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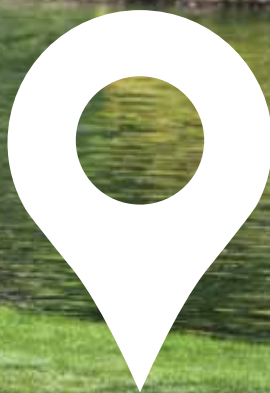
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Picking up the Chalk

Ronald J. Nydam, who lives in Denver CO, is Professor of Pastoral Care Emeritus, Calvin Theological Seminary.

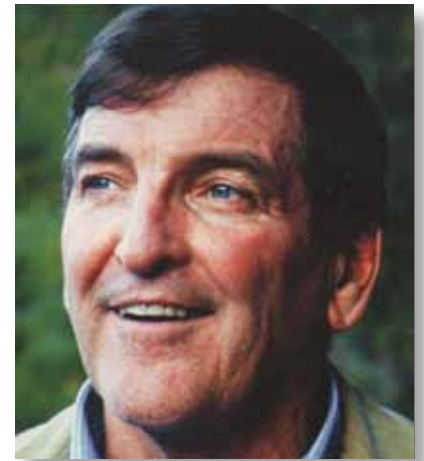
Deadly quiet washed over the classroom when I slowly bent over, pushing my partially paralyzed hand toward the carpet to pick up the chalk that had fallen from my partially paralyzed fingers. I wondered how students were experiencing my new physical limitations and my awkward embarrassment at, once again, dropping something.

At age 65, I was scrambling to make my last year of teaching a good one, despite the beating that I had taken from two rounds of acute leukemia and brachial neuritis, caused by an infection which destroyed about 65% of the nerves in both arms and hands. I had joined the ranks of persons with disabilities.

Up until about age 58 I had lived a charmed life. Health and well-being were excellent for my wife and me and for our three sons. All three sons married great women; eight grandchildren were growing up before us. As a teacher since age 49, I had enjoyed every minute of the classroom conversation with seminary students who were looking towards pastoral ministry in its many forms. The magic of the classroom, the delight of learning and teaching, blessed me daily.

But now, after nearly a year of hospitalization and recovery that included a stem cell transplant, I was back in the classroom being restored and sometimes pastored by my students. They were the ones praying for me; the role reversal in terms of caring was both powerful and embarrassing. I struggled to admit to myself that I needed help from others and wondered how my disability affected my students.

As I look back, I can see one way whereby my personal disability enhanced learning in the classroom. In experiencing my obvious neediness, they had to engage in self-examination as the chalk lay on the floor. For some, I would guess, the impulse to help—to run up and pick it up for me—was quite real. We like to be fixers in troubled situations. Others, perhaps, were paralyzed by indecision. Still others may have tasted a simple moment of empathy when these pastors-in-formation wondered what the suffering of another child of God was like.



As persons, and certainly as students of pastoral care, each was challenged to walk in the shoes of another and, with the gifts of curiosity and hospitality, learn by way of experience what it is like to enter the life of another, to engage human suffering. Jesus did that. The Scriptures tell us that “because he was God, he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” My disability gave my students the opportunity to be Jesus Christ to me.

More Online

Thanks for reading this special *Banner* edition of *Breaking Barriers*. Find more articles in this issue about **Pastors with a Disability** at www.crcna.org/breakingbarriers. Upcoming themes include **Learning from Children with Disabilities** and **Having Employees with Disabilities**. Subscribe to the electronic edition of *Breaking Barriers* at www.crcna.org/disability.

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‘Best Newsletter’ in 2016

For a second straight year, the Associated Church Press (ACP) named *Breaking Barriers* the best newsletter in its class in 2016. The ACP judge wrote, “The writing and editing, topics covered, and format and design well complement each other, resulting in a reader-friendly publication that provides broad coverage of disability and God’s work in the midst of those issues. Each issue has a high ‘pass along’ (print or electronic) value because of the useful, informational, and inspirational content.” ACP honored *Breaking Barriers* with two other awards as well.

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THANK YOU to everyone who donated to *The Banner's* annual donation campaign. We have a record number of donors this year, more than in any of the past ten years, and donations are still coming in! You can still donate. Your gift is tax-deductible as allowed by law.



Cover: Synod delegates take a moment to pray.

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Dear Christian Reformed Church Members,

Imagine the good news of Jesus resonating across the globe – this is the vision behind the name for our denomination’s new mission agency approved by Synod 2017: **Resonate Global Mission**. For over 100 years we’ve been known in this denomination as two separate entities, Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions. As we join to become one agency, we wanted to tell you how and why we chose the name Resonate Global Mission.

Before identifying any potential names, we conducted a survey of a large and diverse group of Christian Reformed people to ask what characteristics were most desired in their new mission agency. Three key features were identified by the church community: *courageous*, *resourceful*, and *innovative*. The name and habits of the new mission agency would need to reflect these three descriptions.

We’ve learned many things on this long and fascinating journey of uniting two agencies. We discovered that selecting a new name for a new organization is difficult. Letting go of names that represent the agencies we have loved for over 100 years is hard. We also learned that easiest is not always best. Originally, we thought we could make this process short and sweet by using the name “Christian Reformed Global Missions.” But this seemingly simple solution did not work for a number of reasons including our inability to protect the name in Canadian patent court, security for some of our missionaries, and its failure to reflect the three key characteristics discovered in the church survey.

Many other names were suggested, tested, and evaluated during the long process, but with careful

thought and continual prayer for discernment, the final candidate for our new identity was presented:

Resonate Global Mission

Engaging People. Embracing Christ.

A ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.

To be honest, we both needed some time to reflect on the new name before accepting it. It is so different and unfamiliar to those who have been engaged in the ministries of Home Missions and World Missions for many years. But through times of prayer and reflecting on how the name exhibits the visual impact of a resonating message going out into the world, we began to see the benefits of a name that inspires action.

We also noticed that the concepts of resonating and amplifying are embedded in Scripture and in our Reformed theology. From God’s decision in Genesis 12 to make Abraham an amplifier of His blessing to all nations, to the many verses that describe the reverberating sound of creation declaring God’s sovereignty and glory in the world, to those very directive missional texts like Matthew 28, Acts 1, and Romans 10, God’s word calls His people to resonate the message of grace into our communities and around the world.

We are excited about the future of **Resonate Global Mission!** We were honored to present the name before the delegates of Synod 2017 and encouraged by their endorsement and the creative ideas they shared. Resonate staff are now carrying out a transition strategy that will include using the old and new names side-by-side as everyone gets used to the change. Please feel free to contact the Resonate staff if you have any questions.

Serving with you in ministry,

Joy Engelsman
President
New Mission Agency Board, US

Carel Geleynse
President
New Mission Agency Board, Canada

Let Justice Roll

HAPPY INDEPENDENCE DAY AND HAPPY CANADA DAY! This year, Canada celebrates its 150th anniversary of confederation. In the midst of celebrating anniversaries, Christians are also called to reflect on the injustices of the past and strive for a better future.

The theme of justice also loomed large at Synod 2017 (see p. 16). We all affirm and want to do justice, but we do not agree on how and when. As I listened to the debates at synod, I discerned at least three underlying questions: *What is justice from a biblical perspective? How does justice relate to gospel proclamation? Is justice the work of the institutional church or only of individual Christians?* In future editorials, I hope to explore the two latter questions.

For now, let's take a look at how the Bible defines justice.

Our common secular concept of justice can be captured by the image of Lady Justice, a Greco-Roman goddess blindfolded and holding balanced scales. Justice is blind—showing no partiality—and is concerned with fairness and equality. Although these are important themes, the biblical view of justice is bigger.

The prophet Amos instead portrays justice as a river: “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24). Notice the two words that seem synonymous: *justice* and *righteousness*. In the original Hebrew, justice is *mishpat* and righteousness is *tzedakah*. However, *tzedakah* means more than personal moral righteousness; it also means justice.

In his book *The Dignity of Difference*, chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains, “The two words, *tzedakah* and *mishpat*, signify different forms of justice. *Mishpat* means retributive justice or the rule of law. . . . *Tzedakah*, by contrast, refers to . . . what is often called ‘social justice,’ meaning . . . that those who have more than they need must share some of that surplus with those who have less.”

We can say that the biblical river of justice has two banks: *mishpat* and *tzedakah*. And they are often emphasized together (Gen. 18:18; Hosea 2:19; Jer. 22:15), which is somewhat obscured by our English translations of *tzedakah* as *right* or *righteousness*.

Rabbi Sacks also points out that *tzedakah* combines in a single word both charity and justice. Hence, when Micah 6:8 calls us to do justice (*mishpat*) and love mercy (*hesed*), the two combined imply *tzedakah*, that is, justice and compassion. The biblical worldview holds these two together in a way that our common Western mindset does not. This may explain why God, on one hand, shows no partiality but, on the other hand, favors the poor and marginalized because his compassion turns his attention to their plight.

Finally, the river of God's justice always flows toward God's *shalom*. *Shalom* can be understood as all relationships—with God, with people, and with creation—in harmony, resulting in life flourishing. Biblical justice, therefore, is not simply about preserving law and order. Its goal is to restore relationships and foster life. But unlike secular social justice, we do not rely on the state or on human efforts, but on God's covenantal ways to achieve it. ■

We can say that
the biblical river
of justice has two
banks.



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On the Road to Killarney

THE GIRL sitting at the front of the bus had gotten sick all over the sidewalk just before boarding. I moved to a seat as far back as possible and slumped against the window. Just what I needed—someone to get sick on the bus and turn this long day into an even longer one.

I shouldn't have been complaining. I was, after all, traveling in Ireland, seeing new sights, exploring new places. I should have been acknowledging how fortunate I was, should have been living into each moment with gusto and joy.

But after a week of walking in a foolishly chosen pair of turquoise strappy sandals, my feet and back ached. My plans to see the Cliffs of Moher had been thwarted by fog and a Galway Horse Race-induced bus delay. I'd been on this bus for six hours, staring at nothing but rain. Then I stared at rain out the window of the Limerick bus station for an hour and a half. And now I was in for another two

hours on the bus to Killarney with a girl who might upchuck at any moment. After three months of travel I was homesick. I was lonely. I was tired.

I put on my headphones and leaned my head against the window, sulking as the bus headed southwest on N21. I closed my eyes and sighed.

Somewhere between Templeglantine and Knocknageshel, I opened my eyes and the world had changed. We had turned a corner around a hill, and the sun had turned a corner around a cloud. Shadows danced over bright green valleys dotted with pines and colorful houses. Mountains, grey and blue, seemed to encircle and envelop us in arms of safety. In the distance, you could sense the sea. Exactly at that moment, the music through my headphones turned to a bagpipe declaration so familiar: "Amazing Grace." I chuckled, blinking back tears. Well played, God. And I gave thanks for the moment.

Our God is a God of moments, I've noticed. That one little sign that God is

still with us, and God is still good, and God is still God. I've thought about moments like these often in the last few years. The papers pile up and the bookshelf sags a bit more and the hoops to jump through to finish this degree and to candidate and to find a job seem to stretch out endlessly.

But there's always a moment. Amid the weariness and frustration and never-ending hoop-jumping, God bursts onto the scene in sunlight and birds nesting and friends smiling. And God says, "Look! See! See the beauty of the earth, the wonder of creation, the joy of the Father. Look beyond your present and rest in the care of the Creator. I am the God of mountains and dancing sunbeams and the sea, and I will bless you." ■



Laura de Jong is a recent graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary. She grew up in St. Catharines, Ont., as a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC, and now resides in West Michigan.

Somewhere between Templeglantine and Knocknageshel, I opened my eyes and the world had changed.

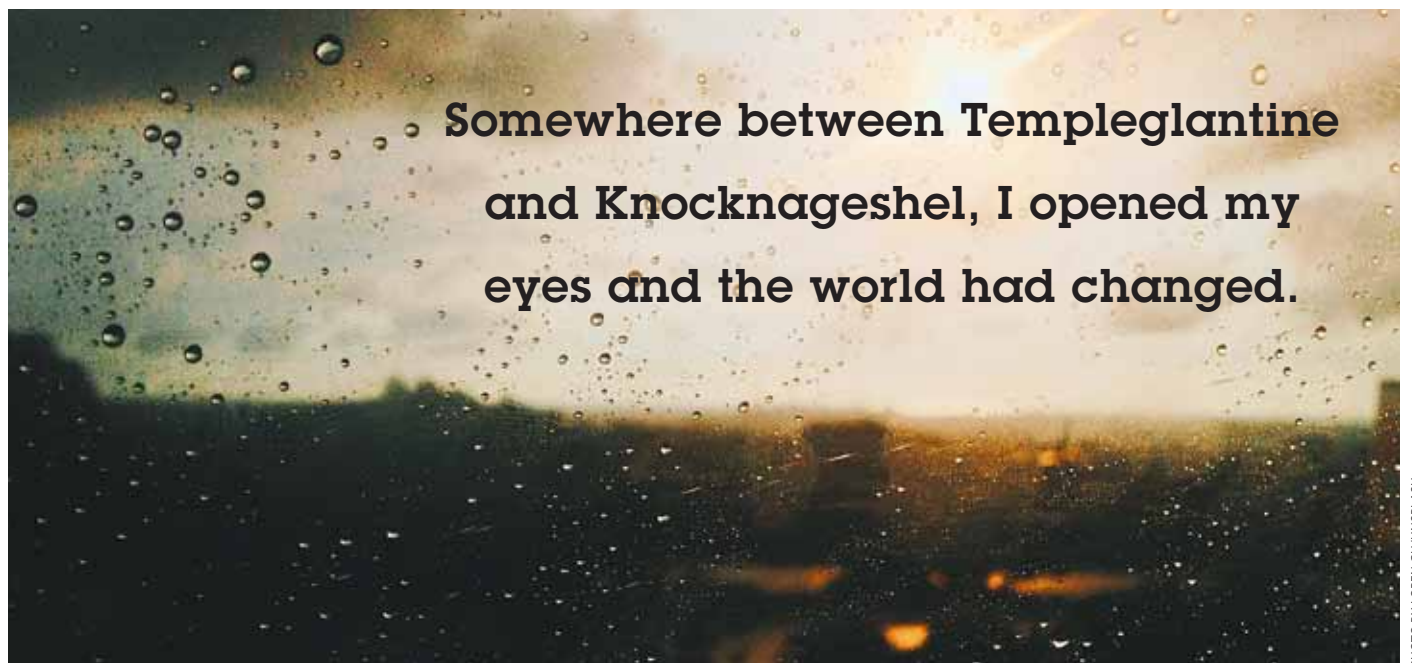


PHOTO BY LOREN GU/UNSPLASH

Loving God More Than Blessings

A FEW YEARS AGO I traveled to India with a group from my seminary. During the 10-day journey, we visited a number of Hindu temples. In one temple I stayed behind to watch a young man pay devotion to a god cast in stone. With a coordinated display of ear tugging, hand clasping, and multiple dips at the knee, he prayed to the deity. As I hastily rejoined the group, I found myself thinking about the man in the Bible named Job.

Although separated by thousands of years, Job was something like that young man in the temple. Both tried to appease the gods with rituals in exchange for showers of good fortune. In the first few pages of the book of Job, we discover a man who seems to do everything right. He is blameless and upright. He offers sacrifices to God on behalf of his children's unwitting sins. Everything seems to be going well. Job is wealthy and healthy, and so are his children. The sacrifices appear to be working as the blessings come pouring down.

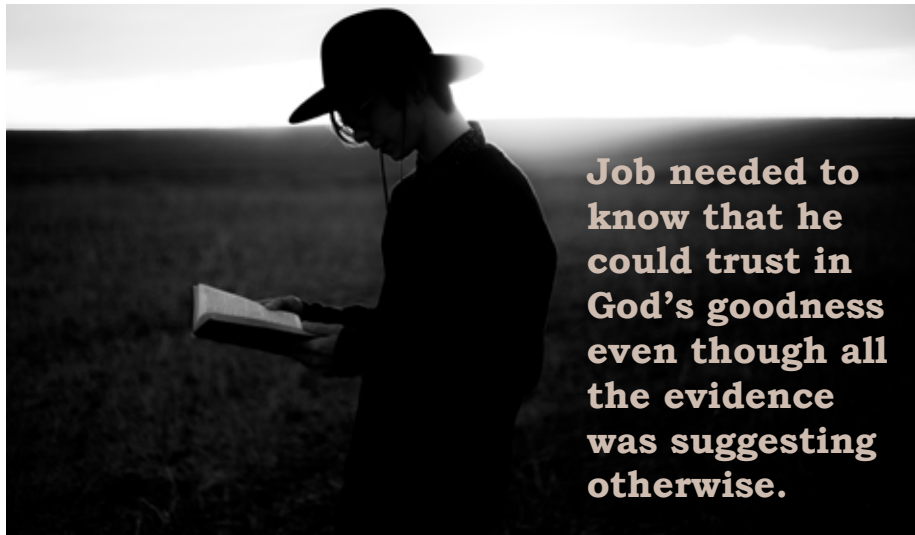
But then something happens.

Job gets sick.

Job is in pain.

Job suffers.

Job is confused, frustrated, and angry. He turns toward heaven and hurls questions at God about why his suffering is so great. God hears—and answers with a series of his own questions. God's questions are a surgical instrument with which God skillfully operates on Job's superstitious and formulaic heart. Question after question, God undertakes a very risky procedure: a heart transplant with a new “for nothing” kind of love. Mysteriously, God seems to do this by walking with Job into and through suffering.



Job needed to know that he could trust in God's goodness even though all the evidence was suggesting otherwise.

PHOTO BY PRISCILLA DU PREEZ/UNSPLASH

Ultimately, Job didn't need an answer to why his suffering was so great. Rather, he needed to know that God was taking his pain, his protest, and his petitions seriously. Job needed to know that he could trust in God's goodness even though all the evidence was suggesting otherwise. To get there, Job needed to be reminded, through a series of divine questions, that his own wisdom and understanding were severely limited. Only then, with his newly discovered humility, could he open the door to trust.

It's no surprise, then, that the Job we see at the end of the book is quite different than the one we saw at the beginning. We no longer find Job demanding answers, asserting his own innocence, or offering superstitious sacrifices. Rather we see a person who trusts God in the midst of swirling injustices and pain. A person who trusts in God rather than in his own righteousness or in spiritual equations (if I do this and abstain from that, God will bless me). A person who prays for his enemies and shares his inheritance with his daughters (a gracious

and generous act in those days). A person who is free enough to “play”—characterized by giving his daughters enchanted names like dove, cinnamon, and eye shadow. In the end, we see a person who breaks bread and sits down with his family for dinner.

From what we can observe, suffering and pain have done their difficult and risky—but important and necessary—work in Job's heart. At the beginning of the book, the accuser asserted that Job loved God only because God blessed him. By the end of the book we learn that Job loves God for God's own sake, not for the blessings God graciously gives. Truthfully, vibrant love and faithful trust can grow only in the fields of pain and suffering. While God leads and walks with us through every dark valley, he quietly plants the “for nothing love” seeds that can grow only there. ■



Sam Gutierrez works as a pastor of spiritual formation at Granite Springs Church in Lincoln, Calif., and as a regional catalyzer with Faith Formation

Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.



MIXED BLESSINGS

BEFORE I MET my husband, my understanding of “mass” was limited to a vague notion of its usefulness in physics. He had no idea “tulip” was anything but a pretty spring flower.

Married now for 19 years, my husband and I have made a mixed-faith marriage—he a Roman Catholic and I, Christian Reformed—work.

Navigating through our faith differences has been intermittently smooth and difficult, fraught sometimes with different expectations of what it means to be followers of Christ. But it has also enriched our journey and, we believe, our church.

A Pew Research Center study published in October 2016 suggests our mixed-faith marriage is less a rarity than it once was. The study says about 10 percent of United States adults were raised in families where the parents had different religious affiliations. The percentage is even higher, about 27 percent, for Millennials.

What that suggests is that all our churches are likely to be experiencing a surge in mixed-faith marriages and rela-

tionships. And it means that we as a denomination and congregations and members face both a challenge and a privilege as we celebrate God’s goodness through different faith traditions.

While I’m no authority on the theology or sociology behind the trend Pew identifies, perhaps I can speak with experience about some of its realities.

When Dan and I met, he made it clear his Catholicism was an important part of his identity—tied to the unique history, culture, and francophone élan of the province of Quebec as much as to a religious tradition. He was baptized as a baby, confirmed at 11, graduated from Catholic schools, and knew by heart the rites and rituals of Mass. Saved-by-works was ingrained in his DNA.

I was born and raised in a Christian Reformed Dutch immigrant family and professed my faith at 18. Tulips grew in my mother’s garden and in my catechism class, where teachers emphasized **T** (total depravity), **U** (unconditional election), **L** (limited atonement), **I** (irresistible grace), and **P** (perseverance of the saints). Saved-by-grace all the way.

When Dan and I grew our friendship, we knew a relationship as a Christian

couple would have to stand on common ground and not fall on differences: we had to parse out which of our beliefs were matters of salvation and which were cultural practices. In the latter category, it puzzled me that he’d never heard the old hymns I knew by heart, and he felt like an outsider to see hymn numbers displayed on a board that read “Looft den Heer” (Dutch for “Praise the Lord”).

Our discussions included the nature of Jesus’ mother Mary, the meaning of communion, sinful-by-nature, infant baptism and believer’s baptism, evolution, tithing, and even whether it’s commandment-breaking to eat Sunday brunch in a restaurant. Do we spend Christmas Eve at a candlelight service or at Midnight Mass (or both)? Couldn’t the world use a few more Mother Teresas? And why-oh-why does our catechism insist Catholicism is a “condemnable idolatry”? (A recent translation places this text in brackets.) We still place an asterisk beside a lower-case “catholic” in the Apostles’ Creed, just in case someone might think it’s possible for a Christian to believe in a holy (big-C) Catholic church.

We worked hard to delineate where we differed, and why. We came to an understanding of what was important to us, and

why. As I surveyed some friends within our congregation, they said they discussed the same questions at profession of faith classes or with family. Others hashed out their differences during student suppers in a supportive multifaith atmosphere. One couple told me, “We needed to figure this out, and that made us stronger in our faith, individually and as a couple.”

For us, by prayer and study and sometimes by sheer osmosis, we came to a few epiphanies about the core of the other’s faith traditions. Dan grew to realize that good-deeds salvation is an unattainable threshold; it came as a relief to him that he need not wonder if his actions were “good enough” to earn God’s love. I gained some insight into the majesty of Mass, the beauty of ceremony, and the faithfulness of a worldwide community of believers who do fervently belong to a holy Catholic church.

fully in communion, volunteering, and benevolence, but does not vote or hold office. I find comfort and nearness to God at a Catholic Mass but know we would have needed special permission to enroll our Protestant-baptized children in Catholic elementary school here. While we are spiritually on the same page, denominationally we live in a world of neither/nor and both/and.

It’s a dichotomy shared by a dozen or so couples in our congregation whose stories are as individual as they are. Some have made professions of faith in the CRC, while others have not. Some attend Saturday night Mass and then Sunday fellowship with us. One couple told me it’s tough enough on Catholic extended-family relationships to worship in a Protestant church without adding the alienation that official membership would bring. Two mixed-faith couples told me their profes-

sion of faith would not only feel redundant, years after they publicly confirmed their commitment to Christ in a Catholic church, it would also seem like a denial of all that was holy and sacramental about that original confession.

