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The Banner wishes its United States readers a blessed Thanksgiving.



Cover: The families of these young people share their stories to raise awareness of teen suicide prevention.

Church and Politics

IN PREVIOUS EDITORIALS I wrote about the biblical view of justice (Jul./Aug. 2017) and the connection between justice and the gospel (Sept. 2017).

Since doing justice involves systemic issues, it often enters the sphere of political laws and policies. Hence, many of our disagreements boil down to whether the institutional church should speak or advocate on political issues. And if so, which ones?

A popular distinction among CRC circles is the church as institute and organism. Drawn from Abraham Kuyper's teachings, this distinction advocates for the institutional church to focus only on the Word, sacraments, discipleship, and diaconal work. The organic church (Christian believers) carries out the mandate of reconciling "every square inch" to God's kingdom, including politics, as individuals—or corporately in non-church organizations. Proponents of this distinction say that the institutional church should keep within its own sphere of authority and not extend into the political sphere.

At first glance, it seems like a neat solution. However, Christian scholars have raised questions about this distinction and its usefulness. How biblical, actually, is it? How do we define a societal sphere? How do we best navigate the overlapping of spheres in our modern world? How rigidly do we hold to this distinction? Is the institutional church to remain silent, for example, on abortion laws, same-sex marriage laws, and evolutionary theory? Should the institutional church have kept silent over the politically sanctioned economic institution of slavery?

I believe none of us desire either turning the church into a political lobby group or making it complicit in its silence to injustice in our world. The institute/organism distinction is one way to help us navigate these extremes. But it is not the only way. It is part of an ongoing conversation, not an ironclad answer to end the conversation.

Our conversations on church and politics must also include voices from various traditions, even the global church. For instance, many black American church traditions, born out of suffering, oppression, and slavery, have a prophetic view of the church in relation to politics, defined as "speaking truth to those in power and speaking truth to God's people, the people in the Black church itself" (*Five Views on the Church and Politics*, p. 97). I believe such conversations can be mutually enriching.

We need to have these tough conversations sooner or later, otherwise political issues fester. But these conversations must be filled with grace. It is a shame that some Christians are more charitable to politically like-minded non-Christians than to fellow Christians who differ politically.

Our Lord Jesus is neither a member of the Christian left nor the Christian right. If our politics divide us, we have to seriously examine our hearts for political idolatry. But neither can we ignore politics. "Jesus is Lord" was both a religious and political confession by the New Testament church. In the ancient Roman Empire, Caesar declared himself the undisputed Lord. To confess Jesus as Lord was to suggest that Caesar was not. It was a politically dangerous confession.

If and when the church does speak to contentious social and political issues, I believe it should always do so from God's Word and from a posture of humility and grace. Without God's prophetic Word, the church would be only another special interest group. Without the all-suffering Christ's humility and grace, the church will end up following the world's arrogance, entitlement, and belligerence.

P.S. The horrific mass shooting at Las Vegas occurred after the writing of this editorial. I pray for the families of victims and all who are affected. Lord, have mercy. ■



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

Without God's prophetic Word, the church would be only another special interest group.

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Are You the One?

LORD, ARE YOU THE ONE? Who summons a friend when darkness descends and hope is lost, and we need someone to talk to? A friend who listens through the dark words and lets us breathe again when all is spilt?

Yes, you are, and for that you are to be praised above all.

Are you the one? Who brings relief when there is too much happening and we're begging for the world to stop so we can get off? Who brings relief in everyday happenings—a flock of birds taking flight against the early morning sky in a bleak cityscape, the laughter of a child, the decency of someone opening a door, the uncompromising gentleness of a red sun rising over the lake—and suddenly we know we can go on for one more day?

Yes, you are, and for that you are to be praised above all.

Are you the one? Who gives unexpected comfort in a cold hallway where we're waiting to hear bad news: losing a loved one, losing an anchor, losing health? Who, just when it seems that life will

never be the same again, opens a door the tiniest, tiniest fraction, just enough to make us see it is still light outside? And the world is so big, and we do not understand even a little of it, and our loved ones are at peace?

Yes, you are, and for that you are to be praised above all.

Are you the one? Who turns our feet without our even knowing it, who walks alongside us on our path despite ourselves, who gives us what we need when we wanted something else, who makes us end up in places—with faces—we never dreamed of seeing or experiencing? Who brings us to where we look back and think we could never have gotten here by ourselves, we could never have found this path alone, we followed the signs without even recognizing them?

Yes, you are, and for that you are to be praised above all.

Are you the one? Who tests our spirits again and again, who lets us flail around in the nest all clumsy so that one day we can suddenly soar when the nest tumbles

to the ground and we find ourselves free in the open air?

Yes, you are, and for that you are to be praised above all.

Are you the one? Who makes us laugh, and live, and love, and linger in the beauty you put here for us to bask in?

Yes, you are, and for that you are to be praised above all.

Are you the one? Who planted that pull in our souls, that longing to go home, knowing that this is not where we belong, this is not where we will stay? Who waits at the end with open arms to bring us in from the cold?

Yes Lord, you are, and for that you are to be praised above all.

Amen. ■



Hermien Venter is a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Toronto, Ont. This prayer is based on Matthew 11:2-11.

We have to **know**
the **darkness** to be able
to **search** for the **light**.
We first must come to **know**
our **lostness** if we want
to **find** meaning, purpose,
and **direction in life**.

— HENRI J. M. NOUWEN



Unintended Consequences

Do you want a foretaste of heaven?



FRIM BEE/PIXARAY

A FEW YEARS AGO my wife and I took a five-week road trip. On Sundays we worshiped at various churches. All of them were evangelical and they ranged from mid-size to megachurches. I decided to keep a worship journal, taking note of information such as the speaker, text and sermon, the praise team, prayers, and, of course, the music for the service.

The experiment proved enlightening—particularly the music. We sang or listened to about 30 songs, with no duplication and only one that we recognized. An Evangelical Free Church in Minnesota sang “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty.” Variety might be the spice of life, but I wonder if such worship diversity brings some unintended consequences.

For 13 years I served as a part-time chaplain at a Christian care facility. On Sunday mornings we held a worship service led by one of the chaplains. Three unwritten rules guided our worship planning: we never stand up, we never take an offering, and we never sing praise songs.

The first two rules were self-explanatory, considering the nursing home population. The third rule stemmed from the fact that the residents were unfamiliar with praise songs, and poor eyesight prohibited many from seeing well enough to read. The residents were much more comfortable singing the songs they had sung since childhood and had probably sung hundreds of times. Songs like “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “Blessed Assurance,” “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” and, of course, “Jesus Loves Me.” Though they might not know all the words any longer, when the chorus came, smiles and tears came with it.

Do you want to experience a foretaste of heaven? On a Sunday morning stand in front of 60 to 70 residents from skilled nursing care. Look at their faces and listen to their voices as they sing by heart, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

On one of the forays my wife and I took to Salt Lake City, Utah, to visit our daughter and her family, we attended a

birthday party. One of the guests was the minister of music at a megachurch in Salt Lake City. As we talked, I told him about the worship journal I was keeping and about the worship in the care facility. Then I asked him this question: “When this generation gets old and moves into a care facility, what songs will they all know?” He looked at me for a moment, then shook his head and responded, “There won’t be any.”

For a denomination that values its heritage as much as ours does, that’s one unintended consequence we need to strive to avoid. ■



Harold Hiemstra is a retired minister in the Christian Reformed Church. He is a member of Almond Valley CRC in Ripon, Calif., and just recently moved to Kentwood, Mich.

LETTERS



Emotional Lives of Men

Thank you for publishing “The Emotional Lives of Men” (Sept. 2017). My husband has a strong group of godly men that support not only him but us as a family as well. They have walked alongside him through some of his most vulnerable times, including the birth of a child with Down syndrome, a marriage that was in turmoil, and a dual diagnosis of autism for our son who has Down syndrome. We, as parents of young boys, have an opportunity to set the tone for our sons to be not only God-fearing and courageous, but also vulnerable and open with one another. Thank you for shining much-needed light on a topic near and dear to me.

*Amy Wigger
Hudsonville, Mich.*

I found Mark Vander Vennen’s article (“The Emotional Lives of Men”) refreshing, informative, and confirming. As a young married man with three small children and few options, someone stepped up and took an interest in helping. First in church as our elder, later as my employer, he was instrumental in the development of my career. His simple

“You can do this, I’ll help you” still resonates 40 years later. He blessed me with insight and direction, and I strove to model his behavior.

I have been part of two men’s groups: one within the community of colleagues at work, the other within the CRC. The first was a real time of partnering and personal growth. Our focus was on becoming better men, spouses, and fathers. Finding time for regular study and personal dialog is a challenge. . . . My experience is that the return far outweighs the investment.

*John Bloemendal
Cambridge, Ont.*

Thanks for an article pertinent to what is going on with men in our culture—and, yes, in our churches—today (“The Emotional Lives of Men”). As someone who has been involved in ministry with men at the local church level and regional men’s ministry, I feel too many churches and denominations have turned a deaf ear and blind eye to what is going on with men. I agree with the author’s assessment that one of the most important ways churches can respond is by realizing that men become godly men through relationships with other godly men (mentoring partners, small groups, etc.). As churches and leaders in our churches, we have to ask how that is being encouraged at our churches and in our communities.

*Todd Wessels
Joliet, Ill.*

Resonate

I am disappointed with the new name “Resonate” for our combined organizations. Without the word “Christian” it seems to be vague and incomplete, especially to one unfamiliar with the work we

are about. This naming parallels popular actions of many churches to rename themselves without the word “Christian.” What are we about? Romans 8:31.

*Jack Lanning
Jenison, Mich.*

Corrections

“Celebrating 30 years of Friendship Ministries in Edmonton” (Sept. 2017). We regret that a photo of Peter Kool, of Covenant CRC, and his friend, Dean, was mislabeled.

Just for Kids (Sept. 2017). The area of the Caspian Sea is over 143,005 square miles (370 square kilometers); it is 3,363 feet (1,025 meters) deep. We regret printing incorrect units of measurement.

NEWS

Embryo Adoption: Building New Families in a Unique Way

Parents who have had children through in vitro fertilization (IVF) are sometimes left with the dilemma of what to do with embryos that were not implanted. In Canada, one Christian agency offers an option that can help parents with this decision.

Beginnings, a Christian family services agency supported by the Christian Reformed Church, was the first agency in Canada to start a program for open embryo donation and adoption and is still the only national agency in Canada that offers this unique way to



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build a family. Modeled after existing programs in the United States, the program was established in 2010. Ten babies have been born so far, and several other families are expecting.

"It offers an opportunity, a wonderful way to address a dilemma of what to do with remaining embryos," explained Kerry Vandergrift, Beginnings' executive director. Beginnings, a sister agency to Bethany Christian Services in the U.S., was founded in 1985. The agency facilitates open infant adoptions and offers other services such as counseling for pregnant mothers and education courses, including BabySMARTS and adoption education programs.

More than 30 donor families have now participated in the embryo donation program, having found Beginnings while seeking

out a service to help them decide whether donation would be a good solution for them. What sets Beginnings apart from fertility clinics is that instead of following a medical model where the prospective parent is at the center, Beginnings is primarily interested in finding the best fit for the child. Additionally, embryo donors are directly involved in the selection of the recipient family.

As with infant adoption, the openness in each embryo adoption can vary, from the child simply knowing their genetic roots to having a real relationship through regular contact. Each relationship is unique as it is negotiated and mutually agreed upon by the involved donor and recipient families.

"When keeping the future of the children in mind, openness is the most beneficial for the child,"

Dawson (striped shirt), born in 2014, was the first baby born from Beginnings' open embryo donation program.

said Mary Howlett-Nero, program director at Beginnings. "The child needs to be comfortable in the world in which they exist."

"Everything we do begins with the child," said Vandergrift. "We are very child-focused and build families around that child." Both donor and recipient families undergo significant assessment and counseling to ensure a successful match. The donor does not receive any compensation, and they don't pay any of the incurred professional and legal fees. For the recipient family, the cost ranges from \$10,000-\$15,000 (CDN), an affordable adoption relative to traditional models of adoption.

Handmade Baptism Gown Reflects Faith Heritage

“We do all the facilitation for the process, coordinating everything one step at a time,” said Howlett-Nero.

One of Beginnings’ founding members is Rev. Arie Van Eek, a member of Bethel CRC in Waterdown, Ont. He was instrumental in connecting with theologians and other focus groups to prayerfully consider and establish this program as a part of Beginnings’ services.

When the program started, it was met with some hostility. “The subject can be very controversial,” explained Van Eek. “But when you are thinking first of the child, as this is what an embryo is, and being mindful of the best interest of the child, starting this program just made sense.”

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Shortly after immigrating to Canada following World War II, Evelyn Aukema and Harm Riepma were married. Sometime after that, they began a tradition that portrays a faith heritage lovingly passed down to their children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren. Most recently that heritage was evident in the baptism of their great-granddaughter Brynn Emily Thompson at North Hills Christian Reformed Church in Troy, Mich.

Brynn was baptized wearing a gown crafted generations earlier by Evelyn. Recognizing the significance of the baptism of her children, early in her marriage Evelyn fashioned a beautiful baptism gown from her own wedding dress to be used at each of her children’s baptisms. The gown’s use extended much further than Evelyn’s immediate family, however. Over the years,



Harm Riepma and Evelyn Aukema, wearing the dress that was to become the heritage baptism gown.

many of her 24 grandchildren and 43 great grandchildren have been able to wear the gown at their baptisms as well. As of little Brynn’s baptism on April 30, 33 babies have been dressed in what had been Evelyn’s wedding dress. The name of each child who has worn the dress has been



Brynn Thompson, on her baptism day.

embroidered in white thread onto the gown’s wide hem.

Evelyn, now 90, lives in Chatham, Ont., and attends Grace Christian Reformed Church. She is still the one who launders the dress following each wearing of it and keeps it between baptisms.

—Anita Ensing Beem

Noteworthy

Destination Christian Reformed Church in St. Thomas, Ont., was recognized as a **Local Food Champion** and won the People’s Choice Award at a community food event. The congregation supports local food through a weekly “stone soup” (bring-your-own-ingredient) meal, community garden, and



People bring one ingredient each to make and share a meal each week at Destination CRC.

winter farmer’s market.

Lindsay Mouw, a regional organizer in Northwest Iowa, for the CRC’s **Climate Witness Project**, was featured in an episode of the cross-platform millennial news program **ASPIREist**, which focuses on people who are trying to make a positive difference in



Lindsay Mouw

the world. The story of her work with Young Evangelicals for Climate Action is in the “God’s Green Earth” episode.

Dao Tran, a member for more than 30 years of **Living Hope CRC** in Abbotsford, B.C., was included in a local high school’s art project telling stories of new-



One of two paintings inspired by Dao Tran created by students of Robert Bateman Secondary School’s Art Activism class.

comers to Canada who arrived as refugees. Two paintings inspired by Tran’s story were created, exhibited, and sold along with the other student works as part of a fundraiser for the creation of a scholarship fund.

