basic order of worship but infuse it with different communication styles? For example, does the prayer of illumination have to be in the form of a litany, or could it be a simple, free-form prayer?

The fullness of the gospel is best communicated to the fullness of our humanity: heart, mind, and body. When we use a variety of worship modes, we engage more personality types and more of each person.

*Greg Scheer (musicblog/gregscheer.com) is a composer, author, speaker, and music associate at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. His latest book is Essential Worship (Baker, 2016).*

## Let her know that you are there for her.

## Missional Living

**Q** A good friend at school is Muslim. Her parents are really hard on her. How can I help?

**A** I commend you for befriending someone from a different religious background and culture than yours. It must be really tough to see your friend experience trouble in her family and the cultural factors that are in play. Although you may feel a sense of helplessness and concern, you can support your friend.

First, let her know that you are there for her. You can't change things in her home. But when she comes to school, let her know she has in you a listening ear. You are not there to replace her parents but to be a friend and peer who understands and supports her.

Second, pray for her. Bringing the entire family before the Lord is the first step in allowing him to change things. Perhaps ask your family to join you in praying "to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20) for your friend's family. Your friend's struggle within her family could be an opportunity for them to reevaluate their lives and find the Savior who has been looking for them.

Finally, remain hopeful. Your friend confided in you because she saw in you the raw materials of hope that Isaiah mentioned: "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31). Continue to be hopeful for her.

By God's grace, your presence and praying over time just might prompt her to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" Also, I am praying for you.

*Reginald Smith is a program affiliate with the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship and co-interim director of Race Relations for the Christian Reformed Church. He attends Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.*

## Faith Formation

**Q** I want to tell my kids Bible stories, but are there some that are not appropriate for little children, like David and Bathsheba?

**A** It is great that you want to share Bible stories with your children. A rich knowledge of Bible stories is important in their faith formation. But we recognize your dilemma. And it isn't just stories with sex in them that people have difficulty sharing with children. Many Bible stories are filled with violence and people who abuse power—and sometimes those are the "good guys." Let's acknowledge that there are some stories or parts of stories a young child is not ready to hear. These stories can wait until the child gets a little older.

Does this mean that any story that includes sex or violence is out of bounds for children? Not necessarily. When we tell stories—any stories, not just Bible stories—we decide what to include and what to leave out. Every telling of a story is edited. The question is not *should* we edit but *how*.

Recently we heard of a teen who slammed his Bible down and said, "I've been lied to!" He'd been told in Sunday school that after the people of Nineveh heeded God's warning and repented, everyone, including Jonah, was happy. When he read the book of Jonah on his own, he was stunned to find out that the story ends not with a happy hero but with the title character irritated with God.

We can leave out the end of the story of Jonah, but we should not imply that, once God sends a big fish to correct Jonah, everyone lives happily ever after. The difficult stories we tell young children don't always have to be *complete*—but what we tell should always be *accurate*.

*Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries in the CRCNA and director of children's ministries at 14th St CRC in Holland, Mich. Robert Keeley is professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary. ■*



BY CHUCK DEGROAT

## The Toughest People to Love

**WHO DO YOU** find tough to love? Is it that person in your church small group who monopolizes every conversation? The boss whose demeaning comments create a toxic workplace? The parishioner who writes Monday-morning emails with a scathing critique of yesterday's sermon? The passive-aggressive spouse whose distance has driven a wedge in your relationship? The neighbor who blows lawn clippings onto your sidewalk?

I've worn several hats over the last 20 years—pastor, professor, therapist. One common denominator is this: no matter where I've served or what I've done, I've pastored, worked with, and cared for difficult people. Truth be told, I've been one myself.

If we have any kind of theology of sin, it should come as no great shock that people are difficult. Since Genesis 3, we've been hiding. In place of the relational intimacy and deep connection with God and one another for which we were made, we manage and manipulate, we control and coerce, we distance and disconnect. Many of us carry wounds from painful relationships. We've experienced trauma from abuse or neglect, from harsh words or clenched fists, from an addicted or absent parent. We've hurt others and have been hurt by others.

And let's be honest—when we put our faith in Christ, our old strategies and deep pains do not magically disappear. It takes a lifetime and a lot of failures along the way to grow into maturity. My belief is that we need a more nuanced understanding of sin and repentance to understand

the tough people in our lives and to understand ourselves. We also need to listen to the wisdom of psychologists and sages who teach us about the complexity of human beings. So let's explore how to love and understand the most difficult people among us.

### Sin and Hiding

We often talk about sin as something we do or fail to do. And we describe our sin with behavioral language:

*I drank too much.  
I spent too much.  
I looked at pornography.  
I yelled at my spouse.*

With this behavioral model, growth and maturity looks like doing something different: drink less, spend less, don't look at pornography, don't yell at your spouse.



But have you ever tried this approach? I have. I've tried it with myself and I've tried it with difficult people. The stubborn truth is that our hearts don't change with simple behavior modification. We're far more complex than this.

We get a hint in Genesis 3 when we stumble upon Adam and Eve hiding in the garden. Hiding? We're told that they were naked and ashamed, and so they hid. In their hiding, they began to craft elaborate fig-leaved personas to navigate their new reality. What Scripture is really saying is that they put on masks. They covered their shame—not with Jesus but with their self-made strategies. And we've followed the pattern ever since.

Hiding is the byproduct of shame. Shame is that insidious sense not merely that we've *done* something wrong, but that we're ultimately flawed to the core. Shame is disconnection from God and others. Shame is the absence of vulnerability. In shame, we hide under a thousand different manufactured—fig-leaved—constructions of ourselves. We cope by being the funny guy, the smart girl, the distant man, the flirt, the spiritual guru, the quiet wallflower, the enthusiastic helper, the success story, the deep thinker. We may not even know that we're doing this. In fact, we may get kudos for being so smart, witty, or religious. However, the reality is that we're stuck in a habitual pattern that works for us as we try to keep our shame at bay. This is the first key to understanding difficult people.

I'm convinced that the toughest people to love are mostly blind to their patterns of living and relating in a fallen world. Bill\*, for example, is a hard-working machinist who was educated in Christian schools. He attends church weekly and is passionate about Christian values in work and politics. He is charismatic and gregarious. He is also spiritually and emotionally abusive to his wife and children. But when I chat with Bill, he says, "I'm basically a good guy with a bit of a temper." Bill is blind to his own

long-standing habitual patterns of coping. He'll go to a men's conference and behave a bit better for a week or two afterward, but then fall back into the same patterns.

Bill is not merely doing hurtful things. No, Bill learned to relate this way long ago. As I probe his story, I find that Bill's dad was verbally and physically abusive. Bill felt deep shame and sadness, but there was no space to express this in his home. And so, quite unwittingly, he developed a hardened shell and a resilient wit. His charm and humor won over Jennifer\*, his wife, who did not see how hardened and defensive Bill was. In time, his emotional distance, his drinking, and his angry outbursts not only hurt her but left her feeling alone and afraid.

## Loving difficult people means loving them in all of their complexity.

Or consider Jenna\*. She's a larger-than-life personality in the church small group. For the first few months, she keeps the group's momentum going. She organizes the food, takes prayer requests, and brings plenty of ideas for studies and service. But eventually Jenna starts sounding demanding. She knows the right way the group should go and the right answers to all the questions. Her condescending tone and critical jabs lead to private conversations among the other group members about what to do.

My conversations with Jenna alert me to a much larger drama. It turns out that she is an only child of two successful lawyers. Often neglected and told to grow up and act like an adult, she traded a normal childhood for an early adulthood. She learned to be in charge, articulate, and certain. But she's really a lonely and sad woman who desperately longs for approval.

Into Adam and Eve's hiddenness, God emerges with the words, *Where are you?* Maybe that's a question for each of us amidst our own relational brokenness. The trouble is that when we treat sin as mere one-off behaviors, we miss a larger relational dynamic going on—a dynamic connected to the larger story of our lives and the relationships that formed us. Loving difficult people means loving them in all of their complexity.

### Sin and Folly

Scripture gives us a category for difficult people: *fools*. The fool is so hidden in his sinful self-protective strategies that he lives disconnected from intimate and vulnerable relationship with God and

others. He may look religious. He may raise his hands in worship. But like the hypocrite, his heart is far from God.

So who of us isn't a fool? I find myself turning to Romans 7 when I blow it, to remind myself that even Paul said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (v. 15). I can relate because I have so many blind spots. And when I'm especially hidden and blind to my stuff, my wife and kids can get frustrated. We're all foolish in ways, but I have found it helpful to distinguish the degree of disconnection from God, from others, and from our own hearts when talking about dealing with difficult people. I like to use three categories: *simple fools*, *self-consumed fools*, and *sinister fools*.

Simple fools are ordinary, broken sinners who continue to "crawl along, making little progress, going as far as our humble ability allows us," as John »

# At the table, Jesus invites us to do the hard work of coming out of hiddenness into his loving presence.

Calvin said. We're growing—it comes in fits and starts, but growing nonetheless. Part of our growth is seeing our blind spots. We're learning not just to repent of behavioral sins (*I did this bad thing*) but owning larger patterns of hurtful relating. Simple fools in a church small group will hurt one another. It's inevitable. But when honest conversation takes place, they'll own their stuff. Jenna might learn to say, "You know, I have lived for a long time needing to be right and certain. I'm really wrestling with it because it hurts people. Thank you for being a friend who I can fail with and yet still be loved. I need that." Simple fools practice what Calvin called "self-knowledge"—getting to know themselves and their stories in such a way as to bring about greater relational health with God and others.

Self-consumed fools are more hidden. They are often unaware of their patterns. When confronted they may be defensive and difficult. Perhaps the pain in their past is so great that real vulnerability is just too scary. Self-consumed fools may try to change. They may attend a conference or read a book and even appear to change for a time. But their ingrained patterns emerge with a vengeance, leaving a debris field in their relationships. I often tell people to tread carefully and wisely with folks like this. If you can muster up compassion for how they must have been hurt, you can see why they are so well-defended and how it may take time for change to occur.

Bill was a self-consumed fool. In our conversation, he chastised me for engaging in "psychobabble" and blamed his wife for not submitting to his authority in their home. I worried for his wife and children and worked with them to find the therapeutic care they needed to heal even while Bill resisted. It's tough dealing

with a self-consumed fool. Looking to Scripture for help, I find this:

*Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
or you yourself will be just like him.  
Answer a fool according to his folly,  
or he will be wise in his own eyes.*  
—Proverbs 26:4-5

Not very helpful! Perhaps this is because loving a self-consumed fool is tricky. Bill's wife, guided by a wise consistency and a helpful therapist, separated from Bill with the kids for a time, prompting rage and accusations from Bill. But it was also the wake-up call he needed. Good friends showed him how his folly was a replay of his own childhood. He finally wept at the thought of his children having to cringe in fear as he once had. Bill did not change overnight, and Jennifer was rightly skeptical and slow to reconcile. But in time, Bill's changes went beyond behavior to real and new ways of relating humbly and vulnerably with his family.

Sinister fools are the most hidden of the three. You may experience them as evil. They learned at an early age that the world was dangerous, and they internalized the cruelty shown to them. I recall Ray\*, who sexually abused his two daughters and eight other nieces while telling them that "the Lord permits me to." I recall Samantha\*, who locked her children in the basement with a chain when they misbehaved. I recall reading that Hitler himself was brutally abused by his father and projected his pain on an entire race of people rather than dealing with it. We deal with sinister fools with great care and with guarded hearts. Often church leaders need to lean toward protecting the flock, because extending grace only enables the sinister fool's cruelty.

## Taking a Good Look Inside

My wife of 22 years, Sara, has been extraordinarily gracious to me. We brought sinful, self-protective patterns of relating into our marriage. Of course, we didn't know this. When we went to premarital counseling, the pastor was more concerned about us "saving ourselves until marriage" than investigating the potentially more toxic patterns that could undermine us. These patterns came to a head about five years into our marriage. Thankfully, we were in a community of loving friends and wise counselors who challenged us to do the hard inner work of looking at our stories, noticing patterns, and moving toward one another with greater honesty and vulnerability.