And, yes, we all know families that have decided it’s all too much to navigate—and, rather than choose one or both, choose neither. The Pew Research poll found that about 20 percent of people raised by mixed-faith parents express no religious affiliation at all. (By comparison, about 10 per cent of people raised by two Protestant parents declare no affiliation.) This is the growing generation of what the Pew Research authors call the religious “nones.” I suspect, though, the number of “nones” is more likely to grow because of their parents’ religious indifference than because of their parents’ religious differences. If churches aim to cultivate a healthier relationship with their multifaith families, I think they will first have to erase some assumptions about who we are. We are not the “member plus one,” but whole families with unique perspectives, gifts, and traditions that can help grow a congregation. Churches, then, need to set aside the notion that (by virtue of membership alone) one person is equipped for service and the other is not; one capable of leadership, the other exempt or unqualified. This is not an argument in favor of universalism but on the side of greater fellowship and truer discipleship. Don’t make assimilation, spiritual or cultural, a condition of receiving a sincere welcome. One couple told me their biggest struggle was not with any interfaith challenges but with expectations that he should try to “act a little more Dutch.” That couple said it’s essential that children, and their friends and our friends, see congregations of people who are able and willing to differentiate the essentials of faith from its cultural trappings. “The next generation is watching us as we act out our faith by showing love to those who are different from ourselves. . . . We should celebrate the love of God that binds us together,” they said.

“MY” CHURCH BECAME OUR CHURCH.

We were married by two CRC ministers in a gathering that honored both my by-the-book heritage and his *joie-de-vivre* traditions. “My” church became our church.

Dan has found in our congregation a people who love him and encourage him to exercise enthusiastically his gifts of leadership. He guides the youth band, is a mentor to teens in the youth group, is a key member of outgoing and incoming mission SERVE teams, and is a guitar-playing and banjo-strumming member of our praise team. I marvel at his spiritual maturity (and sometimes at his time management skills).

I’m an elder and church school teacher. We worship and pray and raise our children together in a Christian home. Some of our closest relationships are within the faith community where we both belong.

Yet I remain Christian Reformed and Dan remains Roman Catholic. These are choices we have made separately and together. And in some ways, that also means we remain outsiders to each other’s faith traditions and privileges.

The Roman Catholic Church does not recognize our marriage as a sacrament to the Lord. The Christian Reformed Church does not recognize Dan’s Catholicism as sufficient for full membership. He partakes

of faith would not only feel redundant, years after they publicly confirmed their commitment to Christ in a Catholic church, it would also seem like a denial of all that was holy and sacramental about that original confession.

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This is the growing generation of what the Pew Research authors call the religious “nones.” I suspect, though, the number of “nones” is more likely to grow because of their parents’ religious indifference than because of their parents’ religious differences.

If churches aim to cultivate a healthier relationship with their multifaith families, I think they will first have to erase some assumptions about who we are. We are not the “member plus one,” but whole families with unique perspectives, gifts, and traditions that can help grow a congregation. Churches, then, need to set aside the notion that (by virtue of membership

alone) one person is equipped for service and the other is not; one capable of leadership, the other exempt or unqualified. This is not an argument in favor of universalism but on the side of greater fellowship and truer discipleship. Don’t make assimilation, spiritual or cultural, a condition of receiving a sincere welcome. One couple told me their biggest struggle was not with any interfaith challenges but with expectations that he should try to “act a little more Dutch.” That couple said it’s essential that children, and their friends and our friends, see congregations of people who are able and willing to differentiate the essentials of faith from its cultural trappings. “The next generation is watching us as we act out our faith by showing love to those who are different from ourselves. . . . We should celebrate the love of God that binds us together,” they said.

Our family is continually blessed by our congregation. Our children are becoming followers and leaders in their own ways and feel a powerful connection with the God who loves them—a God who also maybe smiles with affection at their odd melange of Dutch-Irish, Catholic-Reformed, Quebecois-Ontarian traditions. Perhaps the clearest example I can think of to describe the blessings of mixed-faith traditions is the joy of Easter every year as we gather at sunrise outside a 300-year-old Catholic convent beside the St. Lawrence River. This year, the interfaith service was led in two languages by a Catholic priest, an Anglican priest, and male and female ministers from four other Protestant denominations. Beneath the outstretched arms of an enrobed statue of Jesus, we broke a loaf of Hungarian braided bread and shared it. We dipped our fingers into a bucket of frigid river water and made the sign of the cross on our foreheads to show we belong to a risen Lord. The sun rose and robins sang like God’s benediction to us all. ■



Deb Flaherty lives in London, Ont., where she works as a media relations officer. She attends Talbot Street Church in London.



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- Curriculum Design and the Teaching/Learning Process; *Robert Keeley*
- Doctrine of the Holy Spirit; *John Bolt*
- I and II Thessalonians; *Jeffrey Weima*
- Intersections of Theology and Science; *Mary Vanden Berg*
- Jeremiah and the Church; *Michael Williams*
- Personal Financial Stewardship in the Pastoral Vocation; *Danjuma Gibson*
- Philosophy of Everyday Life; *Young Ahn Kang*
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- The Long Reformation in England and Scotland; *Karin Maag*

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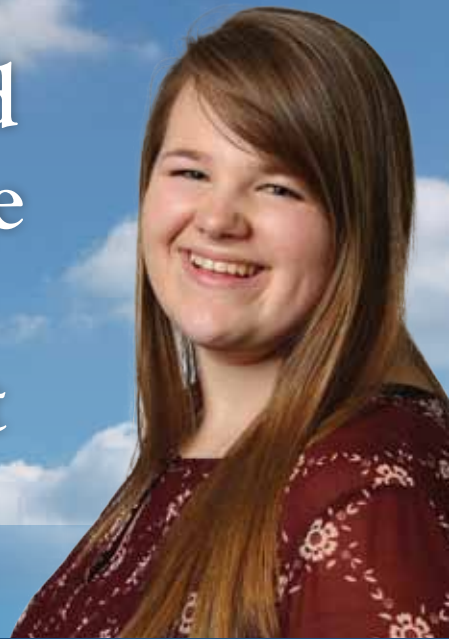
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Do Justice, Love Mercy—But How and When?

It wasn't a quiet week in Palos Heights, Ill., when Synod 2017 convened at Trinity Christian College. With a fairly light *Agenda for Synod 2017*, observers couldn't be faulted for thinking it would be a quiet synod. There were no big, contentious study committee reports. No hot-button issues like same-sex relationships on the agenda.

Despite that, fault lines continue to become apparent in the Christian Reformed Church. This year they showed up in several discussions about how the church carries out its mission to “do justice, show mercy, and walk humbly with God,” particularly how and when to do justice.

In his state of the church address, executive director Steven Timmermans passionately defended the denomination's social justice activity (p. 21). “Some say the CRC doesn't need an Office of Social Justice or a Centre for Public Dialogue. Or World Renew. I dis-

agree vigorously,” he said. “We have a faithful track record of speaking the gospel in Word and in deed to a hurting and broken world.”

How to Do Justice

The discussion of how to categorize the Belhar Confession (p. 18) as one of the denomination's statements of faith brought out tensions. With its emphasis on justice for the poor, some called it “bad theology,” while others defended it. “It is the letter of the law that caused some of the pain and suffering that churches were involved in. The Belhar Confession is about the Spirit of God,” said delegate Wayne Coleman. Synod declared it to be a contemporary testimony, a dynamic statement of faith, but one that is nonbinding on officebearers. It was an artful compromise: one that satisfied the Belhar supporters by declaring it a contemporary testimony, while allowing those who

have issues with the Belhar to avoid having to sign off on it.

Perhaps the fault line became most apparent in the discussion about *Do Justice*, a blog sponsored by the CRC's Office of Social Justice and the Centre for Public Dialogue (p. 20). What started as an overture from Classis Minnkota (a regional group of churches), caused in part by a missed email, galvanized delegates like few other issues. In particular, blog posts in which authors reported on and explored participation in First Nations religious ceremonies, including a new moon ceremony and prayer in the name of the Great Spirit, were alleged by Minnkota to violate the second and perhaps first commandment.

Bobby Boyd, a native American, called putting together worship of God with evil spirits syncretistic. Jeannette Romkema of Toronto, Ont., called the blog “a gift.” Some delegates wanted synod to instruct editors to ensure that the articles conform to Scripture and the Reformed confessions. Others said it is sufficient to encourage staff to ensure that content of the blog articles encourage a Reformed understanding of Scripture. Synod went with the latter choice, but it was clear that there is tension between what previous synods have instructed staff to do and the objections in some churches to how the instructions are carried out.

In affirming the denomination's historic commitment to the poor and the hungry, delegates had trouble agreeing. Supported by a long list of initiatives made by the CRC going back nearly 40 years, synod

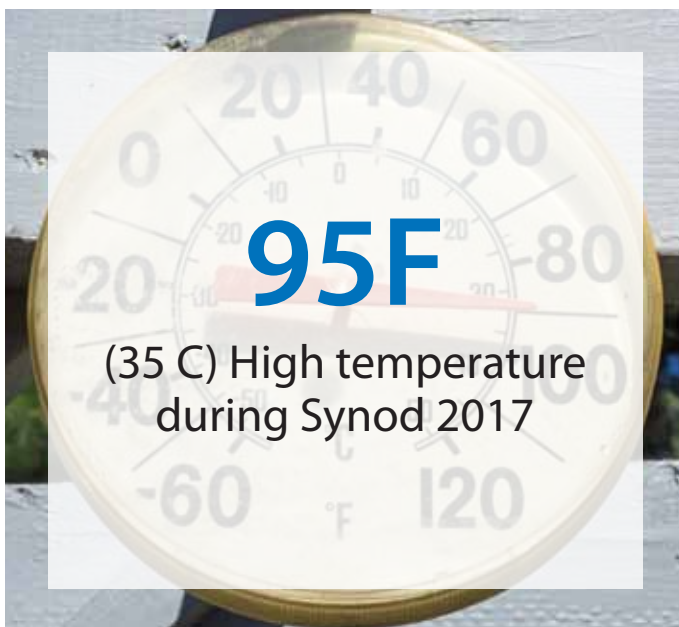
After a morning of dealing with bylaw changes, delegate **Joe Groeneveld** emailed the folks back home: “Feel free to watch [synod] online. Or you can watch paint dry. Not sure what's more exciting.”

urged members, congregations and agencies to renew the passion to serve God by serving the poor and oppressed. Some delegates wished for more emphasis on the gospel in these commitments (p. 19).

Even in a simple matter of approving which organizations receive the CRC's seal of approval for offerings from the churches, there was disagreement (p. 29). Operation Christmas Child (Samaritan's Purse) was denied that approval because its mission approach is not consistent with that of CRC mission agencies. Doug Aldrink, Classis Wisconsin, defended the organization, saying it is making a valiant attempt in joining the addressing of needs with gospel proclamation.

Synod 2017 did encourage setting aside an annual Day of Justice, preferably the third Sunday of August, beginning in 2018 to coincide with the United Nations designated World Humanitarian Day (p. 20).

An old fault line regarding women in ecclesiastical office remains. Even as women attended a dinner celebrating women in denominational leadership (p. 30), three classes (regional groups of churches) continue to disallow women as delegates. A church in Wisconsin



was permitted to change classes to one that doesn't allow women delegates (p. 31). And vice president of synod Thea Leunk was the only female pastor delegated to synod this year (p. 30).

Resonate Global Mission

This year marked the official end of two historic CRC mission agencies, Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions. The two were legally joined in what will now be known as Resonate Global Mission (p. 22). The agency has a new director, Zachary King (p. 23), and the two agencies' former directors, Gary Bekker and Moses Chung, will move on to new roles (p. 24).

Ecumenical Relationships

The relationship between the CRC and the Reformed Church in America (RCA) continues to grow. Synod 2018 will be a joint synod (p. 31) with the RCA. Delegates watched a video in which viewers were asked to imagine increased collaboration with current ministries, building new ministries and programs together, or even the creation of a new denomination together (p. 31).

Presentations by ecumenical guests to synod always give delegates a view of the wider Reformed church within which the CRC operates, including churches that face far more existential issues than the CRC in North America. Delegates welcomed the Christian Reformed Church in Sierra Leone into a closer ecclesiastical relationship, rejoicing that the church survived a brutal civil war (p. 32). And it heard the struggles faced by other churches in Africa, particularly South Sudan, still enduring poverty and civil war (p. 32).

We Need Each Other

Will all these fault lines cause the church to fracture, or will they prompt people to reach across the divides to stay united?

As delegate Mike VanderKwaak tweeted during deliberations, "There are those concerned with orthodoxy and there are those concerned with justice. Both need each other."

It brought to mind the words of retired Calvin Seminary professor Henry DeMoor, Church Order expert who was a fixture at many synods. "Dr. John Kromminga said an airplane doesn't fly without a left wing and a right wing," he said, referring to a former Calvin seminary president. "Keep the wings in place. Sit on the plane. Remember who is on the flight deck, the only one in command. Love him with all your heart."

Despite tough discussions, synod president Cor Pool closed synod (p. 36) by urging delegates to "keep moving forward with humble hearts. Listen more. Speak less. Build oneness and unity."

—Gayla R. Postma, news editor of *The Banner*

All the News of Synod 2017

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Synod 2017 Executive Has Fresh Faces

This year's synod executive included (l-r) Ed Visser, second clerk; Rudy Gonzalez, first clerk; Thea Leunk, vice president; and Cornelius Pool, president. They came to synod with 17 years combined synod experience. Only one—Leunk—had previous experience as an officer; she served as vice president in 2008 and as first clerk in 2012.

Synod Responds to Requests from Churches

Many classes (regional groups of churches) and individual congregations make requests to synod. Here are some of the requests (overtures) Synod 2017 received and how it chose to respond:

- A request to **restrict use of water bottles and disposable serveware at its meetings**: Synod **turned down** this request, responding that the institutions that host synod are responsible for this, and that they trust that their hosts are "already moving forward in facilitating environmentally favorable practices."
- A request to require that its study committee **reports longer than 10 pages should include an executive summary** to make them less intimidating: Synod **agreed**, and made this a rule.
- A request to **translate core denominational documents** into seven different languages: Synod **turned down** this request, but instructed the executive director to communicate to the churches about the denomination's translation services and resources.
- A request to improve communication in the CRC by **reminding denominational board delegates to report** to regional groups of churches (classes): Synod instructed the new Council of Delegates to **encourage consultation with these board members**.

Synod also took note that:

- Classis Toronto **registered a protest** in response to Synod 2016's stipulation that only church members in agreement with the church's official position on homosexuality may serve on the study committee on human sexuality, saying such a restriction is unprecedented.
- Classis Minnkota communicated to Synod **its desire "not to offend brothers and sisters in Christ but to honor the Word of God and our confessions"** while protesting the seating of women officers as delegates.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

NEWS SYNOD 2017

Belhar Confession's Status Changes to Contemporary Testimony

After long and careful consideration, Synod 2017 adopted the Belhar Confession as a non-binding, footnoted contemporary testimony.

The Belhar Confession was created by Reformed Christians in South Africa in 1982 as a response to the sin of apartheid. Its themes are justice, unity, and reconciliation in the body of Christ. The

contemporary testimony that Synod 2017 also adopted. "Our World Belongs to God," a CRC statement of faith, is also a contemporary testimony.

Over the past six years, the Christian Reformed Church has wrestled with its response to the Belhar. Synod 2012 decided against adopting it as a church confession, which would have placed it alongside the Heidelberg

"Many churches have contemporary statements of faith, modern confessions, so this is something they would be able to recognize," said Jim Payton, chair of the denomination's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee.

Delegates raised numerous concerns. One major concern was that ministers, elders, and deacons would have to agree with the Belhar in order to serve in the church, since the original contemporary testimony ("Our World Belongs to God") is referred to in the covenant to which ministers, elders, and deacons must agree. In response, synod voted to add this statement to its decision: "Adherence to the Belhar Confession shall not be included in the Covenant of Officebearers."

Some delegates decried some of the Belhar's content, as had many before them at previous synods. They argued that the Belhar contains faulty liberation theology and makes overly inclusive statements that could be misinterpreted.

One of these was George Koopmans, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan. "The way to battle evil is not with bad theology," he said. "The Belhar Confession is based on liberation theology . . . and says that no social factor can exclude one from the church. This is too vague."

But some, including Wayne Coleman, Classis Thornapple Valley, passionately defended that theology: "To be theological is not just to be intellectual. Theology is also part of our heart," said Coleman. "It is the letter of the law that caused some of the pain and suf-

fering that churches were involved in. The Belhar Confession is about the Spirit of God."

Ecumenical guest Henk Stoker of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, which has long opposed the confession, asserted that "none of the churches in the global south embrace the Belhar, except [the denomination] in which it originated." He continued, "We care deeply about the conditions of your people, but the theology of liberation . . . is one of the reasons that [we] do not embrace the Belhar." Reformed Church in America adopted the Belhar as a full confession in 2010. It was similarly adopted by the Presbyterian Church-USA in 2016.

Many other delegates had their say. The discussions led to a provision "to include footnoted comments with the Belhar Confession to provide biblical and confessionally-grounded clarity to the parts of the Belhar that are widely recognized to cause disagreement and alarm."

The last person to speak before delegates voted was young adult representative Onalee Sneller, who urged synod not to "contemplate too long and refuse to take steps forward." She added, "The Lord is faithful. If we take steps forward, the Lord will be faithful to his calling on us to be workers for justice."

Synod did that, adopting the Belhar Confession as a non-binding contemporary testimony. Several delegates submitted strongly worded negative protests following the vote. Synod also discontinued the category of ecumenical faith declarations.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Wayne Coleman, Classis Thornapple: "To be theological is not just to be intellectual. . . . The Belhar Confession is about the Spirit of God."

Dutch Reformed Mission Church, now part of the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa, offered it to the worldwide Reformed community as a new confession.

The decision by Synod 2017 means that the Belhar is now considered a "dynamic statement of faith that serves the CRCNA—its congregations and members—as a statement that is essential for a given time period." Those words come from the definition of a



George Koopmans, Classis Alberta/South Saskatchewan: "The way to battle evil is not with bad theology."

Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. Instead, that synod created a new category, calling it an ecumenical faith declaration.

But afterward, CRC leaders discovered that other denominations were confused by the ecumenical faith declaration category. So in 2016, a proposal was made to adopt the Belhar as a contemporary testimony on par with "Our World Belongs to God."

Remembering, Reaffirming, and Reinvigorating: the Challenge of Global Poverty

Synod 2017 affirmed again the denomination's commitment to the poor and the hungry.

Synod 2016 had instructed the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, Steven Timmermans, to "prioritize goals and assign resources for . . . justice and mercy."

To fulfill that directive, the CRC's Justice, Inclusion, Mercy, and Advocacy collaboration group produced a study entitled, "Remembering, Reaffirming, and Reinvigorating Our Response to Global Humanitarian Challenges."

The report retrieved a long list of statements and initiatives made by the CRC, beginning with a report on world hunger from 1978. It celebrated the considerable progress made in alleviating hunger and poverty in the world, noting that the number of people living in



Doug Alderink, Classis Wisconsin: "Justice work must always revolve around an intentional expression of the gospel."

extreme poverty has fallen from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015, among other encouraging statistics. It also brought to the attention of synod that great need remains, including at present 65 million displaced persons.

In the light of the many synodical statements of support for

justice ministries, synod urged "CRC members, congregations, and agencies to remember and renew [the] passion to serve God by serving the poor and oppressed in ministries of relief, development, proclamation, and advocacy for justice." Synod delegates also reaffirmed the conclusions and recommendations contained in previous CRC reports on the causes of hunger.

Some delegates wished for more emphasis on the gospel in these commitments. Doug Alderink, Classis Wisconsin, said that justice work must always revolve around an "intentional expression of the gospel." In contrast, Phillip Leo of Classis Chicago South said what had impressed him as he walked in a climate justice demonstration was how the gospel emerged naturally from a concern about justice. He

reminded the synod that "our world belongs to God."

With the long-term denominational commitment to justice in mind, synod endorsed the creation of "a renewed and revised multiple agency collaborative program that would build on existing ministry capacities." The goals are to educate the denomination on the causes of poverty and hunger and to increase the effectiveness of current denomination ministries for people who are suffering from drought, famine, war, climate change, trafficking, and persecution.

To these initiatives, synod attached a long list of supporting grounds citing past decisions, effective ministry directions already taken by the denomination, and ecumenical commitments. —Clay Libolt

Social Justice Coordinator to Retire After 44 Years of Serving CRC

This June, after decades of dedication and leadership, Peter Vandermeulen will retire from his role as coordinator of the Office of Social Justice. Vandermeulen has served in this role for 22 years and has spent his entire career working for the Christian Reformed Church.

Fresh out of college in 1973, Vandermeulen took a position in disaster relief with Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, now World Renew.

Three years later, Vandermeulen went to Bangladesh, where he said he was ready to be a great gift to the community he was serving. "I thought I was bringing all the knowledge, but I learned a lot from those farmers. Interactions with real people give you humility, and I also learned that God is a lot bigger God than I thought I knew," said Vandermeulen.

"This kind of experience forces you to sort out your childhood faith and come to an adult faith and learn how big God's love and justice is."

Vandermeulen served for six years there before moving on to the Dominican Republic and then West Africa.

"Over time, it became obvious to me that it was really important to look at the systems that kept people poor. Advocacy was a logical extension, the final leg of the stool of ministry," said Vandermeulen. "Justice is not all by itself, but needs to be infused in everything we do, a part of all our ministries."

The Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJ) was formed in 1995 to address and implement the recommendations set out in the "Freedom to Serve" report to



Peter Vandermeulen

Synod 1993. Vandermeulen was tasked with leading the ministry that studied the root causes of poverty and hunger. Over 22 years, he helped educate churches, assisted other denominational ministries, and worked to bring significant change in the political sphere through advocacy. Vandermeulen started the CRC's HIV prevention program and had a key role in developing the Kim-

berley Process, an accord set in place to prevent the flow of "blood diamonds" that were used to finance wars.

"We have been able to do this overseas through World Renew but haven't done it as well in North America," Vandermeulen said. "It is the vision of the OSJ that the CRC will do a better job of advocacy within our communities, to lend our power and voice."

Vandermeulen leaves the OSJ officially on June 30, but will continue working as a volunteer on an international peacemaking project in Western Africa in an area where there are many Christian Reformed congregations.

His role at OSJ will be filled by Rev. Reggie Smith, recently appointed director of the Offices of Social Justice and Race Relations.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

NEWS SYNOD 2017

Synod 2017 Requires More Oversight for *Do Justice* Blog

It began with a missed email. Greg Talsma was disturbed by what he read on a blog sponsored by the Christian Reformed Office of Social Justice and the Centre for Public Dialogue. He wrote an email to the editors of the *Do Justice* blog. He received no response. Or so he thought. In fact, staff had responded, but the email somehow didn't get to Talsma. Thinking he had received no response, he brought the matter to Classis Minnkota (the regional group of churches). Minnkota brought the complaint to Synod 2017.

At synod, discussion over the editorial policy of *Do Justice* galvanized delegates like few other issues this year. The Minnkota complaint alleged that the blog had gone much too far to promote dialogue: "Though intended for good, the focus on different points of view has gone much too far, including



Bobby Boyd, Classis Red Mesa: "When you put together the worship of the triune God with evil spirits you are a syncretist. We stand on the Word of God."

authors who promote praying to false gods, equate Native religions to Christianity, participate in idolatry, and promote pluralism."

The complaint was based on a number of articles in which the

authors reported on and explored participation in First Nations religious ceremonies, including a new moon ceremony and prayer in the name of the Great Spirit. Alleging violations of the second and perhaps first commandments, Minnkota asked synod "to establish oversight of the blog *Do Justice* to ensure that posted articles are in line with Scripture and our confessions. . . ."

