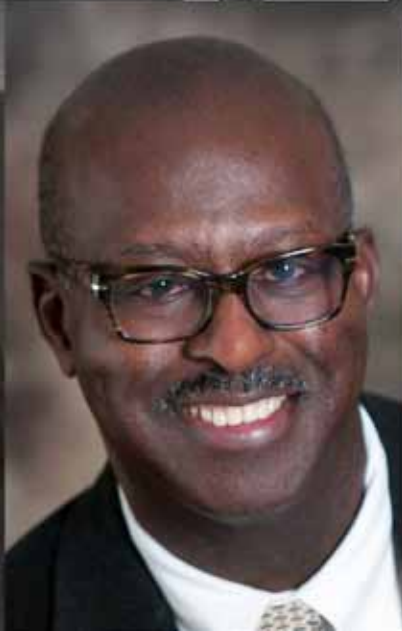


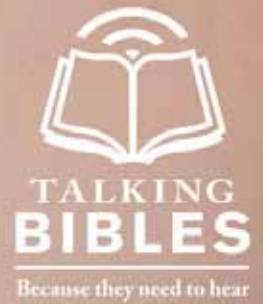
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- » AWS: Why I Decline to Sign 'Prophetic' Declarations



FEATURES



Making Black History in the Christian Reformed Church
Reginald Smith // Some African Americans who have made significant contributions to the CRC.



Profile: Ny Ly: 'Life Is All the Proof I Need'
by James C. Schaap // From the killing fields of Cambodia to The Community CRC in Salt Lake City, Utah.



Faith Matters: A Different Kind of Faith
Daniel Boerman // There's often a gap between our experiences and God's promises.



Cover: Making Black History in the Christian Reformed Church (p. 10). Top row (l-r): Mika Edmondson, Danjuma Gibson, Eugene Callender, Sheila Holmes. Bottom row (l-r): Steve Kabetu, Norma Coleman-James, Colin Watson, Henry Washington.

COLUMNS

7 Editorial: Mission in 3-D

Shiao Chong // Communion, community, and commonwealth are all dimensions of God’s mission.

8 Reply All

9 Vantage Point: Teach Us to Number Our Days

Phyllis Van Andel // Our ordinary tasks can be dedicated to the God of splendor.

12 Big Questions

Ministers in the CRC shouldn’t be requesting payment for performing funerals or weddings.

14 News

- » Mission Church Now ‘Established’ After 90-Year History
- » Church’s Gift to Serviceman Snowballs
- » Former Chaplaincy Director Herm Keizer Dies

31 Discover: Sing to the Lord!

Rachel Lancashire // Hum, shout, or sing your praise.

36 The Other 6: Detour to Contentment

Cecilia Lynne // True contentment is not the absence of problems.

38 Mixed Media: Growing Pains

Michelle Loyd-Paige // A look at a painful period in CRC history and the changes that came from it.

40 Cross Examination: Is There Truth in Other Religions?

Todd Statham // We can detect truth in other religions through the gospel, not apart from it.

41 What I Find Funny: Bad Ideas for Winter Olympics Church Tie-Ins

Bethany Keeley-Jonker // Topical gimmicks are great—until they’re not.

47 Still: Expectations

Jordan Petersen // Unfulfilled expectations sometimes point us to a fuller version of the truth.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY



Sharing God’s Love in Times of Crisis

Taylor Smith // When disasters strike, World Renew sends volunteers to respond with God’s love.

26 The View from Here: Proving Our Love for Each Other

Darren Roorda // The central thrust of CRCNA ministry is the hard work of relationships.

BANNER

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Mission in 3-D

Let's imagine
God's mission as
having three
dimensions:
communion,
community, and
commonwealth.



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

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial available at TheBanner.org.

TEN YEARS AGO AN ARTIST drew a caricature of my two older daughters. Caricatures, by definition, exaggerate certain striking features for comic effect. So even though you can still recognize my daughters, the caricature fails to capture what they truly look like.

I wonder if Christians make the same mistake in relation to God's mission. Our disagreements about how to join God's mission often seem to stem from our exaggerations of that mission's different dimensions.

Let's imagine God's mission as having three dimensions: *communion*, *community*, and *commonwealth*.

Communion is the dimension that emphasizes God reconciling humanity to himself through Christ's work on the cross (2 Cor. 5:17–20; Col. 1:21–23). Christians are commissioned as Christ's ambassadors of this reconciliation, to bring people back into communion or fellowship with our God. Those who emphasize personal evangelism remind us that Christians must never lose sight of this calling.