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

Classis Releases Former Race Relations Director from Ministry as One Deposed

On September 19, Rev. Esteban Lugo, former director of the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Race Relations, was released from the ministry in the status of one deposed by Classis Grand Rapids South. (Classis is the regional group of churches.)

Classis Grand Rapids South took the action at the recommendation of the council of Kelloggsville Christian Reformed Church in Kentwood, Mich., which held the ministerial credentials of Lugo while he was employed by the denomination.

Lugo resigned as director of Race Relations on July 22, 2016, after 12 years in the job. As reported by *The Banner*, the denomination's director of ministries and administration, Colin Watson, stated that Lugo had decided "to consider other ministry opportunities following a short leave of absence."

According to the agenda for the January 19, 2017, meeting of Grand Rapids South, Lugo had requested to be honorably released from the ministry. However, when the council of Kelloggsville CRC received complaints about Lugo from four women, it consulted with Rev. Kathy Smith on Church Order questions. The council contacted the Safe Church Office requesting its assistance and also sought legal advice.

Ordinarily when there are allegations of abuse against a member of the clergy, the approved guidelines call for an Advisory Panel to meet with both the claimants and the accused. If the advisory panel believes the

allegation is probable and serious, it can then make recommendations to the church council.

In this case, since the four women refused to be publicly identified, the council of Kelloggsville requested an alternative process. A panel and subsequently a subcommittee of classis received the written statements of all four women and a written response from Lugo. Those statements were shared with the classis.

The subcommittee of classis tasked with reviewing all the information supported the motion of the Kelloggsville council to release Lugo in the status of one deposed. Classis agreed, and the synodical deputies Revs. Doug Fauble, Chris De Vos, and Paul De Vries concurred.

Kelloggsville CRC's council president, Steve Petersen, said that the denomination should have informed the council about the circumstances when Lugo left his employment. Under Church Order Article 13, when a minister is employed outside of the local congregation, supervision is shared by the employer and the church council. Church Order supplement 13-b states, "If any council, agency, or institution of the CRC involved in the cooperative supervision of a minister of the Word learns about significant deviation in doctrine, life, or duties, it shall officially inform in writing its partner(s) in that supervision about such deviation before any action is taken that affects that minister's status and future."

A statement from the denomination reads: "Denominational



Ebenezer CRC's Sept. 23 gala dinner.

Illinois Church at 150: Great Past, Great Future

Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Berwyn, Ill., celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2017 with three events: an anniversary worship service in May, a block party in August, and a gala fundraiser dinner in September.

With the theme "Great past, great future," the vision of the anniversary celebrations was "a little bit of heaven on earth."

The church experienced a few moves, one name change (it was established in 1867 as First Christian Reformed Church), and a few shifts in language in its 150-year history.

Sam Hamstra, a CRC pastor and former member of Ebenezer CRC who helped plan the events, said it's an amazing story of a Dutch immigrant congregation that, by the help of the Holy Spirit, became a community congregation. Ebenezer now "ministers to any and all who live in Berwyn."

Rev. Pedro (Peter) Alvies, the church's 23rd and current pastor, said the May worship service "demonstrated a wonderful balance of our past style and present style . . . which included Spanish readings and some bilingual songs." The Berwyn community is more than 60 percent Hispanic.

The ministries of the church include a food pantry, free lunch to children under 18 three days a week, and a community center with computer labs, games rooms, and a gym. Kay Rops, a member of Ebenezer CRC since childhood, now serves as the church's director of youth and community care.

—Alissa Vernon

officials did initiate contact with the church after Rev. Lugo's resignation of employment. The denomination communicated with the council of Kelloggsville CRC per the requirements of Church Order 13 (supplement 13-B) and met the obligations of confidentiality it possessed as the employer."

Petersen said the church understands that the employer was bound by a confidentiality agreement that prohibited them from giving details. "But they knew this was deviation of conduct of life. Kelloggsville council feels the

denomination violated that article," he said.

Following the classis meeting, Lugo told *The Banner* that the process "was unfair and unjust from the beginning" and referred all other questions to his advocate, Rev. Peter Borgdorff, executive director emeritus of the CRC. Borgdorff was not representing the denomination. "My main involvement revolved around there being a fair process," Borgdorff said. "My point has been throughout that the process was not fair and did not follow synodical procedure."

—Gayla R. Postma

California Couple Leads Camping Trip for People in Need

For Ross and Sandy Cooper, members of The River Christian Reformed Church in Redlands, Calif., caring for people who are homeless goes beyond providing a hot meal. From August 22-24, the Coopers and 21 individuals who have low incomes or are homeless got away from it all at San Clemente Beach in California. “Half of the people had never seen the ocean, and more than half had never cooked a s’more [campfire treat]. These are new experiences,” said Ross Cooper.

The Coopers open their home every weekend as a place of hospitality to as many as 60 people in need. Visitors take hot showers, eat a hot meal, participate in Sunday worship and Bible study, and pick up clothing donations. On camping excursions, something the Coopers



Ross and Sandy Cooper, along with their friends in ministry, camping at San Clemente Beach.

do a few times a year, they say they enjoy taking the people they’ve met in their home to a picturesque setting away from their usual environment. “We get opportunities for more meaningful discussion and more spiritual experience. It takes us out of our normal routine. . . . People share in a way they don’t normally share in our church community,” said Ross.

The campers enjoyed creating their own “foil dinner” by choosing a variety of foods,

wrapping it in foil, and placing it in the campfire to be cooked. Those who were homeless felt blessed by hot showers and the chance to have a legal campfire.

The group shared devotions together with each meal. “The highlight was hearing God answering prayer,” said Cooper. One participant had recently lost his twin brother, and the group talked about sharing God’s comfort in tough times.

The River Church supports the Coopers’ ministry in various ways, including a footwear drive earlier this year.

—Amy Toornstra

Would You Like a Hymn with That Beer?

It is an unlikely venue for a hymn sing, but every month about 100 people gather at the Last Chance Tavern in Grand Rapids, Mich., to drink beer (or water or lemonade) and sing hymns together.

Last Chance is a little bar that has been a fixture in the Alger Heights neighborhood near Calvin College for decades. And that’s where Carrie Elzinga and her husband and a few of their friends have been hosting the hymn sing on the fourth Tuesday of every month for a couple of years now. Elzinga and another organizer, Andy DeBoer, both work for World Renew, the Christian Reformed Church’s relief and development agency.

“We’ve had up to 130 people crammed into this little bar,” Elzinga said of the family-ori-



ented event. She said the singing is intentionally low-tech, usually accompanied by a guitar or two, a box drum, and sometimes an accordion. “We don’t use microphones, we have a chalkboard in the corner with the song list, and we sometimes take requests from the crowd,” she said. Song leaders are seated among the patrons, not up on the stage. The set list is also posted on the group’s Facebook page.

Other patrons of the bar have been known to scoff as the hymnals are handed out, but Elzinga said there is always someone who approaches them afterward to thank them, “people who were at the bar for a drink or meeting friends, some of them unchurched but perhaps with vague memories of old hymns,” she said.

The owner of the bar has started letting the group write

the date of the next event right next to “Trivia Night” and “Happy Hour” on the bar’s event chalkboard. The group grew to its current size from about 30 after garnering attention in the local press. A second monthly event is starting in October at a bar on Grand Rapids’ west side, led by a different group of singers.

“It’s not an outreach for any specific church,” Elzinga said. “We’re just a group of friends who approached the bar owner about singing hymns in his bar. He said yes, and has been blessed by it—his words—ever since. He appreciates us, and not just for the extra business we bring in once a month!”

—Gayla R. Postma

NEWS

Michigan Church Hosts ArtPrize Venue

For the ninth consecutive year, the worship center at Monroe Community Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in downtown Grand Rapids, Mich., has been transformed into a venue for that city's annual ArtPrize competition, one of the largest art-related

worshippers gathered for communion near a piece titled "The Next Supper," a pencil drawing by Bill Fritsch based on Leonardo DaVinci's famed painting "The Last Supper." For Fritsch, an artist from Kalamazoo, Mich., it was the first time to have one of his works displayed in a

Thomas More, Mother Teresa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Thomas Merton. While the original "Last Supper" murals depicted a large feast, "The Next Supper" shows only bread and wine on the table.

"The message is that we have a table, and we have a God who wants to sit at the table with us," said Rev. Jim Boer, who became pastor at Monroe earlier this year. "That should make us stop and gasp in awe and wonder and gratitude. I encouraged people to look around and not only see one another, but to see the invisible Host who is present with us."

Over the years, Monroe Community's participation in ArtPrize has helped attract members to the congregation, many from creative backgrounds. Jennifer Van Singel first visited the church when she came to see the ArtPrize display there five years ago. Last year, she moved into a condominium within walking distance of the church and started worshipping there regularly.

"To be honest, I was very nervous going into a new church. They were the most warm, welcoming church I've ever been to. Right from the moment I walked in the door, they greeted me, they introduced me to other members, and I haven't stopped coming since," Van Singel said.

—Greg Chandler



"Continuum of Decision" by Joel Niles is displayed at Monroe Community Church.

gatherings in the world.

This year 13 works of art were selected to be displayed at the church out of nearly 300 that were considered. "We had to turn away a lot of really good work," said Steve Fridsma, who headed the curation committee. "We were looking for work[s] that . . . formed a network of meaning from piece to piece to piece."

The church incorporated a four-week sermon series as part of its ArtPrize participation, planned around themes or questions raised in some of the artwork. On the opening Sunday in the series,

church setting.

"I wanted to make the connection with the original [Last Supper] murals, so what I did was duplicated the interior of the room," Fritsch said. "The room remains the same, but the people in the room are different. They're us."

People depicted in the drawing are from Fritsch's faith community, based on photographs he had taken. There's a banner with welcome messages in English, Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, and other languages. Background panels show historical faith leaders including



World Renew Kenya Country Consultant Jenninah Kabiswa with Mary, a farmer in Ithaca, Kenya.

Conservation Agriculture Grows in Kenya

This summer the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) sent a delegation to Ithaca, Kenya, to see how farmers and communities are using the support available through development agencies. A CFGB long-term Conservation Agriculture Program there is being implemented by World Renew.

Conservation Agriculture programs aim to develop sustainable farming techniques to protect soil from erosion and degradation by implementing practices including the use of groundcovers, crop rotation, and minimal soil disturbance. Will Postma, a member of Friendship Community Church in North York, Ont., was part of the delegation.

"World Renew is working in Ithaca with the Anglican Development Services (ADS) Mount Kenya program, providing training and sharing real-time, real-life examples of people modifying their farming practices to get a higher yield. What World Renew and ADS are really doing is adding to the strength of the community," Postma said.

In Kenya, the CFGB delegates met with Jenninah Kabiswa, World Renew Kenya Country Consultant, who introduced them to several farmers.

Through visits with the farmers in Ithaca, it became clear that the new training and support resources were being used.

"Farmers were working together, learning together, encouraging others to adopt key principles of what they learned over the past year about Conservation Agriculture," reported Postma.

Even with climate changes such as less rainfall this season, farmers who have implemented conservation techniques have increased yields and can extend their growing season by several months. With the profits of her flourishing crops, one farmer is now able to help support several orphans in a neighboring village.

—Krista Dam-Vandekuyt

Grant Helps Alberta Church Enhance Creativity and Worship

In an eight-month project that began last October, Woody Nook Christian Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alta., sought to foster artistic expression and enhance worship through a creative experience made possible through a \$15,000 Vital Worship Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. Approximately two-thirds of the church's 800 members participated in some part of the overall project, called *Living Between the Trees: Awakening Our Creativity*.

At the outset, pastors Dayna Vreeken and Neil de Koning set the context with a sermon series referencing the tree at the centre of Genesis 2 (Garden of Eden) and the tree of Revelation 22 (the New Jerusalem). Together the congregation reflected on questions including the following: What does it mean to live between the trees? What does it mean to be an imagebearer of a creative God? How does the world reveal God? How does the creative process create community?

Artist and high school teacher Karen Tamminga-Paton offered workshops in the creative process and how to overcome an "I am not creative" mindset. An Advent service incorporated member-created sculptures reflecting "postures of waiting." Members of the congregation also shared their artistic skills in photography, textiles, crafting with willow branches, woodturning, and writing.



Artist Karen Tamminga-Paton at work.

The congregation then embarked on the big project—an 18 x 9 feet (nearly 5.5 by 2.7 m) installation of trees painted by Tamminga-Paton. Members of the

congregation were asked to create a leaf reflecting their faith story, passion, gift, or how they saw their life lived out in this "in-between" time. Around 340 leaves of many colors and mediums were submitted and attached. Some leaves

represented families. Angie Salomons, a member of Woody Nook for 40 years, said if she could choose one word to describe the art project, it would be community. "For me the tree resonates life, diversity. It's rich in history. It's generational. It's welcoming. I love the smattering of Scripture, song. The stories. God's presence inside his people."

The completed installation now hangs above the entrance to the sanctuary of Woody Nook CRC.

—Janet A. Greidanus

More Online

Have you checked out the online column *As I Was Saying*? Followed *The Banner* on Facebook? If not, you may have missed these stories.

Remember When Liberals Wanted Evangelicals to Be More Political?



"We no longer have to try to convince evangelicals to be politically active," writes Richard Mouw in this *As I Was Saying* column. "The bad news, though, is that we still have a lot to learn, both about what we should be trying to accomplish in our activism and about how we go about social and political advocacy." (tinyurl.com/banner-mouwpolitical)

Facebook Posts and Pics



facebook.com/crcbanner/ carries quick posts and extra photos every week, with news from CRC congregations.

Gateway Community CRC in Abbotsford, B.C., held its annual youth convention *Re:Activate* Sept. 8-10. This year's theme "Alive," focused on Ephesians 2: 4-6. Approximately 250 high schoolers and 60 leaders attended.

PHOTO: JOHN WANTLAND



Celebration and song at First Navajo CRC.

First Navajo CRC in Tohatchi, New Mexico, gathered in celebration at the end of September, thanking God for 100+7 years of blessings, with a theme from Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same—yesterday, today, and forever."

Smithville (Ont.) CRC launched a new building project, snapping photos of its youngest and oldest members breaking first ground.



Smithville CRC members Avery Hessels with her mom, Sarah, and Fred Slotman.

NEWS

CHURCH WORLDWIDE

'Christian America' Dwindling, Study Shows

The future of religion in America is young, non-Christian, and technicolor.

Almost every Christian denomination in the U.S. shows signs of growing diversity as white Christians, once the majority in most mainline Protestant and Catholic denominations, are replaced by younger members, who tend to be of different races, according to a study released Sept. 6 by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI).

American evangelicals—once seemingly immune to the decline experienced by their Catholic and mainline Protestant neighbors—are now losing numbers and losing them quickly.



PHOTO BY SALLY MORROW

Empty pews of a church in Kansas City, Mo.

Americans are also continuing to move away from organized religion altogether, as atheists, agnostics, and those who say they do not identify with any particular religion—the group known as the “nones”—hold steady at about one-quarter (24 percent) of the population.