Two powerful voices punctuated the ensuing discussion. One was Bobby Boyd of Classis Red Mesa. In a quiet voice, Boyd spoke of his experience as a Native American. He said, "My understanding is that we did not [truly] know God until we heard the gospel." He added that when you put together the worship of the triune God with evil spirits you are a syncretist. We are Reformed, he said. "We stand on the Word of God."

Jeannette Romkema of Classis Toronto was equally persuasive on the other side. She said that blogs are a very different kind of forum. She said that she had been a subscriber to and had written for *Do Justice*. She called it "a gift." She mentioned her sons, who were often skeptical of the church but for whom the blog was a positive contribution. In the blog, she added, the church listened to First Nations people in a way that it had not listened before. She said that *Do Justice* was "one of the first spaces that we have welcomed dialogue" with people whose voice has been taken away.

Part of the discussion also had to do with the nature of Internet forums like *Do Justice*. How are they different from older, paper-

based ways of communicating? Jessica Groen of Classis Illiana said that blogs like *Do Justice* should be seen as works in process, a conversation, not something settled and fixed like print. She said that we need to provide for "open and alive communication." We should not "squelch the process."



Jeannette Romkema, Classis Toronto: *Do Justice* was "one of the first spaces that we have welcomed dialogue" with people whose voice has been taken away.

Jim Poelman, Classis Chatham, used the analogy of difference between discussion in the family and a conversation in a neighborhood. He said that if you invite in your neighbors for a conversation, you do not tell them what to say. *Do Justice*, he said, was intended to be a neighborhood discussion, not a family discussion.

The long discussion was interrupted by procedural motions, by other business, and by breaks, but ended with deep passion and a decision that attempted to honor both the concerns of Classis Minnkota and the mission of *Do Justice*.

Synod 2017 Designates Annual Day of Justice

Synod 2017 encouraged its churches, classes (regional groups of churches), ministries, and educational institutions to set aside an annual Day of Justice, preferably the third Sunday of August, beginning in 2018. In the words of the synodical recommendation, "This day will serve as a designated time for congregations to consider the meaning of biblical justice, to lament injustices in the world, and to commit themselves to the transforming work of standing alongside people whom society oppresses and pushes to the margins."

The timing of the Annual Day of Justice in 2018 (August 19) aligns with the United Nations designated World Humanitarian Day in its call "for global solidarity with the more than 130 million people around the world who need humanitarian assistance to survive." The Offices of Race Relations and Social Justice and World Renew have been given responsibility to promote the Day of Justice.

—Clay Libolt

Synod took several non-controversial actions immediately. They commended the editors of *Do Justice* for actions they have already taken to tighten editorial policy. They recommended adding references to past decisions of the church where appropriate. They asked that it be made clear that the articles on the blog do not necessarily represent the official position of the Christian Reformed Church. They asked that representatives from Classis Minnkota meet face-to-face with the editors of *Do Justice*.



Jessica Groen, Classis Illiana: “Blogs like *Do Justice* should be seen as works in process, a conversation. We should not squelch the process.”

in such a way that they encourage a Reformed understanding of Scripture.” Others wanted stronger language, asking that the articles conform to Scripture and the Reformed confessions.

The long discussion ended with Bobby Boyd’s plea to “stay in the Scriptures” and “to make the right decision tonight.”

Synod decided it is sufficient to encourage staff to ensure that content of the blog articles encourage a Reformed understanding of Scripture.

—Clay Libolt

Director of Chaplaincy and Care Sarah Roelefs: “I had another point but I forget what it is. But it was good!”

Synod president Cor Pool to delegates: “We’re just gonna have a holy huddle. You just go have a good time.”



Greg Talsma, Classis Minnkota: He “never got the email.”

There was also general agreement that there should be oversight for the blog. The sticking point was the nature of this oversight. The issue was whether the blog should continue to be a “conversation space,” open to a variety of points of view or whether it should present the fixed positions of the church.

Some delegates wanted synod to “instruct those who have oversight of the *Do Justice* blog to ensure that the articles are written

Executive Director Defends Social Justice Activities

Christian Reformed Church executive director Steven Timmermans spent part of his annual state of the church address to Synod 2017 defending the denomination’s social justice ministries.

After reviewing some facts and figures about the ministry plan, he told a story about his son Paul, who has Down syndrome. When Paul graduated from the special education system at age 21, Timmermans and his wife had to figure out next steps. They found work for Paul at a local book cafe and paid for the job coaching he needed. “What happened to all the other ‘Pauls’ who finished special education that year?” he asked. “My heart bled for parents who couldn’t hatch a plan.”



Christian Reformed Church executive director Steven Timmermans addressed delegates.

Timmermans said that when he recounted that story on Facebook, “[A] commenter wrote ‘Could we all just relax a bit? The best thing citizens can do is write letters to congressmen and pray for lawmakers and not just play political games.’”

Timmermans said he did not take kindly to that as a parent or as a leader of a Christian institution. “The person making the comment leaves it all up to individuals to write letters and pray. And this person’s words are not unlike phone calls and emails I have received

this past year. This person doesn’t expect or want anything from the pulpit. This person doesn’t think the church has a role.”

Similarly, Timmermans said that some say the CRC doesn’t need an Office of Social Justice or a Centre for Public Dialogue. Or World Renew.

“I disagree vigorously,” he said. “This posture that it is just an individual matter, not a matter for the church to speak the gospel truth from the pulpit or in the public square—it’s just plain wrong. It’s the wrong posture for us as believers to take in a broken and hurting world.”

Timmermans told delegates the church must speak the gospel truth, and that will require addressing matters about which there is disagreement. “It is time we stop fussing about whether church should address a broken and hurting world, whether offering gospel words from pulpit or in the public square or doing the gospel by our deeds.”

He said that individuals and churches must speak the saving gospel Christ taught and all its implications about abortion, health care for people with previous conditions, advocacy for wrongs done to First Nation peoples, and more.

“The Lord is not telling us to ‘relax a bit.’ He’s saying, ‘Speak the gospel truth, be my servants.’ We have a faithful track record of speaking the gospel in Word and in deed to a hurting and broken world. It’s not time to slow down and relax a bit.”

—Gayla R. Postma

A New Name for a New Agency

A new director. A new agency. A new—and surprising—name.

Synod 2017 approved the authorizing language to make the new mission agency official, ending a process of combining what had been two separate agencies, Christian Reformed World Missions and Christian Reformed Home Missions. The shift, two years in coming, brings to a close the histories of two of the longest-standing agencies of the CRC. World Missions, in particular, has been in existence for 137 years.

The new director was received enthusiastically.

Amy Schenkel of Home Missions and Joel Huyser of World Missions presented some of the

reasons for bringing the two agencies together. Huyser said that we live in a new world in which people we thought we would meet on the mission field have come to live next door to us. “The joining of Home Missions and World Missions is not first of all a structural change,” he said. “It’s about facing the challenge and also the opportunities of this new world.”

Schenkel said that there is a one in four chance that the person living next door has no church experience at all. Churches, she said, are feeling disconnected. “Even though what we’re doing on Sunday is good . . . we need to learn missionary habits that help us to love our communities.”



Don Draayer, Classis Lake Superior: “Let the name settle in. If it doesn’t ‘resonate,’ we can change it.”

In order to meet the challenges of doing mission in this new context, Home Missions and World Missions were brought together into a single agency.

But what to call it? It couldn’t continue to be called the New Missions Agency. In the end, it was the name that occasioned most of the discussion.

The name that emerged from the combined boards’ new mission agency board—after a lengthy branding discussion—was, well, surprising to many: Resonate Global Mission. The name comes with a double tagline: Engaging people, embracing Christ. *A ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.*

The co-chairs of the temporary board for the new missions agency, Joy Engelsman and Carel Geleynse, walked synod through the process of selecting the name. They said survey respondents wanted the name to characterize an agency that would be “courageous, resourceful, and innovative.” They wanted the name to be metaphorical, more like Apple than, say, General Motors. They wanted it to be the sort of name

that led people to ask about it rather than a name that was explicit about what it named. They wanted it to translate well into other languages. They wanted it to be a name that would work in societies that are not open to the gospel. And they wanted it to have, well, resonance.

John Dykhuis, Classis Red Mesa, struck what was to become a theme in the subsequent discus-



Mark Vande Zande, Classis Heartland: “If ‘Christian Reformed’ appears only in the tagline . . . we are losing our identity.”

sion. He said that his first thought on hearing the new name was, *What were they thinking?* But as he considered it and heard the reasoning behind it, he came to favor the name.

Debra Mead, Classis Holland, extended the metaphor of resonance. She said that her son had recently cast a bronze bell. Bronze, she noted, is made of copper and tin. It is stronger than the two elements individually, and makes a strong and clear bell. To her, this process resembles the two mission agencies being brought together stronger and clearer. She ended her analogy with the appeal, “Let the gospel resonate in the world.”

Summer Shuffle

This is what denominational restructuring looks like: 120 staffers in the denominational building in Grand Rapids, Mich., each taking his or her chair, placing a box or two of personal items in the chair, and scooting down the hallway from one part of the building to another. The desks stay; the chairs and the people move. The “summer shuffle,” as it is called, takes place June 29 and 30.

The reorganization of the building accommodates the reorganization of the denominational agencies in three ways. First, it brings together the staffs of two former mission agencies, World Missions and Home Missions, into one new mission agency, Resonate Global Mission. Second, the move provides space in the denominational building for the media ministry Back to God Ministries International, which is moving to Grand Rapids from Palos Heights, Ill. Third, it groups together, as far as possible, the various ministries and agencies housed in the building in relationship to the categories of ministry included in the set of ministry priorities adopted by synod: faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation.

Transition managers Colin Watson, director of ministries and administration, and John Bolt, director of finance and operations, expressed optimism that the complex move would go well. They have instructed the staff to give it a month before making changes.

—Clay Libolt

Delegate Pete Byma

misspoke, referring to Calvin Seminary as Calvin Cemetery.

Paul De Weerd, Classis Huron, quoted a dictionary that defined “resonate” as “to produce a deep clear sound that goes on for a long time.” Daryl Meijer, Classis Chatham, was also of a mind to probe the word for its metaphorical possibilities. He said that “resonate” picks up on the deep meaning of an older word, “catechism.” At the heart of “catechism” in the Greek is “echo.” He said, “As Christ’s word goes out, people resonate.”

Not everyone was taken with the name. Mark Vande Zande, Classis Heartland, expressed his concern that Christ was nowhere in the name and that “Christian Reformed” appears only in the tagline: “If we put CRC in the tagline, we are losing our identity.”

Don Draayer, Classis Lake Superior, said, “God sometimes has a sense of humor,” noting that he was about to disagree with VandeZande. “Let the name settle in,” he said. “If it doesn’t ‘resonate,’ we can change it.”

Joelle Wilhelm, a young adult representative expressed also enthusiasm for the name after initial misgivings: “I was not for this when I first heard. [But now] I love the name. I’m confident that this name will be a fantastic one.” She added, “We have to stop being afraid of change.”

Synod 2017 was not afraid to affirm the new name, voting strongly in favor of it.

See also “Mission Agency Directors Find New Roles” (p. 24).

—Clay Libolt

After hearing his name mangled a few times, **director of candidacy David Koll:** “My name is not Knoll and it is not Kroll, so just keep that in mind.”

Zachary King



New Mission Director Invites Participation

Only a week after returning from the mission field in Haiti, Zachary King is preparing to direct the Christian Reformed Church’s new mission agency, Resonate Global Mission.

King told delegates of Synod 2017, “I did not grow up in the CRC, and I can’t play Dutch Bingo.” He grew up in a Pentecostal church and attended Calvin College, where he “ran headlong into the Reformed tradition. I was so impressed by the depth and thoughtfulness of Reformed theology.”

He was ordained in the CRC and has worked in Michigan, Puerto Rico, Nigeria, and Haiti, teaching, preaching, and developing mission strategies and leadership for the past 12 years.

King encouraged delegates to communicate with his agency. “Our new mission agency staff are as far as a phone call away. You can be sure that wherever you are, our humble and responsive team wants to be present with you in ministry.”

King asked for three things from delegates and their churches: prayer, support, and raising up of leaders.

“We have a relative abundance of leaders; however, that does not always translate into people who are willing to undertake a mission-focused ministry,” he said. “Encourage your leaders to consider these opportunities.”

As King ended his speech, synod vice president Thea Leunk mentioned that she has a postcard of the Segar-King family on her desk. The postcard reminds her to pray for the family, since her church sponsored them as missionaries.

“I think I’m going to leave it up there,” Leunk said with a smile.

Resonate Global Mission is the name of the agency created by the joining of Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Designates Disability Awareness Week

Synod has set the week preceding the third Sunday in October as Disability Awareness Week. Noting that 15 to 20 percent of the population of Canada and the U.S. have disabilities, synod encourages its churches, ministries, and educational institutions to sponsor events that recognize the importance of breaking down barriers for people with disabilities, reminding the people of God that the Lord welcomes all people and creating communities in which every member knows he or she is indispensable.

—Clay Libolt

Synod 2017 Urges Patience on Same-Sex Issues

Synod 2017 chose not to follow up on a West Michigan church’s request for guidance on same-sex issues.

Ivanrest Christian Reformed Church in Grandville, Mich., made an overture (official request) to Synod 2017 to “provide the churches with guidance for providing pastoral care for same-sex attracted members and their families.”

But Synod 2017 stated that resources from past synodical reports, *The Banner*, and the Network are available to those who need them. Synod added that “the provision of same-sex pastoral care resources in the short-term seems impractical,” since Synod 2016 already mandated a study committee on the issue.

“We felt the weight of the concern over this contentious issue, but in the end we felt [this overture] was asking too much,” said Kenneth Benjamins, in addressing that request. “Ministering properly is what many churches are struggling with but giving advice while this issue is still being studied would be awkward, and it’s hard to withdraw pastoral advice once given.... Please be patient while we wait for the study report.”

That report is scheduled for completion in 2021.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Mission Agency Directors Find New Roles

Two-and-a-half years after starting the process of unifying Christian Reformed World Missions and Christian Reformed Home Missions into a new mission agency, directors Gary Bekker and Moses Chung are moving to new roles. Zachary King has been appointed as director of the new unified ministry.

Chung said he is grateful for where the process is today, despite challenges along the way. "I sensed the Spirit's leading from the start," he said. "I felt joy when I sensed deep unity in mission, call, and vision and getting to know and work together with colleagues in [World Missions] with a heart for God's mission."

But he admits to being fatigued. "[It was] a long, hard journey," he said. "I didn't know how much time and energy it would take for those who are inside the process. Transparency, vulnerability, humility, honesty, surrendering; I had to practice [those] for a season every day. I felt sometimes God was saying, 'Moses, step back and trust me.'"

Bekker said he also felt "a bit weary," but he is very grateful to see a strong team of leaders in place, an outstanding person appointed as director, and expanding opportunities for faithful, courageous, and growing ministry.

He also noted the hard work of the board members involved. "The board worked hard



Gary Bekker (left) and Moses Chung

and well," he said. "We did not foresee that Synod 2015 would adopt the changes to CRC governance coming online so very soon. That decision meant that the joined board with which we have worked over the last two years knew that it had no future as a board beyond the initial joining."

Like Chung, Bekker has no regrets about the decision. "Perhaps only that we did not get started on this sooner," he said, "and that it has taken a while to get the organizational structure and new leadership team in place."

Both leaders knew at the beginning of the process that they would probably be working themselves out of their positions as agency directors.

Bekker has served as director of World Missions since 2001. On July 3 he begins a new role building and leading a combined training group that includes the Timothy Leadership Training Institute and the Coffee Break and Educational Care programs, with the prospect of developing other non-formal educational programs.

Chung has served as director of Home Missions for six years. Although letting go is hard, he said, "If this is where God wants us to go, then we're okay; I'm more than fine. That's

where I want to be." Chung's new role is director of capacity building and innovation. "I'm happy about this; it's closer to ministry on the ground. Less administration work."

They both have high hopes for the new mission agency. Chung said the new agency is about vitalization on the work of the gospel in, through, and by the Christian Reformed Church. "I pray for strong reciprocal relationships between Christian Reformed congregations and God's people in other parts of the world."

Bekker sees the joined agency, Resonate Global Mission, leading Christian Reformed congregations and people to focus on Christ and his gospel, with all of our speaking, doing, and being flowing out of that focus. He also hopes that the joined agency will continue leading the way in embracing diversity.

And Bekker dreams that the global agency will be sought-after for innovative ways of telling, showing, and living the gospel rooted in solid biblical, Reformed theological understanding. "What makes us unique is that we are a Reformed church . . . with a comprehensive Reformed kingdom theology."

—Gayla R. Postma

Delegate Gina Taylor, who became known for calling the question to cease debate: "When I hear a delegate say 'I know someone already said this, but . . .,' then I start feeling the itch to go up and call for the question."

Delegate John Wildeboer: "I'm Gina Taylor, Classis Hamilton, and I call the question!"



Chaplaincy and Care Director Introduced to Synod 2017

Synod 2017 met the Christian Reformed Church's new director of Chaplaincy and Care.

Adopted from Korea at 2 years old, Sarah Roelofs grew up in Pella, Iowa, and attended Dordt College. "I fell in love with the church because the church loved me so well."

During her college years, her pastor encouraged her to pursue ministry as a military chaplain. "That's the story of how people have spoken into my life, spoken that truth, cared, and loved me," she said.

As director, Roelofs said she brings "energy and a diverse set of experiences" to the job, which she began two months ago. She has enjoyed becoming part of the leadership team: "The directors are passionate and care so much."

Chaplains receive specialized training to give them "a firm theological basis to speak the truth of Christ into times of crisis," said Roelofs. "Without that beautiful, solid theology, we can easily lose our bearing and our pastoral authority."

Roelofs spoke of the challenges that chaplains face in a secularizing society: "It's not 'What church do you attend?' but 'Do you have a spirituality?' It's not about same-sex marriage but gender identity. Chaplains are having conversations about death and dying in places where assisted suicide is now legal," she said.

She told delegates, "My desire is that chaplains are connected to the church, themselves, God, community, and the world."

—Roxanne VanFarowe

CRC Chaplains Honor Pioneers of the Past

When Christian Reformed Church chaplains gathered for their annual conference, they celebrated their 75th anniversary by honoring 12 "pioneers of the past."

The chaplaincy ministry was officially approved in 1942, but there have been CRC chaplains since World War I.

Chaplains who shared their stories included the following:

Jim Kok, an ordained minister and chaplain for more than 50 years, was the first Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) supervisor in the CRC.

He served for 15 years as supervisor and chaplain at Pine Rest Christian Hospital and for 29 years at California's Crystal Cathedral.

Dirk Evans was the first CPE supervisor in a secular hospital. Chaplains who were present, both on the panel and in the audience, acknowledged Evans as formative in their clinical training.

John Lamsma was a chaplain with the Federal Bureau of Prisons for 25 years until he faced mandatory retirement. In the late 1980s, the bureau expanded rapidly and Lamsma opened chaplaincy departments at several new institutions.

John DeVries was the first Canadian chaplain. He began as a Protestant Corrections Chaplain in Montreal. In 2008, he was hired by the CRC Office of Social Justice to work with John Lamsma for the Congregational Restorative Justice Project.

In 1984, **Sini den Otter** became the first female CRC chaplain at a time when women could not be ordained. Although there were many roadblocks, "I went forth in faith, and God brought people onto my path—both men and women—to help."

InSoon Hoagland was the first CRC ordained female chaplain, the first minority chaplain, the first female CRC military chaplain, and the first female Korean CRC ordained pastor. She had always wanted to be a missionary

and realized that the U.S. Army would be a great mission field.

In 1959, **John Hoogland** intended to go into the U.S. Army for two years but ended up staying for 30 years and rising to the rank of colonel. A significant four-year assignment brought him to the Pentagon as director of personnel.

Ray Swieringa enlisted in the Navy as a chaplain immediately after seminary and served for 22 years on ships and shore stations, both with Navy and Marine units, including a



CRC chaplaincy pioneers.

year with the Marines in combat in Danang, Vietnam. He then spent the following 26 years as a prison chaplain.

Siebert Van Houten was the first Canadian Director of Chaplaincy. He worked closely with U.S. chaplaincy director Jake Heerema until Van Houten's position was eliminated because of denominational financial constraints.

Nell De Boer, the second female chaplain in the CRC, served for many years as chaplain for the Toronto Hospital Ministry of the CRC.

Eric Evenhuis, who spent most of his career as a chaplain in psychiatric hospitals and private practice and attained CPE acting supervisor status, shared the story of God's grace, particularly in his personal life.

Jack Vander Laan became the first industrial chaplain in the CRC. Along the way, he has worked for four Fortune 500 companies and three professional sports teams.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Synod 2017 Discusses Ministry Priorities

In response to an instruction from Synod 2016, the current synod divided into groups to discuss which denominational ministries should be given priority for future funding.

Colin Watson, denominational director of ministries and administration, talked about the Great Commission and its command to “make disciples.” He said, “This is what we are collectively about.” What needs to be discussed, he indicated, is how and where these things are done.

Each classis (regional group of churches) delegation was asked to discuss how to allocate denominational funding among the various agencies and ministries, using the results of a survey of the delegates taken earlier. This survey turned out to be remarkably uninformative. For a long list of ministry areas, the delegates were asked whether they considered them important. The delegates appeared to think that they were all almost equally important, making it difficult to establish priority.

The discussion will likely become more focused when dollars are attached to it. If the denomination is to “reduce its institutional footprint,” as Synod 2016 instructed, there will be fewer dollars to go around. The discussion about which agencies and ministries receive these dollars will be held at Synod 2018.

—Clay Libolt

Big Bylaw Changes

In short order, Synod 2017 approved a complex set of revisions to the corporate bylaws underlying the agencies of the CRC. These involved dissolving the corporate boards for Christian Reformed World Missions and Home Missions, restructuring the Board of Trustees as the new Council of Delegates, and revising the bylaws for Back to God Ministries International to fit into the Council of Delegates (COD) structure. All of this had to be done twice, using different terminology and legal processes, to reflect the differences between Canadian and U.S. law. The bylaw changes occupy nearly 100 pages in the printed agenda. They passed synod by voice vote and without comment.

These changes of corporate structure, stated in the sometimes obscure language of the bylaws, consolidate and bring to partial conclusion a long-term trend in the CRC toward centralization, dissolving some semi-autonomous agency boards into a single board, the COD.

The change of bylaws does not include the boards or bylaws of World Renew, Calvin College, or Calvin Theological Seminary.

—Clay Libolt

New Procedures Approved for Commissioned Pastors

Synod 2017 took steps to define and regulate the office of commissioned pastor. Commissioned pastors have become increasingly important in the life of the denomination. Once limited to pastors in congregations that had not yet reached the stage of formal organization, the office has been expanded several times to provide ordination for pastors working in a variety of settings, including specialized ministries in local churches, church plants, and chaplaincy.

With the expansion of the office, new situations have arisen, inviting synods over the years to continue to shape the office. Synod 2017 took several actions with regard to commissioned pastors.

Some of these changes require changes in the Church Order, in which case the actions of Synod 2017 must be ratified by a future synod.

One such proposal is to extend the office of commissioned pastor into retirement, giving the pastor the authority to continue to act in official pastoral roles such as preaching and administration of the sacraments.

Another proposed Church Order change creates a procedure for commissioned pastors who are released from a ministry to receive assistance from the classis, the regional body of churches, in the hope of making it possible for the pastor to flourish in future ministry assignments.

Synod also approved language for the Church Order that would facilitate and regulate the use of the office of commissioned pastor as a stepping stone to ordination as a minister of the Word.