All relationships are challenging. Perhaps this is why the communion table is so central to our life together. When Jesus hosts us at the table, he invites us to do the hard work of removing the logs from our eyes, forgiving those we've hurt, inviting those we've neglected, and coming out of hiddenness into his loving presence. God says to us, "Where are you?" He knows we're hiding. But it often takes real intentionality on our part to do the hard work of unearthing our strategies of hiding our shame and crafting our fig-leaved masks.

What if we as a church took this journey together? What could we become? Jesus took the road of humble vulnerability. I invite you to do the same. It's worth it. ■

*\*Names have been changed.*

### STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



**Chuck DeGroat**, associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Mich., is the author of *Leaving Egypt* (Faith Alive) and *Toughest People to Love* (Eerdmans).



# Minding Your Pastor's Mental Health

**T**HE PHONE RINGS at 1 a.m.: a child is in the hospital. Tomorrow is an elderly church member's funeral. Two evening meetings are scheduled this week. Two sermons to prepare for Sunday. The pastor is always on call for the congregation's sorrows, troubles, conflicts, and yes, sometimes, joys.

Over time, though, the demands of pastoring can create a strain on pastors and their families.

Clergy health studies show that ministry stress is causing a decline in the physical and mental health of pastors. The reasons are complex. One study found that one in six pastors showed signs of distress with levels of isolation, loneliness, fear, anger, and boredom. Forty-five percent of pastors report having felt burned out to the degree that they had to take a break from ministry (London and Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk*). An increasing number of pastors are on antidepressants. One denomination discovered that disability claims for clergy listing mental health reasons were higher than in an average workplace setting.

To combat this, pastors need to practice mental health self-care by developing healthy supportive relationships, managing stress, and practicing Sabbath rest.

Pastors often feel isolated in their ministry, even though they are surrounded by people. Those who are primarily in a caregiving role may have few relationships where they are supported. Regular meetings with fellow pastors can provide a confidential and safe place to discuss the demands of ministry.

Some churches provide a small group chosen by the pastor to offer support and encouragement. That can be helpful, but it is not always easy for pastors to move from caregiving to receiving care from members of the congregation. So one of



**Congregations and councils can empower pastors to maintain their mental health.**

the best practices is to nurture relationships outside of the congregation where the pastor can be authentic and vulnerable.

Ongoing stress is one of the biggest reasons pastors leave ministry. Over time, such stress may cause a pastor to lose the ability to function. Relationships may become strained. Writing sermons, attending meetings, and making visits become more taxing. Self-awareness and perhaps feedback from a skilled observer can help a pastor examine his or her gifts, ministry routine, and personality traits. One pastor said, "When I stopped to learn more about myself, it became more clear how I could have a sustained ministry."

Faithfully observing a time for Sabbath rest is an important way for pastors to care for their mental health. Too often congregations expect pastors to be on the job 24/7. Unfortunately, pastors who do overwork are often rewarded with admiration and love. Going beyond what is expected and needed may feel virtuous, but it leads to a misperception about serving the Lord in which taking care of one's self appears selfish, while constant self-sacrifice is equated with ultimate servanthood.

In contrast, observing boundaries allows pastors to establish a healthy rhythm of work and Sabbath rest. This, in turn, can encourage the congregation to build in times of rest for their own lives. Sabbath rest is part of God's creational norm for everyone.

Congregations and councils can significantly empower pastors to maintain their mental health. They can do so by encouraging regular vacations and periodic Sundays off. By expressing words of appreciation and encouragement to the pastor on a regular basis. By not scheduling meetings on the pastor's day of rest. Elders can inquire about the pastor's habits, support the pastor's practice of self-care, and give constructive feedback when appropriate. Offering a sabbatical after a number of years of service will refresh the pastor, and the congregation will benefit. An emotionally healthy leader thriving in ministry can impact the overall ministry of the church.

After all, answering God's call shouldn't be bad for a pastor's mental health. ■



Cindy Holtrop is the interim Minister of Pastoral Care and a member at Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

## Source of Hope in Haiti



North American volunteers worked with Haitian construction workers to complete the office building project.

PHOTO BY ALLISON STOECKER

Rob Ringuette remembers his boss asking him to stay late after work to meet with him.

Ringuette, a member of Trinity Christian Reformed Church in Goderich, Ont., figured this meeting might be related to the fact that he had recently asked for a week off from his relatively new job so he could travel to Haiti. He was right, but not for the reasons he expected.

“I walked into the office to find out the staff wanted to surprise me with \$1,200 they had raised for this trip,” recalled Ringuette, with emotion in his voice that showed he was still incredibly moved by his coworkers’ generosity.

“It not only felt like God wanted me to go [to Haiti], but he was also involving all these other people, calling all of them through me.”

As a new Christian, Ringuette said he wasn’t sure why God was calling him to this trip, but getting time off work and receiving this generous offering taken by his coworkers were just a few of the many ways God affirmed his decision to “see what he had to offer in Haiti.” From last-minute vaccination needs to political unrest in Haiti, several things could have prevented the six team members from going, but everyone landed in Port-au-Prince on schedule.

“As things fell into place, my faith grew,” added Ringuette.

### Hurt and Hope

Service and learning teams like Ringuette’s fuel the ongoing relationship between the CRCNA and the people of Haiti. All three of the denomination’s international missions—Back to God Ministries International, Christian Reformed World Missions, and World Renew—have a presence in Haiti. They are known there collectively as *Sous Espwa*, which means “source of hope.”



“Our volunteers show great engagement in the way they give their time and strength to help us,” said Jacky Chéry, who serves as Back to God Ministries’ French ministry coordinator in Haiti.

Upon arriving in Haiti, the team from Trinity CRC learned about the hurt, hope, and heart of the mission field they would be serving.

First the team learned about *hurt*, the many obstacles Haitians have faced, including the major earthquake in 2010, lost sugar cane crops, and even political issues that were affecting Haiti just as they arrived to serve.

“The planned presidential elections in Haiti did not take place because of allegations of fraud,” explained Zachary Segaar-King, who serves with World Missions in Haiti. “We were thankful for the flexibility of the teams who were able to manage despite this constantly evolving situation.”

Next, the team from Trinity learned about *hope* in Haiti. They learned how God is working through ministries like those of the CRC to bring physical and spiritual change within Haiti. In addition, they learned how they would play a role in that change through the construction of a second floor to the *Sous Espwa* office.

### Heart of Haiti

Finally, they got an introduction to the *heart* of the Haitian people.

“We learned about the camaraderie between the people,” recalled Ringuette. “People have a sense of community that makes them strong, both as a country and in church communities as well.”

As the week progressed, this lesson would become much more real for Ringuette and other members of the team. As they began construction on the office building, they did so with the help of Haitian construction workers, most of whom were recruited from nearby churches. While many of these workers

“ I was able to hear God in another language, and that’s an incredible experience ”

had decades of experience in construction, Ringuette was able to share some methods of construction not typically used in Haiti.

“We had the opportunity to work with six Haitian men,” said Ringuette. “Throughout the week, as I worked with a man named LeLe, I felt like God was putting me there to help him learn a new skill, and I wanted him to be able to use that skill in the future.”

Shared meal time is a favorite part of many volunteers’ experience in Haiti.

As Ringuette shared some of his construction knowledge while using his French language skills, LeLe and other Haitians shared their custom of singing and doing a Bible study during their lunch break. “Those were powerful moments,” said Ringuette.

An equally powerful moment came when the North American volunteers had the opportunity to worship in Jaquet church, a church that Trinity has partnered with for many years, and whose opening dedication service was attended by several members of Trinity CRC.

“I was able to hear God in another language, and that’s an incredible experience,” reflected Ringuette. “Knowing all that [the worshipers] have been through, I could see how real their faith in God was and that they start teaching that faith at a very young age.”

### Lasting Results

In the summer of 2016, *Sous Espwa* staff celebrated the addition of a second floor to their office with a dedication ceremony. The second story would enable Back to God Ministries International staff in »



» Haiti to join the office space that CRWM and World Renew staff have been using.

“The goal was to increase collaboration and make natural connections between the work of our agencies,” said Segaar-King. “This decision [to add the second story] was made by faith, since at that time we did not have resources to enlarge the office building.”

Teams including Trinity CRC in Goderich helped meet this need for resources and provided about 75 percent of the funds for this project. They also helped train local people in some specialized building methods such as using earthquake-resistant steel beams.

The shared office space has already had a lasting effect, as *Sous Espwa* responded to Hurricane Matthew.

When the devastating tropical storm hit in October 2016, all three agencies were able to share their resources and respond. Back to God broadcasted a special message about preventing cholera,



**Rob Ringuette (third from left) with other members of the team from Trinity CRC in Goderich.**



**Sous Espwa staff in their completed office building.**

PHOTO BY ALLISON STOECKER

### Serve in Haiti

- From March 4-12, 2017, join a reforestation project in Pignon, Haiti. Reforestation helps lessen the impact of natural disasters and the likelihood of mudslides that commonly occur on the country's bare hillsides.
- Design a website for *Sous Espwa* or their partners. If you have gifts in web design, *Sous Espwa* wants your help in designing a new site and training local staff to maintain it.
- Join a construction team similar to the one featured in this article. There are still weeks available for your team to serve this winter or early spring.

Visit [worldrenew.net/volunteer](http://worldrenew.net/volunteer) or [crwm.org/volunteer](http://crwm.org/volunteer) to find out more or to apply.

as well as other training in sanitation. At the same time, Segaar-King joined relief staff from World Renew in delivering relief supplies to Vila-de-Woz, a community that was hit especially hard by the storm.

“When I arrived in Vila-de-Woz, I didn't even recognize it,” said Segaar-King. “I estimated that 9 out of every 10 homes were uninhabitable.”

One of the only remaining buildings he found intact was the Christian Reformed church building—a church built with storm-resistant materials in partnership with the CRCNA agencies.

### L'Union Fait la Force

At the center of the Haitian flag are four small words: *l'union fait la force*—unity makes strength. Although these words refer to the unity among citizens of Haiti, the phrase also rings true for the unity among CRC members in North America and in Haiti.

Through *Sous Espwa's* holistic ministry, CRCNA members are able to share long-lasting resources, train leaders, and provide messages with an impact through media.

“We partner with local people and encourage them in their gifts and skills,” said Wilma Hiemstra, another member of the Trinity CRC team. “This will help them make a difference themselves in their own country.”

In turn, the members of the CRC in Haiti who received these resources help strengthen the faith of long-time members of the CRCNA as well as new believers like Rob Ringuette.

“I think God is constantly spreading his love and his Word everywhere, and if we have faith, God will always provide,” said Ringuette. “This was my first time seeing that out of North American culture.” ■



**Brian Clark, Christian Reformed World Missions**



**Nancy Vander Meer, Back to God Ministries International**



You add.  
God multiplies.

## Churches Reach Out to Muslim Neighbors through Mission Montreal

**B**efore fleeing her home in Cameroon, Genevieve\* worked as a nurse. As a refugee living in the Saint Laurent borough of Montreal, Quebec, however, Genevieve was unable to use her nursing skills to make a living for herself and her three children.

Montreal is the largest city in Quebec and has a rapidly growing population of immigrants. This provides many opportunities for Christians to be good neighbors.

“When immigrants first arrive in Montreal, they long for an authentic contact with local people who can introduce them to Canadian culture and answer some of their questions,” said Pam Gebauer, a volunteer of a local ministry called Christian Direction. For Genevieve, Gebauer was that contact.

Gebauer first met Genevieve at a food pantry in Saint Laurent, where Gebauer invited Genevieve to join an English conversation group to help her practice language skills and work toward getting a nursing job.

“As a single mother, Genevieve was struggling to support her children in a new culture with very limited resources, but with great intelligence, desire to work, and hope toward the future,” said Gebauer.

Conversation groups like the one Genevieve attends are just one of many ways Mission Montreal has been reaching out to Saint Laurent’s refugee and immigrant population. Mission Montreal is a partnership between Christian Direction, Christian Reformed Home Missions, Christian Reformed World Missions, Diaconal Ministries Canada, First CRC Montreal, and Classis Eastern Canada.