The study “America’s Changing Religious Identity” contacted 101,000 Americans in 50 states and has an overall margin of error of plus or minus 0.4 percentage points. It spotlights transformations afoot in many religious groups, including a seismic shift for a long-standing American religious powerhouse: white evangelicals.

“This report provides solid evidence of a new, second wave of white Christian decline that is occurring among white evangelical Protestants just over the last decade in the U.S.,” said Robert P. Jones, PRRI’s CEO and author of *The End of White Christian America*.

“Prior to 2008, white evangelical Protestants seemed to be exempt from the waves of demographic change and disaffiliation that were eroding the membership bases of white mainline Protestants and white Catholics,” he said.

“We now see that these waves simply crested later for white evangelical Protestants.” Among the survey’s chief findings:

- White Christians, 81 percent of the population in 1976, now account for less than half the public—43 percent of Americans identify as white Christians, and 30 percent as white Protestants.
- 92 percent of Lutherans are white, more than in any other denomination.
- White Christians are aging. About 1 in 10 white Catholics, evangelicals, and mainline Protestants are under 30, compared with one-third of all Hindus and Buddhists.
- Muslims and Mormons are the youngest faith groups in the U.S., with 42 percent of all Muslims under 30, and nearly a quarter of all Mormons in that age group.

Daniel Cox, PRRI’s director of research, said senior citizens generally have cohorts who look a lot like them—“nominally white Protestant, and that has been normal throughout their lives.” But the under-30 crowd tends to rub elbows with a more diverse group—including the religiously unaffiliated and people of different races and religions.

“The young are much less likely to believe this is a ‘Christian nation’ or to give preference to Christian identity,” he said.

—Religion News Service (edited for length)

Ministry to Single Parents Blesses Church, Community

Once a month on a Sunday afternoon, Elmhurst (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church welcomes a growing group of women to its Single Mothers Support Group, also known as SHE—Sisters Helping Each other. Just beginning its eighth season, the ministry held a spa event to pamper women who are more often busy working and providing care.

“These women, who normally never get any personal attention for themselves, finally can sit back and be blessed in the name of Jesus,” said Jane Loerop, who coordinates the ministry along with 15 women on a steering committee. More than 100 women and their children came to the spa event, including 11 women who hadn’t been to church before. Loerop said the ultimate goal of the ministry is to introduce mothers and their children to Jesus Christ, expressed through the genuine love they receive at every meeting. Mothers and their children are welcomed for lunch and then separate programming for the children and the women. Seventeen volunteer table hosts, some from the church and others from the community, organize the monthly meetings—sometimes sharing practical advice, such as a session on money management, but always presenting a Christ-centered message, Loerop said.

“It has been really rewarding to see these women join Elmhurst CRC and then get involved in the life of the church either through Coffee Break or Little Lambs [an outreach Bible study and children’s program],” Loerop said. “I encourage all our CRC churches to embrace and value our single moms. Our churches have no boundaries. . . . What an opportunity we have to start a new generation of Christians.”

—Alissa Vernon



The kickoff for this year’s Single Mothers Support Group at Elmhurst CRC included free spa services.

FAQs

Worship

Q Our church takes an “all are welcome” approach to worship leadership. While I appreciate the desire to include everyone, sometimes our services suffer because of inexperienced or unskilled musicians. Is there a way to strike a balance?

A We all want our congregations to participate in worship, but there are different ways of achieving that goal.

Some churches believe that anyone who wants to take part should be included in the rotation of singers, instrumentalists, and Scripture readers. Unfortunately, people are not always good judges of their own talents.

Other churches take an “excellence above all” approach: auditions weed out all but the most developed musicians and speakers. This certainly leads to more polished worship services but it also leaves out many eager would-be leaders. It can also lead to worship that is more of a show than an expression of the congregation’s heart.

The first step to finding a balance between these approaches is recognizing that participation begins with the people in the pews. If the pianist has such bad timing that the congregation can’t sing along, or if the choir’s performance is so pristine that people simply listen in rapt amazement, it keeps the congregation from taking part in worship.

The skills of music making, public prayer, and Scripture reading are God-given talents that need to be discerned and fostered, like any other gifts that build up the body. But this doesn’t stop with identifying the most seasoned leaders. We should also create opportunities for the least experienced worship leaders to grow. Creating space for the 8th-grade flutist or immigrant Scripture reader is a beautiful expression of the congregation’s diversity and develops the next generation of worship leaders.

Greg Scheer (gregscheer.com) is a composer, author, speaker, and music associate at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship.

Welcoming new members opens up opportunities to befriend, serve, and stretch your capacity to experience God in new ways.

Faith Formation

Q We do not have many children in our church. Our volunteers are wondering if it is worth their time and the church’s resources to have a Sunday school class with only one or two children.

A The short answer is yes. It is important that everyone in the church feels like they matter—and that includes children. Children need to hear the stories of God presented in age-appropriate ways, even if there are only one or two children. Putting children together with adults other than their parents in a variety of settings has significant benefits.

But volunteers also get tired, so we need to do what we can to use our resources well. One important task for a pastor or church leader is to cast a vision for what the congregation committed to in our baptismal vows. No matter what Sunday school looks like in your church, leaders should support the volunteers through public prayer and encouragement as well as in very concrete ways such as providing materials needed to teach a lesson. This allows volunteers to focus their energy on teaching their lessons well and spending time with the kids.

Sunday school is one way a church can teach children Bible stories and build relationships that support and encourage the faith growth of children—but it is not the only way. Some churches have been very creative in finding other times and places to encourage and support faith growth. Changing the time and day of the program, assigning mentors, having intergenerational church school, or having a family night all have worked for some churches.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children’s ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

Robert J. Keeley is professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.

Missional Living

Q When new people come to my church, I am nervous their presence will change what I like about my church. Any advice?

A I understand your fear. You are right to point out that new people coming to check out your church may create changes in everything from children’s ministries to worship to leadership. Over the years, you have reached a certain level of comfort with the stability of church life. At the same time, the Lord has blessed your church with new people. This opens up opportunities to befriend, serve, and stretch your capacity to experience God in new ways.

It is a wonderful time to ask yourself how your gifts and time can be of service to enfold these new people in your fellowship and in discipleship in Jesus Christ. Possibly a young man needs your time and patience to help him learn the Bible. Maybe a new family in your neighborhood is looking for friendship. Perhaps a single mother is searching for children’s ministries for her two young kids. Allow the new people to see the quiet presence of Jesus by modeling the hospitality of our Lord as he adds to your church.

This kind of change is good, my friend!

Reginald Smith is director of race relations and social justice for the Christian Reformed Church. He attends Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. ■

BY JANET A. GREIDANUS



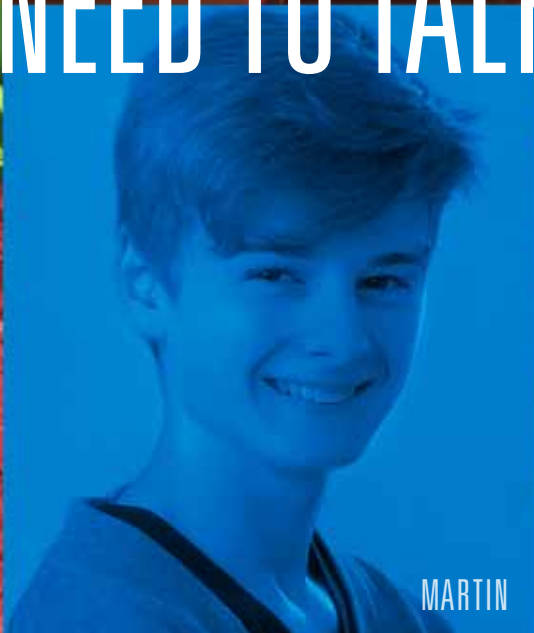
ANDREW



WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT



VIVIAN



MARTIN



KYLE

MENTAL ILLNESS does not wear any bandages. There are no slings or crutches. That makes it difficult to recognize the despair of those who battle depression. Without any indication of the magnitude of their inner struggle, and often without sharing their anguish, an alarming number of teens and young adults in the United States and Canada are ending their lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the second leading cause of death for teens and young adults in both Canada and the United States.

Young people in CRC churches and communities are not immune. We need

to start talking about it. It is the hope and prayer of the people who tell their stories in this feature that such conversation will lead to greater awareness, reduce the stigma attached to mental illness, dispel some of the myths around suicide, and increase the possibility of prevention.

Jordan Hiemstra

Ever since September 23, 2016, the day 17-year-old Jordan Hiemstra died by suicide, his parents, Chris and Christy, have been intentional about sharing their son's story with as many people as they can. "If we can help create awareness of mental illness, get families to talk at the dinner table about depression, or maybe help one person, then sharing this tragedy is worth it," said Jordan's mother.

Outwardly, Jordan appeared happy. He was creative, thoughtful, a good friend, and a contributor to his London District Christian Secondary School community. At church he played keyboard, trumpet, and accordion. Inwardly, it was a different story. "He didn't really share his struggle with any of his friends or tell people what he was feeling," said his father. "I often wonder—if depression wasn't such a touchy or taboo subject, would he have told others what he was actually feeling?"

Martin Saunders

Martin Saunders, 16, was loving and kind. He cared about social justice, loved animals, and always had a joke to tell. He was a talented photographer. The evening of January 30, 2013, was a mild one with

no snow when Martin packed his camera and went out to take some time exposures. He ended his life later that night.

Although his parents, Paul and Wendy, knew things had not been going well for their son about six months before his death, he only shared his feelings deeply with one close friend six weeks before he died. The Saunders want to tell their story for the same reason as the Hiemstras. They requested memorial donations for the Anti-Stigma Campaign of Pathstone, a child and youth mental health agency in the Niagara region. Many people mentioned after the funeral that they also had a family member die by suicide and had never talked about it.

Andrew Kerkhof

At age 15, Andrew Kerkhof was diagnosed with depression. Intelligent, compassionate, and gentle, he lit up a room with his smile. When he was 19, Andrew came out as a gay man. Although his family told him they loved him unconditionally, they believe that for many reasons he did not feel worthy of God's love. The entire family was affected by Andrew's mental illness. "We became dependent upon his health and happiness. It consumed us. While trying to support him, we offered everything within our means." On May 30, 2013, at the age of 26, Andrew died by suicide.

"From the beginning, we decided we would not hide anything," said his mother, Ida. The Kerkhofs established the Andrew Jacob Memorial Foundation, a registered charity. "The tragedy of losing Andrew to depression and suicide has ignited a passion within us to create change in a broken world," they explained. "We recognize the urgency to destroy the barricades caused by the stigmatization surrounding LGBTQ individuals, mental illness, and suicide. . . . We hope that . . . we may chip away at the walls."

Vivian Yvonne Pennock

Vivian, a Grand Rapids (Mich.) Christian High student with an infectious laugh, was a devoted friend and an excellent listener, a wonderful photographer and poet. She shared many outdoor adventures

with her mother, Terri Rozema—whitewater rafting, rappelling, digging for clams, and hiking the Appalachian Trail. Following a suicide attempt, Vivian was hospitalized at Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services for depression and anxiety.

Afterward, family members thought she was significantly better. But Vivian died by suicide on December 4, 2015. She was 17. "Vivian's friends and I all knew she had depression," reflected her best friend and classmate, Christina Bouma. "We knew she was sad and dealing with it, but never did we think she'd attempt suicide."

Kyle Vanderkooi

His family and friends had no idea of the pain Kyle Vanderkooi was struggling with because he shared it with none of them. Following his graduation from Edmonton Christian High School, he lacked the motivation and energy to look for a job. After Kyle refused multiple invitations from his friends to go out with them, they eventually stopped calling. At the root of Kyle's depression and despair, his parents suspect, was sexual and emotional abuse sometime during his high school years by a male in a position of trust, and a subsequent struggle with sexual identity and shame. While his parents sought counseling to learn how to help their son, he refused to go. Kyle died by suicide on August 21, 2007, at age 20.

Warning Signs

Paul Saunders, Martin's dad, raises a conundrum. "The trouble is, as parents of teenagers, we don't know if this is nor-

mal teenage angst and moodiness or whether it's something we should be worried about. It didn't come home to us until a couple of months before Martin died when we learned that he had tried once to take his life. We tried to do everything we could to help him. We contacted a doctor and talked to the school. We got in touch with a counselor and Martin started seeing her, and they thought things were starting to level out a bit. He was on some antidepressants, but they didn't seem to help him much." His sister, Emma, who was 18 when Martin died, believes his friends knew about Martin's struggle but didn't realize the extent of it.

According to the website of Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services in Grand Rapids, Mich., "most people who end their lives exhibit warning signs." These include, but are not limited to, talking or writing about wanting to die, feeling hopeless or trapped, being in unbearable pain, or fearing they are a burden to others.

Changes in behavior may include searching for a way to end their life, such as stockpiling pills; increased use of alcohol or drugs; giving away prized possessions, and withdrawing from friends and family. (A longer list of warning signs is available at pinerest.org/resource/suicide).

Among the factors that increase the risk of suicide are family history; mental illness, especially depression; a previous suicide attempt; a struggle with sexual orientation in an unsupportive environment; bullying; and serious loss.

"Being able, as a parent, to ask the difficult questions: Are you okay? Is something going on? Being able to have open communication with your children, that is something that could change someone's life one day," according to an expert from Forest View Psychiatric Hospital in Grand Rapids.

After a Death by Suicide

All the families spoke about how much they appreciated the support from church and community, including cards, Facebook messages, meals, flowers, and prayers. Collectively, they also said this: »

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (U.S.) 1-800-273-8255**
- **Kids Help Phone (Canada) 1-800-678-5500**
- **In both countries, if you are in immediate crisis, dial the local emergency telephone number (often 911) in your area.**
- **Crisis Text Line provides free assistance to anyone who texts CONNECT to 741741.**

We realize it takes a lot of courage to visit. We encourage people to take on that courage. Don't avoid us. You don't have to say anything. Don't try to fix anything. Just be there. Treat the suicide as any other death. Say the person's name. It's comforting. Don't worry about causing us pain. We are already in pain. Continue to reach out months and years later, even if it's just a card. It's important for us to know that you haven't forgotten about our child. What does not help is trying to give a reason why the suicide happened.

"It's infuriating when people come up with reasons," said one mother. "Mental illness is not about a lack of faith or of the devil."

"Grand Rapids Christian High went above and beyond for me and Vivian's friends," added her friend, Christina. "They sang with us, prayed for us. My counselor was there when I needed to sit and cry, when the days were too hard and I couldn't do my classes. My teachers helped me with homework that I missed. . . . They asked how I was doing and gave me hugs. I am so grateful for their patience and kindness."

Faith and Hope

"We have confidence that Jordan is not maybe 'resting' with Jesus," said Chris Hiemstra, "but he is enjoying Jesus and the joys and thrills of heaven. . . . [T]hrough it all we can still say the Lord is good! We question why. Our perspective is human and we can't see clearly the bigger picture. We have been comforted and blessed with the ability to notice the good that has come from sharing the story of mental illness."