Others are changes in supplemental material that take effect immediately.

Synod clarified the steps to be taken if a commissioned pastor transfers from one church to another. This provision occasioned a lengthy discussion by the synod, picking up on an uneasiness among some delegates, especially those who are commissioned pastors, about regulation of the office in general.

Rodney Hugen of Classis Arizona called it “federalization.” Henry Perez, Classis Wisconsin, said the new procedures are “too cumbersome for ministry.” He said, “We are not thinking progressively.”

David Koll, director of the Office of Candidacy for the denomination, responded by saying that the new procedures are actually less restrictive than they had been previously.

In a final action, synod expressed the need to reformat and perhaps rewrite the changes in the Church Order and supplements for the office of commissioned pastor that have accumulated over time to bring about more clarity and perhaps brevity in the regulations.

This proposal, like the other proposed changes to the Church Order, will be on the agenda for Synod 2018.

—Clay Libolt



Henry Perez, Classis Wisconsin: “[The new procedures] are too cumbersome for ministry. We are not thinking progressively.”



Synod 2017 receives 39 new candidates for ministry.

Synod 2017 Receives 39 Ministry Candidates

In a ceremony marked by joy and laughter, Synod 2017 received 39 new candidates for the office of minister of the Word.

Twenty-two of the candidates attended synod, many accompanied by family members. With the candidates arrayed in front of synod, the director of the Candidacy Committee, David Koll, read the names of the candidates. When the names had all been read, the candidates were welcomed with sustained applause.

Jul Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary, reminded the candidates of three “markers of ministry in a world of division and separation: unity in Christ, unity of purpose in the mission of Christ, and unity in Christ’s body, the church.”

—Clay Libolt

Synod Deliberates on Seminary Funding



Robert Boersma, Classis Grand Rapids South: “Student funding matters. I want the body to feel the weight of what we are talking about right now.”

Synod 2017 briefly looked at the question of funding for divinity students. Like education everywhere, seminary education has become expensive.

Synod 2016 appointed a task force to address a number of funding-related questions, including questions of equity for students receiving funds from classes (regional groups of churches), the financial challenges faced by Canadian students who wish to attend Calvin Theological Sem-

nary (the CRC’s seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich.), and the impact of financial circumstances on the ministry of the CRC.

The task force made a number of recommendations, all of which were adopted by synod. They included urging student funding teams to give preference to Calvin Seminary students, and to work together across classis boundaries, if possible, to help fund students. None of these recommendations addressed the funding itself.

Most of the recommendations passed without comment. After several recommendations had passed, one delegate, Robert Boersma of Classis Grand Rapids South, stood up to say that the issue of student funding matters. He said, “I want the body to feel the weight of what we are talking about right now.” He spoke of his own financial struggles as a second career seminary student and the stress it caused his family.

With that, the synod went on to finish the list of recommendations by voice vote and without comment.

—Clay Libolt

Synod Responds to Membership Decline

Synod 2017 discussed declining church membership and responded with a few directives.

According to an overture (request) that came before synod, CRC membership dropped more than 13 percent in the last decade. The overture asked for a strategy to reverse the trend and for progress reports.

In its response, synod proffered no specific strategy or progress reports. Rather, synod instructed church, agency, and educational leaders to “seek out best practices and resources” for church renewal and share these practices with the churches.

Synod also urged collaboration as people work toward renewing the church and directed that a list of resources be given to churches. Lastly, synod told the executive director “to keep the call to prayer for church renewal continually before God’s people.”

James Kralt, Classis Thornapple Valley, asked his colleagues to be sensitive when passing out advice to shrinking congregations. “If you know a church is struggling, make sure you listen too. Hear the struggles, the heartbreak, the things they tried to do that didn’t work.”

“The way we think about membership is changing and needs to be [reexamined],” said Brian Tarpy, Classis Central Plains. “We want membership to be meaningful.”

“I appreciate that the CRC is a very organized, well-structured denomination,” said Cameron Fraser, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan. “However, that can lead to assumption that church renewal comes through more study committees. . . . I would respectfully submit that our emphasis needs to be in prayerful practice in life and deed.”

Synod wrapped up the session with an unusual prayer that was described as “Korean-style.” The delegates prayed out loud all at the same time. This resulted in a prayerful din, as each asked God for renewal in the Christian Reformed Church.

—Roxanne Van Farowe



James Kralt, Classis Thornapple Valley: “If you know a church is struggling, make sure you listen too. Hear the struggles, the heartbreak, the things they tried to do that didn’t work.”



Cameron Fraser, Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan: “Our emphasis needs to be in prayerful practice in life and deed.”

Minor Change Might Silence Minority Voices

It took only a few minutes for Synod 2017 to unanimously pass a minor change to the Council of Delegates Governance Handbook. But some say that minor change may result in lower ethnic minority representation in the new Council.

Synod was responding to a request from Classis Huron. The request was to allow each classis (regional group of churches) to select its own representative to the new Council of Delegates

rather than having synod select from a slate of nominees.

Synod responded by agreeing to the change, which is intended to give more ownership to classes.

“If the spirit of the move toward the Council of Delegates structure is a return to greater ownership by classis, we wondered if the slate of nominees approach really achieves that goal,” said Joel Vande Werken, Classis Hudson, one of the primary authors of the request.

Reggie Smith, Director of the Offices of Race Relations and Social Justice, appreciates the intent of Classis Hudson’s request, but he worries that synod may not have taken the diversity question seriously enough. “Given our cultural default behavior to select people we know and are comfortable with, it may unintentionally overlook very qualified ethnic minorities whose voices need to be heard at all levels of the denomination—classical and synodical.

“It solves a procedural issue,” he continued, “but may unintentionally harm those voices at the synodical level.”

Vande Werken made it clear the change was never intended to diminish diverse representation. “We made sure we included a sentence of keeping in mind the CRC’s commitment to diversity in the request,” he said.

CRC executive director Steven Timmermans does not think it makes a huge difference. “Neither approach ensures diversity,” Timmermans said. “Our commitment to diversity in every nook and cranny of the denomination must precede either approach [of single or slate nominees]. The hope is that classes, with the assistance of the nominating services committee, are always generating a diverse pool of nominees for the Council of Delegates.”

Although ethnic adviser David Cheung thinks this helps, it does not guarantee minority voices are heard. “If [minority representation] is optional, it will easily be overlooked.” Cheung prefers dedicated seats for various groups to ensure their voices are part of the process.



Reggie Smith, director of Race Relations and Social Justice: “[This] solves a procedural issue but may unintentionally harm those voices at the synodical level.”

Smith hopes the Council of Delegates will pay particular attention to that nominating process. “I wonder what mechanisms are there to evaluate this process? If, say, Synod 2018 brings forth a council that lacks diversity, what do we do? Do we really pause and grapple with the question of why and try to correct it? Or, do we just simply say, ‘Oh well, there’s always next year’? We can feel bad about it, or do we really change?”

Cheung hopes that denominational leadership will be more sensitive to language and cultural factors that restrict certain ethnic groups from full participation. “Some ethnic communities do not speak up because aggressiveness is not part of their culture,” he said. “We need to be more intentional in inviting these groups into participation, as they rarely assert themselves.”

Smith agrees with the need for greater intentionality: “Classes need to look hard for those voices with different strengths.” In the meantime, he wondered, “Are we choosing expedience over humility?”

— Shiao Chong



John Medendorp and Ashley Bootsma

Finding Love at Synod

For Rev. John Medendorp and Ashley Bootsma, a match made in heaven started at Synod 2016.

Medendorp was a delegate to last year’s synod held in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Bootsma was a young adult representative. “Knowing few others, I tagged along with my pastor at the time, Chris deWinter, and met some of his friends,” Bootsma said. DeWinter was also a delegate.

One of those friends was Medendorp, pastor of Community CRC in Kitchener, Ont. “We spent our evenings hanging out with friends and learning more about each other,” Bootsma said. After synod, they started texting each other. “While he was the first to reach out after synod, it was definitely me who asked him out.”

Four months later, they decided to marry, announcing it publicly in December. They are planning an August wedding.

“While neither of us was even remotely thinking of meeting a spouse at synod, God used synod to radically change our lives for the best,” Bootsma said.

—Gayla R. Postma

Operation Christmas Child Denied Accreditation for CRC Offerings



José Rayas, Classis Arizona: “For somebody to come in and throw things at the children robs the dignity of the family, of the fathers in being able to provide for their families.”

Synod 2017 denied a request from Operation Christmas Child (Samaritan’s Purse) to be included on the Christian Reformed Church’s list of accredited agencies for church offerings.

Missions and relief work staff said that Operation Christmas Child’s approach is “not consistent with the approach followed by the CRCNA agencies.”

Operation Christmas Child has distributed about 150 million shoeboxes filled with small toys and other items to children in over 160 countries since it began in 1993. The organization also leads children receiving gifts in a 12-week gospel discipleship program.

Doug Aldrink, Classis Wisconsin, spoke in favor of Operation Christmas Child. “Samaritan’s Purse is making a valiant attempt in joining the addressing of needs with gospel proclamation.”

“There is so much wrong with the idea that we as North Americans should be distributing gifts in boxes to other countries,” said Randy Kroll, Classis Lake Superior. “It seems paternalistic, costly, and not very effective in terms of ministry.”

José Rayas, Classis Arizona, said he has experience in community development work. “For somebody to come in and throw things at the children robs the dignity of the family, of the fathers in being able to provide for their families.” —Roxanne Van Farowe

Ethnic Advisors Urge Deeper Understanding

Synod 2017’s ethnic advisors were Mina Meliky, David Cheung, and Jei Wilson. Meliky and Cheung both live in British Columbia, and Wilson lives in Chicago.

“Our role [as ethnic advisors] is to help people understand other cultures,” said

Meliky. “I also want to encourage our church in friendship with people of other faiths, our ability to dialogue with them.” Meliky attended a session on understanding Muslims early in the week.

David Cheung pointed out that diversity also includes the diversity of languages. “I’m part of a classis (regional group of churches) where all the churches but mine are monolingual,” he said. “They don’t really understand us.”

“Ethnic minorities are not really well represented because we are not identified. We [as the CRC] need to be more sensitive to that.” —Roxanne Van Farowe



Synod 2017’s ethnic advisors (l-r): Mina Meliky, David Cheung, and Jei Wilson.



Young Adult Representatives (from left): Onalee Sneller, Joelle Wilhelm, Izhar Alvarez, Jehvon Walker, and Kristy Bootsma.

Young Adults Bring Youth Perspective to Synod

This year’s young adult representatives participated fully in the life of Synod 2017.

“It’s honoring and humbling to be welcomed into the nitty-gritty of the denomination,” said 20-year-old Sneller, the only returning youth representative. “It speaks to the efforts the denomination is making to have minority voices here—it speaks volumes.”

“It’s been a very big experience to find out how the Christian

Reformed Church works behind the scenes,” said Joelle Wilhelm, 18. “I’ve learned so much as I’ve been meeting and talking to people.”

For Jehvon Walker, 21, of Nashville, Tenn., synod was a “completely new experience,” beginning with his first time flying in an airplane.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Called to Ministry through Synod

When Amy Vander Vliet and Paul De Weerd came to synod in 2010, they and five others were featured on the cover of *The Banner*.

That’s because VanderVliet and De Weerd were among the first “youth advisors,” now known as young adult representatives. Both also attended synod as “youth observers” in 2009.

These pioneers returned to synod this year: VanderVliet as a deacon delegate, and De Weerd as a minister delegate.

It was at Synod 2009 that De Weerd first felt a powerful call to ministry. “Being at that synod solidified my love of the church,” he said.

Vander Vliet has become a deacon in her church and reported for her advisory committee this year.

Both De Weerd and VanderVliet are strong proponents of youth representation at synod—



After being youth observers in 2009 and youth advisors in 2010, Paul De Weerd and Amy Vander Vliet were delegates this year.

in fact, they wish the numbers of youth could increase.

“I’m encouraged to see that the [young adult representative] program continues,” said Vander Vliet. “I’m impressed that these young adults are being encouraged to speak up and that they are making a contribution at synod.”

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Women Celebrate New Leadership Initiative

During Synod 2017, about 35 women met to discuss—and celebrate—their roles as leaders in the Christian Reformed Church.

The group was convened by Denise Posie, recently named director of leadership development for the denomination.

“I really feel encouraged, empowered, and affirmed in doing this work [of developing women as leaders], because there is a need,” said Posie. “This is a historic moment.”

Posie said the Women’s Leadership Initiative began spontaneously in March 2016, when 11

women employed at the denominational offices attended a one-day conference on women’s leadership together.

Following the conference, the group continued to meet once a month.

“To be in a room with all women at the denominational building was so different,” said Bonnie Nicholas, director of the CRC’s Safe Church Ministry. “It has been fun—I love it!”

Joyce Berger, director of Worship Ministries, said she has worked for the denomination for 13 years. “The culture has started to change. I hope that resonates



Several women in denominational leadership spoke about their experience. (L-r): Joyce Berger, Bonnie Nicholas, Lis Van Harten, Denise Posie, Carol Bremer-Bennett.

throughout our denomination. We’re often invited to a table and we’re expected to be thankful. This time we get to set the table.”

Posie asked the women in the room to introduce themselves and describe their leadership roles in the church. They named the roles of deacon, elder, pastor, treasurer, worship director, and many others.

Posie also asked the women to celebrate together how women have been leaders at synod.

Melissa Van Dyk, serving as a women’s advisor at Synod 2017, said that seeing women such as Sarah Roelofs and Thea Leunk on the stage was incredible. Roelofs is the new director of the Chaplaincy and Care ministry and Leunk is synod’s vice president this year.

Posie acknowledged women who have been working to advance female leadership in the

denomination for decades: “This is not a new thing that is happening, this is something that is continuing. God is going to use us—women serving in the CRC—to continue to do this work.”

Posie said her role is to lay a good foundation. “I am exploring what informal and formal ways we can help women to embrace their calling and serve graciously in that calling.” She has been working part-time in leadership development for the denomination for about two years. Her first step in her full-time role, which adds the emphasis on women, will be to form an advisory team made up of people who are already passionate about developing female leadership.

“When we know we’re called to something, it’s amazing what God does,” Posie exclaimed.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Vice President Reflects on Women in Ministry

In an interview with *The Banner*, the vice president of synod Thea Leunk expressed concern and cautious optimism about the progress of women pastors in the Christian Reformed Church.

Women are receiving calls, Leunk said, but “few of us are solo or senior pastors. Usually women are called to be co-pastors.” Leunk is an exception. She has been the head pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., for 11 years.

But Leunk noted that in 2017, she is the only female synodical delegate who is an ordained minister of the Word. “It’s been 20 years,” she said. “There is [among female pastors in the CRC] an impatience with how long it’s taken to become fully integrated into the leadership of the CRC.”

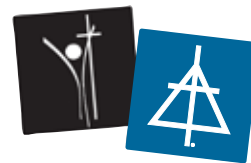
Leunk did not have a singular answer to why women pastors are not better represented at synod. For some classes (regional assemblies that send delegates to synod), there are one or two women pastors. “You can’t keep sending them every year,” she said. Other classes choose not to send women. How to encourage the classes to delegate more women pastors? “The directive is already out there,” she said. “More encouragement? More reminders?”

Leunk has been heavily involved in denominational ministry for many years. She said, “I try to model as best I can what it means to be a pastor.” She added, “To be a pastor. Not a male pastor or a female pastor, but just a pastor.”

—Clayton Libolt

Union Church to Host Synod 2018

To enhance a planned joint session with the Reformed Church in America (RCA), Synod 2018 will be hosted by a church that symbolizes unity between the denominations.



Pillar Church in Holland, Mich., is a “union church,” a congregation affiliated with both the Christian Reformed Church and the RCA. The convening church typically hosts worship events during the annual assembly.

The two denominations plan to hold their synods jointly in Grand Rapids, Mich., in June 2018.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Explores Direction for RCA-CRC Partnership

In anticipation of joint meetings planned for 2018, Synod 2017 explored three alternatives for the future of the partnership between the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America (RCA).

In 2014, the two denominations adopted what has come to be known as the Pella Accord, agreeing that “the RCA and CRC should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately.” The partnership has led to several collaborative efforts, including the Reformed Benefits Association, which manages employee benefits for both denominations. The question for Synod 2018, at which the RCA and the CRC will meet jointly, is how to extend this partnership.

After a brief address to the synod by Kayla Fik, fraternal delegate of the RCA, three alternatives to extend the partnership were presented through the use of a video: increased coordination, in which the two denominations would work together where possible; increased collaboration, in which the denominations would build new ministries and programs together; or new creation, in which the denominations would create a new denomination together.

The delegates were asked to discuss these alternatives among the members of their regional delegation. The results were collected and will become information for the 2018 discussion and decisions. —Clay Libolt

Synod 2017’s Women Advisors

Synod 2017 had three women advisors this year: Gail De Young, Karen Knip, and Melissa Van Dyk. Van Dyk and Knip also served as women advisors in 2016, and De Young was an elder delegate last year.

All three mentioned inspiring moments. De Young offered a list: “The deeply rich times of worship, the presentation of the Calvin Seminary candidates, the reports of our ecumenical delegates, the formation of Resonate Global Mission, and the passion of our executive director, Steve Timmermans, in exhorting the church to go to a broken world with the power that transforms lives through the healing love of Christ.”

Van Dyk said, “I’ve appreciated several ‘holy’ moments here at synod, including being led in worship by the folks from Elim and spontaneous bursts of singing on the floor of synod.”

Knip said, “The words shared by the ecumenical guests from



Synod 2017 women advisors (l-r) Gail De Young, Karen Knip, and Melissa Van Dyk.

Africa were particularly moving. It was a good reminder of the burdens our sister churches face daily.”

All expressed their appreciation for being asked to serve. Knip said, “My time at synod deepens my appreciation for our denomination and how it works.” She encouraged anyone who has the opportunity to attend synod. De

Young appreciated their times of prayer together.

“It’s been a pleasure to serve in this capacity and witness the church at work,” said Van Dyk. “[I] felt welcomed into the conversation.”

—Clay Libolt



Wisconsin Church Leaves Local Classis

Synod 2017 allowed a church in Classis Wisconsin (a regional group of churches) to move to a neighboring classis “so that it can serve in harmony.”

Alto Christian Reformed Church asked to move because it “cannot in good conscience remain in a classis that promotes the ordination of women.” The congregation will move to Classis Minnkota, which does not allow women to be delegated to its meetings. Alto CRC joins two Michigan churches that moved to Minnkota a few years ago for the same reason.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Hope and Horror in South Sudan

In a calm and factual manner, using packed PowerPoint slides, Patrick Jok of the Sudanese Reformed Church presented both the hope and the horror of South Sudan to synodical delegates and guests gathered for a dinner break at Trinity Christian College.

Jok briskly walked the audience through a century of Sudanese history. As he explained, it is a history of war. He said, "My father grew up in war. I grew up in war. My son is growing up in war."

In recent years there appeared to be new reason for hope for an end of the conflict. For a long time the conflict had been between

north and south, but in 2011, South Sudan became an independent nation.

That hope was quickly dashed. By 2013, South Sudan was plunged into civil war along tribal lines. To date, Jok said, 100,000 people have been killed. Millions more have been displaced, many becoming refugees in neighboring nations. Much of the population faces daily hunger.

The Sudanese Reformed Church has emerged and grown in the midst of this violence. The church began in 1992 with a single house church. Five years later, in 1997, it had grown to four congregations. By 2005, with 500



Patrick Jok told delegates about the history of the Sudanese Reformed Church in South Sudan.

members, it was organized as a denomination subscribing to the Reformed confessions. In 2009, the Sudanese Reformed Church held its first synod. The church has now grown to 6,000 members. It

has 12 ordained pastors and 20 evangelists.

This new church has grown without much in the way of outside support. It has been hard. In the ongoing civil war, the church has lost 27 members, two pastors, and five evangelists. Three church buildings have been burnt down. Seven properties have been looted.

The leaders of this brave church have decided to stay. At a trauma healing conference sponsored by Christian Reformed World Missions in Nairobi, Kenya, the leaders decided to go back. They said, "If we die, we die in the Lord."

—Clay Libolt

CRC Moves Closer to Sierra Leone Church

Synod 2017 accepted a request from its daughter church in Sierra Leone to forge an ecumenical relationship. As a "church in dialogue" with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), the Christian Reformed Church of Sierra Leone is still a step away from the closest level of ecumenical relations, "ecclesiastical fellowship."

CRCNA missionaries and relief workers jointly planted a church in Sierra Leone beginning in 1980. Despite many setbacks, the church survived Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war that began in 1991. In 2005, the CRCNA passed on its work in Sierra Leone to nationals.

"It's a gift of God to be here making this decision," said Kathy Smith, Classis British Columbia North-West, a former missionary



Kathy Smith, Classis British Columbia North-West: "It's a gift to see how God has protected and blessed the church."

to Sierra Leone. "It's a gift to see how God has protected and blessed the church."

But Smith and other delegates wondered why the denomination's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) did not recommend the



Phillip Leo, Classis Chicago South: "Let's give thanks for God's grace in spite of setbacks and even the horrors of civil war. This is a success story."

closer category of "ecclesiastical fellowship"—since this church was actually birthed from the CRCNA's work.

"This [Sierra Leone] church is quite young, 10 to 15 years old," answered Jim Payton, chair of

EIRC. "It seemed a wiser course of action to establish a relationship that would not expose us to criticism if there were any problems in their churches." Such problems could include matters like polygamy, which is quite common in Africa, he added.

Original missionaries Paul and Mary Kortenhoven and their son Aaron stayed through the country's civil war and came under repeated gunfire and bombing. "Only God saved our lives as we got caught in machine-gun fire," Kortenhoven said. He said they lost three staff members who were helping those who were attacked.

"Let's give thanks for God's grace in spite of setbacks and even the horrors of civil war," said Phillip Leo. "This is a success story."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Reformed Churches of South Africa Greet Synod 2017



Risimati Hobyane represented the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA).

Risimati Hobyane and Henk Stoker traveled from Potchefstroom to bring greetings to Synod 2017 from Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA).

“We appreciate this invitation because it reflects more than any other thing our ecumenical unity and fraternal fellowship over many years,” said Hobyane. “The most important reason for our presence is our firm commitment to our mutual confession of the unity of the church of Christ.”

He said that in the two synods since the GKSA last had a representative at a Christian Reformed Church synod in 2012, his denomination has struggled over the role of women in ecclesiastical office, coming to the decision that they understand Scripture to only allow suitable men in the offices of elders and pastors. The synods also dealt with a “turn-around strategy” to address their membership decline.

Hobyane also told delegates that his church is interested in the discussion about the Belhar Confession. “We were very clear on it in 2012,” he said, referring to his church’s caution against the CRC adopting it.

“Although we are divided by deep seas and huge waves,” Hobyane said, “We are one in Christ.” —Gayla R. Postma

Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterian Church Looks to Learn, Collaborate



Nate Dreesmann, Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterian Church (ECO), brings greetings.

Nate Dreesmann brought greetings to Synod 2017 from the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterian Church (ECO), a five-year-old denomination of 120,000 members in 340 churches.

Dreesmann told synod delegates that congregations coming into ECO are asked to shift from being clergy-centered to an unleashed laity, from safety to risk-taking, from homogenous to preparing all God’s people for a post-Christian culture, from attractional to missional attractional.

“We did not know how to fully equip our churches for these shifts,” he said. “We

are beginning to cultivate relationships. We desire to share what we’ve learned and be in the posture of learners from those who do better than we do.”

He noted that strategic partnerships with the Christian Reformed Church and World Renew make sense for them, to work together to have a great impact.