“We see the Christian Reformed Church as an invaluable partner,” adds Glenn Smith, executive director of Chris-

tian Direction. “We’ve been in Quebec a long time, we’ve got good roots. But we’re a small organization. We know that we can’t accomplish either the mission or vision God has called us to without partnerships.”

Mission Montreal has worked with 12 local churches to engage with newcomers through ministry and outreach events. At a 2016 Back to School Family Festival,



Distributing backpacks at the Back to School Family Festival in Montreal.

for example, Genevieve’s children were three of 250 children to receive school supplies, play games, and eat halal hot dogs.

Chad Polito, another employee at Christian Direction, added that the festival and other events meet real needs of families while also giving churches the opportunity to have discussions about their faith and share some Christian materials with families, many of whom come from Muslim backgrounds.

“We were very pleased that most of the parents at the distribution of school supplies accepted a gift of a small Christian book for their children,” said Polito. “In addition, 100 Christian DVDs, 27 books, and 122 portions of Scripture were given out at the literature table for adults.”

Since joining the English conversation groups, Genevieve has been able to secure a job as a nurse’s aid. She is close to completing her training and receiving her credentials to be hired as a nurse.

As Home Missions and World Missions move toward becoming a new mission agency, leaders from both agencies recognize Mission Montreal as a successful example of future ministry.

The method of finding where God is already at work, coming alongside efforts like those of Christian Direction that have a long track record, and adding the CRC’s gifts and resources to the mix can be a great template that can be introduced to other places.

“From the beginning, we’ve said we want Montreal to be a laboratory and a classroom for the CRCNA,” says Joel Huyser, who serves with World Missions. “Rather than seeing the places that we do mission simply as ‘receivers,’ we see them as places to learn together.”

*\*name changed to protect people’s privacy*

—by Brian Clark, *Christian Reformed World Missions*

## Carry the Light

**T**he sounds and sights of that day in September will linger a long time.”

“I don’t think we mentioned anything about the genocide.”

The quotes above are not, as you might assume, about the World Trade Center catastrophe or a reaction to the mass killings in Rwanda two decades ago. Rather, they are from *The Disturbances*, a recently released video produced by the Baptist Center for Ethics about the role Christian missionaries and Nigerian pastors played in saving lives during the slaughter of 30,000 mainly Igbo civilians in Nigeria in 1966.

The video describes how North American missionaries, many at Hillcrest School and at the Theological College of Northern Nigeria, faced the atrocities.

The video includes accounts—some by former CRC missionaries with names such as Kiekoover, Scholten, and Baas—of their experiences. One missionary wrote at the time of seeing “blood-soaked men pleading for protection on their hands and knees, spontaneously reciting the Lord’s Prayer.”

Others, in present-day interviews, recounted the danger they faced at Hillcrest, particularly hearing the angry chants of mobs during the night and those fleeing for their lives running onto campus—even into the rooms where classes were being held.

Their account told now, 50 years later, describes providing sanctuary to those fleeing for their lives, tending to the injured even while mobs hovered in the background, and helping those in danger escape by trucks, train, and aircraft. One after another spoke of their desire to model their faith, even under the most dire of circumstances.

One told of college principal Harry Boer’s decision to keep the lights on at the theological college. Many people had urged

him to turn off the floodlights that illuminated the chapel’s spire to avoid drawing attention to the college while angry mobs were on the loose. Boer kept the lights on, saying the school should “receive anyone who might come to us for refuge.” A light shining in the darkness.

As I viewed the video, missionary after missionary said that although the conflict was between Christians from the south and east of Nigeria and Muslims from the north, it wasn’t about religious differences. Rather, it was fueled by a mix of inequality, ethnicity, and economics.

What can we learn from those missionaries of 50 years past? The call to carry the light of Jesus into all the world has always involved both Word and deed. The missionaries in Jos, Nigeria—some Christian Reformed, others from a range of other denominations—were faithful to their call. They shared the Good News and lived out their faith, seeking to understand complex situations while providing refuge and caring for those in need, in even the most desperate of circumstances.

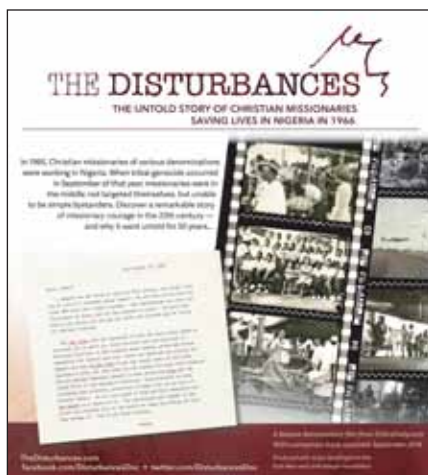
The call to missions requires stepping into religious intersections, sharing the

Good News with and caring for people of differing faiths or of no faith at all. These missionaries resisted the temptation to oversimplify the conflict into a matter of religious differences. They were adept at interacting within the differing religious contexts surrounding them.

What about us? It’s really the same call. To share the Good News. To open our doors and our hearts to those in need. To move faithfully within the increasing plurality of religious faiths in our cities, towns, and rural communities.

Sometimes our call is lived out in ordinary ways, day after day. At other times, tensions are high and crises ensue. But the call is the same: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17). ■

For more information about the documentary DVD *The Disturbances*, visit [thedisturbances.com](http://thedisturbances.com).



“One [missionary] told of principal Harry Boer’s decision to keep the lights on at the theological college.”



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

You add.  
God multiplies.

## A New Media Ministry in Japan

In an historic decision, the Reformed Church of Japan (RCJ), Christian Reformed World Missions-Japan (CRJM), and Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) have signed an agreement to strengthen media missions in Japan, where fewer than 2 percent of the population openly profess faith in Christ.

On Oct. 12, 2016, 200 Japanese pastors and leaders gathered in Yokohama, Japan, for the annual General Assembly of the RCJ and unanimously approved the creation of the denomination's first missions agency—a media ministry.

This marks a transition of the current operations of the CRC Media Ministry, a partnership between BTGMI and CRJM, to the newly created and locally managed RCJ Media Evangelism Office, effective Jan. 1, 2017.

The vote was followed by a signing ceremony of the contract by BTGMI



BTGMI director Rev. Kurt Selles (center) signing the agreement alongside CRJM team leader Rev. Larry Spalink and the RCJ moderator, Rev. Akira Komine.

director Kurt Selles, CRJM team leader Larry Spalink, and the RCJ moderator, Akira Komine.

Komine challenged the churches to aggressively use all the media at their disposal for the spread of the Good News. He then led the assembly in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Reformed media ministry was initiated in Japan by CRJM in the mid-1950s.

In 1974, BTGMI joined the Japanese broadcast ministry partnership and Rev. Shojiro Ishii assumed leadership. He was succeeded in 1998 by Rev. Masao Yamashita as Japanese media ministry director.

Discussions leading to the new RCJ media mission agency began in 2008.

“We are grateful for this next step. It’s an important one to take in ensuring self-sustainability of the ministry in Japan,” said Selles, whose agency will continue to support and partner with the new organization.

Yamashita, who has been installed as director of the new ministry, said, “As far as I know, there is no denomination that has its own media evangelism agency in Japan. Pray that the Lord makes us his instrument to spread the gospel among Japanese people.” ■

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

## Shining a Light for Kenya’s Children

On the front lines of relief work in Africa, Margaret Njuguna was troubled by the sight of children and adults living with disabilities left to fend for themselves.

In response, the 1994 Calvin College graduate founded En-Gedi Home for Children—a place that rescues children with severe disabilities—in the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya.

“These are children that a lot of people don’t like, including their own parents,” she said. “We run a rescue ministry to help children escape from confinement and neglect and to save children who have been left in the



Margarret Njuguna

jungle to be eaten by hyenas,” she said.

Njuguna currently has 12 children in her home; none of them can walk, and just one of them can talk.

En-Gedi is almost three years old, begun after Njuguna

spent the previous 27 years in the employ of World Renew.

Njuguna was trained in Africa as a finance and administrative manager in World Renew’s Kenya and Uganda offices.

But she wanted to do something more and, on the advice of a Calvin College alumna, decided to enroll at Calvin.

“It was the best decision I ever made,” she said. “I learned that all people, regardless of their backgrounds, are made by God.”

After graduating, Njuguna returned to Africa to work for World Renew. In time, however, the call to advocate for people with disabilities led her to a new ministry.

In Kenyan culture, she said, many people believe that having a child with disabilities is a curse or related to witchcraft—the children have been bewitched.

It is her challenge to diminish the hold that superstition has on families who have children with disabilities.

“It is a dark world,” she said. “When I got started, I told God that I want to be a channel through which he can shine his light into the world of darkness.”

For more about Njuguna’s work, see [en-gedichildren-withhope.org](http://en-gedichildren-withhope.org). ■

—by Michael VanDenend,  
Calvin College



### Celebrating the Diversity of God’s World at Christmas

Every year, Calvin Seminary celebrates Christmas Around the World, one of the most anticipated events of the fellowship calendar.

This celebration gives members of the 23 nations represented at Calvin Seminary the opportunity to share their own Christmas traditions, practices, and cuisine.

“Christmas Around the World is more than a feast of food from around the world—it is a multicultural, multi-sensory delight,” said Jeff Sajdak, the dean of students.

“Listening to steel drums from Trinidad, an angklung from Indonesia, choirs from Korea and China, watching a humorous skit from Canada, and learning about Christmas traditions in Nigeria . . . it’s a wonderful way to celebrate Christmas as a seminary community.”

People often bring dishes to the potluck that represent their cultural or family Christmas traditions.

Christmas Around the World is a time of making room for different traditions and celebrating the diversity of the world God created.

Christianne Zeiger, a second-year M.Div. student and the 2015 Fellowship Committee chairperson, said she enjoys all of the performances and how eagerly students present their cultural backgrounds.

She especially loves how the event brings everyone together, since it is “such a great picture of being the family of God!” ■

—by *Emily Sajdak*,  
*Calvin Seminary*



Members of the Chinese Choir sing “My Soul Glorifies the Lord.”



Carla praying with one of her taxi drivers as she arrives at church.

### Taxicab Blessings

Carla’s 15-minute ride to church may be the most important part of her Sunday routine.

A member of Cristo Arca de Salvacion church in Tijuana, Mexico, Carla takes a taxi to church every Sunday and strikes up a conversation with her driver.

“She opens up the conversation by asking her driver’s name and the names of their family members,” said Abe Lee, who serves in Tijuana with Christian Reformed World Missions.

Carla writes down these names and asks if she can pray with the driver when the taxi arrives at church. While she has had many meaningful conversations on her short ride to church, one experience stands out.

“Carla remembers a driver whose father was so ill, he was on his deathbed,” said Abe. “She shared a message from the gospel and prayed for the driver and for his dying father.”

“The driver later told Carla that he shared the exact message from the Bible [with his father] that Carla had shared with him.”

The driver said he was thankful to Carla for sharing these words because he wanted his father to hear a story about Jesus but didn’t know which message to share.

Church members like Carla encourage Abe and his wife, Elaine, as they carry out their ministry in Tijuana. One of their ministry tasks includes leading Bible studies in the churches they serve. Many of the participants are going through the Bible for the first time, which may prepare them for a “taxicab” moment like Carla’s.

“We as Christians are called to make testimonies and praise stories about our God,” said Abe and Elaine. “We have heard and seen this among our Bible readers.” ■

—by *Brian Clark*,  
*Christian Reformed World Missions*

You add.  
God multiplies.

## Discovering the Bible in India

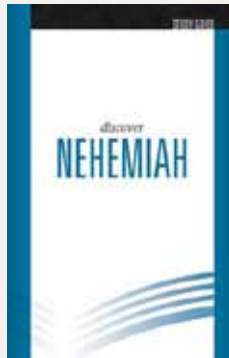
When Sooyoungro Presbyterian Church in Busan, South Korea, realized the effectiveness of Coffee Break groups for global missions, they decided to have all of their missionaries trained in Coffee Break.