Reconciliation with God, however, is inseparable from reconciliation with one another, as the synodical study *God's Diverse and Unified Family* reminds us. In Christ Jesus, God has "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:13–18). "The point for us is clear: If God himself took away the only division that he had ever made within the human family [Jews and Gentiles], how much more have all other man-made divisions within the human family been taken away" (*God's Diverse and Unified Family*, 19–20). Christians who emphasize social activism and justice work rightly see this community-creating

dimension as an indispensable part of God's mission.

Third, God is through Christ reconciling "to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven," into a cosmic commonwealth of sorts (Col. 1:20). Jesus is the Lord of lords over all things "visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" (Col. 1:16). Our Reformed tradition has emphasized this dimension, evidenced in our penchant for Christian higher education and institutions, famously captured in Abraham Kuyper's "every square inch" mantra. Creational care and redeeming our cultural institutions and thought patterns are also part of God's mission.

Conflicts arise when we fail to recognize each dimension's importance or validity. Instead of working in tandem, we argue over our different conceptions of God's mission. I do not wish the Christian Reformed Church to reduce the gospel to a so-called "social gospel." Neither do I want it to narrow Christ's cosmic reign only to "saving souls." I certainly hope we do not lose the gifts and strengths of our intellectual and institutional heritage.

For a fully effective mission, I believe we need all three dimensions. To adapt the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1–23), without the sowing of communion seeds there can surely be no spiritual life. But the work of creating good soil conditions—creating just and loving communities, establishing a God-glorifying commonwealth of ideas and institutions—can only increase the likelihood of spiritual fruitfulness. We can reduce the potential impediments to spiritual growth: the rocky places of broken communities, the thorns of injustice and inequality, and the birds of hostile worldviews that prevent understanding of God's Word.

I pray that we can see beyond our favorite caricatures of God's mission and work together to embrace our shared three-dimensional mission. 



REPLY ALL

Relationship Masters

Last Sunday morning my wife expressed some displeasure with me, and I responded defensively. Tension rose, and I escaped to the family room to read the latest *Banner*, as I often do before leaving for church. It was folded open to where I had left off the previous Sunday.

Amazingly, the article I was up to and read first was "Becoming Relationship Masters" (Dec. 2017) by Cynthia Kok and Cheryl Cooper. Wow! I heard you, God! Thanks!

This couldn't have been more timely. When I finished, I rushed to my beloved and told her about the great article that I had already benefited from.

Too bad I didn't have it several decades ago. At age 80 it really is possible to teach an old dog new tricks.

» Kenneth Van Dellen // Grosse Pointe Park, Mich.

Gentiles and Grace

Author Tuininga helpfully points out that we live under grace, not law, and urges the church to listen to gay brothers and sisters ("Gentiles, Homosexuality, and Grace in the Body of Christ," Dec. 2017). Yet this article ends on a disappointing note. Tuininga does not directly answer whether homosexuality is sexual immorality while hinting that it is. The term *homosexuality* was not in the Bible until 1946; before then, translators used the term *sodomy*. The two are not equivalent. The former carries the connotation of violence, abuse, and using others for self-gratification. The Christian Reformed Church will not resolve the same-sex issue until it stops seeing homosexuality as equivalent to sodomy.

» Nick Loenen // Richmond, B.C.

What we are seeing in our culture is not new ("Gentiles, Homosexuality, and Grace in the Body of Christ"). It is a battle the church has faced other times in history. It is not some sexual innovation peculiar to our "enlightened age." It is, in fact, a return to pre-Christian, pagan sexual immorality that characterizes declining cultures.

The church in our day has abandoned its role as salt and light in the culture. Instead of standing firmly on the eternal truths and ordained principles revealed in God's Word, she has fallen victim to the siren call of postmodernism, allowing the subjectivism of the culture to bully her into irrelevance.

» Steve Walker // Salem, Oreg.

Dr. Tuininga's article "Gentiles, Homosexuality, and Grace in the Body of Christ" raises questions that need answers. When he quotes 1 Corinthians 6:18, for example, the text that commands us to flee from sexual immorality, why are homosexuals singled out? Don't we all have to flee sexual immorality? Although some homosexuals may well be the depraved individuals Paul references in Romans 1, why do he and others paint all homosexuals with the same brush? Did not God knit all of them together in their mothers' wombs?

Instead of the continued harping on gay folks (or the exclusion of committed Christian same-sex couples from the full life of the church), why not, for once, turn our attention to the worship of basketball or hockey teams and stars? Or to the continued problem of Internet pornography? And how is it that we continue to attack homosexuality and monogamous same-sex marriages but skip over texts like "Therefore, there is

now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death"?