“We ask for your prayers for what we are doing and to hear how we can pray for you as co-laborers . . . to work together to accomplish our mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ.” —Gayla R. Postma

ECUMENICAL RELATIONSHIPS



Fraternal delegates (l-r) Jonah Lagat, Reformed Church of East Africa; Marius Ndabazaniye, Evangelical Reformed Church—Burundi; Jean-Bosco Nsabimana, Christian Reformed Church—Burundi; and Martin Wanjala, Christian Reformed Church in Eastern Africa.

East African Churches Share Their Struggles

A group of East African church leaders spoke in a panel discussion at Synod 2017.

Christian Reformed Church in Eastern Africa

General Secretary Martin Wanjala reported that, especially in rural areas, “people are accepting Christ as Savior and Lord, coming to church and liking the life of ministry,” which, he said, “gives me great joy.” He added that people will walk 10 miles to hear someone preach, often necessary because of rough roads and tribal insurgencies.

Wanjala asked delegates to pray for upcoming elections in Kenya, that the violent clashes surrounding the 2007 and 2013 elections there will not be repeated. In Burundi and Congo, he reported, people are coping with shortages of food and medicine and with instability because of violent tribal clashes.

Christian Reformed Church—Burundi

General Secretary Jean-Bosco Nsabimana told delegates that Burundi has been in a state of tribal warfare his entire life. In 2015 there was a deadly conflict over the reelection of President Pierre Nkurunziza. “Thank God it’s over now,” said Nsabimana, but

he added that the Burundian people continue to struggle with disease, hunger, and instability. “People are mostly on the run,” he said. The CRC of Burundi was started in 2005 and has about 1,200 members.

Evangelical Reformed Church—Burundi

Marius Ndabazaniye echoed Nsabimana’s concerns about Burundi. “Most of the Christians [have run] away,” he said. “The problem is lack of food in Burundi. . . . Less than half of our people have jobs—it is not possible to find a job. I ask for your prayers so that we may have peace in Burundi.”

Reformed Church of East Africa

The Reformed Church of East Africa is a Kenyan church that was begun by Dutch missionaries in 1948. The denomination has grown to include over 600 congregations, said Jonah Lagat, general secretary of the denomination. His church has been helping children who are orphaned because of AIDS. “This brings me joy, because we are able to reach out to the world and bring a positive impact.”

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Synod Hears from Churches in Ethiopia, Congo, and South Sudan

Four ecumenical guests from Africa brought greetings to Synod 2017 in a panel discussion.

Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia

Fikre Norcha represented the Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia, a denomination of 75,000 members in 139 churches started 20 years ago.

Norcha said the denomination was especially encouraged by church planting efforts and the creation of development programs for women and children.

He said a large challenge for the denomination is learning about the Reformed heritage. "We need to know how to build our local churches in confessional faith. If we can translate the *Calvin Institutes*, that would maybe bring

change all over the country. We have no basic Reformed books in our language."

He also said they need Christian schools and poverty alleviation programs for especially women and children affected by drought.

Ethiopian Kale Hyewt Church

Woyita Olla brought greetings from the Ethiopian Kale Hyewt Church, one of the biggest denominations with close to 10 million members. He said the denomination, started 88 years ago, is known mainly as a Bible-believing church.

He noted that the church is known for zealous evangelism in



(L-r) Ecumenical guests Kalala Malebongo Kubongo, United Reformed Church in Congo; Patrick Jok, Sudanese Reformed Church in South Sudan; Woyita Olla, Ethiopian Kale Hyewt Church; and Fikre Norcha, Presbyterian Church of Ethiopia.

areas people are afraid to go. "What thrills me is our global missions movement. Our mission is to stand wherever there are gaps in global missions, in places like Afghanistan and Malaysia."

But the church faces many challenges too, including famine, drought, and the militant Islamic movement. "They burned down 42 of our local church buildings. After three years, they burned down 10 local churches."

Olla noted the many refugees in Ethiopia from Somalia, Eritrea,

and South Sudan. "That is a wonderful opportunity for us. That ministry is very much relevant. As good stewards we need to reach out to them."

Sudanese Reformed Church in South Sudan

Patrick Jok brought greetings from the Sudanese Reformed Church in South Sudan. "We are still very young," he said, "celebrating our silver jubilee, 25 years of ministry." After wandering between Presbyterian, Pentecostal, and African independent churches, he said, they at last settled into a Reformed home. "The Reformed family found us and embraced us."

The church faces much hardship and suffering from famine and with the war that began two years after South Sudan became independent, which brought "targeted killing, a genocide going on because of people's ethnicity." He said that when coming to North America, he has trouble with too much food because he is used to eating only once a day.

Despite that, Jok said, pastors and evangelists are laboring in areas of high instability and religious persecution and intolerance.

"We have a challenge of leadership lacking theological training," he said. He noted that leaders don't have Bibles and Reformed literature in their language.

Dutch Church Rejoices in Stability



Fraternal delegate Peter Sinia of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands.

In a country where churches are shrinking, the Dutch Reformed Church has maintained its number of members since 2014. The church is known in Dutch as the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*.

"Being stable sounds boring," said Synod 2017 ecumenical guest Peter Sinia. "For us it's exciting in a country where lots of people are leaving the church."

Not only are the numbers stable, the Dutch Reformed Church is active. Congregations are working with refugees from the Middle East, teaching them Dutch and helping them establish themselves. The denomination is seeking to reunite with a sister church it split from in the 1950s, and it has growing ties with congregations in Hungary.

"Maybe because the church is in decline, we realize that we need each other," said Sinia.

The Dutch Reformed Church's synod recently ruled against allowing same-sex couples to serve in the church—but some congregations disregarded the ruling, a matter that is still in process, Sinia said.

People in the Netherlands watch American politics very closely, Sinia said. "Our health and survival in the Netherlands, the lowlands, people who live behind the dikes, depends on other people's decisions," he said, referring to environmental policies about rising sea levels.

"All this I report as a servant of the Good Shepherd, who counts his sheep, but also guides us in issues of morality," Sinia concluded. "May the Lord bless you."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Appeal Denied, Synod Prays

"We are still a young denomination in infancy. We need oversight. Work we've started, we can't finish . . . on our own without mature Reformed churches standing by our side. If we do it well, we'll have a strong Reformed church in Sudan and South Sudan."

United Reformed Church in Congo

Kalala Malebongo Kubongo traveled from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to bring greetings from United Reformed Church in Congo.

This church in Congo is a miracle for us, he said. It started with radio broadcasting from Back to God Ministries International in the 1980s and is now an established church.

In a country that is primarily Roman Catholic, he said, the church tries to emphasize God's grace, the Word of God, the Bible alone. "In Congo, we preach [the] Word of God in the cities and rural areas. . . . We need pastors because we have 181 local churches but only 34 pastors."

Kubongo noted the political and economic problems in the country. "We need not only prayer. We need also your action: Action in the sense you can write, appeal to your leaders to tell them in Africa our leaders are opposing tribes so they continue to be in power. We live in very extreme injustice, not only people but natural resources."

Because sending students out for training is difficult, he said, they have started their own seminary. "We need the support of Reformed churches worldwide, with books and lecturers. We need your support for training so people in Congo can know what Reformed doctrine is." —Gayla R. Postma

Synod 2017 denied an appeal brought by seven congregations and one individual pastor against a decision by Classis Pacific Northwest (a regional group of churches) to approve a candidate for ministry.

The action of the classis was endorsed by the synodical deputies, representatives of other classes sent to ensure that good order is followed.

A committee of synod examined the materials submitted and recommended that synod not sustain the appeal, stating that proper procedure had been followed.

Some delegates wanted to see the materials themselves. George Koopmans of Classis Alberta South said that in this case synod was acting as a court



Peter Byma, Classis Grand Rapids North: "Classes are hurting all over our denomination."

of appeal, and that as a court of appeal it needed the relevant facts.

Synod did not agree. It voted not to sustain the appeal on the basis of the testimony of its committee.

But Synod did not leave it there. J. Scott Roberts of Classis

Pacific Northwest spoke of "deep divisions and rifts" in the classis. He said, "This is a no-win situation." He requested prayer for Classis Pacific Northwest.

Peter Byma of Classis Grand Rapids North broadened the appeal. He said that "classes are hurting all over our denomination." Asking for a "spiritual moment," he suggested that the delegates spend time in prayer for the classes.

As the synod bowed in prayer, the song "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" emerged spontaneously from the delegates. Synod president Cornelius Pool instructed that a request for prayer for Classis Pacific Northwest be placed in the minutes.

—Clay Libolt

Synod 2017 Learns about The Global Christian Forum

Delegates of Synod 2017 learned about the work of The Global Christian Forum (GCF) from David Han.

The Christian Reformed Church is a member of GCF. The organization's purpose is to bring together a broad range of Christian denominations and ecumenical organizations from around the world to address common challenges.

The forum gathers top leaders of denominations in the three main strands of the Christian church worldwide: Catholics, evangelicals, and Pentecostals, according to Han. They meet every five to seven years at a global summit. They also convene church leaders in regional summits, most recently in the Middle East and Latin America.

At the 2012-13 GCF summit, leaders identified two key challenges to the church worldwide: persecution and the perception



David Han spoke to delegates about the work of Global Christian Forum.

that some churches are proselytizing from other denominations.

In response to the issue of persecution, GCF held "a global consultation of 150 church leaders, half of whom were leaders of churches suffering persecution and the other half leaders of churches and agencies in solidarity with them.

"It was the first time in the modern history of the church that

a gathering consisting of nearly all streams of global Christianity coalesced around the issue of persecution of Christians," said Han.

The forum has also "encourage[d] work on reconciliation and 'healing of memories' between churches and communities which have experienced tension and pain due to conflicting perspectives and practices on mission and evangelism."

Synod's first clerk, Rudy Gonzalez, led prayer for Han and his work. "Father, we can say it is only by the power of your hand that you bring about these gatherings where people who wouldn't normally come together come together. . . . We pray that your name would be honored and glorified as they fellowship with one another. We pray that it would be all about honoring the name of Jesus Christ."

—Roxanne Van Farowe



Sesquicentennial Beard

Michael J. VanderKwaak from Classis B.C. South-East, sported a lengthy beard in honor of Canada's 150th anniversary this summer. He remembers his dad, Len VanderKwaak, and other men in the church growing beards for Canada's 100th birthday.



Thea Leunk and Andrew Beunk

Beunk and Leunk

You would think these two names would rhyme, but they don't. Andrew Beunk, Classis B.C. North-West, pronounces his Be'unck. Two syllables. Thea Leunk, Classis Grand Rapids East, pronounces hers Link. One syllable. We found them sitting together in the warm sunshine discussing how to pronounce their names.

—Clay Libolt

Synod 2017 President Urges Delegates to Keep Moving Forward



Synod president Cor Pool: "Make God famous in all you do."

Cornelius Pool, in his capacity as president of Synod 2017, gave a final address to synod, urging delegates to keep pressing on. Pool noted that in Philippians 3:12-14, the apostle Paul said two things should matter most to Christians and to the church: knowing Christ and winning the prize. Pool said that Christians "must never be satisfied" but "keep moving forward."

He highlighted several ways that Synod 2017 had, in his opinion, moved the church forward: the change in the governance structure and setting up the new Council of Delegates, the discussion of the future of the Reformed Church in America-CRC partnership, the joining together of Home Missions and World Missions as the new Resonate Global Mission agency, and even in the tough discussions that had occurred.

Speaking of these tough discussions, Pool said again, "Keep moving forward with humble hearts. Listen more. Speak less. Build oneness and unity."

And last, "Make God famous in all you do."

—Clay Libolt

Drew Brown, pastor of Crossroads Community CRC in Schererville, Ind., joked that the church's coffee is "Reformed Total Depravity Blend, the coffee that chooses you."



Calvin Seminary Retirees Honored

The annual synod banquet included honoring retired Calvin Theological Seminary faculty. They are (l-r) Drs. John Bolt, John Cooper, and Dean Deppe.



A Reformation Beard

Petr Kornilov of Classis Hackensack started growing a beard in the summer of 2016 while preaching on the Ten Commandments. He was attempting to look like Moses, à la Charlton Heston. He has decided to keep growing it to commemorate the Reformation's 500th anniversary this year—in hopes of resembling the Reformer John Calvin.



Woodrow Dixon aka Fidget Spinner Guy

Fidget Spinner Guy

Delegate Woodrow Dixon was often seen playing with his fidget spinner during synod deliberations. He was seated right behind a microphone and was seen so often on camera that webcast viewers began referring to him as "Fidget Spinner Guy."

—Roxanne Van Farowe

Two Eds and Two Kathys

At Synod 2017 there are two Ed Vissers and two Kathy Smiths. The Eds, Edward W. of Classis Hamilton and Edward C. of Classis Atlantic Northeast, first came to each other's attention in seminary.

Ed W. was actually in seminary; Ed C. was about to be. A check arrived in Ed W.'s mailbox at Calvin Seminary, a sizable check. It was written to Ed Visser. He cashed it, having received unexpected gifts before. He was a Canadian student, struggling financially. He took it as a gift from the Lord. The problem was the check, a check from Classis Lake Erie, was for the pre-seminary student, Edward C. To his surprise, Ed W. was taken into an office and told that he had cashed someone else's check.

Kathy S. Smith is the adjunct professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary. In her role as an expert on church polity she attends every synod. Kathy N. Smith is an elder delegate to Synod 2017 from Classis B.C. North-West. This is her first synod. She has been the chair of her council and active in her classis. They had not met until this year's synod.

—Clay Libolt



Edward C. Visser (left) and Edward W. Visser



Kathy S. Smith (left) and Kathy N. Smith



Jim DeZeeuw and his aunt Bev Clover

Aunt and Nephew Share Synod

Bev Clover and her nephew Jim DeZeeuw are two of the four members of the Classis Grand Rapids South delegation. They share common roots in Prosper Christian Reformed Church in Falmouth, Mich. Clover is a deacon at LaGrave Avenue Church in Grand Rapids and DeZeeuw is the pastor of Moline Christian Reformed Church in Moline, Mich.

—Clay Libolt

Reformed Church of South Africa delegate: Risimati is my name, but my Christian name is Synod. So Synod is about to address synod!



Calvin Hoogstra (left) and Drew Hoekema

Oldest and Youngest Delegates at Synod

Calvin Hoogstra, 80, was the oldest delegate to Synod. "I'm going to praise the good Lord that I can still be like this at my age!" he said. The youngest delegate, 28-year-old Drew Hoekema, was enjoying his first time at synod. "I'm just taking it all in," said the newly ordained pastor.

—Roxanne Van Farowe

NEWS

The Banner Appoints News Editor

The Banner is pleased to announce the appointment of Alissa Vernon as news editor for the official magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. Vernon lives in St. Catharines, Ont., where she is a member of Jubilee Fellowship CRC.

Shiao Chong, editor in chief, said Vernon brings nearly 20 years of news and journalism experience to the role, including both print and online multimedia.

"Alissa is a journalist at heart," he said. "Besides excellent writing, reporting, and editing skills, she has exceptional organizational abilities. We believe these gifts equip her perfectly for this role to serve our readers in finding the best news stories."

Chong noted that the news editor role acts as a bridge for news to travel from the local churches, ministries, classes and denominational agencies to the readers. "The role is vital in fulfill-



Alissa Vernon

ing our mandate to inform our readers of what is happening in the CRC."

Vernon sees her new role as one of facilitating the church in telling its stories: of struggle, of grace, of wonder, of perseverance, of discovery. "Where God is leading us, his people, to do ministry matters," she said. "To us and to the wider world. I will humbly take what I have and know . . . as I read, write, and distribute our stories through *The Banner*."

Judy Hardy, *The Banner's* associate editor and part of the hiring team, said that Vernon brings a deep love for the church to her new role. "We're excited about the opportunity to work with her!"

Vernon will work alongside current news editor, Gayla Postma, who will now concentrate on denominational news reporting including synod, classis meetings, and meetings of the new Council of Delegates.

Synod president Cor Pool during a long debate: "I have 28 speakers in the queue . . . and you know . . . just sayin'!"

Calvin Theological Seminary president Jul Medenblik after spotting a baby: "And we have a really, really future seminarian over there!"



115,494
Number of steps taken by
Banner photographer
during Synod 2017

African American **delegate Wayne Coleman**: "God, why did you send me here among all these black folk? That was a joke!"

Fraternal Delegate Marius Ndobazaniye

(following a reference to polygamy in Africa that morning):
"I have six children . . . and one wife."

Noteworthy

Aaron Abma of Grand Rapids, Mich., was chosen for the **Lilly Fellows Graduate Program** for top students who seek to find the connections among Christianity, higher education, and the vocation of the teacher-scholar as they pursue graduate degrees in humanities and the arts.

The King's University in Edmonton, Alta., received a grant of nearly \$300,000 from the government of Canada to upgrade infrastructure.

Bernadette Arthur, Race Relations coordinator for the Christian Reformed Church, was honored as **this year's "emergent leader"** by the Phoebe Palmer fundraising organization in Hamilton, Ont. Honorees are selected for the leadership they bring to their ministries.

For more, please visit thebanner.org.



Aaron Abma



Bernadette Aurthur

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Earl S. Holkeboer

1923-2017

Schoolteacher, missionary pastor, church planter, chaplain, superb athlete, loving father, model caregiver. Earl Holkeboer is remembered for his kindness, integrity, and steadfast trust in the ways and goodness of God. He died in New York City on April 26 at age 93.

After attending Midshipman's School at Northwestern University, he served in the U.S. Navy during World War II, including the final campaign in Okinawa. It was during and right after his military service that, as Holkeboer would later observe, "I found spiritual realities becoming more meaningful, personal, and relevant."

After the war and following a stint as a teacher, Holkeboer went on to seminary. He planted and pastored three congregations in Colorado, Ohio, and Indiana. While an interim pastor in New York, he was chaplain to the AIDS support group in a maximum security prison.

A superb athlete, Holkeboer played college basketball and pitched for the church softball league until he retired at 65. He loved golf and was an avid fisherman.

Holkeboer is survived by his son, David. He was predeceased by his wife, Helen, in 2015 and his son Robert in 1995.

—Janet A. Greidanus

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



Rev. Jelle Nutma

1928-2017

Despite a debilitating stroke 21 years before his death, Jelle Nutma continued to serve the Lord, impacting others through his faith, his values, and his character. Nutma died on May 6 at age 89.

His dream of becoming a pastor was somewhat prompted by his mother making him memorize psalms when he was naughty. "Standing on a box, he'd preach to the empty chairs," said his family. At age 19, he emigrated from the Netherlands, to Hamilton, Ont. He graduated from Calvin College and Seminary.

Nutma served many Christian Reformed congregations in Ontario and Alberta and helped establish several Christian schools.

Family camping trips "brought us moments that are indelibly etched in our memories," his children said.

After his stroke ended the Nutmas' dreams of traveling together, they chose to make the best of the situation, keeping a great attitude and living life to the fullest.

Nutma is survived by his wife, Alida; their children Harry and Miriam, Sid and Alice, Margaret and Richard, Faith and Terry, Andrew and Darlene; and by 23 grandchildren and 35 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus



Rev. Gysbert John Rozenboom

1916-2017

Interested in ministry from an early age and actively preaching through his 92nd year, Gysbert Rozenboom died on April 2 at the age of 101. Rozenboom was the oldest living retired Christian Reformed pastor.

Following graduation from Calvin College and Seminary, Rozenboom faithfully pastored eight Christian Reformed congregations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. He found great joy in preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. He loved teaching catechism to the youth. After retiring in 1981, he served as an interim pastor for 15 churches throughout the U.S. as well as serving as a "winter park" chaplain for 20 years in Bradenton, Florida.

Rozenboom's family has fond memories of many wonderful road trips. Rozenboom also loved sports and was an avid fisherman and golfer. He played his last golf game at age 100. He was still playing pool and Wii bowling until two months before his death.

Rozenboom will be lovingly remembered by his children Lois, Al and Jan, Pat, Nadine and Ron; and by 13 grandchildren, 34 great-grandchildren, and 12 great-great-grandchildren. He was predeceased in 2013 by Ada, his wife of 73 years, and two sons-in-law.

—Janet A. Greidanus



Rev. Samuel Vander Jagt

1918-2017

Prior to his career in ministry, Samuel Vander Jagt served with distinction during WW II. He flew 66 missions as part of the 596th Bomber Squadron and received many military awards. Following his death at the age of 99, Vander Jagt was honored with a military burial.

After graduation from Calvin College and Seminary, Vander Jagt served congregations in Michigan, California, Illinois, and Iowa, and as a hospital chaplain. At the age of 88, he was hired as chaplain for Select Hospital in Davenport, where he ended his formal career at the age of 92.

Vander Jagt served as chaplain of the Davenport American Legion. He worked with youth in the Civil Air Patrol and earned Citizen of the Year Award from the Rock Island City Council for service to their local rescue mission. He worked to protect the unborn.

Vander Jagt will be lovingly remembered by his children Sandra and Marve, Jane "Laurie" and Steve, Janna and Bruce, and Samuel Vander Jagt, Jr.; and by 16 grandchildren, 34 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great-grandchild. He was predeceased by Jane, his wife of 73 years; by their son, Ronald; and one granddaughter.

—Janet A. Greidanus



THE PATH TOWARD UNITY IN CHRIST

UNITED WE STAND, divided we fall. I learned this proverb back in elementary school. My teacher told us a tale of an old king who tested his three sons to find out who was worthy to succeed him on the throne. He asked them to try to break a small bundle of sticks. The first two sons tried with all their strength to break the bundle of sticks but failed. The third son chose to untie the bundle and break each stick one by one—thus proving he was smarter than his brothers and worthy of the throne. The sticks on their own were vulnerable, but together they were an unbreakable force.

Perhaps that early lesson is why I developed a strong affinity for unity and

peace. Part of me longs for what Jesus prayed to God the Father: “May [Christians] be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:23). That prayer seems far from being a visible reality today.

I know I am not alone in this desire for reconciliation and unity. Some Christians seem to advocate for peace and unity at all costs—even at the expense of silencing dissent, for instance. (And, some may say, at the expense of truth.) And then there is Christ’s own claim that he comes to bring division (Matt. 10:34). We live in an increasingly polarized and divided world.

What are we to make of all this?

Unity in Diversity

First, the Bible suggests that unity is a creational good. God created a world of unity, harmony, and peace. But this unity is not the same as uniformity. Rather, God delighted in creating diverse creatures, each according to its own kind. These creatures lived in unity and harmony under God’s rule, represented by God’s mandate to human beings made in his image (Gen. 1:26-28). Ancient kings in biblical times would erect images or statues of themselves in their territories to announce their dominion and rule. As God’s imagebearers, humanity was to represent God’s rule on earth by stewarding God’s dominion. In God’s good creation, we see that unity is by nature a unity in diversity—reflecting God’s own

triune nature—and united by a common purpose to serve and glorify God.

From the New Testament we learn that this creational unity was also rooted in Jesus Christ: “For by him all things were created . . . all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:16-17). Unity in Christ is a unity in diversity from its very beginning.

Distorted into Division and Uniformity

When sin entered the world, it distorted both the nature of unity and the common purpose for unity. First, sin aggravated diversity into division. After Adam and Eve fell into sin, we see alienation and division between God and humanity, between man and woman, and between humanity and creation (Gen. 3:8-19). Where these diverse relationships were once marked by peace and unity, sin brought conflict and enmity. Difference and diversity are part of God’s good creation. But division and enmity are sinful intruders, not part of God’s original design.