One of these missionaries, Gwangho Song, now lives in northern India and helped to plan two Coffee Break conferences for this past December in Delhi and Kolkata.

The goal of these conferences was to train missionaries and local Coffee Break leaders in Coffee Break's style of inductive Bible study, as well as to introduce them to *Discover Your Bible* studies in their own languages.

Coffee Break translates easily across cultures and languages: it's a chance to meet with others over a cup of coffee or tea, to talk about important things, to build friendships, and to experience the joy of learning something for oneself.

Christian Reformed Home Missions supports more than 700 Coffee Break groups around the world. As more and more groups spring up, the most frequent request is for new



translations of *Discover Your Bible* studies.

One of them, *Discover Nehemiah*, has now been translated into Hindi, so Hindi-speaking attendees at the conferences in Delhi and Kolkata were able to use this new material in their training.

The *Discover Nehemiah* translation was made possible because the Coffee Break group from Brookfield CRC in Brookfield, Wisc., decided to partner with the group in India that planned the conferences.

The Brookfield group prayed for the group in India as they planned and generously contributed a large portion of the translation costs for *Discover Nehemiah*. ■

—by Erica Eizenga,  
Christian Reformed Home Missions

## Fruitful Work in Guatemala

Rosa used to spend her mornings washing clothes for other families. By the afternoon she would head back to her remote Guatemalan village, feeling exhausted.

For many years, Rosa thought washing clothes was the only way she could make a living. Without a formal education, it was difficult to find other work.

To help earn a better income, Rosa and her husband decided to try growing cardamom. It took nearly 10 years to see an increase in their earnings. Then, in 1998, their work was destroyed by Hurricane Mitch, which brought torrential rain and wind to Rosa's community.

The destruction was heartbreaking for Rosa's husband, whose mental health began to suffer. He stopped helping Rosa in their field, forcing her to support her family alone.

But then World Renew and its local partner ADIP met Rosa and invited her to participate in agriculture training. The training helped her learn new techniques to improve her soil and increase her harvest.

Now Rosa is growing a variety of crops.

"I invite other women to follow the steps I took to overcome poverty," said Rosa. "I am motivated and asking God to give me the strength to continue working in my terrain for the benefit of my family." ■

—by Taylor Smith, World Renew



Rosa shows off some of her crops.

## SHORT TAKES



### Celebrating 30 Years of Reformed Worship

Copies of 30 years of *Reformed Worship*, a quarterly journal that provides practical help and support to worship planners, were displayed on tables in the atrium of the Christian Reformed Church's Grand Rapids, Mich., office as part of an anniversary celebration.

The first issue, published in September 1986, featured resources to help churches celebrate Advent.

The issues all reflect some of the changes and challenges the CRC has faced in areas of worship and liturgy over the years.

"It has been a journey that the church has been on, and it is reflected in the journal," said editor Joyce Berger. *Reformed Worship*, which comes out quarterly, is published by Worship Ministries. ■

—by Chris Meehan,  
CRC Communications



# Snow World

*"He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes"*  
—Psalm 147:16

Imagine big, fluffy snowflakes gently drifting down. In the winter stillness, they gather in the empty trees and cover the fields like a blanket.

Does it snow much where you live? If it does, what do you do when it snows outside? Maybe you build a snowman or a fort. Or grab snowshoes or a toboggan and head for the hills. But have you ever wondered what animals do when the snow comes? God gave animals everything they need to live in a snowy winter world, so they know just what to do.

## In the Snow

The ruffed grouse is a big chicken-like bird. It uses the snow to get out of the cold. When the snow is soft enough and deep enough, the grouse will build itself a snow tunnel to spend the night in. How does a bird build a tunnel? It starts by jumping from a tree into the snow. Then it uses its wings and feet to make the tunnel up to 10 feet (3 m) long. Like the snow cave, the grouse's snow tunnel may warm up to 32°F (0°C) even when it is much colder outside. That helps the grouse save energy, and it doesn't need to eat as much to stay warm. Spending less time out in the open also means less time for predators to see the grouse.

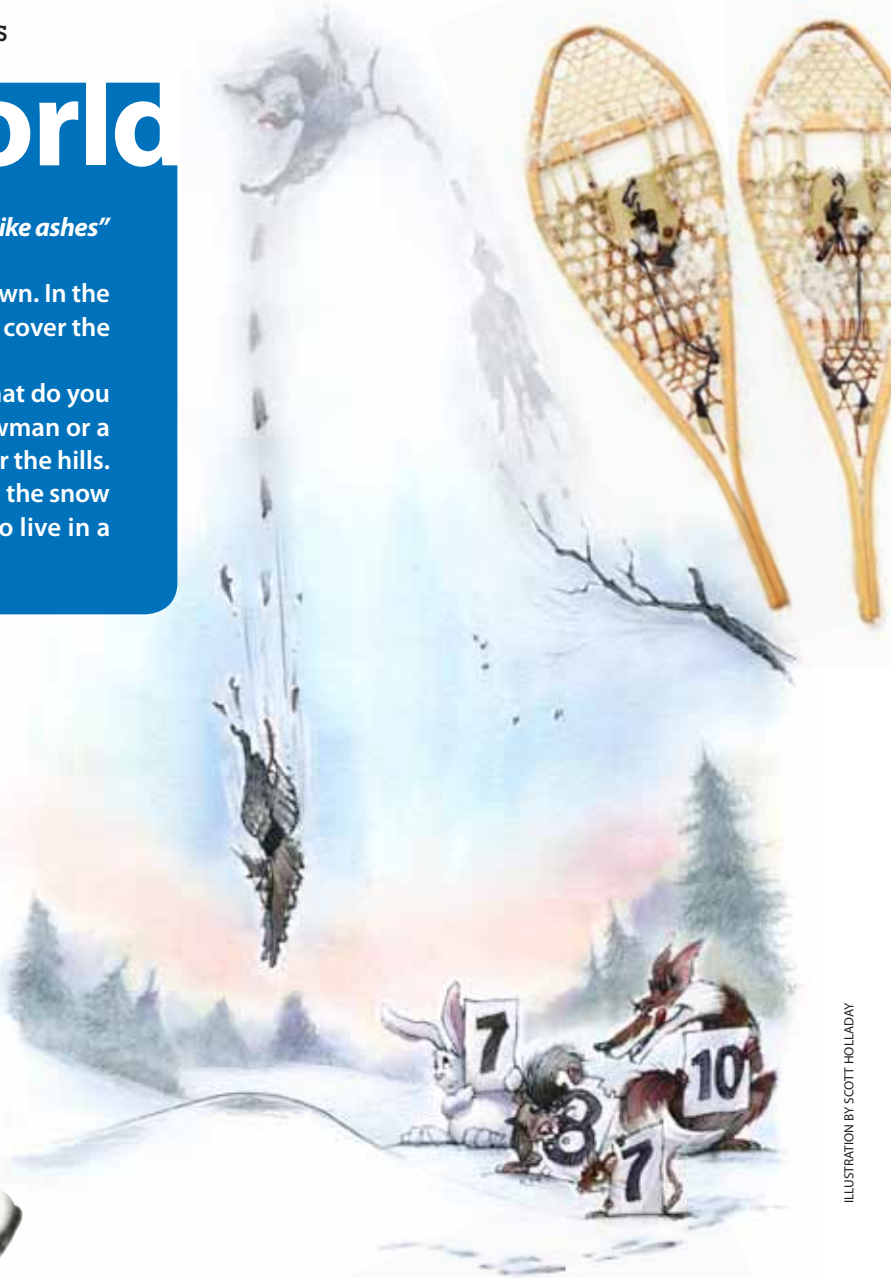


ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY



## Snow Fun

Do you like to go tobogganing when it snows? So do otters. When otters travel on snow, they bound for a few steps and then drop down onto their bellies and slide. They use their legs to push themselves along, almost like swimming. The marks they leave in the snow are called "otter slides." Usually otter slides lead down a hill into water, but sometimes otters will even take a few slides where it is flat.





## On Top of the Snow

It is easy to walk on top of the snow when it is hard and crusty, but what about when the snow is soft and fluffy? That's what snowshoes are for. Snowshoes work by spreading your weight out over a larger area.

The snowshoe hare's "snowshoes" are its extra-large and very hairy hind feet. These big snowshoe feet allow the hare to walk, run, and hop on the fluffiest snow. As the snow gets higher and higher, the hare can reach more and more of the small fresh twigs it likes to eat.

The ruffed grouse has "snowshoes" too. In the fall, it grows fleshy, comb-like bristles called *pectinations* along the sides of its skinny bird toes. These bristles increase the surface area of the foot the way that a snowshoe does. In the spring, those bristles fall off.



## Tracks in the Snow

Watch for these animal tracks in the snow the next time you go for a winter walk in the woods or even in your neighborhood.

- **Squirrels** bound through the snow with their long hind feet landing in front of their smaller front feet. Squirrel trails usually go from tree to tree.
- **Mouse** tracks look like very tiny squirrel tracks. Two tiny front footprints behind two longer hind footprints—sort of like two crooked exclamation marks!
- **Rabbit** tracks make a long triangle. One front foot lands in front of the other, and the two long hind feet side by side in front of that.
- Don't forget to watch for **bird** tracks too. Grouse and turkey tracks are probably the most common among the larger birds. Grouse tracks are smaller (about 2 inches long). Turkey tracks are bigger (4 to 5 inches long). Winter birds like cardinals and sparrows are much smaller!

After a fresh blanket of snow, animals leave their footprint signatures behind. Can you figure out which animals have been here? Draw a line between the animals and the correct footprints.



## Snow Plungers

Being underneath the snow doesn't mean total safety for the creatures who shelter there. After all, bigger animals like owls and foxes have to eat too! How do they catch a meal that is scurrying beneath a foot of snow? By snow plunging!

The great gray owl has very sensitive hearing and can listen for prey underneath the snow. When it hears the sound of animals moving underneath, it dives through the snow crust with its feet in order to grab its prey.

### Did you know?

- The great gray owl is able to break through snow crusts that are hard enough to support an 80-pound (36 kg) person. They can reach prey as deep as 1½ feet (45 cm) under the snow!
- Foxes use their ears to find prey under the snow too. When they hear something, they pounce, plunging their front paws, head, and upper body deep into the snow. To see a video of a fox hunting in the snow, visit [tinyurl.com/BannerFox](http://tinyurl.com/BannerFox).




## Under the Snow

A thick blanket of snow makes the world seem very peaceful and quiet. But just underneath is a whole other world of tiny scurrying feet. Warmth from the ground causes the snow directly above it to melt. That forms a sort of cave between the ground and the snow above. The temperature in this snow cave stays around 32°F (0°C) even when it is much colder outside, making it the perfect winter home for little animals like shrews, voles, and mice.



Rachel Lancashire is a nursery worker (plants not kids) and freelance writer with an educational background in wildlife. She attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Chrch in Selwyn, Ont.





# Reading the Bible with the Church Fathers

**W**HEN I WAS A CHILD, I lived in a house filled with books. Over 1,400 of them, to be precise—we counted them together one day.

At the spiritual center of our library dwelt that foremost book, the Bible. The one that spoke to all other experiences of reading. In a house full of books, you move through childhood with companions who speak to you from across a huge expanse of time and space and imagination and possibility. You never stop thinking or discovering.

So it happened that one day, during my early teens, I discovered a weighty tome of selections from the Church Fathers on the living room bookshelf. I had a very general idea that these were early Christians whose writings fell into the category of “church tradition,” which more or less made them Catholics. That meant Protestants were supposed to politely ignore them. But like all things Catholic, the Church Fathers radiated an aura of mystery that suggested there might be something vaguely

forbidden, yet not actually sinful, about reading them. So I spirited that volume off to my room. And thus began my first acquaintance with Augustine, among other theologians of the early church.