"I know we could not have gotten through this without our Lord holding us up," added Jordan's mother. "Even though this tragedy is so hard to understand, God has let us see some good that can come out of this. . . . We know there is evil in this world. This was not God's doing. He can allow evil to happen . . . but he does not cause it. God has blessed us . . . with an amazing church family, our friends, new friends, and our community. We are so thankful."

"We are very grateful that we have our faith," said Paul and Wendy Saunders, "because it would be very difficult to get through this without it. Not to sound trite, but we know Martin's gone to a better place. There is more than our earthly existence and that gives us comfort, but it doesn't help the pain of losing him."

"Ultimately I know that God rescued Andrew from all the pain he was in," said Ida Kerkhof. "God has shown me heavenly things, such as visions. In those moments, I have felt comfort, joy, and peace." Her husband, John, added, "My relationship with Jesus is very real. Heaven is real now. Andrew is there and I wonder, what's he doing now?"

"I know for certain Vivian is with Jesus," said her mother, Terri, who finds comfort in her belief that the way a life ends does not determine one's eternal destination. "Once in Christ, always in Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. God is faithful, and he will never let us go."

The Vanderkoois find joy and a focus for the future in the new lives that have come into their family in the way of grandchildren.

A Message for Parents (and Young Readers)

"Talk about the tough subject of anxiety and depression with your kids at the dinner table," said the Hiemstras. "This may help those suffering to open up, to realize that depression and anxiety is a disease and something that needs to be shared. Discuss what to do if a friend is in pain. They should tell an adult. It could save a life." A video made in memory of Jordan a few days after his death could be a good discussion starter (see tinyurl.com/CelebratingJordan).

"You've got to communicate," said the Saunders. "It's hard to talk about it, but it's worse if you don't. Talk about the death of your child. We have to tell each other how hurt we are, how we feel, and how much we loved him. If you keep it inside, you can get bitter and it's unbearable—marriages get destroyed." Emma Saunders added, "Talk as a family. Tell your family how you feel."

Terri Rozema said, "If you were the first responder after the suicide, try not to blame or judge yourself if you can't seem

to move on with life or heal within the same timeframe as others. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a real possibility."

"If you are going through a hard time," said Christina Bouma, "confide in someone and please stay. You have a purpose here and I wish I could make you see it. You are loved. You are worth so much."

"Make sure to interfere immediately and seek professional help and guidance from whatever sources are available," said the Vanderkoois. "Parents, pay attention to what you say at home. Overheard judgmental comments about others may keep your child from sharing their feelings with you."

"Take your children seriously, show unconditional love, know as much about them as you can—about their friends and where they are going," said the Kerkhofs. "Don't be afraid to ask a loved one if he or she is suicidal. Ask if they have a plan. Pay attention to their behavior. They need an advocate because they are unable to find the energy and effort to make the choices they need to get better."

Andrew's sister, Laura, said, "Please believe that your family will *not* be better off without you. Despite how you may feel, you are not a burden." ■

A year and a half after Kyle's death, his father, Andrew, wrote the following poem that reveals from where his hope comes.

**What consolation then do I seek
To get me through my life
Something solid and concrete
To relieve me from my strife**

**I have no answer on this day
But I'll tell you how I cope
I ask God's guidance every day
And it's him that gives me hope**

**I know one day I will reunite
With the son I hardly knew
I'll hold him close and squeeze him tight
And whisper I love you**



Janet A. Greidanus is a freelance writer. She lives in Edmonton and is a member of West End CRC in Edmonton, Alta.

Love Letter

IN THE FINAL WEEKS of my mom's life, she made me a promise. When she got to heaven, she said, she would ask God if she could send me a love letter. She was sitting up in her wheelchair, a prayer shawl wrapped around her small frame. Laying my head in her lap, I wept. "Please send me a love letter . . ." I whispered.

I didn't know it at the time, but the Lord was already working on a love note for my mom to send. As I prepared to say goodbye to the only mother I'd ever known, Christ was preparing my heart to say hello to the mother who knew me nine months longer than anyone else.

Adopted at six weeks old, I often wondered about my biological mother. And as a young adult I even thought about searching for her. But the timing was never quite right. I just wasn't ready.

Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, I was 36 years old with three children. My mother was dying. My health was at risk with a recent cancer diagnosis of my own. I needed answers. The timing was now and I was ready.

I contacted the private agency used for my adoption and was matched with Suzanne, a Post Adoption specialist. Walking me through the process of opening my closed adoption, paperwork was submitted and questions fielded. The hardest part was the waiting.

On August 9, 2016, my mom lost her battle with cancer.

My family and I laid her to rest and I returned home, trying to piece back a life that had been shattered by her death. By November things had started to feel a little more "normal." My kids were back in school and our daily routines were in full swing. On the morning of November 7, I was enjoying the quiet and a cup of coffee when my phone rang.



I didn't know it at the time, but the Lord was already working on a love note for my mom to send.

"I spoke to your biological mother today," Suzanne said. "She would love to speak with you, meet you. . . . She's been waiting for you."

Her name was Teresa. Plans were made to connect on the phone, and when the day arrived I nervously made the call. We spoke for three hours, full of joy and tears. Like Mary, I treasured it all up and pondered it in my heart.

My relationship with Teresa has gone from carefully and slowly to weekly phone calls, emails, and care packages. After one particular call, I learned she didn't have

any baby pictures of me. I decided I would create a photo album for her.

Determined, I turned my house inside out until I found my box of childhood memories. Lifting the lid, I saw some folded pieces of yellow notebook paper. I opened it up and immediately recognized my mother's handwriting.

It was my love letter.

It began *A letter to Rachel's birth mom. Today—Rachel's sixteenth birthday—I am filled with pride and joy.* It was written for Teresa by my mom. I slowly read it aloud. Tracing each word with my finger. I held the crinkled papers to my chest. No tears came, just joy.

In a few weeks my family and I will be traveling to the east coast to meet Teresa in person.

My love letter continues. ■



Rachel Von Stein is a writer who lives in Madison, Ala. She worships at The Village Church.

Friendship and *Today* Devotional Plant Seeds of Faith

by Kristen Fergus Van Stee and Nancy Vander Meer

Bill* was an intelligent man who worked as a software developer for a large restaurant chain while living at his parents' home in Beamsville, Ont. He had a love of flying and a gift for music. In his last days of life, he developed a relationship with the Lord thanks to God's grace, a new friendship, and a devotional booklet from Back to God Ministries International.

Bill had no connection with a church, but through a support ministry of nearby Providence Christian Reformed Church in Beamsville, he was introduced to Paul Vandersteen. Bill suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease, and Vandersteen was asked to walk alongside him during this season of his life.

Vandersteen is a member of Providence CRC and a church advancement officer for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI). He admitted that meeting Bill for the first time was a bit awkward and uncomfortable.

"Bill was 49 years old, but he could hardly speak and was very weak," recalled Vandersteen. "He used an iPad to communicate with me through voice recognition and typing. Though Bill was not a believer, he was receptive to my visit."

By their second meeting, Vandersteen asked if he could pray for Bill. Through this prayer, a seed was planted.

The One Who Plants Has Purpose

For nearly six months, the two met weekly for about an hour. They talked about their lives and laughed together. As their relationship grew, Vandersteen also brought Bill a *Today* devotional produced by ReFrame Media, the English-language outreach of BTGMI.

"We started reading from the July 2016 issue where author Jimmy Lin wrote



about how we don't walk alone; Christ is with us," said Vandersteen. "That's when it occurred to me how *Today* hits you wherever you are in life. When you're sitting with somebody who is facing death, or feeling down, the words are so powerful."

They continued with the devotions, but as Bill's physical state worsened, the symptoms of his illness wouldn't allow him to comfortably read.

"That's when I thought of sharing the audio version of *Today*," Vandersteen explained, pointing out that in addition to print, the *Today* devotional is available as an audio program, email subscription, on a website, and through the *Today* app.

"When Bill heard the audio program, he gave me the biggest smile. He started listening to it daily on his own."

As Christmas came closer, Vandersteen also gave Bill access to Providence CRC sermons available on a new Christian

When Bill had no church to call home, Pastor DeBoer and Providence CRC's congregation were there to support his family and friends, offering an opportunity to say goodbye.

Reformed Church mobile phone program called the Bridge App, which allowed him to connect and have access to the church.

"Over and over, Bill would thank me for the prayers and for sharing these messages and devotions with him," said Vandersteen. "It's amazing how such a small part of Back to God's ministry can have such a large purpose and impact in someone's life."

Growing the Seeds of Faith

As Bill went in and out of the hospital, Vandersteen continued to visit and disciple him. Meanwhile, God was growing the seeds of faith planted in Bill's heart.

"He could no longer speak, but he would hold my hand and nod and smile

and give me the thumbs up when I was with him and when I prayed with him,” Vandersteen recalled.

In February 2017, Bill was hospitalized for the last time. Though his illness was terminal, Vandersteen said that Bill’s sudden death caught him off guard. But Vandersteen is confident that his new friend is with the Lord.

“He wasn’t able to verbalize that he accepted Christ, but I have no doubt that God had a claim on Bill,” he said.

In the days that followed, Providence CRC held a funeral for Bill. Many of Bill’s friends and family attended, as well as members of the church.

Vandersteen gave the eulogy. He said that through his relationship with Bill, he was able to tell the mourners about



Bill’s illness prevented him from saying much in his final days, but “God had a claim on Bill,” Paul Vandersteen said.

God’s goodness and how he believed Bill was healed and in a better place. “I knew him for only six months, lying in a bed,” Vandersteen said. “He had 49 years where others knew and loved him. But I knew him when his heart was changing.”

Since Bill’s passing, Vandersteen has been able to connect with his family. Bill’s father has also attended services at Providence CRC and communicates with Vandersteen regularly. ■

*Last name has been withheld to protect the privacy of the family.

A Greater Calling

Dr. Weisen Li is a man of influence. Following a long career in education, he serves as director of the Research Institute of Economic Thought and History at Fudan University in Shanghai, China. He has met with world leaders from the United Nations and Washington D.C. and is a columnist of the Chinese *Wall Street Journal* and other leading media in China.

But that’s not where his ultimate passion lies.

“People have an emptiness in their heart,” said Li. “Right now is a crucial time for people to find faith, and the pure gospel needs to get to people’s hearts.”

When Li met Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) Chinese ministry leader Jerry An at a publishers’ conference and learned how BTGMI proclaims the gospel message through media, he was excited. “What we are doing, using new media, is crucial to sharing the gospel and reaching Chinese people’s hearts.”

Li’s enthusiasm comes from his own journey to faith. He spent the first part of his life studying Marxism and neo-classic economics. In 1979, a fellow university student gave him a Bible. “After reading all those philosophy books, it was hard to come to faith in Christ. I was confused and depressed.”

Li’s friend didn’t give up on him. “Slowly, I came to know the faith. I was baptized in 1991, and my desire was to witness to many Chinese people.”

He thought about becoming a pastor but felt God calling him to share faith through his position as an economist. His work as an economist has given him a global platform but, he said, “I also wanted to share the gospel with people throughout mainland China.”

In a country of more than 1.3 billion people, sharing the gospel can be daunting. That’s why Li is so impressed with BTGMI’s approach.

“New media is the channel to share the gospel now. Everybody in China has a mobile phone. What you do at BTGMI is a big job, particularly for Chinese people. They are using media to learn God’s heart.”

Professor Li partners with BTGMI and other Christian leaders in China to facilitate new media outreach. “We pray that God will open doors so we can widely share the gospel,” said Li. ■



Dr. Weisen Li is enthusiastic about the opportunities new forms of media offer for reaching Chinese speakers with the gospel.



Kristen Van Stee is communications coordinator with Back To God Ministries International in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Nancy Vander Meer is a staff writer for BTGMI.



Growing Faith through Radio Outreach

Pascaline*, 20, lives and works in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where the majority of the population adheres to the Muslim faith. It wasn't until she heard the radio messages of BTGMI French ministry leader Rev. Marc Nabie that she wanted to learn more about following Christ.

"Pascaline called me and said, 'Pastor, I've listened to the broadcast; I want to give my life to Jesus. Will you come and meet with me?'" Nabie recalled.

Nabie met with Pascaline. When she accepted Christ, Nabie suggested that Pascaline join a church close to her village even though such a public display of her faith could have consequences. Pascaline's Muslim employer noticed that she had begun attending church. He expressed his disapproval of Pascaline's new faith and told her that if she continued to go to church he would fire her.

Pascaline continued to follow her heart and her employer followed through on his threat. Pascaline called Nabie and said, "They have chased me away because I won't quit going to church, but I will continue to pray."

Three weeks after she had been fired, Pascaline called Nabie again, this time to report that while she was on her knees praying, her boss called her to come back to work.



Rev. Marc Nabie is the BTGMI French ministry leader in Burkina Faso.



BTGMI's French broadcast reaches people like Pascaline, a former Muslim who after listening gave her life to Christ.

"I love Christ and will never forsake him," Pascaline testified.

Please pray that God will continue to grow Pascaline's faith and give her opportunities to witness Christ's love for her boss. ■

—Kristen Fergus Van Stee and Nancy Vander Meer

*Last name has been withheld to protect privacy.

At-a-Glance

- The mission of Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI) is to proclaim the gospel, disciple those who come to faith, and strengthen the church.
- BTGMI works internationally with indigenous leaders and ministry teams in 10 languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.
- Through radio and TV broadcasts, resource distribution, and discipleship centers, BTGMI reaches people in 80 countries. Through the Internet, social media, and digital apps we connect with people in an additional 106 countries.
- ReFrame Media, the BTGMI English-language outreach, provides discipleship resources for individuals and churches to bring people to Jesus and help them grow spiritually. See reframemedia.com.
- The BTGMI volunteer prayer team has grown to nearly 4,000 people. To join us in praying for those around the world searching for hope in Christ, visit backtogod.net/help/prayer.

Two-Year Leadership Project Reveals Key Learnings



The Reformed Leadership Initiative has been led by (left to right) Mike Johnson (CRC), Dave Barlett (RCA), Gianni Gracia (CRC), Marco Avila (CRC), Richard Caballero (RCA), Bethany Devos (RCA), Marijke Strong (RCA), Barb VanGiessen (CRC), Paul Vander Klay (CRC), EunBeom Kim (CRC), Steve With (RCA), and Eun Jae Joo (RCA).

Most Christian Reformed churches are long-term, quiet, close-knit communities of believers worshipping God, fulfilling their baptismal vows, serving each other, and sharing the gospel with their neighbors. What happens when these churches want to grow or deepen their faith and impact? What steps should they take, and how can they get started?

“Sometimes churches look for fast, off-the-shelf solutions to contend with creeping doubt or to meet consumeristic itches to bolster their numbers,” said Paul Vander Klay of Living Stones CRC in Sacramento, Calif. “What would better serve the church is steady, long-term, incremental, persistent, and contextual help with leadership development, discipleship, and evangelism.”

This is exactly the type of help the Reformed Leadership Initiative (RLI) was designed to provide. The initiative is a two-year pilot project of both the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America. It was created to develop and support leaders

in both denominations by facilitating learning communities and coaching for local congregations.