Sin also distorted the goals of unity and turned unity into uniformity. The Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11 suggests this. The Babel builders were united in a common purpose—but a purpose that was in rebellion against God’s purposes. Their uniformity in language was not inherently positive. Rather, it facilitated their rebellion against God. God’s introduction of diverse languages to thwart their efforts was a blessing in disguise.

The problem with uniformity becomes clearer when we reflect on what God did at Pentecost in the New Testament (Acts 2). Instead of using the already common tongues of Aramaic (used in Jewish synagogues) or Greek (used in the Roman Empire’s marketplace), God blessed the diverse human tongues of various cultures as vehicles of his truth (Acts 2:8-11). And instead of uniting the various Pentecost pilgrims

by erasing their cultural differences, God united them in Christ by transcending those differences while blessing their specific cultures and languages.

Furthermore, the apostle Paul employed the metaphor of one body with many parts (1 Cor. 12:12-31) to explain unity in the church. He distinctly warned against envisioning unity as uniformity in all things, emphasizing instead the necessity and enrichment of the diverse gifts God has given.

Thus Scripture suggests that uniformity is a sinful distortion of God’s unity. And unity is not always good in and of itself, as people could be united for evil purposes. Unity is good when we are united for godly purposes.

Reconciled in Christ

Because of sinful divisions and humanity’s alienation from God, God embarked on a mission “to reconcile to himself all things” through Christ by “making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:20). As the CRC’s 1996 synodical report “God’s Diverse and Unified Family” states, “The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God’s eternal plan for the ages” (p. 16).

In this mission, God not only set out to reconcile humanity to himself but also to reconcile people with one another. Jesus made peace between Jews and Gentiles by breaking down “the dividing wall of hostility,” creating “one new humanity out of the two” (Eph. 2:14-16). “Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God’s saving work” (“God’s Diverse and Unified Family,” p. 17).

Reconciliation is first and foremost God’s mission and work. It is not our political agenda, and it is definitely not rooted in our efforts alone. But God did entrust us with his “ministry of reconciliation,” and God sends us out as “Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Cor. 5:18-20). The church is integral to God’s mission of reconciling all things. It is reconciling

people into a unity that is neither simply “getting along” with each other nor enforced obedience to rules.

Unity in Christ is much deeper and harder than either of those. It is a unity of unconditional love rooted in our faith in Christ. It is a unity that transcends, not erases, many of our differences. And it unites us in a common mission of reconciliation.

UNITY AND RECONCILIATION IN CHRIST ARE, FIRST AND FOREMOST, GOD’S GIFTS.

Mistakes to Avoid

Viewed from a biblical perspective, some of our common ideas about unity may be mistaken. For example, unity despite differences is not necessarily an act of compromise that betrays faithfulness to the gospel that divides “us” from “them.” Matthew 10:34 alone should not overshadow the other New Testament passages that emphasize peace-making as part of our Christian discipleship, including “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:9). In its context, Matthew 10:34 spoke to the inevitable conflict between gospel proclamation and the message of the world as Jesus was sending out the twelve disciples as “sheep among wolves” (Matt. 10:16).

Some Christians seem to take Matthew 10:34 as license to be divisive and »

belligerent, insisting that anyone who disagrees with their “tribe” or their biblical views are “them”—that is, enemies of Christ. But bracing for inevitable conflict should not equate to embracing conflict as a goal. Keep in mind that division is a sinful intruder into God’s good creation. So our goal should not be creating or sustaining an “us versus them” reality but rather the creation of one new humanity in Christ, where there is only “we.”

This “we” cannot be artificially created by enforcing rules or even creeds. It cannot be manufactured through uniformity. It ultimately results from the Holy Spirit’s work of transforming hearts and minds. This is why unity and reconciliation in Christ are, first and foremost, God’s gifts.

In many ways, God has already united us, despite our differences. We have only one Lord, not many.

A well-known saying goes like this: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.” Our problem, of course, is determining the essentials. And, as one friend remarked to me, our list of essentials keeps getting longer.

Unity in Christ will always revolve around God’s Word (which includes God’s truth and justice), God’s mission, and God’s love. If we do not first find our unity in God’s love, it’s unlikely that we will ever come to an agreement about God’s Word and God’s mission. I believe that our embodiment and practice of love, not our intellectual prowess, will help us better arrive at the essentials that unite us. Fertile soil for the Holy Spirit’s seeds of truth and justice to bear fruit requires humble hearts and minds that have drunk deeply from the living waters of God’s love—not simply intellect and study.

First Step to Unity

I suggest, therefore, that humility is the first step toward unity and reconciliation. Writing to a divided congregation (Phil. 4:2), the apostle Paul appealed to the Philippian Christians to be like-minded, calling them to love and humility: “Do

nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4).

If there is a serious disagreement in a church council, for instance, humility is being willing to lay down one’s ambition or pride. It is willing to not have to win an argument. Humility is willing to learn from even those we disagree with.

To emphasize the point, Paul drew on Christ’s example: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Can we follow Christ’s example? Jesus gave up his privileged divine status in order to bring reconciliation between us and God. Are we willing to give up our privilege and power in order to bring peace and unity among each other? Or do we proudly and stubbornly hold onto our agendas and demands?

True and False

But what about distinguishing between the true church and the false? Surely true Christians cannot be united with false ones?

Jesus suggested that the difference between true and false Christians may not be easy to determine, humanly speaking. In his parable of the weeds in Matthew 13:24-30, Jesus implied that the world will always have bad weeds and good wheat growing together. Instead of God’s servants trying to root out the bad weeds, they are to leave that to harvest time, most likely a reference to Christ’s return and Judgment Day.

Perhaps it is really not up to us to identify and uproot the bad weeds. After all, it is hard for us fallible and sinful creatures to tell the difference between

immature wheat and weeds. This is the point of the parable and why we wait until the harvest. What if we uproot by mistake immature Christians who are still growing spiritually? It is best left to God to do the weeding. Meanwhile, we’re called to mutually encourage one another toward holiness and strive for collective godly obedience.

Vulnerable Peacemakers

Does this leave the church vulnerable to infiltration and corruption in our quest for unity and reconciliation? I believe this is where we should humbly trust in God’s protection rather than in our invisible walls and boundaries.

Ambassadors of Christ’s reconciliation destroy walls of hostility not by using force, hostility, or intimidation, but by being vulnerable cross-bearers. They are willing to be vulnerable for the sake of God’s gospel of peace. They are willing to suffer pain and hardships, even turn the other cheek, in order to further God’s kingdom. They know that God’s kingdom cannot be established through violence, division, hatred, fear-mongering, stereotyping, or human coercion over others. Any so-called unity or victory gained from such sinful means can never justify the end.

Above all else, we become vulnerable cross-bearers because our Lord Jesus Christ was a vulnerable reconciler. Jesus, the Son of God, became vulnerable to the point of death. Through his steadfast obedience and faithfulness to love and peace, God gave him the victory over sin and death.

Likewise, the humble and vulnerable way of the cross, relying on God’s power rather than our strength, is the path we take toward receiving God’s gift of unity in Christ. ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



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

2017

Candidates for the Ministry

*“and Jesus sent them
out to proclaim the
kingdom of God. . .”*

—Luke 9:2

**Asterisks indicate candidates who
are not eligible for call until they
have completed all requirements.*

D O YOU HAVE TRAVEL PLANS?

Residents of North America like to travel, and summer is a great season to head for the closest lake or somewhere else in order to get away from it all. Some of us even own trailers and vehicles designed exclusively for travel.

On the next couple of pages you'll see the names and faces of people who have been on a different kind of journey—a journey toward ordained vocational ministry. They have been approved by Synod 2017 as candidates, and they are eager to move into a position of service. Some will serve as pastors in a local church. Some will work to plant a new church. Some will be sent as missionaries, and some will serve as chaplains. Some will physically move a great distance away from their current location. Others will stay put even as they enter into a new chapter of their discipleship journey.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are all on a journey. According to Hebrews 11:13, one mark of faithful discipleship is to admit that we are “foreigners and strangers on earth.” God’s people have always been nomads. Like Abraham, like the children of Israel, and the disciples of Jesus, we join the journeying crowd—keeping a light grip on the things of this world and holding tightly to the Lord who promises to lead us.

Foreigners and strangers in this world need guidance. The role of the pastor is to point the community to the Guide, the Savior, the Protector. We're so grateful as a church for those who are ready to serve as pastors that we highlight the candidates each year in this synod issue of *The Banner*. The candidates join us in expressing gratitude to their mentors, seminary professors, and local congregations as they have been supported through this part of their journey. And together we covenant to faithfully follow and serve our Lord as we journey through this life.

For contact information, biographical information, and testimonies from each of the candidates, visit the Candidacy Committee website at crcna.org/candidacy. ■

—Rev. David Koll
Director of Candidacy



Patrick Anthony



Josiah Bokma



Laura de Jong



Mark DeVos



Brad Diekema



Brian Dunn



Joshua K. Friend



Cari Fydirchuk*



Ernesto J. Hernandez*



Ryan Hoekstra



James Hollendonner



Jeff Hoos*



Sarah Kim Hoos



Eunjun Jeong



Rafik Kamel*



George Keulen



**Jungseong (Samuel)
Kim***



Hannah Ryou Lee



Hope Lee*



Michael McGowan



Kyle Meyaard-Schaap



Cory Nederveld



Fikre Norcha



Arek O'Connell



Ryan Taylor Pedde



Allen Pontarelli



Marg Rekman



Janet Ryzebol*



Bailey Sarver



Mark Van Andel



Michelle VanDenBerg*



Greg Vander Horn



Nicole Veenkamp



**Femke
Visser-Elenbaas***



Michael Westerveld



Brian White



Joanna Wigboldy



Jianlou Xu



Cody Zuiderveen



Christian
Reformed
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Support CRC Ministry Candidates

We're here to encourage and enable people entering into ordained ministry in the CRC. Your gift to the Candidacy Committee will help ensure that ministry candidates have the resources they need to successfully enter into ministry.

crcna.org/candidacy

*This ad is sponsored by Congregational Services. Visit us at crcna.org/services.

What's in a Name?

After God made all of the animals, he brought them to Adam to name. Pretty amazing, right? To get to see all of the animals that God had made and to get to name them too.

Sometimes we can learn about an animal just by knowing its name. Imagine seeing a

strange bushy-tailed animal with a long, skinny, snout and a long tongue. As soon as you find out that it is called an anteater, you know something about it! Names might tell us what an animal looks like or where it lives, what it eats, or even what it sounds like.

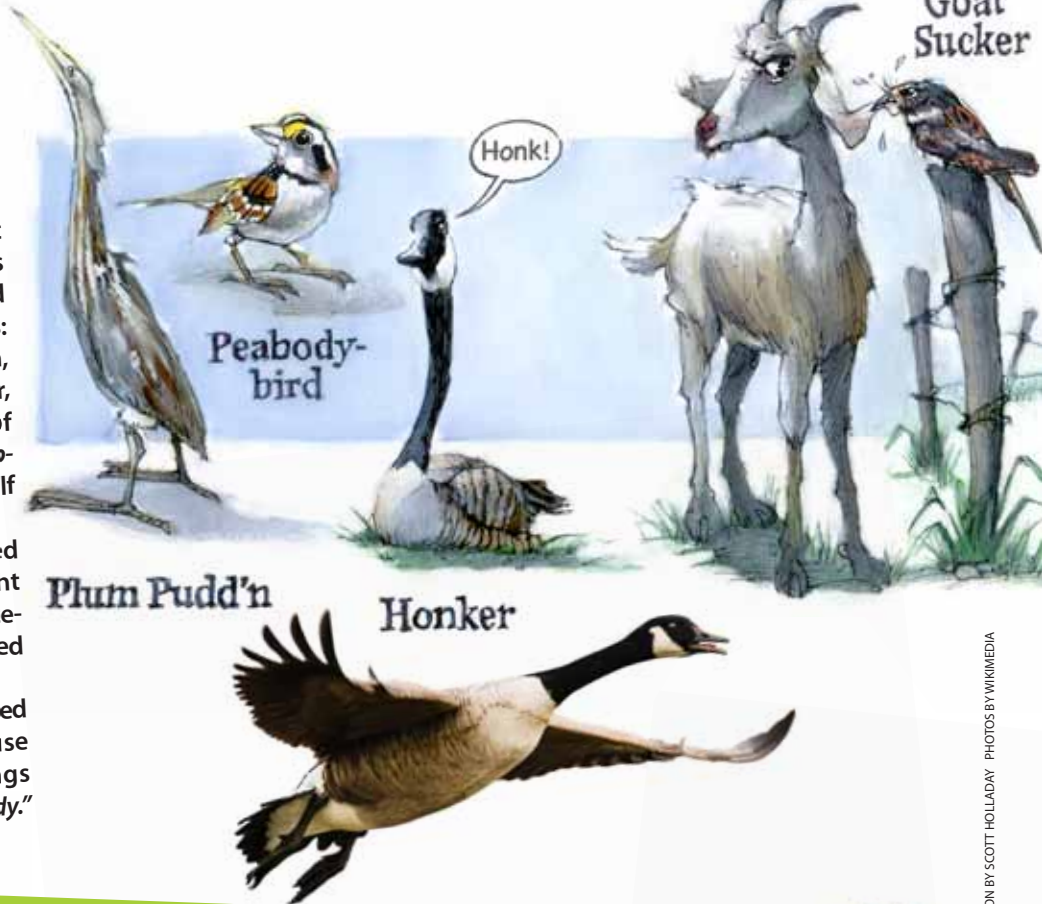


Plum Pudd'n, Squawk, and the Peabody-bird

The American bittern is a marsh bird that hides by standing in the cattails with its bill pointing toward the sky. People used to call this bird by lots of different names: stake-driver, thunder-pump, plum pudd'n, dunk-a-doo, barrel-maker, bog-pumper, mire-drum, bog hen, sun-gazer. Most of these names are from its loud, low *pump-er-lunk* call, which can be heard up to half a mile away!

The Canada goose was once called "honker," and the black-crowned night heron was the "quawk" or "squawk." White- and red-breasted nuthatches were called "big quank" and "little quank."

Some people called the white-throated sparrow the peabody-bird, not because it has a tiny body but because it sings "Po-or Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody."



Name of God

I AM is the special name that God called himself to Moses at the burning bush. Many years later, Jesus said, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). Jesus was telling us that he was and is God. In the book of John, Jesus uses seven "I am" statements to describe himself:

1. I am the bread of life.
2. I am the light of the world.
3. I am the gate for the sheep.
4. I am the good shepherd.
5. I am the resurrection and the life.
6. I am the way and the truth and the life.
7. I am the true vine.



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY PHOTOS BY WIKIMEDIA

Imperfect Names

As we learn more about God's world, the names that people have given some birds now seem silly.

The name "goatsucker" was given to birds like the whip-poor-will and nighthawk. These birds have big mouths and were commonly seen flying around over pastures, so people thought that they drank milk from the goats grazing there. Really, they were eating the insects that were attracted by the goats.



Hummingbirds and swifts belong to a group of birds known as *Apodiformes*, which means "without feet." In fact, these birds do have feet, although they are small.

The names that we give to animals are never going to be perfect. Even when we think we know all about them, there's more to them that only God knows.

Luckily, God knows us better than we know hummingbirds. In Isaiah 43, God says, "I have called you by name, and you are mine." And Jesus, who calls himself the Good Shepherd, says this: "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." If you believe in Jesus, then you are one of his sheep, and he calls you by name. God, the Creator of the universe, knows you and calls you by name!

Pancake Names

Here's a way to make your name—and eat it too! With an adult's help, use pancake mix or your own recipe to make the batter. Carefully pour the batter into letter shapes in a greased pan to cook. Make enough letters to spell your whole name, or make the first letter of everyone in your family's name!



Rachel Lancashire currently attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont. Her first name comes from the Hebrew name meaning "ewe."

Names in the Bible

Many of the names in the Bible are from the Hebrew or Greek languages and have meanings that you might not know. Look up these verses to match the names with their meanings.

Genesis 3:20 **EVE**
 Genesis 17:5 **ABRAHAM**
 1 Samuel 1:20 **SAMUEL**
 John 1:42 **PETER**
 Matthew 1:21 **JESUS**

HEARD BY GOD
ROCK
THE LORD SAVES
FATHER OF MANY
LIVING

With a parent's permission, visit www.behindthename.com to find out what your own name means!

Word Search

All through the Bible we are given many names and titles for Jesus. From them, we can learn more about who Jesus is and our relationship with him. Can you find all of these names hidden in this word search?

R D K N M Q Q U S M Y D O O N F O R
 W O L I G M I T I I O G B L A V U E
 C D L U N N G G V G M I L O M T R H
 F L T E I G H O F Y U S E R F I D T
 W W E Q S T O O S H G C S D O U Z A
 O Z F U Y N N F G A A Q Z O N P J F
 R X R G N O U O K E V R S F O L B G
 D E O P S A Y O P I A I V L S D Y N
 M D L O Y V M F C P N V O O N M V I
 R O S H G D O M O L M G Q R B J G T
 A K H Y Q E O C I E U L S D A F I S
 R K D T C X G Z Z F W F H S E M M A
 C A M N M E S S I A H M R I O J N L
 I Q I A L P H A A N D O M E G A G R
 S R Q J K L D W C G L F N V D I V E
 P Z Q R Z J H L L U S D Q R C N H V
 D O G F O B M A L T U H G M W N O E
 L O E H K Y M M S W K R M R S X S W

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR
 MIGHTY GOD
 EVERLASTING FATHER
 PRINCE OF PEACE
 LAMB OF GOD
 IMMANUEL
 ALPHA AND OMEGA

SON OF MAN
 SON OF GOD
 SAVIOR
 MESSIAH
 WORD
 KING OF KINGS
 LORD OF LORDS

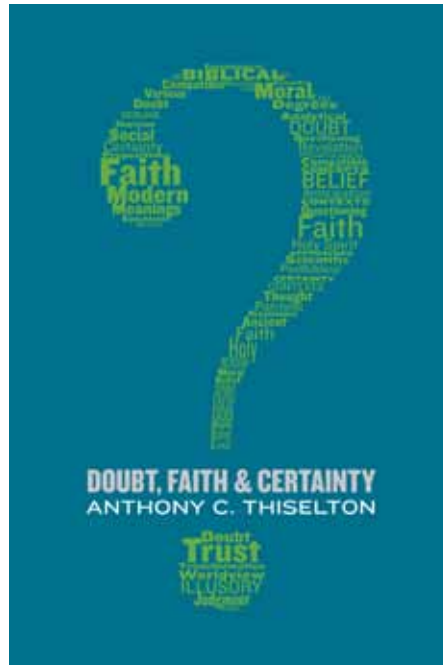
The Benefit of the Doubt

ANTHONY THISELTON HAS SPENT A LIFETIME WORKING at the crossroads of biblical studies, philosophy, and theology; many pastors and scholars know him from his distinguished works on philosophical hermeneutics or his massive biblical commentaries. In *Doubt, Faith, and Certainty* Thiselton writes with a general audience in mind, as a pastoral theologian to people struggling with spiritual doubt or overwhelmed by uncertainty.

Admittedly, he's not entirely successful in this aim. Long digressions on scholarly topics, frequent use of Greek and Hebrew words, and detailed summaries of complex thinkers like Paul Ricoeur, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and René Descartes will likely overwhelm many of the general readers he hopes to reach.

However, this small book can be very useful for pastors, chaplains, and teachers who are preparing sermons or talks that tackle the themes of doubt, faith, and certainty. The chapters read almost like working notes, shifting between biblical word studies, philosophical analysis, and theological and historical considerations—hardly elegant, but illuminating for anyone seeking clarity on the three concepts, as well as food for further reflection.

Above all, Thiselton urges that we use the words *doubt*, *faith*, and *certainty* in sermons, counseling, or conversation with attention to each concept's "many-sidedness in biblical, theological, and philosophical thought." Certainty, for example, can mean something different in law than



it does in physics, and again in theological or pastoral contexts. He also insists that while doubt can be negative, in many situations (including in the Bible) it can stimulate fresh thought and questions, and even expose the idols we have made of belief and God.

Perhaps the richest chapter for spiritual reflection is the final one on the Holy Spirit and certainty. Here, Thiselton argues that certainty is a gift of the Spirit that believers have in a provisional way now in Christ, but which is only complete at the last judgment, when "the partial, finite, and fragmentary will give way to understanding the whole context and entire picture of God's completed purpose." (Eerdmans) ■

Doubt can stimulate fresh thought and questions



Todd Statham is a CRC chaplain ministering at the University of British Columbia–Okanagan.

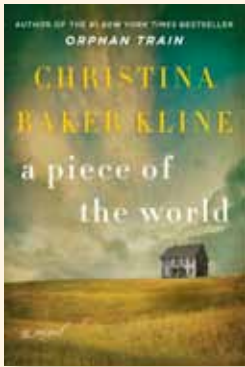


Movies Are Prayers

by **Josh Larsen**

reviewed by **Kristy Quist**

Josh Larsen, movie critic and editor of the *Think Christian* blog, has written a slim, thoughtful, and companionable exploration of movies as prayers—prayers of lament, confession, obedience, and joy, among others. Predicated on the idea that “prayers can be unintended and can come from unbelievers, that even the howl of an atheist is directed at the God they don’t acknowledge,” Larsen weaves together a study of prayer and movies. With wisdom from the likes of Job and King David, Richard Foster and Thomas Merton, this book will inspire readers to enhance their experience of both subjects. (IVP Books)



A Piece of the World

by Christina Baker Kline
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Blending fact and fiction, this book tells the story of Christina Olson, who lived on a remote farm in Cushing, Maine. At an early age, Christina's body was crippled by an undiagnosed infirmity. Later in her life, young artist Andrew Wyeth set up his studio in the Olson farmhouse and, for nearly 20 years, painted the world that Christina and her brother inhabited. *A Piece of the World* is a gently paced novel made up of the big and small hopes of one woman's life, hopes that were often dashed, but then resurrected in the knowledge that her yearning to be seen had finally been realized. (William Morrow)

Maybe God Is Like That Too

by Jennifer Grant
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

A young boy who lives in the city has seen people, buildings, and subway cars—but he wonders why he's never seen God. When he asks his grandmother if God lives in the city, she points out that wherever love, joy, peace, patience, and the other fruit of the Spirit are evident, God is there. He begins to look for God in the city. Jennifer Grant's age-sensitive tale simply and articulately shares a biblical truth that might be difficult for young children to understand. (Sparkhouse Family)



The Case for Christ

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Meet Lee Strobel (Michael Vogel), an investigative journalist for the *Chicago Tribune*. Strobel and his wife, Leslie, (Erika Christensen) are confident in their atheism. When Leslie commits her life to Christ, Lee responds with hostility. In an attempt to save his wife and their marriage, he embarks on his own investigation into the historicity of Christ and the New Testament. The film carries the storyline through the marital tension as well as a parallel police shooting investigation, allowing the transcendent themes to follow. Sincere without being preachy, Strobel's true-to-life story leaves the viewer free to respond. On disc August 15. (Pure Flix)

God's Problem Child

by Willie Nelson
reviewed by Micah van Dijk

Willie Nelson, the self-proclaimed "young bull rider" in his song "Old Timer," released his latest album the day before his 84th birthday. This country album is more polished than usual for Nelson, with simple songwriting and full arrangements supporting his strong voice and the straightforward stories within each song. It's a collection of honest songs of sadness and regret, but also humor and life; he expresses doubts and requests forgiveness from God. The album may be particularly powerful for those who've recently experienced the death of a loved one or for those who are wrestling with their own mortality. (Sony)

THE LOWDOWN



Reformation Celebration: Churches looking for ways to remember the

500th anniversary of the Reformation might find exactly what they need in the *Reformation 500 Sourcebook*.