## An Unfolding Story

It wasn’t until I began my graduate studies in Old Testament, though, that I really started to comprehend the significance of these earlier interpreters. Only then did I realize that these brothers and sisters in Christ across the centuries had a lot more in common with me in how they approached the Bible than did my modern, secular academic peers. Modern methods of reading the biblical text often seek a single meaning that the historical author could have intended. They are designed to seek a historically accurate reading of the Bible as an ancient text. But what those methods couldn’t do was guide me toward the goal that had motivated my academic study of the Bible in the first place: figuring out how to use the Bible as nourishment

# Look at the *words* on a page in your Bible . . . and you may see them fairly squirm and dance with energy. *God speaking!*

for the Christian life in my own time and place. A single ancient meaning embedded in the past just wasn't going to cut it.

That was when I began to acknowledge a truth that Christian readers before the modern era had taken as a given—namely, that the Bible contains many texts that must have more than one “meaning” if they're going to mean anything for us. As theologian David Steinmetz urges, the church today needs to join previous generations in confessing that Scripture has multiple meanings in order to “recapture the various levels of significance in the unfolding story of creation and redemption.” To put it bluntly, neither Christians in the past nor the present have any reason to be reading the Old Testament if there's nothing in it for us! But as soon as we assert that this collection of ancient Israelite texts forms part of the plotline of a larger divine story of redemption that continues in the New Testament and into our own lives, then we've very much stepped outside the lines of reading the Old Testament as an “ancient text.”

## **Sola Scriptura and Dead Theologians**

Why did it take me so long to figure this out? Well, because my Christian formation—and quite possibly yours, as well—was driven by a good Reformed impulse that you probably know best by its Latin name: *sola Scriptura*. By this, Protestants generally mean, as John L. Thompson asks in *Reading the Bible with the Dead*, “Who would want to read the uninspired opinions of dead theologians when you could go straight to the inspired word of God and figure it out for yourself?” Thompson then describes, though, how he went on to become a professor of Reformed theology who spends a lot of time and energy reading those “dead theologians.”

What changed his mind about their value? Nothing more or less than being compelled by circumstances—or Providence—to actually read them. In doing so, he discovered two things that surprised him. First, he realized that we have much more in common with these earlier readers because of our shared Christian faith than we might expect. Many present-day Christian readers of Scripture miss this important point. We assume that we “just read” the Bible, failing to appreciate fully how our beliefs about God, his Word, and the world make the church's reading of Scripture different from any other way of reading. Our shared focus on God's ongoing work among his people across the overarching storyline of salvation forges a powerful bond between us and Christian readers of the past.

Thompson's second surprising discovery when he read these “dead theologians” was how relevant and illuminating their readings of Scripture turned out to be. Given their historical and cultural distance from our own situation, he had

assumed that their interpretations would seem dusty and outdated. Instead, he found that their writings offer contemporary Christian readers a fresh perspective on the Scriptures with insights that can escape us as we too read within our own limits of time and place.

Reading across the expanse of church history reminds us of God's faithfulness to the church across the ages: God has never stopped speaking to his people, and God's Word never becomes obsolete.

Okay, you might say, but didn't the Church Fathers read the Bible in a lot of weird, pie-in-the-sky ways? It's true—some of the things early interpreters say about the natural world or their historical context seem outdated. That's because like all human thought, theirs is historically conditioned. Some of the connections they draw between different texts within the Bible will seem fanciful to us.

## **Faithful Examples of How to Read Scripture**

But that shouldn't stop us from communing with our brothers and sisters across time. Tremendous spiritual benefits await us if we listen patiently and thoughtfully to their words, just as we benefit from the perspectives of other Christians around the globe today—both in spite of and because of our differences. What other Christian readings of the Bible, whether ancient or global, have to offer us is not new or different “information” about the text. Instead, they provide faithful examples from many times and places of how to read Scripture as Christians: namely, within the context of the Christian life, our eyes fixed on Christ.

Earlier Christian readers used the methods and reflected the assumptions of their own time and place. But they also excelled at seeking interpretations that continue to richly feed the church and shape the Christian life. When you think about it, that makes sense, because when Christians of any era approach the Bible, we don't expect to encounter just ancient words on a page. We expect someone to speak to us—namely, the Lord God of Israel, revealed in Jesus Christ and dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit.

Look at the words on a page in your Bible right after reading the sentence above, and you may see them fairly squirm and dance with energy. God speaking! Once you add in the element of God speaking to us, his church, through the Spirit of Christ, the living Word, you may be surprised that those words can stay anchored on the page at all. ■



**Rachel M. Billings** holds a Ph.D. in Old Testament from Harvard University and lives in Holland, Mich., with her husband, two busy children, and a gorgeous cat. In addition to writing and reading, she enjoys creative baking and archery.



## Listen Carefully

**AS IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE**, Christians have to decide whether or not particular music-listening choices bring us closer to being the person God has created us to be. These choices have become increasingly personal. We can each compile our own playlists, selecting from artists around the world, often without the knowledge of our family or community. Developing a personal method of music discernment and embedding helpful habits through practice equips us to engage with any music we encounter.

Discernment can be summarized as “the ability to judge well.” A key component of discernment is being curious

discerning how best to respond to the song going forward. In his book *Culture Making* (IVP), Andy Crouch identifies four different responses Christians traditionally have had toward culture. He argues that all of these responses could be appropriate, and it is our job to discern the best response to a particular cultural object. He cautions that the danger emerges when our responses become habit and we begin to see all culture through one of these responses. Our choices when listening to a song are:

**1. Condemn the song.** Don’t listen to it again because there is a lack of musical quality, a harmful artist intent, or our

of music that precedes them, shuffling various existing ideas into something creative and new.

**4. Consume the song.** Continue listening to it with little active discernment or thought. Enjoy the song without asking more questions.

Sometimes our beliefs, feelings, and context change. We may need to revisit the discernment process from time to time, potentially arriving at a different conclusion. Yet we all benefit from developing a personal method of music discernment, forming habits that help us decide whether particular music brings us closer to—or further away from—Jesus.



while delaying conclusions until we’ve spent time exploring the song and its impact on us. There is no formula for this process, but here are some things I consider as I attempt to understand a song better.

**Emotion:** How does the song make me feel? How do my emotions change while I’m listening to the song?

**Impact:** What do I still remember after the song has finished playing? What ideas or words are impacting me the most?

**Intent:** What was the artist trying to accomplish by creating this song? What response is he or she hoping for from the listener?

**Interpretation:** What does the song mean to me? How do my experiences shape this interpretation?

Once we have spent time curiously exploring the song, we can weigh it alongside our beliefs, feelings, and context,

response to the song is taking us further away from Jesus.

**2. Critique the song.** Actively listen to it again to learn about Jesus or the world. Even if we disagree with the mood or message, songs may still be able to teach us about the emotions and perspectives of others.

**3. Copy the song.** Musicians can go beyond listening by creating similar work. Identify specific aspects of it to copy in a more overtly Christian song. This usually means imitating the music and adding words that have more spiritual and Christian themes. The church has received criticism for doing a poor job of this response with many citing cultural appropriation or blatant plagiarism. However, there are many instances where Christians have creatively imitated music to be more overtly Christian, in ways similar to all musicians who borrow from the canon

We do not have to learn the habits of discernment in isolation. Two books provide helpful frameworks for Christian discernment; the aforementioned *Culture Making* by Andy Crouch and *Creation Regained* (Eerdmans) by Al Wolters. Also, Calvin College will be hosting their excellent Festival of Faith and Music on March 30-April 1, 2017. The Festival is filled with helpful resources and discerning conversations. ■



**Micah van Dijk** works at Redeemer University College, planning students events that facilitate an engaged campus culture. He also speaks in classes and youth groups regarding faith and popular music; you can find out more at [www.micahvandijk.com](http://www.micahvandijk.com).



## Dheepan

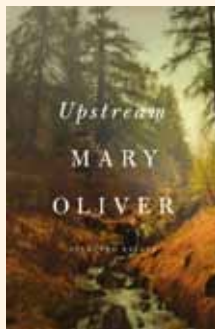
reviewed by **Jenny deGroot**

No longer able to bear more losses or the atrocities that he finds himself participating in, Dheepan wishes to flee Sri Lanka and seek asylum elsewhere. A challenge to watch, this film portrays both the desperation and hope that lead refugees to take great risks, as well as the cruel disappointment when the new country often doesn't deliver the community, culture, and security they need to begin a new life. The glimpse at a hopeful ending is a reminder that safety and a warm welcome are elusive but necessary, and we are called on to make them possible. (IFC)

## Upstream

by **Mary Oliver**  
reviewed by **Adele Gallogly**

Eighty-one-year-old Mary Oliver is widely acclaimed for her wise, lyrical poetry that presents life as a spiritual pilgrimage. Her latest book, a collection of essays, celebrates nature and literature as sources of hope and points to the power of quiet acts, such as taking a slow walk in the woods or spending hours with a book. *Upstream* is gorgeously written and tenderly curious. It captures a seasoned poet's devotion to "the beauty and the mystery of the world" and its remarkable ability to "redignify the worst stung heart."

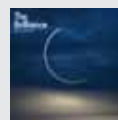


## Wish

by **Barbara O'Connor**  
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

Eleven-year-old Charlie Reese realizes that her family is "all broken and scattered every which way." Still, she's not happy that she's been sent away from home. Aunt Bertha and Uncle Gus, her new friend Howard and his family, and a stray dog show her a new way of life, one in which authentic love is unconditional. In this warm, appealing novel, middle school readers will enter a world where Christianity and church life play a significant role in people's lives, and where most adults love children and provide a stable environment in which they can thrive. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

## THE LOWDOWN



**Find This:** Worship team David Gungor and John Arndt, also known as The Brilliance, offer up a new album called *All Is Not Lost* this month. (Integrity)



**It's No Secret:** The folks at *Masterpiece* know you love your British costume dramas; look for the eight-part miniseries *Victoria* this month. (PBS)



**Write Right:** Christian writers, take note: editor Bob Hudson has updated his essential guide, *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style*. (Zondervan)



**Strong Words:** The story of Christian Columbine victim Rachel Joy Scott is told in the movie *I'm Not Ashamed*, available on DVD this month. (Universal)

## You Want It Darker

by **Leonard Cohen**  
reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**



Canadian singer/songwriter Leonard Cohen's hauntingly personal lyrics explored life and death's big themes. His final studio album, released three weeks before his death, feels like a sort of piously crafted last testament. Cohen goes to great lengths to set his lyrics to Jewish music. His gravelly, ravaged voice dominates the recording; like an Old Testament prophet descending the mountaintop, he wedges proclamations between eschaton and atonement. And like a modern psalmist, he calls out to God, asking why bad things happen to good people. An ode to Ecclesiastes, the record provides a soundtrack to Cohen's exit, leaving peripatetic advice for those of us left behind. (Columbia)

**MORE REVIEWS ONLINE**

# Step by Step: The Pilgrimage of Santiago

## “WHAT IS A PILGRIM?”

The nun didn't wait for a reply from the 90 people assembled for a blessing in Carrión de los Condes, Spain. She explained, “A pilgrim is someone who has a goal.” The nun followed up with another question and answer: “How do you reach your goal? Step by step.”