The initiative focused on four geographical networks (Canada, Central California, Iowa, and New Jersey) and two ethnic group networks (Hispanic and Korean). Each of these networks is co-led by a leader from the CRC and one from the RCA; the networks explore their own pathways to helping local churches develop biblical leadership.

“In California, we have tried to help local churches take on small challenges in a successive but persistent way,” said Vander Klay, who serves as a CRC co-leader in Central California. “In learning communities the groups get some basic training and discover they are not alone in their challenges. We [referring to Steve With, RCA co-leader] have also discovered that coaching a pastor might not trickle down to the council. Councils benefit from coaching themselves.”

The initiative has seen positive growth among participating churches. Participants have felt supported by their

peers and coaches as they’ve learned new things. It has also taught the CRCNA and RCA a few key lessons that they can apply in the future.

For example, the co-leaders of the various networks have learned that proper pacing is important, especially for small- and medium-sized churches.

“Helping churches grow by two to four families a year is a reasonable and profitable goal,” Vander Klay said, pointing out that more lofty goals can lead to churches getting discouraged early on in the process.

The Reformed Leadership Initiative will officially end in December, but those involved are eager to share their learnings and provide assistance to other churches who want to explore this kind of church renewal.

Vander Klay concluded, “What all of us are learning from RLI is that little things can mean a lot, and with some initiative and creativity, old structures can be leveraged to do some new things to impact the kingdom.” ■

—CRC Communications

Not Songs but Sighs

During my high school years, I went to a stage production of the musical *Godspell*. One song in particular struck a chord with me: “On the Willows,” a haunting tune based on Psalm 137:1-4. Imagine my surprise when I discovered our *Psalter Hymnal* (blue at that time) also had a song based on Psalm

137—one that addressed the entire psalm!

“By Babel’s Streams We Sat and Wept” is a song of lament that includes these words: “Not songs but sighs to us belong.” That’s the feeling that fits me as we step into the final weeks of this year.

Many times a psalm captures our thoughts and feelings. Walter Brueggemann, a well-known author and Bible interpreter, says there are three types of psalms. The first type, “orientation psalms,” brings us to focus on God and God’s divine order for his world. Brueggemann labels the second type “disorientation”—psalms that express the disarray of life leading to lament. The third type he calls “reorientation”—psalms of hope and assurance giving rise to thanksgiving.

While I trust we all seek to walk faithfully in an ever-moving cycle of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation, some situations call us to linger and reflect in just one of these areas. As I look back over the past year, I find myself lingering in disorientation, and the psalms of lament capture my feelings.

For some of us, it’s been a “sighs not songs” kind of year. Recall with me the various challenges this year has brought: wildfires stretching from Alberta to Los Angeles, hurricanes and floods as well as earthquakes. These aren’t somebody else’s

problem: just ask members of Christian Reformed congregations on the north side of Los Angeles—or those in Fort McMurray with memories from the year before. Touch base with any of the CRCs in Houston or Miami; ask missionaries in Haiti or the Dominican Republic. Our brothers and sisters are hurting.

The challenges intensify outside of North America. Floods in Sierra Leone and South Asia; Christians targeted and persecuted in Egypt and elsewhere; war and conflict in the Middle East; hundreds of thousands of refugees crowded into camps. Our brothers and sisters are hurting.

Our brothers and sisters are hurting in other ways as well. Imagine having come to the U.S. as a baby, only to find out now that your home might no longer be your home. Picture living on a First Nations reserve in a country such as Canada and having no access to clean water. Think about being singled out for hate and protests based on the color of your skin. Consider the country of Iceland that, according to some reports, has nearly eradicated Down syndrome—by means of abortion. “Not songs but sighs to us belong.”

Even in lament, the psalms are instructive, for they show us that

we go to God with our fears and longings. Psalms of lament show us how to cry out to God. In so doing, the psalms remind us to put our trust in God—our covenant-keeping God. Psalm 31 states it in singular form: “But I trust in you, Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hands.”

Soon a new year will be upon us, and with it new times of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. May we profess, as the song by gospel music legend Andrae Crouch proclaims, “Through it all, I’ve learned to trust in Jesus; I’ve learned to trust in God.” ■



“Psalms of lament show us how to cry out to God.”



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

You add.
God multiplies.

'A Great Cloud of Witnesses' Begins a New Academic Year at Calvin Seminary



Calvin Seminary kicked off its academic year with a convocation address that highlighted the past and anticipated a year full of reflection and commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

In her presentation "How to Flourish in Seminary: Lessons from Reformation Geneva," Karin Maag offered reflections on seminary life during the Reformation in 16th century Geneva, making connections with the experiences of students today.

Maag, director of the Meeter Center for Calvin Studies and an expert in the area of early church training and higher education, painted a picture of life for a pastor-in-training at the Academy of Geneva in the 1500s.

While some aspects of early Reformed education

may seem odd in today's context—did you know that all courses were taught in Latin?—Maag showed how this early student body had an interest in strong theological education for the purpose of church service within the growing movement of the Reformation.

These early students came from all over to study at Geneva, and some took a great risk in doing so, coming from areas that still leaned heavily toward Roman Catholicism.

Maag made connections between the students of the past and current Calvin Seminary students. While the life of the student may look different today, the dedication to strong theological and ministry education remains the same. So too does the strong connection to the church.

Karin Maag spoke at the opening convocation at Calvin Seminary.

She began and ended with the encouraging words of Hebrews 12:1-2: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus."

Referring to this text, she reminded students that within a call to service in the church and to the body of Christ, they are not alone on this journey, nor are they the first to traverse this path. Instead, she said, they are surrounded by a "great cloud of witnesses." ■

—Matt Cooke,
Calvin Seminary

SHORT TAKES



Creation Care Resources Available

The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship has put together a wide-ranging worship resource guide on creation care. The guide has six parts:

- **Creator and Creation** celebrates God, who created this planet as an abundant home for all to share.
- **Lament and Blessing** looks at how we humans claim and hoard what God has given rather than sharing with those who suffer and leaving enough for generations to come.
- **Earth Keepers and Caretakers** gives ideas for cooperating as Christ renews all things.
- **Music** suggests songs about creation, lament, and caretaking from many cultures.
- **Sermon Planning** offers general, liturgical, and lectionary resources for creation-themed preaching.
- **Service and Series Planning** will help churches integrate care of creation themes into special Sundays, church-year seasons, or parts of worship.

You can access the resource guide at tinyurl.com/CreationGuide. ■

—Joan Huyser-Honig,
Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

Seeing and Sharing the Passion of Sierra Leone

Richard Britton will always remember the prayers he heard during church services and before training events in Sierra Leone. Prayers in which, simultaneously, everyone standing in the room would shout enthusiastically, each person praying their own praises and prayers, directed by a church leader or member.

“I loved the passion that I saw people show while praying like this, and I



Richard Britton spent much of his time in West Africa with Rev. Istifanus Bahago.

admired the love for Christ I saw in the leader and people praying,” said Britton.

“It was exciting to be a part of, partly because I knew nobody was listening to each other to see how elegant the prayers of others were.”

Britton was in Sierra Leone this past summer for five weeks for his cross-cultural internship with Calvin Theological Seminary. He soon realized that the passion displayed in these prayers also translates into other areas of the church.

He saw that passion in the action plans people made after taking part in the Timothy Leadership Training—plans that

Peace Garden: Building Relationships between Two Communities in India

The Maltos and Santhals, two different ethnic groups living in Jetkey, a small village in India, were each struggling to provide food and income for their own groups.

The two communities developed a joint venture committee consisting of both Maltos and Santhals to help them work together on their common challenges. The committee proposed creating a Peace Garden as a way to address their food and income needs.

The project included anyone from the two groups who wanted to be involved—Malto people, Santhal people, and others from the lowest income groups. Project participants were surprised and grateful when one community member from the low income group heard about the Peace Garden proposal and offered his land to the project at no cost.

World Renew is committed to supporting individuals



The Peace Garden in Jetkey provided food and growing fellowship for neighboring ethnic groups.

and communities with many different ethnic and religious backgrounds as they overcome poverty and embrace justice. World Renew and its local partner, Evangelical Fellowship of India Commission on Relief (EFICOR), helped project participants as they began working together on the land.

After clearing, tilling, and watering the land, they planted vegetables such as potatoes, garlic, radishes, and tomatoes. The relationships within and between the two groups grew as they worked and ate together.

The Peace Garden not only brought the two communities together, it also produced a bigger yield of vegetables than the villages had ever harvested before.

“It was an eye-opener for us,” said one community member. “The garden is helping us build relationships while also providing income for everyone involved.”

The fruit and vegetables from the Peace Garden are helping families in the community supply healthy meals for their children, and the extra food sold at the market

is allowing some families to earn a larger income.

The Peace Garden experiment is living up to its name. It provides a relaxed environment for both communities to work together and build relationships with one another.

“This kind of work project is very successful,” said Lakhinder Malto, leader of the joint venture committee. “We hope that it will soon become a model for other communities to work together across ethnic and social barriers to build food security and improve income across the region.”

Please pray that as the Maltos and Santhals are working together, sharing meals, and enjoying the harvests, they may begin to experience the true peace of Christ. ■

—Ivana Setiadi,
World Renew

You add.
God multiplies.

would help the pastors reach their goals of doubling their church size or organizing a talent show for young people.

“When I heard those plans I had no doubt in my mind that they were going to go through with them,” added Britton.

Britton spent almost all of his time in Sierra Leone and the neighboring country of Liberia with Rev. Istifanus Bahago, a missionary from the CRC of Nigeria supported by Resonate Global Mission. Again, he was impressed by the passion.

“It encouraged me that someone is that passionate about serving the Lord,” said Britton. “He was just so invested in everyone, taking time to talk and giving advice.”

Although Britton went to West Africa with a mix of anxiety and excitement, he was able to draw on some of his experiences serving right in his own community to prepare him for the trip.

Britton volunteers at Strong Tower Ministries, a church plant primarily serving African refugees from a Muslim background only a 10-minute drive from Calvin Theological Seminary. (You can read more about Strong Tower in October’s issue of *The Banner*.)

“Serving at Strong Tower, I learned to go with the flow and be adaptable in new situations,” reflected Britton. “I learned that I often won’t know what to say so I have to listen more than I speak.”

As Britton continues his studies, he still serves regularly as an English tutor at Strong Tower and has been strengthened by his experiences in Sierra Leone. He looks forward to seeing how God will use both of these experiences. That’s one of the reasons Resonate was formed—to allow for more opportunities to serve in God’s mission around the world and at home. Thank you for making that possible. ■

—Brian Clark,
Resonate Global Mission

Annual Survey of CRC Congregations Shows Healthy Signs

Preliminary results of the 2017 CRCNA Member Survey show that many respondents believe their congregations have become healthier in the past five years. The member survey will take place annually through 2020.

Other results include the following:

- A solid majority of respondents say their congregation strongly encourages them to build relationships with one another (52 percent say this is “definitely true”).
- The average age of members continues to climb, and the proportion of households without children under 18 continues to rise.
- From 47 percent of households having children in 1987, the share in 2017 was down to 30 percent. During the same time period, the share of households with children who had at least one child in Christian day school dropped from 87 percent to 57 percent.
- There was a small increase in devotional practices such as praying privately, reading the Bible, holding family devotions, and having personal devotions.
- Evening worship continues to decline, from 51 percent attending at least once a month in 1987 to 14 percent this year.

Respondents who report more frequent interactive worship experiences (storytelling, children’s sermons, personal testimonies, question-and-answer sessions, missionary reports) were more likely to report a healthier church.

A fairly small percentage of respondents said their congregation is “involved in the birth of new churches and disci-

pling communities.” Just 32 percent said this statement is “mostly true” or “definitely true.”

In the coming months, another group of over 200 churches will be contacted to participate in the 2018 survey. However, any church wishing to participate in the survey during the next data collection window (to be announced soon) may do so simply by using the materials available on the survey entry page at crcna.org/survey.

This year, 216 churches were invited to recruit responses to the survey. (Other churches were also welcome to participate but were not formally asked to recruit.) The invited churches—designated as a “cohort”—represent approximately one-fifth of

the denomination.

The annual surveys are being done as part of “Our Journey 2020,” the denomination’s new ministry plan that focuses on five desired futures: Church and Community, Discipleship, Leadership, Identity, and Collaboration. The CRC is working, in conjunction with congregations, to make continuous progress in each of these areas.

In sorting through survey results, the CRC will get a sense of what the strengths and challenges of local congregations are in light of the desired futures.

To read the entire story on the survey, visit crcna.org/news-and-views/annual-survey-crc-congregations-shows-healthy-signs. ■

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications



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

Each and Every Hair

Quick question: what do a skunk's stripes, a sheep's wool, a walrus's whiskers, and a porcupine's quills all have in common? Answer: They're all hair!

Hair makes the porcupine prickly, the muskox fluffy, and the water shrew a fantastic swimmer. And God designed each and every one!

All about Hair

Hair is made of something called **keratin**, just like claws, feathers, and your fingernails. An animal's outer coat is made up of **guard hairs**. These show the color and pattern of the animal. Underneath the guard hairs is the **underfur**. This fur is very soft and fluffy and helps keep the animal warm. **Whiskers** and **quills** are hair too. They are both special types of guard hairs created to do specific jobs.



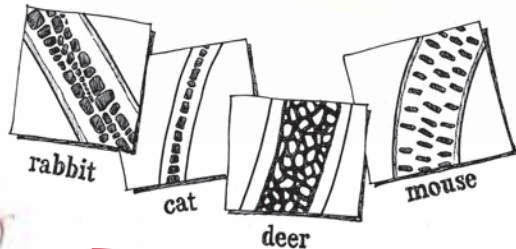
hare



no hair



mohair



Why Do Animals Have Hair?

For protection. The porcupine's quills criss-cross its back in all directions. It can't shoot the quills out, but if a predator gets too close the porcupine will lash out with its quill-covered tail.

For camouflage. In the fall, the snowshoe hare loses its brown summer coat and grows a white winter coat, making it hard to spot against a snowy background.

For communication. The white-tailed deer flashes the bright white underside of its tail to signal to other deer that there's danger and say, "This way! Follow me to safety!"

For insulation. The muskox stays warm during cold arctic winters with its long overcoat (with hairs up to 24 inches or 60 centimetres long!) and its woolly undercoat, which it grows in the fall and sheds in the spring.

For finding food. The bearded seal uses its super-sensitive whiskers to find food on the sea floor.

For warning! The skunk's bold black and white stripes say, "Stay away if you know what's good for you!"



ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT HOLLADAY

FUN Facts

Not all **red foxes** are red! They can also be coyote-colored, "silver" with mostly black silver-tipped hairs, or a "cross fox" with darker hair along the back and across the shoulders.

A **caribou's** nose is completely furred.

A **baby porcupine** (porcupette) has soft quills that harden shortly after it is born.

Stiff hairs around the edge of the **water shrew's** hind feet actually work like flippers, helping it swim!

Moles have hair that can lie in any direction, allowing moles to easily move forward or backward inside their narrow tunnels.

When a **weasel** gets its winter coat, the white fur shows up first on its belly and then spreads toward its back. The opposite happens in the springtime—the brown summer fur appears on its back and spreads toward the belly.