(AugsburgFortress.org)



Wax On: *Waxing the Gospel* is a Grammy-nominated book/CD package exploring

the history of when the revival movement met the early recording industry. Three CDs offer 102 early recordings, including one by hymnwriter Fanny Crosby herself. (Archede)



Shattering: Book club favorite *The Glass Castle*, a memoir of a

nomadic, impoverished childhood from Jeanette Walls, is now a movie starring Brie Larson and coming to theaters on August 11. (Lionsgate)



More Music? Check thebanner.org for online reviews of

albums by Alison Krauss, Kendrick Lamar, Laura Story, Demon Hunter, Eric Brandon, the xx, U2, and more.

MORE REVIEWS ONLINE

What Happens When Pastors Get Together

by Lis Van Harten

Sometimes pastoring a congregation can feel isolating. While pastors share many leadership decisions with their church councils, there are a lot of concerns that rest on their shoulders alone. This can lead to stress, frustration, mental health issues, and ministry stagnation. Many pastors are learning, however, that peer learning groups can help them escape isolation and find new paths to ministry.

Reconciliation Nation

“I can’t be a fully effective pastor on my own,” one pastor from northern British Columbia recently said.

It was a feeling shared by five other area ministers. The six leaders pastor churches along a 600 kilometer (375 mile) stretch of road in a remote part of the province. Each of their congregations is quite distant from the others, which has led to a history of the pastors feeling isolated in their ministry.

Each had a strong desire to come together with others on a regular basis for mutual learning and collegial support. To meet this need, the group submitted an application to Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE), a program of Pastor Church Resources of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Through ministry shares funding, SPE provides learning events and resources to help support and sustain pastors and their spouses so that they, in turn, can build vital congregations. Another aspect of this ministry is providing grants to groups of pastors to help them form peer learning groups.

The B.C. pastors, calling themselves “Reconciliation Nation,” completed their



These five pastors in British Columbia (plus one not pictured) learned to rely on each other for emotional and spiritual support.

application together. They said that they would focus on “reconciling ourselves as pastors with our calling, our congregation, and to make peace with all things and persons on earth through attention to justice and reconciliation.”

Their plan included reading multiple books and articles, watching a video on 19th-century Kuyperianism focusing on justice and order, studying some curriculum, and attending a conference together. They would accomplish all of this via video conference calls, gathering together at classis meetings, retreating, and engaging in a couple of face-to-face meetings.

It all looked great on the application form for a SPE grant, and it sounded right

to the group members, but the reality turned out to be something quite different.

Peer group coordinator Rev. Joel Ringma of Terrace CRC said, “I believe we learned much more from our *intent* than we did from our *content*. Our content was supposed to be focused on justice issues, but because of one member of our group moving away and another working through some challenges, a lot of our focus [on justice and reconciliation] was lost for a good chunk of time.”

The work the group had agreed to do together “became a weight.” The additional tasks of focusing on the chosen topic seemed too much, said Ringma, which was not the intent of SPE or of the group.

So the group changed gears. They began to focus on themselves and their wellbeing. A typical gathering would start with the members sharing their pastoral questions and challenges. Input from the members followed, and the meeting was concluded with a time of prayer.

“On a recent video call, one group member described a challenging issue and the resulting dynamics at a committee meeting,” Ringma explained as an example of how the group functions. “The member wasn’t looking for a solution to the problem, and nobody offered one. Others chimed in with their own challenges, and together we simply discussed our own perspectives and what helped us out of the ‘fog’ of deadlock, the frustration of conflict, and the shroud of tension. This turned out to be a helpful theological reflection for all involved.”

During their time together, the pastors discovered a feeling of partnership. They enjoy each other’s company and have learned the importance of peer fellowship. In fact, they have learned that taking a small amount of time away a couple of times a year can lead to very large gains in terms of refreshment and pursuing pastoral work with excellence.

“I had colleagues with whom I could share my hurts, concerns, tears, and struggles, and do so without fear of judgment,” one pastor said. “It is this kind of collegial support that provides another piece in my sense of place in God’s kingdom as a pastor and also helps remind me of the power of encouragement.” The congregations these leaders pastored also benefited.

“The emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing of pastors is crucial to the health of congregations. I believe that our peer group has contributed significantly to the wellbeing of our pastors. Congregations sense this when they witness the pastors’ collegiality, partnership, friendship and even (especially?) good-natured ribbing. All this leads, I believe, to a

“ It is this kind of collegial support that provides another piece in my sense of place in God’s kingdom as a pastor. ”

human face for the pastor and a greater sense of shared ministry,” said Ringma.

Junia’s Daughters

A group of pastors in Grand Rapids, Mich., would agree with Ringma’s assessment.

“A pastor who grasps the call [to ministry] also knows that she needs a community of support, accountability, and learning in order to engage fully in both the challenges and joys of ministry,” wrote a group of 12 women clergy in their application for an SPE peer group grant.

Since SPE began awarding peer learning grants 14 years ago, this group of 12 was only the third all-female group to request and receive a grant. This is significant considering that 205 groups, involving 76 percent of all CRC pastors, have been funded to date.

All pastors, regardless of gender, need and desire support and encouragement from colleagues in order to flourish in ministry. Female pastors, however, also have specific, unique needs.

“Women who serve in ordained ministry fill positions traditionally held by men,” explained group coordinator Rev. Heather Strooboscher. “People’s reactions to women pastors are many and varied. It’s easy to become distracted by hidden rules and underlying behavior expectations, and ultimately we can be

unsteady on our feet and in our calling. But women are called into ministry, just as men, and it’s lovely to have women shoring one another up.”

The group members call themselves Junia’s Daughters after the female apostle mentioned in Romans 16:7. They include chaplains, co-pastors, senior pastors, and pastors of congregational life who represent eight churches, five classes, and the denominational office in Grand Rapids. They’re all passionate about ministry, uniquely gifted, and agree that peer groups are important in significant ways. »

Did you know the CRC offers these resources for pastors and congregations?

Candidacy

- Information on candidates approved by synod.
- Various resources for search committees, classis leaders, and potential pastors as they make their way through the Church Order processes for ordination. crcna.org/candidacy

Chaplaincy

- Grants for Clinical Pastoral Education for those intending to enter into chaplaincy ministry. crcna.org/chaplaincy/become-chaplain

Pastor Church Resources

- Grants for Continuing Education for pastors and church staff. crcna.org/pastor-church-resources/pastors
- Resources for Pastor Search Committees. crcna.org/pastor-church-resources/churches

Sustaining Congregational Excellence

- Grants for new ministry in smaller churches. crcna.org/SCE/grants/health-renewal-grants

Sustaining Pastoral Excellence

- Grants for pastors to form peer groups. crcna.org/SPE/pastor-peer-learning-grants
- Conferences for pastors’ spouses. crcna.org/SPE/pastors-spouses

» With their SPE grant, Junia's Daughters began to gather in members' homes or at local restaurants to learn from ministry experiences, pray with and for each other, and work toward their individual and group goals. Among these goals were exploring their pastoral identity and providing soul care for each other.

"What a gift this group has been in my first year of being a fulltime pastor. I hadn't realized before how isolating ministry can be, particularly as a woman. This group has provided friendship and camaraderie and a safe place to ask questions and grow," said one participant.

"Building friendships with other women in ministry has been both an encouragement and a joy," another pastor added. "It's helped me identify and address gender-related challenges and grow in confidence in my call. Thanks be to God for all of you!"

Strooboscher said that the peer group has "empowered each of us in our pastoral identities. In some cases, there were victories realized as our group members navigated challenging conversations with the support of the group, or found their voices in situations where they otherwise would have remained silent, or moved forward with confidence knowing they were not alone in situations where they previously felt isolated. The capital-C Church was indeed strengthened through our group."

A highlight of the group's year was an overnight retreat focusing on Sabbath. One group member said, "To be led spiritually by facilitators and invited to just *be*, to not be responsible for anything at all, other than myself, was refreshing."

Strooboscher agreed it was a wonderful experience. "Our retreat was life-changing, powerful, and transformative. For the first time as a group, we let our guard down completely and fully accepted one another; no condemnation, no judgment, just grace and acceptance and wonder. It was beautiful. Our retreat leaders helped create that space of trust



Junia's Daughters, a peer learning group of pastors in West Michigan, encourage each other in ministry.

and vulnerability, and God moved mountains within it."

As the group's year together came to an end they decided to request a second year of funding. Reflecting on the experiences of the time they'd spent together, their second proposal stated, "We've established that we need fewer but longer meetings together to share more deeply and spend more time in prayer for one another, encouraging one another by being together and giving space for soul care."

Having secured their second year of funding, Junia's Daughters plan to discuss a book and spend some time focusing on spiritual disciplines. The group has cre-

ated a Facebook page where they're able to connect more often than the four day-long planned gatherings. Once again they'll retreat together, focusing on Sabbath as well as allowing time for spiritual reflection.

No matter the original reasons that pastors identify for gathering in peer groups, most pastors would agree that the experience is a positive one that allows them to share the journey of life and ministry. "It's a lot like having life and having it more abundantly," said Ringma.

Strooboscher agrees. "We're better together than we are on our own flying solo." ■



Lis Van Harten is codirector of Pastor Church Resources

You add.
God multiplies.

Making Connections in Southern California

The Connections Project team in Southern California has been helping a diverse group of local ministry leaders come together to share and learn from one another across ethnic backgrounds.

The Connections Project is a three-year grant-funded project to help Christian Reformed churches in three regions explore and connect with resources for ministry. Under the umbrella of Pastor Church Resources, the Connections Project staff walk alongside congregations as

Ivens and fellow Connections Project resource coach Kristen Rietkerk spent time with local ministry leaders and heard their desire for more connection and conversation specifically about church planting and connecting to the community.

Working together with these leaders, they helped develop plans to gather regularly to discuss readings, interact with guest teachers, and go on field trips to explore the rich resources God has blessed the region with in these two areas of ministry.

The project is also building bridges between leaders and the denomination.

“A lot of people out here didn’t think the denomination actually cared about helping them. There’s been some disappointment with the CRC, especially among leaders from ethnically diverse churches, because of what they saw as a lack of support,” reported Ivens.

Now, because of the work of local leaders like Ivens and Rietkerk, these same leaders are receiving some of the support they were longing for. That support, in

The Connections Project brings people together to learn new ways of connecting and ministering in their communities.



they address the unique questions, opportunities, and challenges they face in their contexts. Their goal is to improve ministry by helping churches discover and use a wide variety of ministry resources from the CRC and beyond.

In Southern California, Connections launched two multiethnic learning cohorts last February. One cohort is made up of ministry leaders from Classis Greater Los Angeles. They are focusing on paths to church planting. The other cohort is from Classis California South and is focusing on ways to better connect to the community. They have both been meeting regularly to explore resources related to the two topics and share their own stories and ideas.

“This has been an inspiring experience of connecting, discovering resources, learning, and dreaming about our church future,” said Connections Project regional resource catalyzer and coach Tomas Ivens.

“The experiences are sparking externally focused, kingdom-oriented, people-developing ministries within CRC congregations in Southern California,” said Pastor Nick In’t Hout from The River CRC in Redlands, Calif., about his experience exploring different models and hearing new voices as part of this project.

Besides connecting to outside resources, the Connections Project cohorts are helping the leaders connect with each other. And because the cohorts include pastors and leaders from Colombian, Mexican, El Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Mexican-American, Chinese, and Anglo communities, they’ve been learning what it means to be a part of the diverse kingdom of God in Southern California.

“Multiethnic cohort groups in Southern California have been [participating in] a unique experience of learning about diversity and cultural ownership,” noted Ivens.

turn, is inspiring leaders to continue to look for new ways to minister to their communities by providing what Derby Sanabria from Iglesia Cristiana El Sembrador CRC identifies as “motivación para continuar y aprendizaje para mejorar” (the motivation to continue and learning to get better).

Plans for more cohorts as well as a few one-day learning events are in the works as the Connections Project team seeks to listen and respond to the needs of local leaders in the region. For more information about the project or to connect with a Connections Project team near you, visit crcna.org/connectionsproject. ■



Derek Atkins is project coordinator, Connections Project.

It's Time to Redouble Our Efforts

While the memories of my high school and college years become more blurred as the years go by, I'm amazed at the things I recall clearly. One such event occurred while I was in college and formed and deepened my faith. The Christian Reformed Church focused our attention on world hunger that year, calling for us to set aside the first Sunday in November as a day of prayer and fasting.

That was the very first time I attempted to fast. Fasting is not a spiritual discipline that was practiced widely in the CRC then, and the call to fasting grabbed my attention in two ways. First, it awakened me to the hunger people face daily across the world. Second, it taught me that my faith requires me to look out for the good of my neighbor.

Synod 2017 reached back to that report from 1978 and a handful of others as it called us to the same kind of faithful response to today's humanitarian challenges. (See p. 19.) Sadly, the world's needs seem to be growing ever more complicated and the potential results more dire. It's time to redouble our efforts and to once again commit to prayer and fasting.

This action by Synod 2017 leads me to a second and very different observation. We have an interesting way of being the church. Authority begins with the local council; when all of those councils and congregations are knitted together to speak from the Holy Spirit's leading at synod, our denomination is able to address broad issues impacting all of us and God's entire world.

So how did this proposal about recommitting ourselves to prayer and fasting in the face of global humanitarian needs come to be? It started with the Board of Trustees (BOT) of the CRCNA. They asked staff from a number of agencies and

ministries to develop a proposal for synod. These staff had been working under the auspices of a number of different boards, but Synod 2017 completed the process of transitioning governance from four separate boards into a single Council of Delegates.

These changes actually began at Synod 2015, when synod approved the formation of a Council of Delegates "to take the place of the current Board of Trustees of the CRCNA and the

boards of C.R. Home Missions, C.R. World Missions, and Back to God Ministries International," mandating that this transition be completed by Synod 2018 or sooner. As it turns out, it took just two years, not three, to make the plans and adjustments necessary for this change.

Synod 2015 based its decision on a report from the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture. What Synod 2017 approved is fairly close to what the Task

Force suggested. For instance, there is one delegate from each of the 48 classes. The Council of Delegates will have committees focusing on various aspects of our ministries to do the work while relying on the form of governance the Task Force suggested.

The Council of Delegates will focus on setting clear policies and direction while administration is carried out by denominational staff. The Council sets the course, in other words, and the administration sails the ship.

I believe the new Council of Delegates will lead, with God's blessing, to better integration and effectiveness in our wide-ranging ministry efforts both in North America and around the world. Instead of four separate voices deciding on policy and issuing direction, there will be one voice—a voice that represents all of us, connects all of us and, with the Spirit's leading, charts a common purpose and direction for the CRC. That will help us to be the church that God is calling us to be and maximize the impact of our ministry efforts throughout God's world. ■



🚩 The Council sets the course and the administration sails the ship. 🚩



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

You add.
God multiplies.

OUT AND ABOUT

Advocate for Affordable Housing

Sometimes just one college class can change a life's direction.

That's what happened for Morgan Davis Mansa, who began at Calvin College as a pre-med student but was inspired by a sociology class on race, diversity, and inequality led by professor Michelle Loyd-Paige.

"I was exploring the class offerings in sociology at the time, and in Professor Loyd-Paige's class I learned so much about the urban area in which

I was born—Chicago—and I knew, after that class, that I wanted to work in an urban setting and contribute to bringing equality to such a community," she said.

Today, Mansa works for the city of Nashville, Tenn., as the housing program manager, administering a \$15 million grant for affordable housing development and reporting directly to Nashville mayor Megan Berry.

In her work, Mansa strives to expand Nashville's supply



Morgan Davis Mansa, a Calvin College graduate, sees her work in housing as part of her faith in Christ.

of affordable housing, collaborating with for-profit and nonprofit developers.

"Just about everyone needs affordable housing, and the face of those in need is different than the perception," said Mansa. For instance, she added, "There are a lot of creative people living and working in Nashville, and they need innovative spaces and thoughtful payment options that reflect their situations."

She is energized by developing an array of housing options for diverse vocations and situations, such as for teachers, veterans, and ex-offenders.

Though the tasks involved can make the 2007 Calvin grad's job stressful at times, Mansa is mindful of the purpose of her efforts, and that sustains her daily work.

"Faith motivates me," she said. "We're all God's children and no one is above anyone else. . . . Everyone deserves access to a safe place to live. God says so."

After seeing a vision for urban renewal in her classes, Mansa enrolled in Calvin's Chicago Semester program and did urban planning for the city of Evanston.

That internship led to a longer stay in the position and then to graduate school for a master's degree in public policy.

She held other housing-related positions until her husband took a job in Nashville, where she landed a position with the Tennessee Housing Development Agency and was later hired by the mayor. ■

—Michael Van Denend,
Calvin College

BTGMI Reaches Struggling Youth

Yulia, a high school senior in Kiev, Ukraine, grew up in a Christian family but drifted away from the faith, struggling to find direction for her life.

Not wanting to give up on her, Yulia's friends from her parents' church shared with her some online videos produced by Back to God Ministries International. The videos present a message that gently calls young people back to faith.

The videos touched Yulia's heart, so her mom suggested she attend an upcoming youth rally in Kiev.

"We planned this rally in cooperation with local believers," noted BTGMI Russian ministry leader Rev. Sergei Sosedkin. "The theme was Christian faith and ethics in light of the Bible."

Yulia went to the rally and listened as the speaker shared a gospel message, followed by an informal Q&A session. She was moved to tears.

Afterward, Yulia approached one of BTGMI's Russian ministry staff members to thank her for this outreach. She briefly shared her story, admitting she was about to make some crucial decisions.

The rally and videos helped Yulia realize that she had been heading down the wrong path. "Your gospel proclamation turned out to be a direct and timely response to my intense inner search and anguish," she testified.

BTGMI staff connected Yulia with local Christian youth workers who helped renew her commitment to God and the local church. ■

—by Nancy Vander Meer,
Back to God Ministry International



Yulia (right) talking with one of BTGMI's Russian ministry staff.

Medenblik Tells Seminary Graduates to 'Keep Moving toward Jesus'

Calvin Theological Seminary graduated its largest class with 126 students receiving a certificate, diploma, or degree at its commencement service on May 20, 2017.

Fifty-six of these students received either a Certificate in Hispanic Ministry or a Certificate in Family Counseling, both of which are taught in Spanish. Another highlight were the eight M.Div. or M.T.S. graduates from the first cohort of the distance-learning program begun five years ago.

The following countries or territories were represented by these graduates: Brazil, Canada,

China, Cuba, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Mexico, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Puerto Rico, and the United States.

President Jul Medenblik addressed graduates, giving them encouragement from the story in Luke 5:17-20 of friends carrying their paralyzed friend to see Jesus.

"From this story, I want to give you this summary of ministry," he said. "In ministry, you are called to serve others and even carry their mat." Also in ministry, he said, "you will sometimes find yourself on the mat."



Calvin Seminary president Jul Medenblik addresses graduates.

But always keep moving toward Jesus, he advised.

"The persons carrying the mat and the one on the mat have this in common: they are moving toward Jesus. In these few verses we have a picture of persistence, but also invitation. People in the way are not going to stop friends from moving toward Jesus. Nor is a roof going to stop friends from moving toward Jesus.

"And then when they are there (in the presence of Christ), Jesus does not turn away from them," said Medenblik.

"He sees them. He sees their faith. He sees the need for healing and he sees even more—he sees a need for the forgiveness of sins.

"Grace comes into our lives, and grace works at the stains of sin in our lives and in this world. Even though you are graduating from a seminary today, please keep this truth before you—God is not finished with you." ■

—by *Jinny DeJong*,
Calvin Theological Seminary

Building Houses, Restoring Lives in Fort McMurray

May 2017 marked the one-year anniversary of the wildfires in Fort McMurray, Alta., that made news across the globe.

Families who suffered through the trauma of evacuating, losing their home and possessions, living in temporary housing, seeking assistance, and wondering what their future holds, are finally starting to see their new homes take shape.

"We are thrilled to be a part of giving much-needed hope to the families whose homes we are rebuilding," said Bob Laarman, director for World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS).

Some families had insurance and were able to rebuild; others left and have not returned.

Still, there are families without a home. The changing oil economy and other circumstances beyond their control have made it difficult for them to rebuild and



This house, destroyed by a wildfire, will be rebuilt this summer with the help of World Renew volunteers.

return. These are the individuals and families World Renew DRS met with in November 2016 during a needs assessment, and these are the families for whom DRS volunteers are building homes.

Here is a look at the history of the wildfires and World Renew's involvement in their aftermath.

May 2016: Wildfires forced the population of Fort McMurray to evacuate. DRS asked for prayer and financial support

and began monitoring the situation.

June to September 2016: After clean-up, residents began returning home. Meanwhile, the provincial government asked DRS to explore the possibility of completing an unmet needs assessment in the area.

November 2016: DRS volunteers met with and called individuals and families to connect them with resources that would meet their needs.

January to May 2017: DRS worked out the details of necessary home reconstruction projects in partnership with other groups.

June to August 2017: DRS volunteers are completing requested home reconstruction services also in partnership.

September 2017 and beyond: World Renew DRS will continue to seek ways to serve Fort McMurray fire survivors. ■

—by *Kellie Scholma*, World Renew

You add.
God multiplies.



Walter Bonilla has found hope at mosaicHouse.

Refugees Receive Warm Welcome to Edmonton

Shoveling snow was a big adjustment for Walter Bonilla and his family when they moved from Honduras to Edmonton, Alta., in 2013.

But every time he steps out into the biting winter air, Bonilla is reminded that he didn't have to make this adjustment without help—for instance, his jeans.

"It's a pair of jeans with insulators, and I always remember those jeans because they came from my church."

Besides the weather, Bonilla and his family faced many struggles when they arrived in Edmonton: a lack of language skills, resources, and community.

"After a few weeks of living in the city, we knew we needed help," Bonilla recalled, "a place where we could get support."

That place was mosaicHouse, planted with help from Christian Reformed Home Missions now known as Resonate. Through a family friend, Bonilla connected with

Victor Ko, the pastor, who invited him to church.

"We were really nervous," said Bonilla. "We sat in the back row, almost like we didn't want to be seen."

That first day, though, the family joined in "Table Fellowship," mosaicHouse's weekly potluck.

Bonilla and his wife were able to have conversations with other adults in Spanish instead of having things translated through their children.

They soon joined one of mosaicHouse's "house churches" and began to feel like part of the community.

"We want you to feel that God is a welcoming and hospitable God," said Ko, who planted mosaicHouse. "This is a value that we cultivate; we appreciate, we welcome, emulating who God is. Many of us are in a house church; we build friendships, and that naturally exudes into mosaicHouse."

"MosaicHouse is a family for sure," agreed Bonilla. "We are divided into house

churches, and that is a small group of people that you connect better with. For us this is a second family and the whole church is a third family."

As the Bonillas gained a stronger sense of belonging, they also felt closer to Christ. Bonilla and both his sons were baptized at mosaicHouse.

"I was never so close to a church as here," said Bonilla. "Never involved at this level, never praying like I do now." ■

—by Brian Clark,
Resonate Global Mission

Longer versions of
these and other
stories are online at
[thebanner.org/
together](http://thebanner.org/together).

SHORT TAKES



Finding a New Pastor

The Christian Reformed Church's Pastor Church Resources office has launched a new online process by which churches and pastors can find each other.

Called PastorSearch, this new arrangement will give search committees access to a database of all active, ordained CRC pastors, which will allow them to generate a list of possibilities for an open position, said Cecil VanNiejehuis, codirector of Pastor Church Relations.