» Frank DeVries // Abbotsford, B.C.

Has Dr. Tuininga never read the CRC's position on homosexuality, which distinguishes between same-sex attraction and homosexual practice ("Gentiles, Homosexuality, and Grace in the Body of Christ")? Carefully defining which one you're talking about makes a world of difference in the conversation and in one's conclusions. By not doing so, his article creates confusion at best and advocates sin at worst. There is no analogy whatsoever between welcoming repentant Gentiles into the church and welcoming unrepentant sinners into it.

» Aaron Gunsaulus // Newton, Iowa

Follow the Body

As I am a newer member of the CRC, Rev. Vander Zee's article "Follow the Body" (Nov. 2017) answered many of the questions I had after attending a funeral service for one of our beloved church elders. I've only attended a few services in the CRC and thought it was a CRC tradition not to have the body present at the service. I was happy to read that it is merely a preference, and he did a wonderful job explaining the reasons for the decision. I found this beautifully written article enlightening and comforting.

» Maggie Rhodes // Maple Falls, Wash.

We Need to Talk

"Take your children seriously, show unconditional love . . ." ("We Need to Talk About It," Nov. 2017). This a powerful statement and so true. As a teenager, I too had thoughts of suicide. I felt that I was never good enough after I was bullied in school and told by one of my parents that I would never make it to college. I battled with those experiences for a long time and came up with suicide plans. If I hadn't met my husband of 14 years, I probably would have followed through with those plans.

We need to talk to our teens and take them seriously.

» Name withheld // Petrolia, Ont.

Unintended Consequences

While reading Harold Hiemstra's "Unintended Consequences" (Nov. 2017), I was stunned to realize that I could remember the words to "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." I'm a millennial and haven't sung that hymn more than a handful of times in the last decade. The tune was stuck in my head the rest of the day. Good to know it could still be in my head when I'm in the nursing home. If no one else knows it, I guess I'll just have to teach it so we can sing together.

» Steve Roels // Bath, Mich.

A few of us have been holding Sunday afternoon worship services at a local nursing facility for nearly 30 years. So I read with great interest "Unintended Consequences." The hymnal we use at the center has 134 songs from our Reformed tradition. Two occasions stand out in my memory: three grown daughters in teary-eyed amazement at their hardly-responsive mother with Alzheimer's singing one of the hymns with a smile on her face, and the testimony of a Catholic nun whose sister passed away after 40 years at the facility. At the gravesite, she asked everyone to sing "Standing on the Promises" because it meant so much to both of them over the years.

Those familiar songs sung over the years can mean so much to so many, young or old, even from traditions other than our own.

» Bill Goossens // Tinley Park, Ill.

READ MORE ONLINE

Correction from CRC Communications

In the CRCNA Annual Ministry Report inserted in the December issue of *The Banner*, the expenses for Calvin College should have read \$111,949,000 (p. 10). We apologize for the oversight.



Teach Us to Number Our Days


WHEN I WAS A 10-YEAR-OLD, Psalm 90 was my favorite psalm. I knew it as the hymn "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." I had no idea that both the music and the words had been composed in the 1700s. Words such as *everlasting*, *shelter*, and *eternal home* were comforting to a small girl in a big world. As the organ played a melody both stately and haunting, and as our congregation raised sturdy voices, I felt a joy that was also a yearning.

I still like to sing that song, which takes its images mostly from the first third of Psalm 90. Reading the whole psalm is not as comforting; in fact, it is downright challenging. The beginning verses assure us of God's everlastingness. But then we are brought up short by the reminder that we are sinful people and that life on earth is relatively brief.

Shortly after we married in 1949, my husband, John, said to me, "I sure hope I live to see the year 2000." My answer was, "Whatever for? I'll be 74 years old!" My mother hadn't yet reached that age, and I certainly couldn't imagine myself there. Tactfully, I didn't add, "And you'll be 84!"

Eventually the millennium came and went with little fanfare. John celebrated his 90th birthday with family and friends and three months later left here for heaven.

So what does it mean to "number our days" as the psalmist writes in verse 12? It must be more than estimating one's longevity. The verses that precede the advice to number our days are filled with references to God's anger, indignation, and wrath as he looks at our iniquities and secret sins. Is our only consolation the fact that this life of trouble and sorrow won't last forever? Hardly.

No, the verse that counsels us to number our days says that our goal is to gain a heart of wisdom. Such a heart recognizes the compassionate God who wants to restore his erring creatures. And we see that God has unfailing love for his children. Then we are encouraged to sing for joy, to realize that our ordinary tasks can be dedicated to the God of splendor. So go forth with a wise heart. Let's make this day count! 