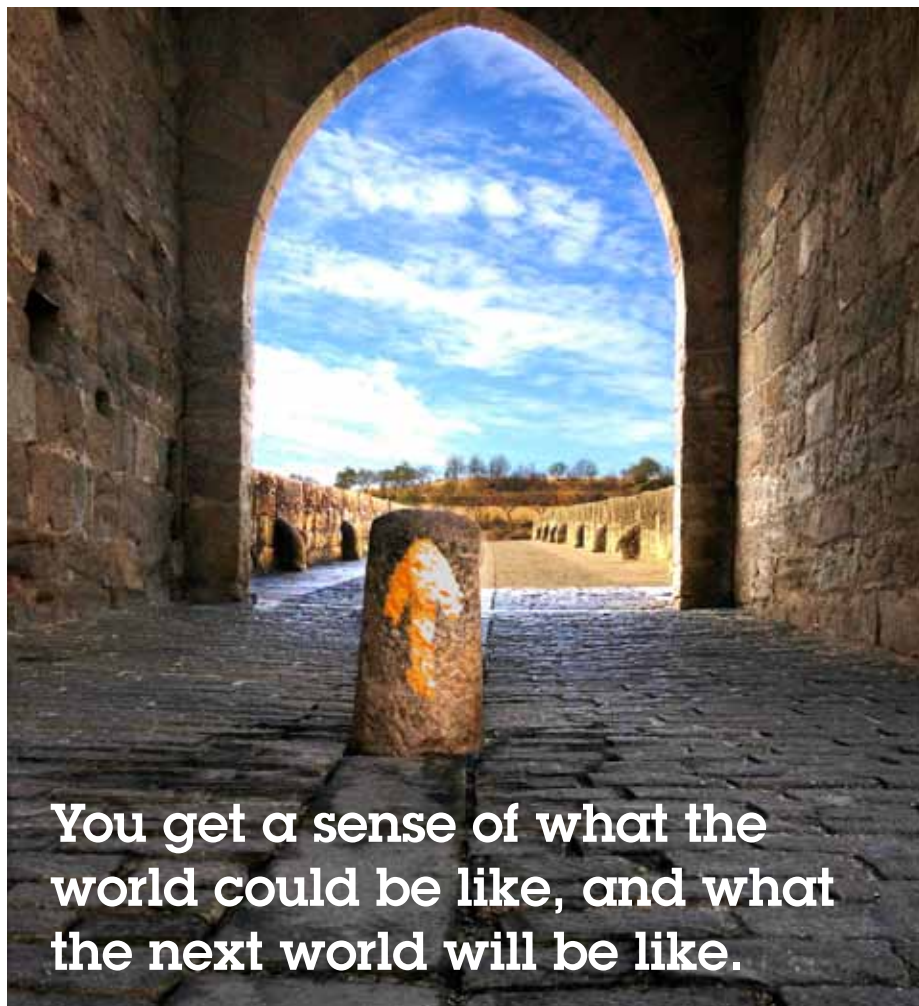
As I hiked El Camino de Santiago, “The Way of Saint James” or simply “The Camino,” in northern Spain with a group of students, the nun's words stuck with me. What does it mean to be a pilgrim in the 21st century? And what can a thousand-year-old pilgrimage like the Camino offer us today?

Pilgrims first started to walk to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in the 9th century when, according to tradition, the remains of the apostle James the Greater (brother of John) were discovered in a field. Pilgrimages on the Camino soon rivaled pilgrimages to Rome and Jerusalem.

A medieval pilgrim usually went to Santiago to receive forgiveness of sins—an indulgence—and so spend a shorter time in purgatory. These pilgrims started from home, wherever that may have been in Europe. Consequently, a web of trails developed across Europe, all converging on Santiago.

Today few pilgrims begin at home. Most take the Camino Francés, the “French Way,” which begins in France at Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, crosses over the Pyrenees, and continues across northern Spain for approximately 500 miles (800 km). Hiking on average 15 miles (24 km) each day, it takes about 33 days to complete the entire Camino Francés. The majority of pilgrims complete only a section of the Camino, usually the last 60 miles (100 km) needed to receive a *compostela*, a certificate of completion, in Santiago.

Few modern pilgrims hike the Camino to receive an indulgence. I discovered that those who hiked solely as tourists were



You get a sense of what the world could be like, and what the next world will be like.

PHOTO BY HANS JÖRG GROSS/FICKR

often disappointed, as the trail became a blur of long days, sore feet, and crowded hostels. Most often, fellow pilgrims told me they had chosen to do the Camino for religious or spiritual reasons—out of thanks, in memory of a loved one, or to find direction in life.

In that light, a contemporary pilgrim needs to begin with an openness to the profoundly spiritual experience the Camino offers. Here are some reasons you may want to set off on a pilgrimage to Santiago.

**Discover God's grandeur.** During our hike, I was often overwhelmed by the

beauty of the Spanish countryside. Rolling fields of wheat, rows of poppies, sunrises above blue and black mountain peaks. The path also took us through ancient villages and to cathedrals with glorious stained glass windows. Admittedly, the Camino also goes through some gloomy industrial areas and along dreary highways. Even in such desolate places I saw signs of life and beauty: wildflowers growing through concrete or a solitary snail persevering on the path.

**Learn to face discomfort.** The Camino's asphalt roads and gravel paths can be very hard on feet and joints. The intense



Spanish sun sometimes alternates with drenching rain. The *albergues*—pilgrim hostels—usually offer bunk beds in large dormitories where snoring echoes throughout the night. You may hike 15 miles easily one day but not feel so ready the next day, or the next. A pharmacist we consulted about blister care dispensed bandages, salve, and wisdom: “Suffering is part of the Camino.” In that sense, being a pilgrim on the Camino means confronting your physical limitations while building the hope and trust needed to complete the journey. After weeks on the trail, that life lesson is not easily forgotten.

**Enjoy community.** The Camino is an international community of hikers where acts of great generosity and kindness are not uncommon. In one *albergue*, a *hospitalero*—a Camino volunteer—spent hours cleaning and bandaging students’ blisters for free. In another, our hosts prepared a massive *paella* and joined tables together so we could share the meal, family-style, with pilgrims from across the world. Friendships develop as you travel from village to village and meet the same people, share stories, and discuss politics, religion, and sports. You get a sense of what the world could be like, and what the next world will be like.

**Embrace simplicity.** I loved the simple rhythms of each day: getting up with the sun, hiking until lunch, showering, washing my clothes by hand, taking a siesta, and then joining fellow pilgrims for a meal. My possessions were reduced to what I could carry in a small backpack. I had to depend on pilgrim hostels for lodging and food. The Camino allows you to focus on what is essential in life, and then reflect on how you live at home.

**Live like a pilgrim.** Hikers will greet each other on the trail with *Buen Camino*, literally, “Good path.” I heard the greeting so

### Practical Advice

*How fit do you need to be?* You should be able to walk at least 15 miles a day comfortably on varied terrain with a 20-pound (9 kg) backpack. That said, the Camino can be broken down into smaller segments. Many do the Camino in stages over several years or complete just the final 60 miles. My group only had time to do 300 of the total 500 miles. It is possible to have your luggage transported from town to town or to complete the Camino by bike or even on horseback. I recommend going on foot to experience the Camino fully.

*How much does it cost?* Once you have proper hiking gear and arrive in Europe, costs are quite low, especially if you stay in a hostel and can make some of your meals. Budget U.S. \$25-35 a day for lodging, meals, and a midmorning *café con leche*.

*Do I need to know Spanish?* While you can get by with English and hand gestures, basic Spanish is very helpful, as many hosts speak only Spanish. A solid knowledge of Spanish will deepen your connection with your hosts and with the many Spanish-speaking pilgrims. A knowledge of almost any foreign language is an asset as you interact with pilgrims from across the world.

#### Websites

Pilgrim societies in North America offer useful websites to prepare for the Camino:

- American Pilgrims on the Camino: [americanpilgrims.org](http://americanpilgrims.org)
- The Canadian Company of Pilgrims: [santiago.ca](http://santiago.ca)

Through these sites you may order a *credencial*, the pilgrim passport needed to stay in municipal and church-run hostels. Also available in Spain, the *credencial* is used to collect the *sellos*, stamps given by hostels and churches along the way to prove you have completed the Camino.

#### Films, Books, and an App

- “The Way,” Emilio Estevez’s moving film about a father hiking the Camino in memory of his son. Starring Estevez’s own father, Martin Sheen.
- “Walking the Camino. Six Ways to Santiago.” An informative documentary by Lydia B. Smith that profiles a very mixed group of pilgrims.
- Father Kevin A. Codd’s *To the Field of Stars. A Pilgrim’s Journey to Santiago de Compostela* provides an engaging and profound pilgrim’s memoir.
- John Brierley’s *A Pilgrim’s Guide to the Camino de Santiago: St. Jean-Roncevalles-Santiago* is the standard English-language guidebook.
- Smartphone users will love Camino Francés—A Wise Pilgrim Guide, an app that offers historical information, elevation maps, and the location of cafés, restaurants, *albergues*, and hotels.

often that it started to lose meaning. But when villagers began to wish me “Buen Camino,” I took the greeting to heart. With so much uncertain in life, being identified as a pilgrim was liberating. My job, education, salary, number of Facebook friends—all that didn’t matter. I was a pilgrim, someone with a clear goal.

Now that I’m back home, I realize I’m still a pilgrim—moving ahead day by day, step by step, in God’s care. ■



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

# Baptizing Babies

PHOTO BY PIXABAY.COM

We baptize babies because God, in covenant love, claims our children as his own.

## WHY DO WE BAPTIZE INFANTS?

In a way, that's a strange question. After all, infant baptism was the universal practice of the whole church until just the last few centuries. The two main Reformers, Luther and Calvin, vigorously defended it. But many Evangelical churches today say that baptism is only for believers.

We Reformed folks gladly baptize believers who come to faith in Christ, but we also baptize their infant children. We trace this practice back not only through church history, but, more important, to God's covenant with Abraham. God made a covenant with Abraham to make of him a great nation; through Abraham and his descendants, all the people of the world would be blessed.

The sign of that covenant was circumcision (Gen. 17). One of the important features of circumcision was that it was to be cut into the flesh of infant boys at eight days old. Children were included in the covenant of grace. God did not say to Abraham and Sarah, "I am making a covenant of grace with you, but we'll have to see about the kids." Instead God included their children and their children's children in that covenant.

Think of it this way. God made us as social beings, not just individuals. And

God chooses not only to work individual by individual but to work through the social networks of family and community God created. These circumcised children of the covenant learned from their earliest days that they belonged to God's covenant people. It was their identity.

To this, many of our Evangelical friends respond, "But that was the Old Covenant; we now live in the New Covenant. Now people must first come to faith in Christ and then be baptized. Isn't that what Peter said on Pentecost to that group of people from around the world who heard his stirring sermon? 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you,' (Acts 2:38). Faith and repentance must come before baptism."

But Peter didn't stop there. "For the promise"—that is, the covenant promise to Abraham—"is for you and for your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:39). In saying that, Peter was being a good Jew. He understood that the Old Covenant was not set aside in Christ; it was fulfilled. God still works through the ties of family and community.

And on it goes. Three times, with the conversion and baptism of Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian jailer, the book of Acts tell us that these new believers were

baptized *and their entire households with them*. To say that those households didn't necessarily include infants misses the point. Peter and Paul baptized entire households because they understood that the operational principles of the covenant apply to baptism, just as it did with circumcision.

We baptize babies because God, in covenant love, claims our children as his own. We do not raise our children in the vague hope that someday they will be converted and then become Christians. We nurture them with the identity that they have already been claimed by God in their baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We don't tell our children who they *could be* if they only believe, but who they *are*.

Of course, baptism, whether as an infant or adult, does not guarantee salvation. It demands that we ourselves claim in faith the identity God gives us in our baptism. That's why we invite young people to publicly profess their faith. It's their personal affirmation of the identity they already have in their baptism. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



**Leonard Vander Zee** is interim pastor at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich.

# ADS

**Deadlines:** Feb. issue is 1/3/2017; March issue is 2/7/2017. Details online.

**Prices:** Beginning January 2017, new rates will go into effect. Most ads are \$0.39<sup>US</sup> per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.32<sup>US</sup> per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

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## Denominational and Classical

### Calls Accepted

**REV. DREW SWEETMAN**, Spring Lake (MI) CRC, has accepted a call to First CRC - Fremont (MI).

### Eligible for Call

We are pleased to announce that **HENDRICK ROEDA** 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

### Financial Aid

**CLASSIS GRAND RAPIDS SOUTH** invites students from their Classis who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC (undergraduate or graduate level) and are in need of financial assistance for the academic year 2017-2018 to apply for a classical grant. Applications must be received prior to February 15, 2016. Please apply at [onefaithmanyfaces.org/leadership-development](http://onefaithmanyfaces.org/leadership-development). Contact Rev. Stephen DeWit with any questions at: [stephend@algerparkchurch.org](mailto:stephend@algerparkchurch.org) or call 616-452-9686.