Cozy Socks and Sweaters

Circle all the animals below that you think people collect hair from to use as fiber for spinning into yarn. When you're done, read on to check your answers.

**SHEEP DOG BISON MUSKOX CAMEL
GOAT RABBIT ALPACA YAK COW LLAMA**

If you circled sheep, you're right! Sheep wool was one of the earliest fibers to be spun and woven into cloth. Today people raise lots of different kinds of sheep with different types of wool. But people also use hair fibers from many other animals.

Cashmere and mohair come from goats. Cashmere is very soft and fine. Mohair has a silky shine and is nicknamed the "diamond fiber."

Angora comes from Angora rabbits. The hair on these long-haired rabbits is collected when the rabbit sheds every three to four months and is very soft, light, and warm.

Qiviut is the underwool of the muskox and it's eight times warmer than sheep's wool. It is shed in the spring and collected by combing or gently pulling it off farmed animals, or retrieving the puffs of hair shed by wild muskoxen.

People also spin yarn using hair from camels, bison, yaks, alpacas, llamas, and even long-haired cows (like Highland cattle) and dogs!

You can find lots of fun yarn craft ideas online. Here are a couple to check out:

- Needle-felted acorns (you'll need an adult to help with these) (tinyurl.com/feltdacorns)
- How to Finger Crochet a Scarf (tinyurl.com/FingerScarf)

Hair Has "Fingerprints"

Did you know that? It's true! The outer surface of a hair is made up of overlapping layers of scales. The pattern made by the scales is different on different types of hair. You can make an impression of the scale pattern by pressing a hair into wet nail polish or hairspray on a microscope slide. When it's dry, you peel off the hair, and that leaves a print. When you look at the "hairprint" under a microscope, the scale pattern tells you what animal the hair came from.

With a parent's permission, visit the website micro-labgallery.com/hair.aspx to see what different kinds of hair looks like under a microscope.



By the Numbers

- **Walruses** have up to 700 whiskers.
- **Porcupines** have about 30,000 quills.
- **Sea otters** have up to 140,000 hairs per square centimeter (less than a half-inch) of skin.
- **Humans** have up to 150,000 hairs on their heads.

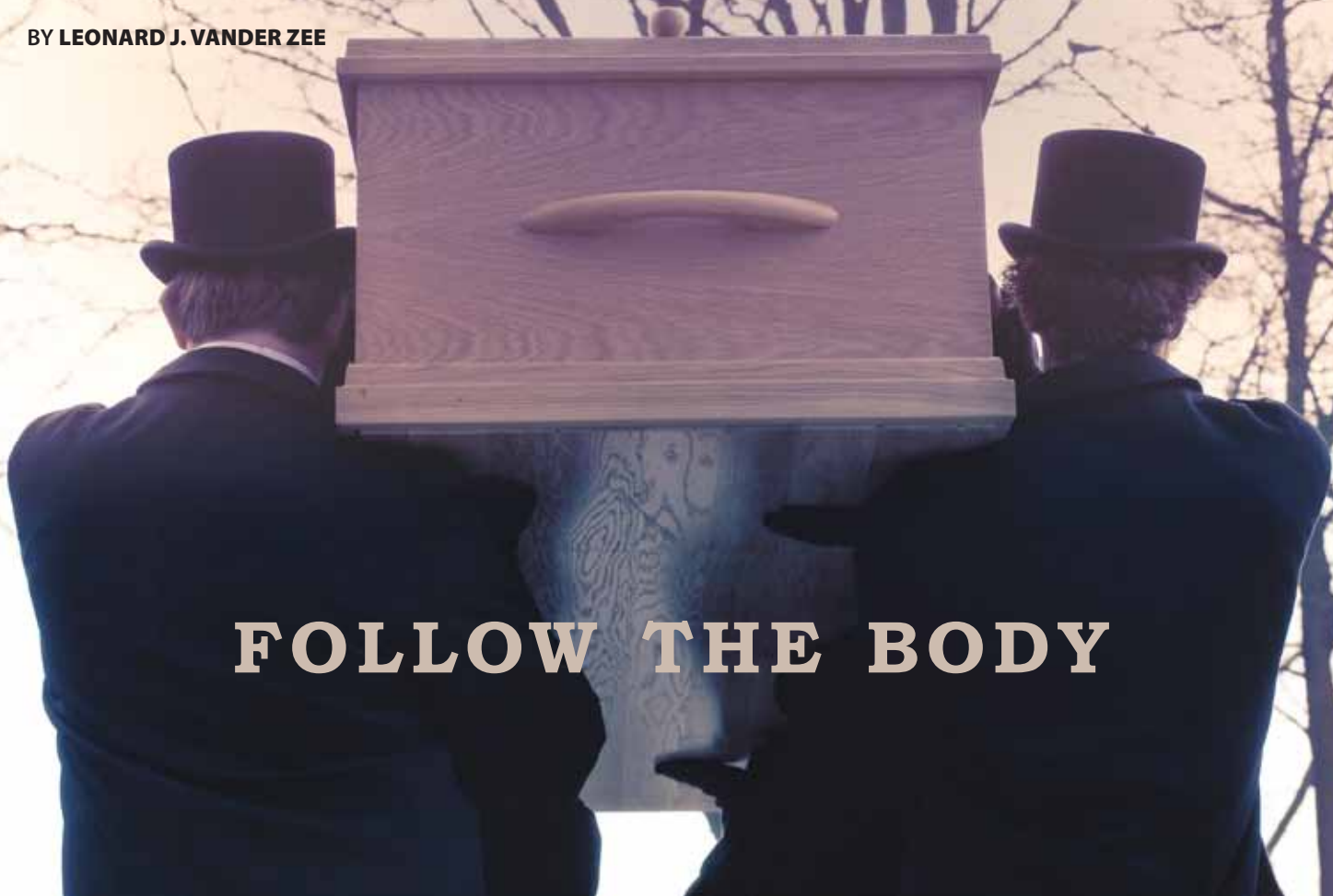
With all the animals and people on this planet, that's a lot of hair! Yet Jesus says, "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matthew 10:30). What an awesome God we have!



Rachel Lancashire grew up in the CRC but currently attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont. She once had a job identifying

wildlife hair samples using a microscope.





FOLLOW THE BODY

THE SERVICE BEGINS IN SILENCE. The casket with the body inside is carried to the front of the sanctuary, followed by the family, who take their seats before it. Two granddaughters take the pall, unfold it, and drape it over the casket. The pall is a white cloth used to cover the casket, an ancient practice that symbolizes baptism. This simple, beautiful pall with a symbol of baptism embroidered on it was made by the congregation for use in funerals.

While the pall is placed over the casket, the following words are spoken:

Leader: For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ (Gal. 3:27).

People: If we have been in united with him by baptism into his death, we will certainly be united with him in his resurrection (Rom. 6:5).

Then, still in silence, a close family member lights a large “resurrection candle.”

The service proceeds with hymns, Scripture readings, prayer, remembrances, and sermon. At the end, again in silence, the

body is carried out first, followed by the family, and then the rest of the congregation. On this occasion, the body remains at the church while family and guests are served a light lunch.

An announcement is made, inviting anyone who wishes to follow the body once more by meeting at its last resting place on earth, the grave. There, the somber and comforting words of committal are read:

In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our brother/sister, and we commit his/her body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.

This is a description of a recent funeral service at which I officiated. I offer it not as a prescription for everyone, but as a way of introducing some important considerations regarding Christian funerals.

In the Christian Reformed Church Order, funerals—like weddings—are called a “family matter.” So, while churches, and certainly pastors, may be involved, the Church Order chooses not to regulate funeral practices except for the consistory’s supervision of the pastor. I think this is right.

However, it may be very helpful for pastors and churches to offer guidance to families in this time of bereavement when

WE FOLLOW THE BODY OF ONE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST TO ITS LAST PLACE ON EARTH WITH A STRANGE AND AWESOME MIXTURE OF LOVE, GRIEF, AND HOPE.

there are so many decisions to make while carrying the crushing burden of loss.

What I have to say here is not meant to criticize anyone's preferences, practices, or the rituals they have chosen surrounding the death of a loved one. I do want to invite people to think about those practices from the perspective of how our Christian faith may guide them.

I've noticed a distinct trend in funerals over the past few years: the body is missing. Strictly speaking, without the body, it's a memorial service rather than a funeral.

There could be a number of practical reasons for this. One may be an increase in cremations (to which I have no objection). In many cases the cremation takes place before the memorial service, though, in fact, cremations can take place before or after a funeral. Another reason that the memorial may need to be delayed quite a few days is in order to allow time for widely scattered family and friends to gather. Loved ones may feel that they need the closure of burial or cremation. But often neither of these reasons apply.

We also need to consider a deeper reason for preferring memorials to funerals. Many commentators have noted that in our culture, people increasingly tend to distance themselves from the reality of death. The dead body makes us uncomfortable.

A memorial service, rather than a funeral service with the body present, appeals to many people. It tends to focus on the "celebration of a life" rather than mourning a death. Its central theme is thanksgiving rather than sober reflection. None of this is bad in itself and, of course, the presence of a body at a funeral does not exclude the element of celebration either.

But the presence of the body does serve several important functions. First, it emphasizes the reality of death. In the midst of our thankful remembrances and the deep hope of our faith, we also squarely face the sheer, incontrovertible fact of our mortality. A funeral reminds us of the fragility of life, our finiteness.

*Our days may come to seventy years,
or eighty, if our strength endures;
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away. . . .
Teach us to number our days. —Psalm 90:10, 12*

The presence of the body also points to something even more important. For Christians, the body is profoundly important; we are created as embodied creatures. We are not just souls imprisoned in a decaying body. We cannot separate body and soul so neatly. Our humanity is incomplete apart from bodily existence.

Paul, speaking of the body as a kind of clothing, says, "We do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our

heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Cor. 5:4). The goal of our salvation is not to die and go to heaven, but "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting," according to the Apostles' Creed. Our promised future is not some amorphous spiritual existence; our future is with our bodies glowing with resurrection life, fitted out for a new heaven and new earth.

That is another reason I believe it's important for Christians to honor the body, even when it has breathed its last on this earth. Honoring the body means that we don't hide it away somewhere, especially at the funeral. Why shouldn't it be, literally, front and center?

When I consult with a family about arrangements after death, my pastoral advice comes down to three words, *follow the body*. It's an ancient and deeply Christian tradition that we often see portrayed in films and described in books. Follow the body to the funeral home. Follow the body to the church (the best place for a funeral). And finally, follow the body to the grave or the crematorium. It's an ancient practice because, over the centuries, people have found it to be good.

One of the most touching and revealing aspects of Jesus' death is the care that was taken in his burial. A suitable burial place was offered by Nicodemus, a high official in the Sanhedrin. The women who loved Jesus followed the body to the tomb, but because sunset brought in the Sabbath, they could not properly prepare the body for the grave. They hurried out before dawn the day after the Sabbath to perform these loving acts of burial. But they were too late. Christ had risen!

In the same way, we follow the body of one baptized into Christ to its last place on earth. We do so with that strange and awesome mixture of love, grief, and hope. Unlike those who hopelessly followed Jesus to the grave, we can follow the body in the "sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ." ■

STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE



Leonard J. Vander Zee is a retired CRC pastor now serving as interim minister of preaching at Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

15 Great Gift Ideas



As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A Conversation on the Ways of God Formed by the Words of God

by Eugene H. Peterson
reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Eugene Peterson served as the pastor of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Md., for 29 years. This collection of sermons that he preached to the congregation he so deeply loved is a volume to be savored again and again. Peterson offers fresh and deep insights into the living Word of God and what it means for our lives. Readers might consider using it as a devotional, each day or week reading and reflecting on one sermon and the Scripture passages on which it is based. (WaterBrook)

When the English Fall

by David Williams
reviewed by Kristy Quist



When a solar storm puts an end to electricity in the world, society begins to collapse. This unusual apocalyptic novel is written as the journal of an Amish man whose life is mostly unchanged at first. Eventually, the world begins to intrude, and he must weigh protecting his family against staying true to what he believes. Meditative and deeply spiritual, this compelling book is part commentary on our rushed and thoughtless lifestyles and part rumination on the ways that we are all connected as children of God, even when we feel insulated from the outside world. Good for adults and young adults alike. (Algonquin)



Break Open the Sky

by Stephan Bauman
reviewed by Jim Romahn

Love conquers fear. We are supposed to know that from 1 John 4:18. But Stephan Bauman shows us that, even though we may know it to be true, it isn't changing the way we live. He demonstrates, chapter by chapter, how we live in fear. We fear failure, we fear loss, and we are afraid to take risks—small or huge—to practice love. And so the world ignores, criticizes, or mocks our churches. Bauman tells why and how Christians need to wake up to the core truths of the gospel Jesus proclaimed and lived. (Multnomah)

The Other Alcott

by Elise Hooper
reviewed by Kristy Quist

Living in the shadow of her older sister, author Louisa May Alcott, could not have been easy for May Alcott.