For many years, Phyllis Van Andel was involved with church plants in Philadelphia, Pa., and Detroit, Mich. She is a member of Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Making Black History in the Christian Reformed Church

by Reginald Smith

Mika Edmondson was speaking with his doctoral advisor, Dr. Ronald Feenstra, at Calvin Seminary one day. His work was winding down, but he had a question. Edmondson asked Feenstra if he was the first African American to receive a doctorate from the school. Feenstra checked the graduation rolls and discovered that Edmondson would indeed be the first.

Edmondson, along with other African Americans and Canadians past and present, did not know he was making history in the Christian Reformed Church. Instead he and others were quietly following Jesus' call on their

lives when they found themselves in Christian Reformed churches and institutions. Let's take a moment to look back and celebrate some of their journeys.

Dr. Danjuma Gibson was not looking for Calvin Seminary. He worked in corporate life and pastored in a Chicago church for over a decade. Then the seminary offered Gibson an opportunity to teach on the topic he loved: pastoral care. Gibson knew the cultural pitfalls of teaching in a predominantly white institution. During his synodical interview, Gibson explained, "I told people that I can only be me. I'm an African-American male from the South Side [of Chicago]. The embodied desire for me

to do well and to prosper is very affirming of the call." Gibson became the first African-American tenure-track professor in the history of Calvin Seminary.

Almost seven decades ago, one man was making history in more ways than simply by being the first African-American pastor in the CRC. Rev. Eugene Callender was our Jackie Robinson. While pastoring Manhattan CRC, he conducted the funeral of legendary blues singer Billie Holliday. He mentored a young, struggling writer named Alex Haley to keep working on his novel *Roots*. He attended several presidential inaugurations and debated Malcolm X in a bookstore. Callender invited

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to speak in Harlem in 1957 for the first time. And, by the way, baseball pioneer Jackie Robinson sought Callender's advice on strategies to better the lives of African Americans.

Alongside Callender, James Allen was one of the denomination's first African-American worship directors. Allen battled through his addiction to become the first director of Addicts Rehabilitation Center in New York. The new ministry began in the church, and Allen recorded a few albums with his choir. Allen's "Walk with Me" was sampled in Kanye West's single "Jesus Walks." The late Rev. Stan Vander Klay never forgot Allen's wisdom on winning African Americans to Jesus as he began preaching at Northside Community CRC in Paterson, N.J., in the 1960s. Vander Klay wrote, "You can make some mistakes, and you will, but as long as you are sincere, people will see it and your ministry will succeed" (*Chains of Grace*, p. 22).

Henry Washington and his wife, Louise, were looking for a Bible-centered church when they moved to Grand Rapids from Chicago in 1943. In 1950 they started attending Buckley Chapel with their three active boys. The chapel was mostly African American in its membership and leadership. Former pastor Roger Van Harn wrote, "Before Buckley Chapel became Grace (Christian Reformed) Church in 1962, its membership was nearly 90 percent black." Van Harn noted that the church was one of the first all-African-American church councils in the CRC. Because of Washington's presence as a trailblazing elder in 1962, Grace Church dedicated the Henry Washington Chapel after his death in 1980.

Back in Paterson, N.J., Rev. Sheila Holmes recognized her call to the pastoral life at an early age. She did not know how it would happen for her. Holmes was invited to Northside Community CRC when she was 11 years old. The church affirmed her

gifts, gave her opportunities in ministry, and cheered her on.

Holmes became the pastor of Northside Community in 1998, becoming the first African-American woman pastor in the CRC. But the Lord was not done with Holmes's history-making. In 2011, she became the first African-American woman to serve as synodical executive officer, and in 2013, she achieved double "firsts" by becoming the first woman and African American to serve as president of the denomination's former Board of Trustees (now Council of Delegates).

Reflecting on her ministry, Holmes said, "The biggest challenge in leadership is dealing with people who hold too tightly to controlling their ways or traditions for fear that empowering and trusting your ideas will not go their way. If only people would understand that God is in control—we all have to learn to daily submit everything we are to him."

As the first African-Canadian director of Resonate Global Mission, Steve Kabetu never forgot the words of his grandfather—even when English missionaries' actions were incongruent with the gospel he read. "My grandfather's message until the day he died was, 'Please distinguish between the white man who brought news of Jesus Christ and the white man who came to take your land,'" said Kabetu. Steve loved reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ combined with a passion for justice.

Norma Coleman did not know why the Lord had challenged her to move from her home in Washington, D.C., to Grand Rapids, Mich. In 1993, she became the first African American to break the senior denominational leadership ceiling in the CRC. As human resources director, she combined all personnel responsibilities and duties into one office and did so with integrity and professionalism.