**CLASSIS KALAMAZOO** The Student Aid Fund of Classis Kalamazoo, Michigan invites students from their classis who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC (undergraduate or graduate level) and are in need of financial aid for the 2017-2018 academic year to apply no later than March 31, 2017 by contacting Rev. Phil Kok at 9316 Oakland Dr., Portage, MI 49024 or [philkok@charter.net](mailto:philkok@charter.net). Undergraduate students must be at least in their junior year during 2017-2018. Students presently receiving aid must reapply.

### Meetings of Classis

**CLASSIS HEARTLAND** will meet in regular session at Calvary CRC, Orange City, Iowa, on Saturday, March 4, 2017. Agenda items must be submitted to the stated clerk no later than January 14, 2017. Rev. Robert Drenten, S. C.; 1405 Albany Ave NE; Orange City, IA 51041.

## Miscellaneous

**AZ SNOWBIRDS** Come worship with us at Maranatha Community CRC from Dec. thru mid-Apr. at 10:00 AM at Farnsworth Hall, 6159 University, Mesa, AZ. Pastor: Rev. Harry Weidenaar ??? Call John DeJager 920-344-1675

**MOLINE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL** Moline, MI - Celebrating 100 Years of Faithful Growing - Picnic June 3, 2017, 3-7 PM. [www.molinechrsc.org](http://www.molinechrsc.org). 616-877-4688; Facebook

## Birthdays

### 90th Birthday

**AL DEWIT** celebrated his 90th birthday on Dec. 21. Celebrating with him are his wife, Ann, children, Carol and Tom VanDenBosch, Dale and Jeanne, Diane and Vince Bonnema, 10 grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren. Al resides at 1900 S. Main Ave #114, Sioux Center, IA 51250.

**CONNIE RECKER** residing at Raybrook Manor, celebrated her 90th birthday on December 29. We are grateful to God for her love and wisdom over the years! Her six sons (Paul/Nancy, Bill/Linda, Ted/Eunice, Bob/Sandy, Tim/Judy, Mark/Dee) and their families celebrated the occasion with a gathering on December 31.

**MARGE WYNGARDEN** of 500 Parkside, Apt. 137, Zeeland, MI 49464 will be marking her 90th birthday on January 14. Celebrating with her will be her husband, Glenn, her children (Rob & Sally Petroelje and Doug & Sandy Holtrop), 14 grandchildren/spouses and 16 great-grandchildren. We praise God for His many blessings and faithfulness to her!

## MINISTRY TO AND WITH MILLENNIALS JUNE 12-16, 2017

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## Anniversaries

### 65th Anniversary

**VAN DYKE** Dr. Louis and Martena (Buys), Sioux Center, IA, celebrate 65 years of marriage on December 21. Children Steve (Vonnie), Alan (Cyndie), Joan (Terry), Mike (Lillian) and Wayne, 9 grandchildren and 13 great grandchildren thank God for his faithfulness and their loving example over the years.



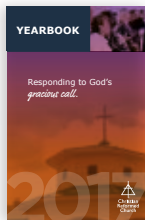
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### 60th Anniversary

**TIEN** Clarence and Bette of 931 W. 1100 Road, Prairie View, KS, 67664 celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on December 21, 2016. Children: Kelly and Jayne Tien and Jan and Dian Tien. They have been blessed with 6 grandchildren and their spouses and 4 great-grandchildren.

**ZEILSTRA** Charles and Carol (VanDrunen) of Oak Brook, Illinois, celebrated 60 years of marriage on October 26, 2016. Their children, Van/Lois Zeilstra, John/Lynn Beukema, Dave/Julie DeVries, and David/Dina Zeilstra, along with 13 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren join them in thanking God for their long and loving marriage!

### Obituaries

**BOSCH** Mary, age 91 of Grand Rapids, went home to be with her Lord on November 11, 2016. She was preceded in death by her husband,

Jacob; and is survived by her son, Larry Bosch; daughter and son-in-law, Joyce and Ron Ross; her 9 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren.

**DECKER** James (Jim) Decker, age 67, went to be home with his LORD November 27, 2016. 27 W 722 Hickory Lane, West Chicago, IL, 60185. Beloved husband of Linda, nee Post; loving father of Carrie (Tony) Fries and Jim (Carrie) Decker; dear son of the late Melvin and the late Jeanette, nee Vanderveld; devoted grandfather of Briana, Anthony, Caitlyn, Isabella, Connor, James, Jonah, and Jase; fond brother of Bob (Jan) Decker, Don Decker, and the late Melvin (Joanne) Decker; uncle of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Marianjoy Foundation, 26W171 Roosevelt Road, Wheaton, IL 60187, are appreciated.

**GRITTER** Kathleen (Doezema) age 85 of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Saturday, November 5, 2016. She is survived by her husband William (Bill); children, Kim (Thom) Sprick, Debra (Rick) Magrath, Bill (Betsy) Gritter, and Michael Gritter; 5 grandchildren; and 3 great grandchildren.

### Church Position Announcements

**PASTOR** Trinity CRC in Anchorage, Alaska has a unique opportunity for an experienced pastor who has a passion for God's Word and is blessed with a shepherd's heart. Position available beginning July, 2017. See the pastor search page at [www.trinitycralaska.com](http://www.trinitycralaska.com) for more information.

**DIRECTOR OF YOUTH & EDUCATION** Pease CRC, a large, rural church in central Minnesota, is hiring a full-time director of youth & education to oversee our growing youth programs and facilitate the educational programming for K-12. Preferred applicants should have training and/or experience in youth ministry or education. Call or email Trudy Ash for more information. [peasecra@frontiernet.net](mailto:peasecra@frontiernet.net). 320-369-4228

**LEAD PASTOR:** Cornerstone Christian Reformed Church of Chilliwack, in southern British Columbia, Canada, seeks the services of a full time lead pastor commencing in the summer of 2017. This pastor will help us grow into the next chapter of our ministry by dynamically proclaiming God's Word, by actively leading in the implementation of our ministry plan and by caring for the congregation and community. Please indicate your interest in this position to: [searchteam@cornerstonecra.ca](mailto:searchteam@cornerstonecra.ca)

**PASTOR** Rochester CRC: Our mid-sized western New York state congregation seeks a senior pastor for preaching, spiritual leadership

and pastoral care. We value strong preaching of the Word and seek someone who will challenge us to implement it in the culture around us. We have a strong desire for church growth and seek leadership to realize that vision in our community. Can you lead us as we face these challenges? To explore this opportunity with us, contact our Pastor Search Team at [Office@RochesterCRC.org](mailto:Office@RochesterCRC.org)

**DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP & YOUTH MI** Crossroads Christian Reformed Church in beautiful San Marcos, CA (25 miles north of San Diego), is seeking applications for a full time Director of Worship & Youth Ministries. Responsibilities include planning worship services, leading the congregation in singing and praise, and leading the high school and middle school youth groups. For a complete job description and application e-mail: [worship@crossroadsccr.com](mailto:worship@crossroadsccr.com)

**PASTOR** Crossroads CRC in beautiful north San Diego County is seeking a full time pastor who is a collaborative leader with a passion for worship, discipleship and outreach. The pastor's leadership gifts and ability to preach the Word will bring glory to God and build up the church. For more information, please contact [searchteam@crossroadsccr.com](mailto:searchteam@crossroadsccr.com).

**PASTOR:** Full time Pastor, Faith Reformed Church (RCA), Brookings SD. Active congregation in a dynamic community. Contact: Search Committee at [wragelj@gmail.com](mailto:wragelj@gmail.com)

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**GROENEVELD** Edith, age 92, passed away peacefully at Christian Care Nursing Facility on November 7, 2016. She married Sid Groeneveld on October 5, 1945 who preceded her in death in 1992. In June of 2016 her loving daughter, Joyce Sherburn also preceded her in death. SURVIVORS include two children, Jack (Sharon Sikkenga) Groeneveld, Esther (Roger) Brown and son-in-law, Ken Sherburn. She had four grandchildren, Matthew Groeneveld, Andrew (Rochelle Gerten) Groeneveld, Tim (Lisa Breuker) Groeneveld, Kim Griffin and great-grandchildren, Makenna, Addyson, Violet Groeneveld and Lilly, Gavin and Korbin Griffin. Edith and Sid moved to Grand Rapids in 1970 where Sid accepted a job in maintenance at Calvin College. In 1980 they became the host and hostess of Calvin College Manor House and thoroughly enjoyed entertaining guests of Calvin from many parts of the world. After retirement they travelled and volunteered for many ministries of the Fuller Avenue Church. In 1995, Edith moved to a duplex on Burton and in 2011, she moved to an apartment in Muskegon to be closer to Joyce and Ken. After a fall in 2013, she lost mobility and eventually moved to Christian Care. Memorials to Marketplace Ministries; 3351 Claystone St. SE Ste G16, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

**HAACK** Charles Fredrick William, age 88, went to be home with His LORD on November 8th, 2016, 21W071 Kensington Rd, Lombard, IL 60148. Beloved husband of Mildred Jean, nee Tinkenberg; dear son of the late Herbert and Wilhelmina Haack; loving father of Mary (Steve) Puchalski, Kurt (Tracy) Haack, Annie DeYoung (Bill Smith), Jon Haack, and Richard (Heidi) Haack; devoted grandfather of 9; great-grandfather of 6. Memorials to Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church community outreach ministries, 1300 S. Harvey Ave, Berwyn, IL 60402 or Timothy Christian Schools, 188 W. Butterfield Rd, Elmhurst, IL 60126.

**LAPPINGA** Harold Henry age 98, of Ontario, CA, died October 27, 2016 at his home in Inland Christian Home, surrounded by his family. Psalm 121

**MUHLENA, EVELYN (MULDER) VAN KAMPEN**, 81, of Palos Park, IL and Estero, FL was safe in the arms of Jesus on November 11, 2016. Her husband of 17 years, Peter Van Kampen, preceded her in death. In 1981 she married Hilrich "Hil" Muhlena. They had 35 happy years together. Evelyn is survived by her loving husband Hil, devoted daughters Barbara Van Kampen (Russ Snella), Ruth (the late Charles) Sherwood, and Janet (Dave) Ellison, and four stepchildren. Evelyn was also blessed with ten grandchildren and one great granddaughter.

**OPHOFF**, Dr. Arthur C. aged 92, of Bend, OR, formerly of Grand Rapids, passed away into the fullness of eternal life with his Lord and Savior

on Saturday, November 5, 2016. He is survived by his devoted wife of nearly 7 years, Beverly; children Daniel (Patricia) Ophoff, Ruth (Ross) Kladder, Arthur C (Karen) Ophoff, and Steven Ophoff; Paul and Debi, his stepchildren; 11 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. Art is also survived by a sister, Ardis (Don) Estell, a brother-in-law, and two sisters-in-law. Art was predeceased by his wife Jean in Oct., 2006, after over 60 years of marriage. Well done, good and faithful servant.



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**PETERS** Nancy, age 84 of Grand Rapids MI, passed away Saturday, November 12, 2016. She was preceded in death by her husband Leo Peters, daughter Brenda, and by grandson Peter Mandeville. She is survived by her children Martha and Warren Van Genderen, Linda and James Kok, Di and Duncan MacQuarrie, Barb and Lane Dorcy, San and Mark Spee, Mark and Sara Peters, Andrea and Adam Blickley, Theresa and Glenn Mandeville; 26 grandchildren; 25 great grandchildren; and by brother Scott and Marty Wallace.

**SLAGTER** Anna Geraldine (Gerry) (Rypma) 83; November 2, 2016; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Gerry is survived by her sons and their families: John Slagter & Darren Walhof; Robert & Julie Slagter (Nathan & Melody, Christine, Kelsey, Ryan); Brian & Cindy Slagter (Rachel & Joshua Vandergrift, Brittany Delks, Jessica, James, Alleya); and Gregory Slagter. She is also survived by 13 great-grandchildren; her brothers Don & Jeanne Rypma and Rich & Tena Hamming; stepsister Joanne & Chris Sonneveldt. She was preceded in death by her husband Cornelius iBobi Slagter; her father Harm Rypma; mother Anne (Van Spronsen) Faber; stepfather Dick Hamming; stepfather Rev. Morris Faber; father-in-law John Slagter; mother-in-law Etta Slagter; and sister-in-law Lucille Vander Velde.