Meanwhile, pastors can see which positions in churches have openings through the Church Jobs section of The Network (a website of crcna.org). ■

—by Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

ADS

Deadlines: Sept. issue is 8/8/17; Oct. issue is 9/5/17. Details online.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.39^{us} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.32^{us} per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

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

Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

Denominational and Classical

Meetings of Classis

CLASSIS ZEELAND will meet on Thursday, September 21, 4PM, at the Bethel CRC of Zeeland. Agenda deadline: August 9.

Rev. Ron Meyer, S. C.

General



PASTOR JIM POELMAN RETIRES

Redeemer Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia, ON, wishes to congratulate Pastor Jim Poelman, together with his wife Linda, as they celebrate his retirement in June 2017. Our congregation gives thanks to God for his 13 years of faithful service and

ministry with us at Redeemer, and his over 38 years of ministry in the denomination. Congratulations and a heartfelt thank you. Join us in praying for both Pastor Jim and Linda as they transition into this new chapter of life!

Birthdays

99th Birthday

CHRIS VANDEN BERG of Covenant Village at 2520--Lake Michigan Dr. NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504, with gratitude to God, celebrated his 99th birthday on June 16 with his children: Allan & Hermena; Robert & Marie; Ruth & Carl Clevenger; Marge Palmerlee; 9 grandchildren, and 12 great grandchildren. Praise God for His blessings.

95th Birthday

IRENE (VAN EGMOND) KIMM will celebrate her 95th birthday on August 21. Celebrating with her are her children Bill (Marian), Gwen

(Ray-deceased) Leenstra, Lee (Ginette Garipey), Miriam Van Eps, and Scott (Denise); 13 grandchildren and their spouses; and 21 great-grandchildren. We praise God for His blessings and faithfulness all these years. Greetings can be sent to 6151 Shady Rest St. Apt. #11, Manhattan, MT 59741.

90th Birthday

DR. DERKE BERGSMASMA will be celebrating 90 years of God's rich blessings on August 29. Praising God with him are his wife Doris, children Deb & Dan VanProoyen, Derk & Cheryl Bergsma, Diann Otten and Danette & Rob Buikema, 13 grandchildren, 10 greats. We are thankful for his love, faithful life & ministry, especially his work at Trinity Christian College and Westminster Seminary. Derke & Doris live at Park Place of Elmhurst, Unit 2313, 1050 Euclid Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126.

LOIS (POPPEN) HANNINK will be celebrating 90 years of God's grace and faithfulness on July 9, 2017. Please join us at an open house celebration on Saturday, July 8 from 2-4 pm in the Friendship Room at Raybrook Estates.

JAKE TERPSTRA with thankfulness to God will celebrate his 90th birthday with an Open House on July 25 at 2111 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

CORALEE VANAMSTEL 1715 Homan Dr, Schererville IN 46375 will celebrate her 90th birthday on August 23. She is the mother of John & Shelley(deceased) VanAmstel, Trudy & Bob VanWieren, MariLou & Ken VanDerWal, Tom & Maryann(both deceased) VanAmstel, 9 grandchildren, 19 greats. We praise and thank God for her love and godly example.

REV. THEODORE VERSEPUT will celebrate his 90th birthday on July 12th. Family and friends will celebrate with him at Breton Woods on July 8th. We thank God for each day given to our father, grandfather, and great-grandfather.

80th Birthday

JAMES (JIM) KRUIHTOF of 2900 Thornhills SE, Apt 106, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 is celebrating his 80th birthday on July 11 with his wife Donna, children, grandchildren and great-grandson. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Anniversaries

65th Anniversary

BOERSMA, MARION & ANGIE 2634 NE 6th St. Gresham OR 97030 celebrated our 65th wedding anniversary on June 3. Our whole family including brothers and sisters - sons and daughters - grandchildren & great grandchildren all realize that only God's grace made this possible. THANK YOU FATHER!

BRUXVOORT, MARVIN & BETTY (Stouwie), Pella, IA, are celebrating their 65th Anniversary on July 2. Children: Carol (Tim) Bruxvoort, John, Beth Dieleman, Gregg (Joan) and Eric (Trish). 10 Grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. We thank God for all our blessings.

NYHOFF, KENNETH Merle & Rose (Koops), 610 Ross St., Downs, KS 67437, celebrated 65 years of marriage on July 24, 2017. Their children Ken (Beth) Nyhoff, Mike Nyhoff, Greg (Cindy) Nyhoff, Kathy Nyhoff, 8 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren celebrate God's faithfulness, love and continued blessings.

VANDER KLOK, ROY AND MARJORIE (Tanis) 4317 Muirfield Dr. W. Bradenton FL 34210 will celebrate 65 years of marriage on Aug. 29, 2017. Their 3 children/spouses, 11 grandchildren, and 8 great grandchildren are thankful to God for their encouragement, love and support.

60th Anniversary

BRINKS DUANE AND DOROTHY of 7760 Noffke Dr. Caledonia, MI 49316, will celebrate 60 years of marriage on July 12. Their children Sue & Dave Cole, Doug & Mary, Chris & Ron Groen, Ray & Rhonda, 12 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren have been blessed with this Godly, happy and loving example.

HOEK, DIRK & GLADYS (Smit) of Modesto, CA will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on August 2. Praising God for many years of blessings are their children (Allen & Robin, Jeff & Rosie), 5 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

50th Anniversary

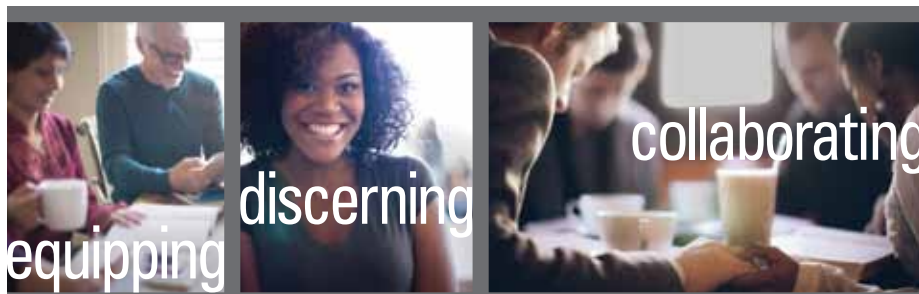
KLUNDER, CLARENCE AND ELEANOR 720 W Blackburn Rd Mt Vernon WA 98273, will celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary on July 14, 2017. They, with their children (Todd, Greg (deceased), and Jill), praise God for his faithfulness and blessings. To God be the Glory!

PETROELJE, REV. ALLEN & MARCIA (Kloosterhouse) celebrated 50 years of marriage on June 8, 2017. Rejoicing with them for God's faithfulness and blessing throughout their marriage are their children (Scott, Jennifer & Mark DeGraaf, Julie & Kevin Knoll, Maribeth & Eric Laansma) & 7 grandchildren.

VANDEN BERG, ALLAN AND HERMENA (Molendyk) of 9529 Bingham St., Zeeland, MI 49464, Lord willing, will celebrate 50 years of marriage on August 9. They have 4 children and 5 grandchildren. Praise God for his faithfulness and blessings.

Obituaries

BOUMA, LAWRENCE, age 99, of Ontario, CA went to be with his Lord and Savior on May 16, 2017, just 2 months before his 100th Birthday.



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He was preceded in death by his loving wife, Geneva (Plett), and lovingly remembered by his children, Dick and Maureen Bouma, Larry and Marj Bouma, Sharon (Tony, deceased) DeBie, Kathy and Rich VanderTuig, Bonnie and Pete VanderFeer, Gwenny and Gerard Slegers, Susie and Steve Whitten, 25 grandchildren and 60 great grandchildren. Great is the Lord's faithfulness from generation to generation.

BRASSER, LEW of Brookfield, WI passed on to his eternal home May 14. He was preceded in death by his son Bill and daughter Jean Roskamp. He is survived by his wife JoAnne (Waanders) and children Jane and Steve Shaver, Bob Brasser, Sue and Scott Hoeksema, Mike and Sandy Roskamp, Lynda Latzko Brasser and grandchildren: Justin and Hilary (Silas) Brasser, Nathan Brasser, Meghan Brasser, Katelyn Roskamp, Kyle Roskamp, Dan Hoeksema and Steven Hoeksema. Foster grandchildren: Joseph Diing, Isaac Kuenig and Jiech Jagah and family. Also survived by sisters and brothers-in-law: John/Judy Waanders, Cora Sinke, Marilyn Waanders, Jeane/Tony Diekema, Bill/Pat Waanders, Judy/Bob Wiers.

CAPPENDYK, MARGARET ANNE was peacefully led to her eternal home with her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ on Saturday, May 27, 2017.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Peter Cappendyk. Surviving are her children, Gordon (Marcia) Cappendyk, Gail (Mark) Verwys; 5 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren.

HOFSTRA, DAVID age 79, of Jenison, MI, formerly from South Holland, IL and Roseland (Hofstra's Bakery), passed away Feb. 21, 2017. Beloved husband of 58 years to Ahleen. Dear father of Dale, Don and Joy. Five grandchildren.

ELDRENKAMP, CORINNE E. (nee Vis), age 96, of Oak Lawn, IL went to the arms of Jesus on May 8, 2017. Preceded in death by her husband Clarence in 1972. Loving mother of Judy and Nancy (Paul) Zylstra. Devoted grandmother of Roger Zylstra and Corie Zylstra. Memorials appreciated to Trinity Christian College or Bethshan. Psalm 121

HOLWERDA, EVELYN JEAN (VAN Noord) died on May 6, 2017 at the age of 94. She is preceded in death by her husband, Rev. George Holwerda and daughter, Carol Post, and is survived by her children Peter and Pat Holwerda, Ken Post, Bill and Judy Paxton, Jim and Cindy Holwerda, and Ken and Sharon Van Beek; twenty-seven grandchildren, and twenty-five great grandchildren.

KWANTES, HENRIETTA of Grand Rapids, Michigan passed away May 6, 2017 at the age of 84. She was preceded in death by her husband, Dr. Harry J. Kwantes.

NAEREBOUT, DOROTHY (Moss) aged 90, of Grand Rapids, MI, died May 26, 2017. She was preceded in death by her husband of 25 years, Mart Naerebout, and is survived by two step sons and a step daughter: Tom (Cathie) Naerebout of Vero Beach, FL, Robert J. (Doris) Naerebout of Twin Falls, ID, and Nancy Sue (Brad) Hansen of Goodyear, AZ; ten grandchildren; twenty-one great grandchildren; and one great-great grandchild.

PETTINGA, PAUL V. passed away peacefully on Saturday, June 3, 2017. He is survived by his wife Joyce (Ryskamp); his children: John Pettinga (wife Joanne), Ross Pettinga (wife Jonell), and Rosemary Van Allsburg (husband Mark); nine grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

SCOTT, LORRAINE (Vander Wall), 81, of Fremont, MI went to be with her Lord on May 5, 2017. Lorraine is survived by her husband of 58 years Wayne Scott, their four children Sandra (Paul) Boersma, Steven (Michelle) Scott, Sally Scott (Chuck LeHew), Keith (Julia) Scott, and grandchildren Anna (Mark), Peter, Mark, Alex, Briar, Nicole, Jason and Samantha.

Church Position Announcements

WORSHIP COORDINATOR First CRC in St. Thomas, Ontario is seeking to fill a 16-20 hour per week position for a Worship Coordinator. This position requires music proficiency and an ability to plan a variety of worship styles in a multi-generational setting within the Christian Reformed perspective of Blended Worship. Visit our website at www.firstcristhomas.com for more details. Email a cover letter and resume to firstcristhomas@gmail.com or by mail to 320 Elm Street, St. Thomas, ON N5R 1J7

PASTOR Interested in joining Trinity CRC in a life transforming journey under God's design? Located in Maryland Hts MO, we are an ethnically diverse church family with a deep passion for the St. Louis area. Reach us at pastor@trinity-stl.org, or contact Don Shippy at 314-374-7651. Go Cardinals

PASTOR - FCRC RED DEER AB: Do you have a passion for people and preaching? With the upcoming retirement of our Sr. Pastor, First CRC Red Deer AB has an opportunity for a full time ordained CRC pastor to lead a multi staff team. As a congregation, we are actively engaged in learning more about ourselves, our potential, and God's will for our ministries through the Renewal Lab process. We are a multi-generational congregation with a love for biblical teaching, intentional worship, honest fellowship and multi faceted music along with supporting our community and missionaries. Contact: pastor4frc@gmail.com

YOUTH AND EDUCATION DIRECTOR Faith CRC in Pella, IA, is seeking a Director of Youth and Education Ministries to oversee our growing youth programs and facilitate educational programming for K-12. The successful candidate must create opportunities and environments to reach and shepherd youth and partner with parents in guiding children toward a life-long relationship with Jesus Christ. Opportunities may exist to use talents in worship and small group ministry. Please contact searchteam@faithcrcpella.org to learn more.

PASTOR Clinton Christian Reformed Church located in Clinton, Ontario, Canada seeks a highly motivated Pastor of Youth & Congregational Life who has a passion for the ministries of youth & pastoral care. This calling includes occasional preaching and other possible leadership ministries, depending on the interests and skills of the candidate. Must enjoy a cooperative ministry with our lead pastor. Ordination required. Please visit our church's website for further job description www.clintonchristianreformedchurch.ca or Amanda at the church office 519-482-5264.

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC & WORSHIP Modesto, CA CRC is seeking a full time Director of Music and Worship. See detailed description at <http://www.modestocrc.org>

DIRECTOR OF OUTREACH Modesto, CA CRC is seeking a Director of Outreach. See detailed description at <http://www.modestocrc.org>

FULL TIME LEAD PASTOR POSITION Maranatha CRC in Lethbridge is looking for a lead pastor to join us in our growing community in sunny Southern Alberta. Our vibrant, engaged, intergenerational community desires to be challenged and encouraged to relate our

faith to our daily lives through solid biblical teaching and leadership. We strive to effectively build relationships in our community and be a light in our city. If you are a compassionate and caring person that is excited about equipping the next generation and feel a calling to explore the opportunity to join us on our faith journey, please email us at maranathasearchcomm@gmail.com.

PASTOR: The Christian Reformed Church of San Jose, California, in the heart of Silicon Valley, is currently seeking a full-time lead pastor. To explore this opportunity, please email Steve Bouman at sbouman@pacbell.net.

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. See the pastor search page at www.trinitycralaska.com for more information.

FULL TIME PASTOR Jamestown CRC is seeking a full time pastor to replace our minister who is retiring in April, 2018. We are a multi-generational, blended worship-style congregation in West Michigan; close to Grand Rapids, but in a rural country setting. For more information or to submit a resume contact jtdevries@charter.net. www.jamestowncrrc.org/

PASTOR NEEDED Zion Church in Oshawa, Ontario is looking for a pastor. Profiles available on website zioncrrc.ca

STUDENTS MINISTRY DIRECTOR Our mission is simple: to bring LIFE to community! Jesus Christ is the LIFE of God, and He has impacted his LIFE to us through the gift of His Holy Spirit. Knowing that we live in a world that is broken by spiritual death, we make it our mission to bring the LIFE of Christ into every arena of our lives. Please use the link below for additional information. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1t1pnY1b9dj0ONSrVJQVvzqMjr9gdK0JAl1ph6emJx0M/pub>

SEEKING LEAD PASTOR: Do you hear God's call to serve Bethel Christian Reformed Church, an authentic grassroots community situated in the picturesque riverfront town of Dunnville, Ontario (pop. 12,000)? Bethel CRC needs a dynamic preacher and caring shepherd who models a close relationship with God, to minister to all ages. We are seeking spiritual growth and discipleship opportunities within and outside the church building, and welcome a servant leader who inspires and encourages the same. We are actively visioning how our facilities and programs can take us confidently into the future. To find out more, please contact the calling committee in confidence at: bethelcrrccalling@gmail.com or contact the correspondence clerk directly at 289-880-2225 or mail to Calling Committee, Bethel CRC, 17 Robinson Road, Dunnville, Ontario N1A2W1. We look forward to meeting you!

LEAD PASTOR OPENING: After a period of prayer and re-visioning, Ebenezer CRC in Trenton, Ontario is ready to put out a call for a Senior Pastor to lead and encourage us with new joy and enthusiasm into the next chapter of our church's life. With approximately 300 members,

our church is situated in the beautiful Bay of Quinte area, close to Christian Schools, recreational areas, shopping and much more. We hope to find a minister with 10 or more years experience, but will consider all applicants. Please go to our website at www.ebenzerccc.ca to see what we have to offer. 613-394-5046

SEEKING TWO PASTORS Charlottetown Christian Reformed Church, located in beautiful Prince Edward Island, is seeking 2 ordained pastors to serve our multi-generational, missionally-minded congregation. Job descriptions will be tailored to suit the gifts of those called to these positions and to meet the needs of the congregation in the areas of preaching, pastoral care, congregational visitation, youth/young adult ministries, mission/community involvement, education, and discipleship. To receive a church profile or express interest in one of these positions please contact peircsearch@gmail.com.

FULL TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR Solid Rock Youth Group, a combined ministry of Rock of Life CRC (Willmar, MN) and Unity CRC (Prinsburg, MN), is seeking a dedicated youth director with experience to lead our Jr. and Sr. High youth group (70 members) and grow the youth ministries in our church communities. Visit unitycrrc.org/ygdirector for more information. Apply by August 18, 2017 to youthdirector@wpa.global.

PASTOR: Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, MI, seeks a pastor to serve among us in ministries of preaching, pastoral care & collaborative leadership. We invite interested pastors to join us in discerning God's will. Details at coscrrc.org/pastorsearch

"COMMUNITY CRC, DIXON'S Corners will be a community that is passionate about loving God and all people." We are a rural church just south of the Nation's Capital, Ottawa, Ontario looking for a full time PASTOR who is passionate about worship, spiritual growth, community care and prayer. Elementary and secondary Christian education available in our area. Please contact our Search Team at crrc.vacancies@gmail.com to request our Church Profile and to forward your Ministerial Profile.

PASTOR POSITION - Maranatha CRC is a healthy, family-focused congregation full of children, laughter and love in beautiful Calgary, Alberta. With the majestic Bow River literally at our doorstep, we are 'flowing with the promises of Christ' and seek a pastor to walk with us as we grow deeper in our relationships with Christ and with each other. Believing we are 'blessed to be a blessing,' we strive to be active ambassadors in our community with tangible initiatives such as community dinners, gardens and movie nights to name a few. With North America's most extensive urban pathway system and the Rocky Mountains on the horizon, Calgary offers year-round recreation as well as diverse cultural experiences. An established network of CRC pastors is also active in Calgary. For more information, contact the search committee at peterdejonge@shaw.ca or 403-730-9543.

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QUIST, DOUGLAS D. age 71, of Grand Rapids, left this earthly life on Saturday, May 27, 2017. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Christina Rose Quist; and is survived by his wife Mary Jeanne Quist; children, Jonathan and Johana Quist (Maia, Madison, Aidan), Sarah and Jim Slater (Isabelle, Andrew, Lucas, Abby and Bradley), Rachel Quist (Preston and Avery), Aaron and Carrie Quist (Mary and Hannah); step children: Katie and Adam Krieg (Martin), Abbie and Christopher Huizinga (Grace, Anna, Audrey and Eddie), Andy and Bethany Lynch (Louisa, Margaret, and Jack)

VAN LAAR, MYRTLE age 91 of Silver Spring, MD and formerly of Grand Rapids, went home to be with Jesus on Friday, May 26, 2017. She is survived by her brother, John and Barbara Van Laar, nieces and nephews, cousins and many friends. Please see www.zaagman.com for the complete obituary.

VANNETTE, EUNICE passed away May 16. She was 102 years old. She lived in Denver, Co. She is survived by her daughter Barbara and husband, Wayne Vriesman and son Walter and wife Trena Vannette and numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Employment

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

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and details of a Witte hosted May 2018 cruisetour! RSVP required by August 23 to Witte Travel, 616-942-5112 or 800 GO WITTE.

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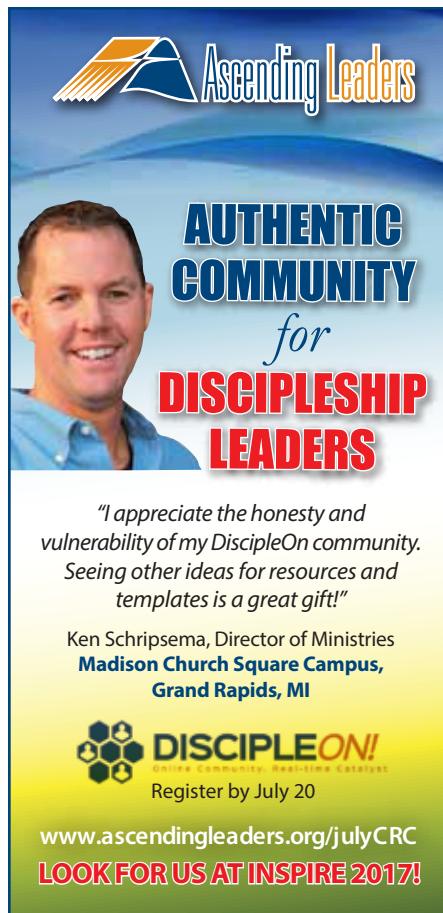


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Punch Lines

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

My daughter and her husband have friends who were expecting their first child. The four of them were discussing possible names. The father-to-be, a pastor, preferred biblical or religiously significant names. For a boy, the name "Theo" met with some approval. My son-in-law trumped the friendly debate as to what middle name might go best with Theo when he suggested "Logan."

Cal Hoekema

While he was riding in the car with me, my 4-year-old grandson asked, "Grandpa, when you go into the hospital, does God come and visit you there?"

Larry Gras

Spotting in the hall of our retirement home:

Who needs Santa? I've got Grandma.

M. Gort

A guest preacher was about to begin the service. He wanted to greet the congregation with the words "Peace be with you" but quickly realized the microphone wasn't working. So he turned to the worship leader

and whispered, "There's something wrong with this mic."

The congregation, not hearing, thought he had uttered the usual words of greeting, and responded in unison, "And also with you."

Raj Kadia

My children and grandchildren recently came for a weekend visit. As usual, they were sent to bed on time on Saturday night so that they would be well rested for church on Sunday.

"Edward, say goodnight to Opa," instructed my daughter-in-law.

"Why?" asked Edward. "Is Opa going to bed already?"

Sidney Vander Wilp

Hello."
"Hello"

"Is that you, Sam?"

"Yeah, this is Sam."

"It doesn't sound like Sam."

"This is Sam speaking, all right."

"Are you sure this is Sam?"

"Certainly, this is Sam."

"Listen, Sam. This is Bill. Will you lend me \$50?"

"All right. I'll tell him when he comes in."

Dick Bylsma

A father was at the beach with his kids when the 4-year-old son ran up to him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore where a seagull lay dead in the sand.

"Daddy, what happened to him?" asked the boy.

"He died and went to heaven," the dad replied.

The boy thought for a moment and then said, "Did God throw him back?"

Dawn Gebben

Nine-year-old Joey's mom asked him what he had learned in Sunday school.

He replied, "Well, Mom, our teacher told us how God sent Moses behind enemy lines on a rescue mission to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. When he got to the Red Sea, he had his army build a pontoon bridge and all the people walked across safely. Then he radioed headquarters for reinforcements. Then sent bombers to blow up the bridge and all the Israelites were saved."

His mom said, "Now Joey, is that really what your teacher taught you?"

"Well, no, Mom. But if I told it the way the teacher did, you'd never believe it!"

Gerrit Feyer

I saw a big sale on paddles at the boat store the other day. It was quite an oar deal!

R. Smit



— III —
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