Colin Watson was not looking for another job. He was doing just fine

living in New Jersey and working at Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson. Watson served as the first African-American board president for Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission) in 2005. It was his work as head of the CRC's Diversity and Leadership Inclusion Working Group that nudged him to being open for a new task from the Lord. In 2015, Watson accepted an appointment as the denomination's director of ministries and administration.

Watson said he is "used to being the first person of an ethnic minority in roles that have not been traditionally held by African Americans. 'I recognize that my ethnicity makes it more inviting to others who want to seek me out, and I welcome that'" (*Banner*, April 2015).

These and other African Americans and Canadians in the CRC were not looking to make history. Instead they were looking to bring glory to God in their work. Our history is richer for their contributions. Let the church say amen! 🙏



Reginald Smith is director of the Office of Race Relations and Social Justice for the Christian Reformed Church. He attends Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

1. How many of these notable CRC African Americans and Canadians were you aware of? Are there others you know whose service you wish to celebrate this Black History Month?

2. Rev. Eugene Callender has influenced the lives of some...

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

BIG QUESTIONS

Church/Bible/Doctrine

My grandfather passed away recently. He had been a member of his church for 30 years. When the pastor visited my father and uncle to make funeral arrangements, he outlined costs the family should expect. These included paying him for performing the service. Doesn't his regular salary cover this? Is this "double dipping" allowed within the Christian Reformed Church?

Your question totally baffles me. I had no idea such a practice existed anywhere within our denomination. I have struggled for some time to come up with possible motives that would allow me to provide a reasonable rationale for it. Slim pickings there.

A minister of the Word is to feed the flock, not feed *on* it. He or she is called to "preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship services, catechize the youth, and train members for Christian service" (Church Order, Article 12a). Other duties include exercising pastoral care and shepherding the congregation, a subset of which is the solemnization of marriages and the provision of funerals and memorial services (CO, 69–70). For all this and more, the local church is expected to "provide for the proper support of its minister(s)" (CO, 15). So yes, the pastor's salary covers this.



Early Reformed liturgical forms for ordination warned against the sin of simony, the selling of sacred things for material gain. The word *simony* is based on Luke's account of Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. In the ninth and 10th centuries, the practice was rampant in the Catholic church. Priests, for example, would provide absolution for pay. I do recall warnings against it in my seminary education in the late 1960s. Perhaps that has fallen by the wayside precisely because simony has largely disappeared from the scene.

Couples who came to me for the solemnization of marriage or families that asked me to lead a funeral or memorial service were routinely told that a monetary gift should only be given to volunteers—an organist, for example—and not to a minister or anyone else already being paid for the service provided.

Henry De Moor is professor emeritus of church polity at Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich. He's the author of *Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary*.

Vocation/Calling

As a high school senior I feel so much pressure in making decisions that might affect my career and life: Do I go to college or not? What programs do I choose?

These are challenging decisions. Which paid occupation should I

pursue? If the one I choose requires further education, which school should I attend? How will I balance the need for income with doing what I love to do? How do hopes for marriage and family fit with plans for career and paid work?

For Christians these questions are deeply related to understandings of vocation and God's callings. Neither the Bible nor the great Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin address these questions in detail.

But they do set forth some principles that can help you make these important decisions. The first is Christian freedom. In the Bible, God commands or forbids us to do or to not do many things. But there is no command to marry or to remain single, to become a carpenter or a pastor, a plumber or a professor. Whatever we do, we should do it "in the Lord" and "for the Lord" as a grateful response to the marvelous gift of God's grace. Belonging in body and soul, in life and in death to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, is the most important aspect of Christian vocation.

But we still must make important choices.

The second principle is discernment. Perhaps on rare occasions, God tells us what to do in a miraculous way, as God did with Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, and Paul. But for most of us, the pattern of discernment follows the book of Acts. This pattern identifies the needs of a community and the

gifts necessary to meet these needs. Which needs of this world burden your mind and heart? Do you have the gifts and opportunities whose development and use can meet those needs?

If so, in prayerful gratitude and hope, take steps to find the particular ways in which your life choices serve Christ by serving the needs of your neighbors. If you lose yourself in service to Christ by serving your neighbors, you will find yourself.

Douglas J. Schuurman is a professor of religion at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.

Digital Life

Our deacons are promoting electronic funds transfer (EFT) as a giving option for our church. I think I can figure out how it works, but doing it this way makes my gifts feel less thoughtful and deliberate.

I have the same feeling about adding “God bless” as an automatic signature on my e-mails. It sounds nice and all, but if it happens automatically, is it a genuine expression of my feelings that is conveyed every time I send an email?