Especially when everyone thought of her as Amy, the selfish, superficial little sister in *Little Women*. Author Elise Hooper weaves a story around the factual frame of May's life, creating a warm historical novel that delves into the complicated relationships between sisters, the desire for individual identity, the drive to pursue art and beauty, and the difficulty of forging a way in a career that society reserved for men. (William Morrow)



How to Survive as a Firefly

by Kristen Foote
reviewed by Gwen Marra

Do you know someone who is missing those summer nighttime fireflies? If so, this is the perfect book. With Erica Salcedo's brightly colored, cartoon-like illustrations, Kristen Foote's engaging text helps readers explore the life cycle of the firefly. She introduces and explains scientific vocabulary and presents interesting facts in a humorous way. The book includes a "Frequently Asked Questions" section and related links to encourage the learning to continue. This would be a great gift for a budding scientist. Don't wait for summer—check it out now! Ages 5 and up. (The Innovation Press)

You & a Bike & a Road

by Eleanor Davis

reviewed by Francene Lewis



Comic artist Eleanor Davis challenged herself to ride her bike the 1,800 miles from her parents' home in Tucson, Arizona, to her home in Georgia. In this diary of her trip, she deftly captures the scrubby brush, open landscapes, and roadsides with her rough pencil sketches. Along the way she creates quick portraits of the people she encounters. Her drawings convey the force of the wind and the impact of the long ride upon her body. She honestly portrays her anxieties and joys as well as the confusing situations in which she finds herself, from ghost towns to border patrols. This understated graphic memoir provides the reader with the chance to join Eleanor on her journey. (Koyama Press)



Winsome Persuasion: Christian Influence in a Post-Christian World

by Tim Muehlhoff and Richard Langer

reviewed by Todd Statham

In our fractured North American society, “it seems that people are neither hearing each other nor letting each other be heard,” according to authors Muehlhoff and Langer. And so they offer their timely attempt to encourage Christians to practice respectful and gracious persuasion when talking to people with whom we radically disagree. *Winsome Persuasion* is about the process of Christian communication rather than the result. As such, this book meets a real need. It will be deeply appreciated by pastors, chaplains, youth leaders, Christian politicians, or anyone who regularly interacts with non-Christians over matters of cultural and social importance. (IVP Academic)



Steadfast Live

by Sandra McCracken

reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

Sandra McCracken has never sounded better than she does on her new album and DVD, *Steadfast Live*. She still sings her songs, but the songs have a more corporate focus; they more clearly invite us to join her either in voice or in spirit. McCracken's voice, piano, and guitar are front and center, while her fine band stays in the background and gives her just the right amount of harmonic and rhythmic support. Even if you already have most of the songs, *Steadfast Live* is well worth your time. (Towhee Records)



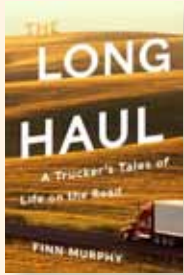
Quicksand Pond

by Janet Taylor Lisle

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When 12-year-old Jessie and her family rent an old cottage in a remote area, she finds a dilapidated raft floating on the nearby murky pond. She takes the raft out and ends up helping a girl, Terri, escape a pursuer by letting her get on the raft. Terri tells stories about the history of Quicksand Pond. In this captivating juvenile novel, author Lisle has created a realistic world fraught with danger, evil, compassion, and justice. It explores the discrimination we must confront in our own sinful hearts and shows how wrong judgments can have consequences for generations to come. Ages 10 and up. (Atheneum)

MORE REVIEWS
ONLINE



The Long Haul: A Trucker's Tales of Life on the Road

by **Finn Murphy**

reviewed by **Otto Selles**

Finn Murphy quit college to work full-time as a mover. Soon he managed his own rig, crisscrossing America hundreds of times for an elite clientele. Murphy remained a lifelong student, an intellectual trucker. His memoir is a blend of amusing tales about his career and straight-talking reflections on “the dregs of the American Dream.” While offering a dim view of society, particularly his wealthy clients, Murphy defends eloquently the joys of manual labor. His language can be at times as salty as a sailor’s, but his overall message is thought-provoking and provides an engaging companion piece to J.D. Vance’s *Hillbilly Elegy*. (W.W. Norton and Company)



The Space Between Words

by **Michèle Phoenix**

reviewed by **Kristy Quist**

While Jessica visits a friend in Paris, they are caught in the 2015 terrorist attack on the Bataclan theater. Reeling from her trauma, she eventually continues her travels to the French countryside. There, as she reckons with what has happened, she finds the writings of Adeline, a Huguenot woman suffering persecution in the late 1600s. In their quest to find out what happened to Adeline and her family, Jessica and her friends face questions about suffering and why God allows it. A unique read for the inspirational fiction fan. (Thomas Nelson)



The Dragon with a Chocolate Heart

by **Stephanie Burgis**

reviewed by **Francene Lewis**

Aventurine is bored with the family caverns, tired of learning, and ready to try her wings. She decides to show her family she can take care of herself. After all, she is a dragon, even if her scales have not yet hardened. When she ventures outside her mountain home, she is tricked into drinking a magical hot chocolate that transforms her into a puny human. But even as a girl, Aventurine is a dragon at heart. In this warm and wonderful children’s fantasy, Aventurine will need all her inner strength and confidence to make new friends, save her family, and find her passion. Ages 8 and up. (Bloomsbury)

Exit West

by **Moshin Hamid**

reviewed by **Jenny deGroot**



Nadia and Saeed fall in love in an oppressed city in the not-too-distant future. Unnamed, the setting could be Damascus or Mosul; militants might strike at any time. Nadia has already abandoned her family and her faith, but she wears her black hijab for protection and confidence as the couple begin to imagine a clandestine escape. Even as they do not trust others who are in the same circumstances, they realize that everyone is displaced, “and so, in a sense, no one is.” The telling is sparse, well-written, and inviting. A great read for adults and high school students. (Riverhead)

You Bring the Distant Near

by **Mitali Perkins**

reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**



Born in India to a Hindu mother and a Christian father, Tara and Sonia have also lived in Ghana and England.

Uprooted once more in the early 70s, the girls and their parents arrive in New York. They soon realize that their cultural habits make them stand out in their new, predominantly African-American neighborhood. As the girls grow older, each gets into complicated relationships. The author was born in India, grew up Hindu, and converted later to Christianity. This sensitive and thought-provoking young adult novel explores themes of race, discrimination, gender inequality, religion, and national pride and identity. Ages 12 and up. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

'Twas the Evening of Christmas

by **Glenys Nellist**

reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**



Based on the structure and cadence of Dr. Clement C. Moore’s famous poem “’Twas the

Night Before Christmas,” this picture book instead offers a retelling of the true Christmas story. Tired Mary and Joseph, watchful animals, magnificent angels, curious shepherds, and three splendid kings bearing gifts celebrate the birth of the Christ child (though in the biblical narrative, the magi make their appearance later at a house where Jesus and his parents are staying). Lilted verse and gentle illustrations invite young children to imagine what it was like on the night that Jesus was born. Ages 4 and up. (Zonderkidz)

What You May Not Know About Foster Parenting

MANY PEOPLE have heard about the need for foster parents. But probably fewer have thought much about the needs of foster parents. My husband and I are in our 50s. We have been fostering for almost eight years and have had the privilege of caring for 13 babies and toddlers during that time. We are very much “newbies” in the world of foster parenting. But here are some things we’ve discovered along the way.

People our age don’t generally have little ones in their constant care, so being a foster parent can tend to be a lonely experience. People our own age may overlook our need for friendship and inclusion, thinking, “They’re busy with those little ones.” And the people who have babies or toddlers the ages of ours are young, so we don’t quite fit there either.

Comments we hear often are, “I’ve thought about fostering, but I wouldn’t be able to give them up,” or “You knew going in that you would have to let them go.” While these statements are true, they are not helpful during the difficult time of saying goodbye to one of our foster children. Saying goodbye is very hard, even as the focus quickly changes to the next little one. Family, friends, and church members quickly forget that we just had to let go of a member of our family. If a family member had died, everyone would be understanding and expect us to be grieving. By contrast, although we have a painful hole in our home, we “knew it was coming.” And so we grieve alone.

When a child first comes into our home, it means major adjustments. Many of the newborns we care for are dealing with some sort of withdrawal from substances such as alcohol, which can mean six weeks or more of crying that doesn’t



People our age don’t generally have little ones in their constant care.

respond to comfort. It means little sleep and heartache along with night feedings. Older children may come with other issues that need to be worked through.

Contact with the birth parents can be challenging because we are called to love even those who are difficult to love because of the choices they’ve made that affect their children. We’re called to love those who sin, as we who sin are loved. It continually reminds me of how our Father loves us. We mess up over and over, and yet God loves us and continually welcomes us back to him. God also uses others to draw us back to him. Our prayer is that God will use us in the lives of the families we come in contact with through fostering.

Do you have foster families in your church? Please pray for them and each of the children whose lives they touch. Church families often show amazing hospitality by bringing meals to a young couple welcoming home their new baby. Perhaps your church could consider

asking foster families what would be helpful when they are adjusting to a new child in their home. Besides bringing meals, perhaps someone from the congregation could offer a pair of arms to hold a crying baby or an hour of babysitting as foster families adjust to a new child in their home.

Romans 12:6 says each of us are given different gifts and abilities. If you feel a nudge toward this ministry, please look into it further! As difficult as foster parenting can be at times, the rewards of touching the lives of children gives us so much more than we give. And if that is not your calling or gift, please pray for, encourage, and enfold the foster parents in your church. ■



Brenda Bron is a wife, mother, and foster parent. She lives in Brighton, Ont., and attends Ebenezer CRC in Trenton, Ont.

They'll Know We Are Christians



It's at this point—when I distinguish between my godly and my ungodly behavior in uncomfortably specific ways—that I also encounter God's grace.

FROM OUR EARLIEST DAYS, we are taught to distinguish. We learn fingers from toes, mom and dad from strangers, up from down, hot from cold. As we grow, in pursuit of hobbies, education, or professions, some of us will come to distinguish Marvel from DC, sine from cosine, John Williams from Hans Zimmer, hyphen from em dash.

This practice of distinguishing is rooted in the opening chapters of Scripture. God separates day from night, sky from water, water from land. Humanity's care of the garden includes giving names to the abundance of creatures God has made. By attending to differences between an Australian silver oak and a Norway maple, or the lesser kudu and an American bison, we add our voices to Psalm 24's declaration that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

Regrettably, we are not immune to misusing the call to distinguish. I have told ungodly jokes, mocking people of other ethnicities, genders, and abilities. I have been suspicious of rich people and dismissive of elderly people. Though an immigrant myself, I am often slow to build relationships with those who do not speak English as their native language. Instead of honoring the beauty of God's image in others, I too often fall short. Perhaps you have too.

It's at this point—when I distinguish between my godly and my ungodly behavior

in uncomfortably specific ways—that I also encounter God's grace. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession teaches us that true Christians can be distinguished by three qualities: their faith, their fleeing from sin, and their pursuit of righteousness.

Article 29 declares that our faith is rooted completely in "the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord Jesus." Here is where I have found the practices of daily Scripture reading and prayer so helpful. As I repeatedly listen to the Spirit unfold the ongoing story of God's grace, my faith begins to reverberate with awe at "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (Eph. 3:18). What I discover is not only God's love for me, but also how God repeatedly chooses to extend love and faithfulness to and through the least-expected people.

As we encounter the immensity of God's grace in Jesus Christ, we also begin to see more clearly the "great weakness" remaining within us. The confession distinguishes Christians as those who flee sin, fighting "against it by the Spirit" every day. One of the more helpful daily patterns for me in this regard has been to pray alongside David: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24). In this practice, I remember that the Spirit is the one who

makes me whole and holy, and I am learning to "keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25).

As the Spirit works in us, we pursue righteousness by loving "the true God and [our] neighbors without turning to the right or left." We embrace this invitation into righteousness by becoming friends with those who are different than us and spending ourselves to see them flourish. As we do, we become distinguishable by our association with and love for others—imitating God, who sent Jesus Christ in love for the world. Ultimately, pursuing righteousness in restored relationships with others becomes a gateway to wondering: will we recognize the immensity of God's grace, love, and faithfulness present within each person we encounter? ■

[STUDY QUESTIONS ONLINE](#)



Christopher Schoon is lead pastor at First Hamilton CRC (Ontario) and has taught mission and leadership-related courses at Redeemer University College and Calvin Theological Seminary.

ADS

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Denominational and Classical

Announcement of Candidacy

We are pleased to announce that **HOPE (GUAN) LEE** has now completed her academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word.

Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

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

Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

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

Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

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

Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

Retirement

CONGRATS REV. BAKER The Congregation of Third CRC congratulates Rev. Ken Baker on his retirement from ministry. Rev. Baker has served as the Pastor of Worship and Discipleship at 3rd CRC for the last 25 years. During that time, he has been a thoughtful and prayerful leader who has loved God's people well. We will miss him, and we wish he and his wife Annelies many blessings in this next chapter.

REV. JOHN VISSER RETIRES Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Belleville, ON congratulates Pastor John Visser, together with his wife Michelle, as they celebrate his retirement Nov. 30, 2017. We thank God for 32 years of faithful service here and 45 years of ministry in the CRC. A retirement celebration is planned for Saturday night, Nov. 25 at the church. Refreshments and appetizers will be served at 6 pm with a program to follow at 7 pm. Pastor John's farewell worship service will be the next day, Sunday, Nov. 26 at 10 am. The Saturday night event is free but it is ticketed. To reserve a ticket, call the church (613-962-2062) or email info@maranatha-church.com no later than Friday, Nov. 17. Join us as we convey our love and affection to Pastor John and Michelle on his retirement.

Congregational

Church's 130th Anniversary

CALVIN CRC, OAK LAWN, IL is privileged to celebrate 130 years of God's faithfulness on Sunday, October 29, with a celebratory service and luncheon. To God Be The Glory

General

FAIRLAWN CRC (WHITINSVILLE, MA) celebrated the installation of Rev. Joel Vande Werken as our Pastor on Sept. 10. We praise God for His provision, and pray for His guidance and blessing on a faithful and fruitful ministry.

SUN FOLLOWERS: Maranatha CRC welcomes winter visitors from Dec 3 to Apr 8. We meet in Farnsworth Hall, 6159 E University, Mesa, AZ at 10 am. Our preacher this season is Rev Harry Weidenaar. Check us out at mesamaranathaccr.net or like us on Facebook.

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b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
(1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	56,707	56,322
(2) Paid In-County Subscriptions	0	0
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution	25,422	25,320
(4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	15	14
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation	82,144	81,656
d. Free Distribution by Mail		
(1) Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541	35	35
(2) In-County as Stated on Form 3541	0	0
(3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	0	0
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e. Total Free Distribution	40	40
f. Total Distribution	82,184	81,696
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Birthdays

100th Birthday



JANTINA HEKMAN (Bakker) celebrates her 100th birthday on October 25. Celebrating with Tina are her children Evert (Sally) Hekman, Winnie (Gary) Whitmore, Deborah (Jack) Howell, Phil (Joyce) Hekman; her grandchildren Brian (English), David (Rachel), Daniel (Tabby), Deborah (Dan), Sarah, Erin,

Sam, Jacob; and her great-grandchildren Madison, Ethan, Theodore. Greetings may be sent to 6825 O'Daniel Loop W. Lakeland, Florida 33809-4666.

90th Birthday

JENNIE MAE (BULTHUIS) WUBBEN celebrated her 90th birthday October 3. Her family praises and thanks God for her life and faith.

Anniversaries

70th Anniversary

HEERSINK, OLIVER & GERRY (Viss) 4913 Blue Gum Rd, Modesto, CA 95358. Wedding date Nov. 5. Congratulations Dad and Mom! We love you—your 6 children, 19 grandchildren and 35 great grandchildren. Celebrating God's "faithfulness is unto all generations." (Ps. 119:90)

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.firstcrtstthomas.com for more details. Email a cover letter and resume to firstcrtstthomas@gmail.com or by mail to 320 Elm Street, St. Thomas, ON N5R 1J7

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: bethelcrrcalling@gmail.com or contact the correspondence clerk directly at 289-880-2225 or mail to Calling Committee, Bethel CRC, 17 Robinson Road, Dunnville, Ontario N1A 2W1. We look forward to meeting you!

PASTOR Fresno CRC, located in California's central valley, is seeking a pastor who is passionate about preaching and relationships. We are a family of believers desiring to grow in our walk with Jesus and attract others to follow Him. Please view our website and profile at www.fresnocrc.org.

SHERMAN STREET CRC, seeking to be a living testimony of God's grace and justice in the city, is looking for a lead Pastor to join us in our mission. See our website at shermanstreetchurch.org/pastorsearch for more information. Women and men of all ethnicities are encouraged to apply.