**VAN BEEK** Myrna, of Grandville, MI left this earth for her heavenly home on August 30, 2016. Myrna served God faithfully for 50 years as a Christian educator. She loved teaching, always encouraging her students to use their talents to glorify God. Myrna is survived by her sister, Lois, of Bradenton, Florida. She was preceded in death by her parents, Art and Jeanette Van Beek, her brother, Gilmer, and sister, Joyce Elaine. Those wishing to honor Myrna's memory are invited to send contributions to Jenison Christian School in Jenison, MI, or Bradenton Christian School in Bradenton, FL.

**VAN HALSEMA** Thea B. died on Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2016. She was preceded in death by her husband Dr. Dick Van Halsema, sister June Bouma Bangma, son David Van Halsema and granddaughter Dana Van Halsema. She is survived by her children Nancy Tess Van Halsema Lindholm, Clark Van Halsema, Emily Amahl Van Halsema and Dick van Halsema,

Jr.; her grandchildren Thea Van Halsema Brophy; Ian and Toby Van Halsema; Luke and Anna Lindholm; and Leah, Emma, Elizabeth and Holly van Halsema; and great-grandchildren are Max Loughin, Vivian Van Halsema, Rhys Brophy and Harrison Brophy.

**VAN HARMELEN**, Maarten Hendrik, age 77, after a brief illness, passed away peacefully on November 15, 2016 in Oshawa, Ontario with family by his side. Beloved husband of Wilma for 55 years. Loving Dad of Peter (Rachel) of Halifax, Nova Scotia and Bert (Glenda) of Oshawa, Ontario. Loving Opa to Erin, Marissa, Annalies, Andrew, Christopher and Ashleigh. Dear brother of Egbert (Nel) of Lelystad, the Netherlands. Psalm 121 Correspondence address: 408 Simcoe St. N. Oshawa, ON Canada L1G 4T6.

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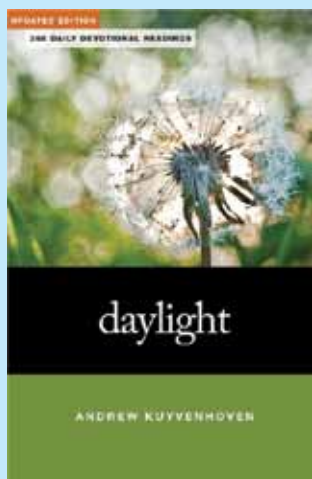
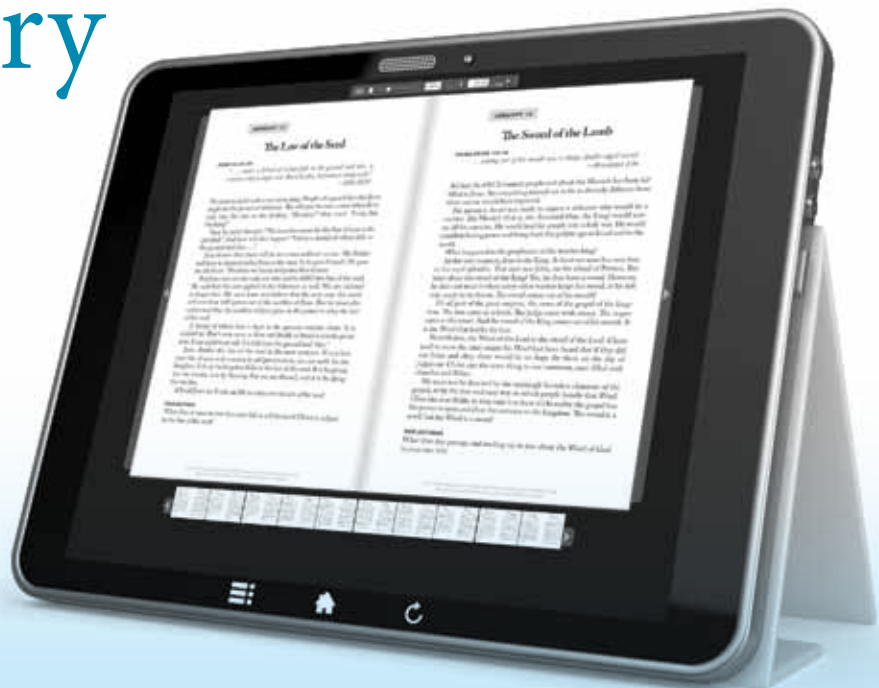


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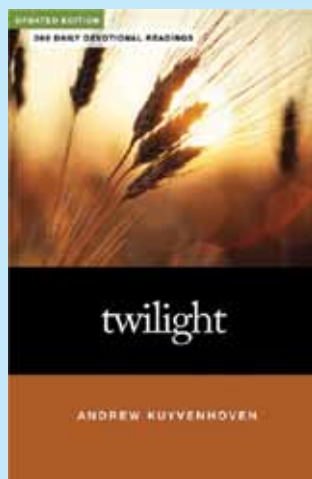
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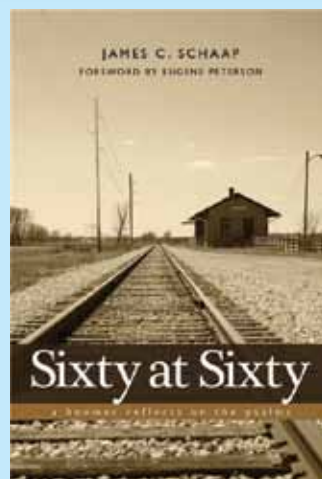
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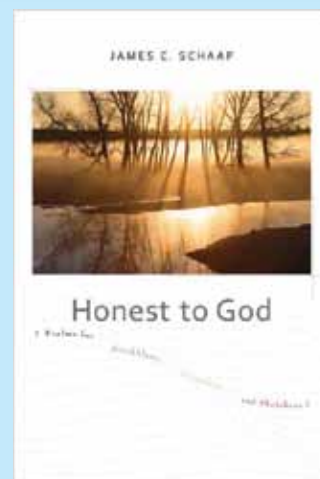
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**Foundation**

## Punch Lines

What has made *you* smile lately? Got a joke or funny incident you'd care to share with your wider church family? Please send it to *The Banner* at 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407; or email it to [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org). Thanks!

**W**hen my older brother called me on my 59th birthday, I said for once I was pleased to be younger than him, for he had always been first with the two-wheeled bicycle, then the car, then graduating from high school, and so on. But now he was in his 60s and I was not.

He thought for a moment and then responded, "You can always look to me like the canary in a coal mine!"

—John Janssens

**I**t was Easter Sunday and we had just finished watching the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. It ended with the Great Commission. Our 5-year-old grandson, Matthew, turned to his mother and exclaimed, "Isn't that great? Someone should write it down!"

—Ralph Slager

**I** don't usually laugh out loud when reading death notices in the newspaper, but I did when I read the following sentence in the *Holland Sentinel* about a Michigan woman who died in her mid-80s: "She fought the good fight, she finished the race, and is now wearing her crown of riotousness."

—Judy Parr

**D**uring communion, my then 5-year-old son asked me, "Mama, what is that red stuff?" I responded, "This is the blood of Jesus." He gave me a puzzled look. Shortly after the pastor blessed the wine, I partook. My son blurted out, "You drank Jesus' blood? Yuck!"

—Caroline Gitau

**I** was entertaining two of my great-granddaughters. They decided to play "store," so I got a bunch of odds and ends together that they could purchase. I gave each of them a billfold and was giving each some money, when Kacie piped up, "Oh, we don't need any money. We just need a card!"

—Leona Noteboom

**A** Sunday school class was studying the Ten Commandments. They were ready to discuss the last one. The teacher asked if anyone could tell her what it was.

Susie raised her hand, stood tall, and quoted, "Thou shalt not take the covers off thy neighbor's wife."

—Clarence A. Wildeboer

**W**hile shopping with my almost-4-year-old granddaughter, I was in the fitting room of a store with her in her stroller beside me. Looking at the blouse I was trying on, I said aloud—more to myself than to her—"I don't think Nanny is going to buy this blouse because the armholes are too big." To which she responded, "Wait until you grow up, then you'll fit into it!"

—Hennie Vanderveer

**T**he shoemaker did not deny his apprentice anything he needed. He gave him his awl.

—Ralph VanderKoooy

**I** was reading a nightly devotional to my son, Sam. The verse was Philippians 2:14: "Do everything without complaining or arguing." Right after I read the verse, he said, "Mom, that is not the verse for me tonight!"

—Jennifer J. Schoenherr

**W**hen I went to get my driver's license renewed, our local motor-vehicle bureau was packed. The line inched along for almost an hour until the man ahead of me finally got his license. He inspected his photo for a moment and then commented to the clerk, "I was standing in line so long, I ended up looking pretty grouchy in the picture."

The clerk looked at the man's photo closely. "That's OK," she assured the man. "That's how you're going to look when the cops pull you over anyway!"

—D. Gebben



"I've reviewed your performance, Henderson. And I think it's time we tossed you a bone."



# CALVIN COLLEGE PRESENTS

# 30<sup>th</sup> the January Series

Listen | Learn | Discern | 2017

Covenant Fine Arts Center  
12:30 to 1:30 p.m. EST  
**free admission**

## 4 Wednesday

**KARIN MAAQ**  
500 Years Later: Why the Reformation Still Matters  
*Underwritten by I.C.N. Foundation*

## 5 Thursday

**MATTHEW DESMOND**  
Poverty and Profit in the American City  
*Underwritten by Howard Miller Company and Miller Johnson*

## 6 Friday

**MARK CHARLES**  
Race, Trauma and the Doctrine of Discovery  
*Underwritten by Friends of the January Series*

## 9 Monday

**RESHMA SAUJANI**  
Closing the Gender Gap in Technology  
*Underwritten by Jeff & Shirley Hoogstra*

## 10 Tuesday

**ABRAHAM NUSSBAUM**  
Tinkering in Today's Healthcare Factories: Pursuing the Renewal of Medicine  
*Underwritten by John & Mary Loeks and Holland Home*

## 11 Wednesday

**GARY HAUGEN**  
Until All Are Free: A Look at Slavery Today and the Church's Invitation to End It  
*Underwritten by Barnes & Thornburg, LLP and the Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics*

## 12 Thursday

**JUSTIN SKEESUCK & PATRICK GRAY**  
I'll Push You: A Story of Radical Friendship, Overcoming Challenges and the Power of Community  
*Underwritten by GMB Architects + Engineers and the Richard & Helen De Vos Foundation*

## 13 Friday

**TODD HUIZINGA**  
The EU and Global Governance  
*Underwritten by Calvin Academy for Lifelong Learning*

## 16 Monday

**LISA SHARON HARPER**  
in celebration of MLK day  
The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right  
*Underwritten by Friends of the January Series*

## 17 Tuesday

**DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN**  
How Did We Get Here? A Historical Perspective on Our Wild 2016 Election  
*Underwritten by Meijer, Inc., the Peter C. & Emajeane Cook Foundation and the Center for Excellence in Preaching*

## 18 Wednesday

**EUGENE CHO**  
Overrated: Are We More in Love with the Idea of Changing the World than Actually Changing the World?  
*Underwritten by World Renew*

## 19 Thursday

**TAYLOR DAVIS IN CONCERT**  
*Underwritten by Holland Litho Printing Services*

## 20 Friday

**BRYAN DIK**  
How to Find and Live Your Calling: Lessons from the Psychology of Vocation  
*Underwritten by Bruce & Mary Okkema and the Calvin Center for Innovation in Business*

## 23 Monday

**JEREMY COURTNEY**  
The World is a Scary Place, Love Anyway  
*Underwritten by Howard Miller Company, Garry & Pat Ringnalda and Samaritas*

## 24 Tuesday

**N.T. WRIGHT**  
The Royal Revolution: Fresh Perspectives on the Cross  
*Underwritten by The Stob Lecture Series*



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