Giving to your church via EFT for the recurring electronic transfer of money from your bank account to your church’s is not a new idea, and churches who offer this usually have a step-by-step guide for setting it up securely.

For the church, it’s great because the computers behind these transactions are more reliable than we humans sometimes are. It also requires less administrative work for church staff and volunteers. It can even be argued that giving via EFT is more secure. For givers, it’s something they can set up and forget about.

But it’s the forgetting that’s the problem, right?

Maybe pick a time—the end of year is good, or the beginning of a church year—to think deeply and pray hard about your planned contributions for the following year. For many of us, this once-a-year exercise could actually be more thoughtful—and wise—than the weekly checkwriting you do as you’re rushing out of the house on Sunday morning.

Or maybe, instead of committing to writing a check each month, commit to keeping an eye on the financial reports published by your church. Ask a question if something doesn’t look right. Increase your gift if need be. Your time and attention is worth something too.

Finally, as with any technology, you can always opt out of the deacons’ suggestion to use EFT. Maybe giving online doesn’t feel secure to you. Maybe giving electronically makes the act invisible to your kids or grandchildren. Maybe you’re simply not ready. Whatever the case, it’s the thought behind your giving that matters.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the Christian Reformed Church and art director of *The Banner*. He is a member of Covenant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Stewardship

I recently finished school, found a job, and have my first steady income. I want to give appropriately to my church and other organizations. How do I decide how much to give and to whom? Is a 10 percent tithe required of Christians?

Christians have never viewed the tithe (based on Abraham’s giving 10 percent to King Melchizedek in Gen. 14:20) as a religious or legal obligation but have always honored the principle. Recognizing God as the source of all blessing, we give back to God out of gratitude.

A tenth of your net income is a good place to start your calculations, but other factors play a role. Nowadays it’s not unusual for recent graduates to have significant student debt with substantial monthly payments. The cost of living in your area may be higher or lower than the average; your income may barely cover food, housing or other necessities.

If, on the other hand, you bring home more than what you need to pay for essentials, then you can consider contributing more than 10 percent. It may seem like an odd rule of thumb, but if you are spending more on nonessentials such as entertainment, vacations or hobbies than you are contributing to church and kingdom causes, you should probably increase your giving.

As to how to apportion your giving, it may be that your church recommends a certain percentage. Ask one of your deacons. Churches I’ve attended have recommended giving anywhere from 3 to 6 percent of income to the local church, with the remainder of one’s charitable contributions going to other ministries and causes. In this way, churches encourage their members to contribute both to the church and to other kingdom causes.

Here’s an example: Leeann just started a job paying \$48,000 per year. She has \$15,000 in student debt and is paying \$650 per month in loan payments. Living expenses in her area are high and total \$2,000 per month before loan payments. Ten percent of her income would be \$400. Because of loan payments and other constraints, Leeann decides to set aside \$300 per month for charity, of which \$125 to \$175 will go to support her church community.

Rolf Bouma is pastor of academic ministries at the Campus Chapel in Ann Arbor, Mich., and teaches in the University of Michigan’s Program in the Environment.



Mission Church Now ‘Established’ After 90-Year History

NEWS

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The term “church plant” hadn’t come into common use in 1929 when a group of Christian Reformed congregations started the West Fulton Mission to evangelize the west-side urban neighborhoods of Grand Rapids, Mich.

Nearly 90 years and several name changes later, the mission is now Gold Avenue Christian Reformed Church. Gold Avenue was recently established as a full-fledged Christian Reformed congregation after more than 50 years of support from sponsoring churches.

“We feel like there’s a call on this church—to people, to ministry, and to plant [new churches]. We couldn’t do that if we hadn’t been planted first,” said Dave Westra, a former missionary to China who accepted a call to become pastor at Gold Avenue in 2010. Westra was joined three years later by a second pastor, Gina Dick. Together they share pastoral duties for the congregation.

On a Sunday afternoon in early December, about 200 people packed the church sanctuary for a two-hour service to mark Gold Avenue’s official establishment. Westra and Dick were formally installed as the congregation’s pastors, as were the first elders and deacons on the newly-established church council.

“It’s been a wonderful work of God. It never seemed very likely [that we would get to this point]. We’ve been blessed in so many different ways,” said Ken Adema, an elder who has been coming to Gold Avenue for more than 30 years.

Adema said that at one point, Gold Avenue considered closing its doors; becoming a satellite church of another CRC congregation in Grand Rapids; merging with a nearby Reformed Church in America congregation; or continuing on with no certainty of where they would find a pastor. “We put it to a vote of the congregation, and a huge majority voted to keep on going as we were,” he said.