PRINCETON CRC, KENTWOOD, MI Live. Love. Lead. Sound good? Princeton CRC is looking for a lead pastor. We'd love to talk w/ you. searchteam@princetoncrc.org #princetoncr

PASTOR The congregation of First CRC in Sioux Center, IA is seeking a full time pastor. We desire a pastor who is passionately reformational, is committed to Christian education, and preaches in an expository manner. We prayerfully ask that those interested in learning more about this position please contact Mark Sybesma at

65th Anniversary

BUIKEMA, WILLIAM & CLARA (BOSMAN) 8040 E. Dartmouth Ave. #1 Denver, CO 80231-4287 Celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary on Nov 21st our children Linda & Steve Lucht, Karen & David Velgersdyk William & Carol (Deboer), Patricia. 11 Grandchildren, 10 Great-Grandchildren. We thank the Lord for so many blessed years.

PRINS, CARL AND BERDIENE (Schut) of Hudsonville, Michigan, celebrated their 65th anniversary on September 18. Children: Craig & Sherri Prins, Duane & Jane Prins, Bryan & Mary Prins. Ten grandchildren (two deceased) and four great-grandchildren. We give thanks to God for His love, faithfulness, and blessings!

Obituaries

DELANGE, GENE, age 82, passed away on September 2, 2017. He is survived by his wife, Miriam; his children, Doug DeLange, Kathy and Doug Dunham; his 3 grandchildren, Justin Dunham, Trevor Dunham, Alexia DeLange; his sisters, Janice DeLange, Mary DeLange (Don Eckelbarger, Sr.); and brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Kenneth and Karen Kobes.

ERFFMEYER, HAROLD Harold Erffmeyer, age 70, of Dorr, Michigan, went to be with Jesus on Sunday, July 9, 2017. He will be lovingly remembered by his wife of 51 years, Nancy (Vander Hoek); his children and grandchildren, Michelle Erffmeyer (Jordyn), Michael Erffmeyer

sybm@mtcnet.net to begin building a relationship with our church. www.firstcrrc.com

OUTREACH DIRECTOR Full-Time Outreach Director, Sioux Falls, SD: Shalom Christian Reformed Church, a growing and vibrant congregation, is seeking a dynamic full-time outreach director. This person must display a strong personal relationship and love for Jesus Christ. The outreach director will have a passion for leading and encouraging others in sharing the Gospel through the spoken word, acts of Christian love and service, and an ability to inspire and mobilize the congregation in service ministries. If interested, please visit our website for a full job description: www.shalomcrrc.org

WORSHIP DIRECTOR South Olive CRC in Holland, MI is seeking a part-time Worship Director to plan and lead blended worship services which includes a praise team and band. Approx. 10 hrs per week. For more information please email cal_dozeaman@hermannmiller.com or call 616-875-7378.

FULL-TIME OUTREACH DIRECTOR, SIOUX FALLS, SD: Shalom Christian Reformed Church, a growing and vibrant congregation, is seeking a dynamic full-time outreach director. This person must display a strong personal relationship and love for Jesus Christ. The outreach director will have a passion for leading and encouraging others in sharing the Gospel through the spoken word, acts of Christian love and service, and an ability to inspire and mobilize the congregation in service ministries. If interested, please visit our website for a full job description: www.shalomcrrc.org.

PASTOR: We at First CRC of Allendale, MI are looking for a lead pastor to help us connect with God in Worship, to Grow our faith, and to Serve our community. If you are interested in sharing your faith and story with us, please contact our search committee at: SearchCom@firstallendalecrrc.org.

MUSIC DIRECTOR - Rock of Life CRC in Willmar MN is seeking a part-time music director. For a full job description go to rockoffirecrrc.org. 320-235-3060

SEEKING LEAD PASTOR Mill Creek Community Church, located in the exciting, growing north Seattle area, seeks a pastor to lead it into the next phase of its mission. We are an open and inviting church, seeking in all we do to reflect the renewing love of God in our community. Check out our church profile at millcreekchurch.com with information on how to apply. We are open to both women and men in leadership.

(Emily, Hannah, Morgan, Taylor), Marc Erffmeyer; brothers and sister, Phil (Trudy) Erffmeyer, Russ (Judy) Erffmeyer, Dr. Marilyn (Dr. Bill) Dahms, twin Rev. Gerald (Carol) Erffmeyer, Paul (Barb) Erffmeyer; sister-in law, Hope (Rich) Veltman. He was preceded in death by his parents, Rev. Henry & Antoinette Erffmeyer.

ESSENBURG, GLADYS age 83, of Holland, MI, went to be with her Lord on September 3, 2017. She is survived by her husband of 57 years, Milton, her daughter Sheri (Mark) Bennink, and 2 grandchildren.



DARLENE RUBINGH, age 83, of Grand Rapids, went to be with the Lord on Monday, September 18, 2017. Darlene was an adventurer. She grew up on a farm in Pease, Minnesota and was the oldest of 7 children. With dreams of becoming a nurse and engaging the wider world, she went to Calvin College where she met and married Eugene Rubingh. After she obtained her nursing degree and Eugene finished seminary they went on the adventure of a lifetime together for 9 years as missionaries in Nigeria. While in Nigeria, Darlene raised her children, helped run a clinic, dispensed medicine, sewed up patients and delivered babies. Darlene later became one of the founding professors in the Calvin nursing program where 30 years earlier she had been an undergrad. Darlene was also an accomplished musician and passed on her love of music to all her children. She was a faithful wife, amazing mother and never stopped growing as a person and disciple of Jesus. She is survived by her loving husband Rev. Dr. Eugene F. Rubingh, daughter Val Nyenhuis (Steve), and her sons Jeff Rubingh (Marlene), Trevor Rubingh (Linda), Kevin Rubingh and grandchildren Heather (Nate), Rebecca, Erisha, Emma, Michal, Zechariah and great grandchildren Landon and Adysen.



F. H. (HENK) VERHOEFF Henk was lovingly embraced into the arms of his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ on Saturday, September 16, 2017. He will be remembered and dearly missed by his wife of 63 years Wilhelmina; children, Paul (Cobi), Anya (Kenn), Stephen (Joyce), Margaret (deceased) (Thane), and David (Brenda); grandchildren, Lies (Jean Pierre), Anya (Jeremia), Jesse (Marina), Lance (Marissa), Cameron, Jordan (Matthew), Rudy (Kyla), Julia (Kenton), Madeline, Leanne, Adrian, Joshua, Marieka, Annalies and his ten great-grandchildren. Henk was born in Lawang, Indonesia, and moved back to the Netherlands with his parents just before WWII. In 1952 he was awarded his masters degree in Geology at the Free University of Amsterdam. On May 5, 1954 he married the love of his life, Wilhelmina Amelia van der Bijl. In 1958, they immigrated to Canada and moved to Calgary, Alberta, where they lived all their lives. Henk worked in the Oil and Gas Industry until 1987 when he retired. His professional career encompassed working at Shell (Nigeria), Westcoast Transmission, The National Energy Board and Home Oil. His love for God, his wife, children, extended family and many friends, was central to his life. His work to promote Christian education at all levels, church life and political involvement kept him busy. Henk's passions included travelling, providing hospitality together with Wilhelmina and connecting with those who needed a helping hand especially newcomers to Canada. He loved celebrating life in every way.

Employment

ADA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL is seeking a Director of Advancement. For more information and to apply please contact Julie DeKoster at jdkoster@adachristian.org.

CAREGIVER: Caring, responsible individual looking to help out persons who need help shopping, light housekeeping, meals, errands and other personal needs. Interested persons contact me at 616-337-2744.

GENERAL SECRETARY The Reformed Church in America is seeking candidates for their next General Secretary. The General Secretary is responsible for nurturing a shared vision for the mission of the RCA and ensuring effective implementation of this mission. For a full list of responsibilities, qualifications and application details, visit <https://www.rca.org/employment/general-secretary>.

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Reformation Themes: Commemorating the 500th Anniversary New
October 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, an event that changed the course of Western history. This collection includes a series of articles focusing on Reformational themes along with a retrospective by Dr. Karin Maag, "The Reformation: What Did We Gain? What Did We Lose?"

Reformed Basics
What does "Reformed" mean anyway? A compilation of previous *Banner* articles by award-winning writer and former *Banner* editor Rev. Len Vander Zee on topics including election, the Trinity, original sin, and more.



HEAD - DUTTON CHRISTIAN Dutton Christian School in Grand Rapids is a premier CSI school serving 485 Preschool through 8th grade students. DCS takes seriously its commitment to be intentionally Christian, to have accountable instruction, and to be a place where all can expect community. Dutton Christian has experienced steady upward enrollment, completed successful capital campaigns, and remains debt-free. The next Head Administrator needs to be a strategic leader deeply rooted in God's word, a skilled financial steward of DCS's resources, and a highly relational representative of the school. We invite you to learn more through the search video and full Opportunity Profile found on the JobfitMatters website at www.jobfitmatters.com/dutton.

REDEEMER U. C. PRESIDENT SEARCH Redeemer University College (Hamilton, Ontario) stands out across Canada for its commitment to a Christian undergraduate liberal arts and sciences education that develops the whole person. Redeemer is now embarking on a search for the fourth President of the institution. The next President needs to be a skilled communicator to internal and external audiences. The University needs a bold, decisive leader who is prepared to take calculated risks in line with a well-articulated vision that will ensure a healthy future for Redeemer University College. This person will identify and develop new partnerships and financial resources while stewarding existing relationships and resources extraordinarily well. Redeemer has talented faculty and staff who are eager to be a part of the future. The President needs to build, nurture, and empower this strong and capable faculty and staff community. For more information

about the President search, see a video, Opportunity Profile and Process of Candidacy at www.jobfitmatters.com/ruc.

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ALLEN RENAISSANCE ORGAN - Chapel CF-8. 4 yrs. old. Bench, blocks, and power surge adapter. \$25,000/obo. 708-341-4122.

Miscellaneous

TWO CEMETERY PLOTS for sale in Chapel Hill Nativity garden in GR, Mi \$1,295.00 each. (616) 662-2844

Redeemer University College invites applications for the **H. Evan Runner Chair of Philosophy**, beginning July 1, 2018. The successful candidate will have demonstrated ability to perform research within and represent well the reformed philosophical tradition in the line of Augustine, Calvin, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven, the tradition from which Dr. Runner taught in a faithful and fruitful career to several generations of students. For more information and application details, please go to redeemer.ca/runner-chair



Dordt College is seeking applications for the following areas beginning August 2018:

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- Agriculture
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- Engineering (Chemical)
- Engineering (Electrical)
- Farm Operations & Management
- Graphic Design

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

Dr. Eric Forseth, Provost
Dordt College
498 4th Ave NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697
provost@dordt.edu

www.dordt.edu/prospective_employees/faculty/

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Punch Lines

What tickles your funnybone? We're looking for original humor, including either true or fictional anecdotes (300 words max), original cartoons, or visual humor. Please send yours to editorial@thebanner.org.

At our men's morning coffee club, one man related the story of the wonderful RV camper trip he and his wife had taken across the United States. He was told by the Yellowstone Park ranger to lock up any food in the trunk of his car, as, if left out in the open, bears would smell it and cause havoc.

In the night his wife woke him to say "Wake up! I hear bears outside our camper!" He dutifully

went outside to check—not too smart!—but there were no bears.

Later that night, his wife heard the same sound. Once again she woke him up and he checked it out—but there were still no bears.

The next morning as they discussed the evening experience, they figured out that there had never been bears outside their camper. The sound his wife heard was John rubbing the canvas with his big toe in his sleep!

Charles Lindemulder

A little girl was sitting on her grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story. From time to time she would take her eyes off the book and reach up to touch his wrinkled cheek,

alternating with stroking her own smooth cheek.

Finally she said, "Grandpa, did God make you?"

"Yes, sweetheart," he answered. "God made me a long time ago."

"Oh," she said. "Did God make me too?"

"Yes, honey. God made you just a little while ago."

Feeling their respective faces once more, she observed, "God's getting better at it, isn't he?"

Bruce Tilbury

I don't trust mimes. They do unspeakable things.

Dave De Wit

The Sunday school teacher asked her preschool class, "How many of you would like to go to heaven?" All the children

raised their hands except one. The teacher asked Tommy why he wouldn't like to go to heaven.

He answered, "I'm sorry, but I can't. My mother told me to come right home after Sunday school."

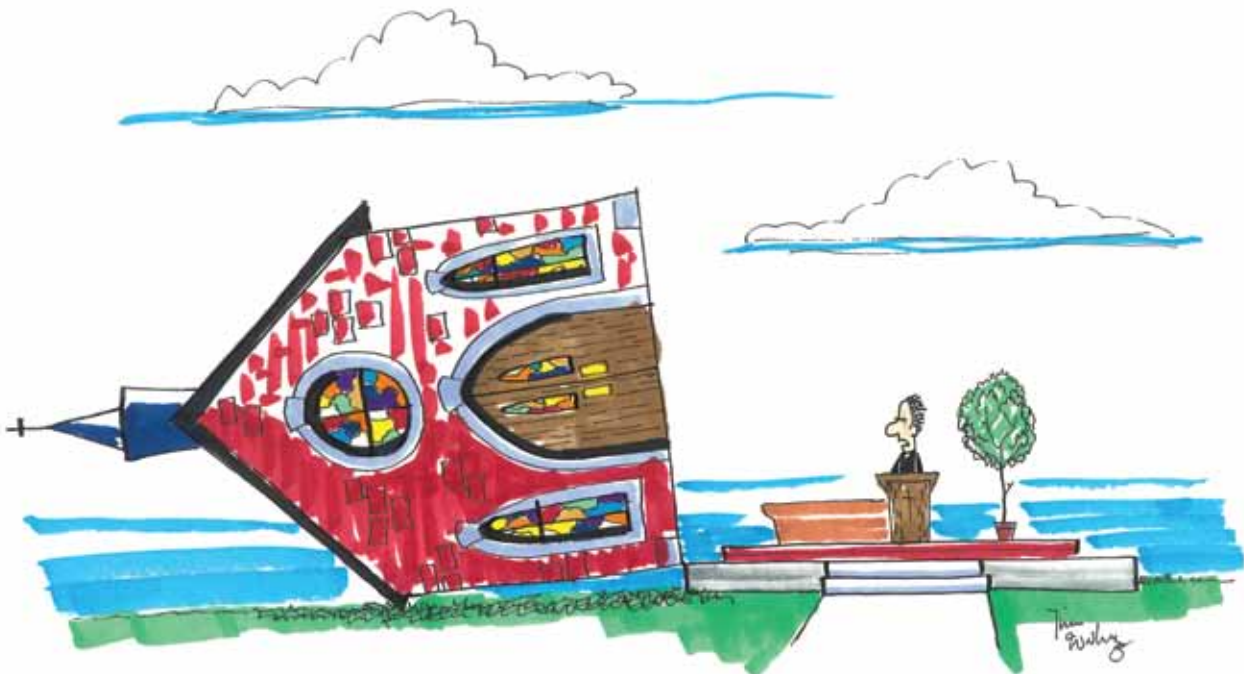
Marie Albers

Sutton: Nana, in a few weeks I get to go to TK. You know what TK stands for?

Nana: What does it stand for?

Sutton: (with a smug "I know everything" face): Tarantula Kindergarten.

Janelle Volkers



"I warned you about everyone sitting on one side!"



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