Laurel Ackerman-Lindholm chaired the group that planned the celebration service. She shared some historical highlights. In 1960, Highland Hills CRC in Grand Rapids agreed to provide volunteers and financial support to what was then known as Gold Avenue Back To God Chapel. In 1989, the congregation moved to its present location on Gold Ave. A few years later, Highland Hills and another CRC congregation merged to form Westend CRC, which continued to provide oversight and support.

The congregation has had an active prayer ministry for the last several years, including a regular Thursday night gathering during the summer where about 25 to 30 members go into the nearby neighborhood to offer prayers for the community. Gold Avenue also has a youth ministry program known as Gold Rush for middle school and high school students, as well as a food pantry for residents of the neighborhood who are in need, Ackerman-Lindholm said.

—Greg Chandler



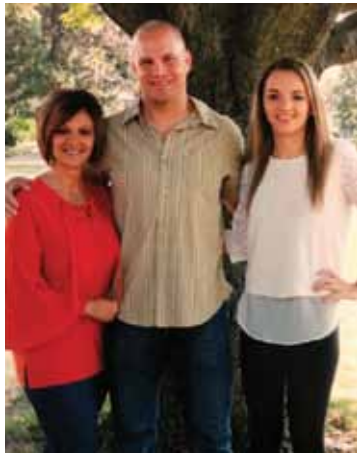
Greg Chandler

Pastors lay hands on Dave Westra (left) and Gina Dick as they are formally installed as Gold Avenue Church’s co-pastors.

Church's Gift to Serviceman Snowballs

Devin Benter is a tech sergeant with the 133rd Test Squadron of the Iowa Air National Guard currently deployed to Turkey. The veteran serviceman with 14 years combined service in the Marines, Air Force, and Iowa Air Guard is expected home in eight or nine months.

During his deployment, people at Rolling Acres Christian Reformed Church, which Benter attends with his family, asked his wife, Lisa, how they could support Devin and what they might send to show their love. When Lisa announced to the whole church community that she was putting together a care



Lisa Benter

package, contributions came pouring in. "We had a list of requested items" including snacks, books and magazines, bottles of lotion, and lip balm, she said. Many people included cards and notes. Lisa said she has been "truly overwhelmed with the outpouring of love and support."

She ended up with 83 pounds of goods to send to Devin. The \$157 shipping fee was paid for by donations that exceeded the amount needed. Lisa donated the

Lisa, Devin, and Jade Benter

excess money to United Services Organization, a charity that assists military families, so they could send a care package to a service person who may not have a family from which to receive a gift.

Lisa, Devin, and their daughter, Jade, have been a part of the Rolling Acres CRC community for the past 15 years. Lisa currently serves as head of deacons. She said the church's motto, "Love God, love people #FriendsBecomingFamily," is exactly what she has experienced. She saw this even more clearly in the combined care package. "We feel truly blessed and know God is amazing in placing such caring people in our church family. I know Devin feels a sense of relief knowing so many of them are taking care of his girls while he's away."

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

Former Chaplaincy Director Keizer Dies



Rev. Colonel Herm Keizer died unexpectedly on December 22 in Grand Rapids, Mich. He was 79. Keizer was the director of the chaplaincy ministry of the Christian Reformed Church from 2002 until he retired in 2009.

Ordained in 1968, Keizer spent nearly 50 years in CRC ministry, always in chaplaincy. His military service took him many places, including Hawaii, Germany, and Washington, D.C. In Vietnam, Keizer served with the First Infantry and the Fourth Infantry Divisions. He was wounded twice: from a rocket attack in Cambodia and from a 159-foot fall in a helicopter accident.

After retirement in 1998, his continued government service included numerous roles, among them service with the Secretary of the Army and the State Department. Keizer received many awards and decorations over his career, including a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart.

Following government service, Keizer served as director of chaplaincy in the CRC. Rev. Peter Borgdorff was executive director of the CRC during that time. "As many of the chaplains who served with Herm will testify," Borgdorff said, "he provided excellent and compassionate leadership during his years of directorship."

In retirement, Keizer advised both the Army and the CRC on such subjects as just war theory and the use of nuclear weapons.

Keizer was a member of LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids. He is survived by his wife of 53 years, Ardis, and two sons.

—Gayla R. Postma

A more detailed version of this article is available on *The Banner's* website. *The Banner's* In Memoriam for Keizer will follow in print and on our website at a later date.

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News Feature

Intergenerational Friendships Found in Shared Work

It's not hard to see that the loss of engaged young adults in local churches is a worrying trend—just listen in on church members' conversations ("Where Did Our Young Adults Go?" Aug. 2007, pp. 18-20), read results of national surveys (such as Pew Research's "America's Changing Religious Landscape" from May 2015), or take a look at demographic study results (like James Penner & Associates' 2015 "Hemorrhaging Faith").

A possible response is fostering connection between younger and older members. In some Christian Reformed church communities across the U.S. and Canada, members are finding genuine, reciprocal, intergenerational relationship through shared work and mission experiences.

Friendships on the Road

Jim Beezhold, an 81-year old cross-country cyclist who attends Crossroads CRC in San Marcos, Calif., experienced that last summer while participating in Sea to Sea. Beezhold has adopted the phrase "Aspire to inspire before you expire," a quote he found on the sign at Calvin CRC in Ottawa during one of the legs of his cross-country trip. Beezhold found himself connecting instantly and deeply with the young adults on the ride, four of whom were still teenagers, despite the 60 or more years between them. He attributes this to their assistance to him as the "grandfather figure." The younger riders would often slow down to provide encouragement, share music from the 50s and 60s, or help Beezhold operate his cellphone. In turn, Beezhold and the other older cyclists supported the team spiritually. Through the daily cycling grind, camping together each night, and the overall shared experience, the entire team formed a special bond, regardless of age or background.



Eric Zimmer, Maple Ridge Times

Cashier and an older volunteer at Mission Thrift Store in Maple Ridge, B.C.

Thrift Store Camaraderie

In the less physically intense but equally friendly environment of Maple Ridge, B.C., a volunteer-operated shop called Mission Thrift Store is another setting for cross-generational connections. Started by a group from Maple Ridge CRC, and with almost half its volunteer staff still belonging to the denomination, the shop resells donated items to aid the Bible League of Canada. While the majority of the volunteers are seniors, Janet Melissen, a long-time volunteer and current chair of the board, said young people refresh the space with energy, new thoughts, and focus, playing a crucial role in keeping the mission going. In turn, the seniors enjoy the young adults' company. The older generation loves the chance not only to talk to someone new but also to nurture the youth. The amount of time spent on a common task leads to a regular sharing of stories, which enhances the

connection between the generations. While it can prove challenging to find younger volunteers during the busy school year, the store has set up a summer job program in which a university student is hired full-time for the summer. This usually ensures that the store has a young person for at least part of the year, greatly assisting both the store and student. Three of five past summer students have stayed in touch with the store, either as shoppers or occasional volunteers, proving these intergenerational friendships to be true and meaningful.

Calling Each Generation Equally

If having intergenerational friendships benefits people so greatly, why doesn't it come more naturally to the church? Lesli van Milligen, a regional catalyzer with the CRC's Faith Formation Ministries (FFM), attributes fear as the biggest stumbling block to a healthy

intergenerational set-up. Seniors are afraid that youth will shut them down with statements such as, “We don’t do that anymore.” Equally, young adults fear judgment from the older generation.

FFM has addressed some of these concerns in its 2017 Intergenerational Church Toolkit, a resource for Christian Reformed congregations. Karen DeBoer, who worked on the resource, was happily surprised to find that cross-generational relationships “are built into our denominational DNA.” But for some churches, intentionally building intergenerational friendships is still a new concept.

Van Milligen said that up until a generation ago, such relationships developed organically. Now, the recent prevalence of age-segregated ministries has drastically displaced the shape of church relationships. In response, FFM researchers gathered tested ideas from multiple Christian Reformed congregations and compiled a toolkit.

Without this focus, when the church rejects a multigenerational set-up, DeBoer believes that three things take over: assumptions, lack of awareness, and an inability to communicate—none of which promotes church health.

Van Milligen emphasized, however, that the toolkit is not a curriculum or meant to be “one size fits all.” Rather, it is a collection of stories and examples of real-life people. “‘Intergenerational is not something churches *do*—it’s something they become,’” reads FFM’s user guide to the toolkit—a quote from an article by Brad Griffin of Fuller Youth Institute.

In the experiences of Beezhold and Melissen, *being* intergenerational is far more than a piece of curriculum or cookie-cutter advice. Rather, it is a relational practice that any church may adopt if they call each generation equally to work together towards a common goal, the living out of God’s kingdom.

—Elizabeth Drummond

‘Table for Ones’ Welcomes Singles for Food, Fellowship

About 14 people gather regularly at a restaurant in Sarnia, Ont., for a Saturday morning breakfast. It’s a casual group made up of men and women from their mid-20s to their 80s. Some are beginning careers; others are long retired. Some have 30 years of marriage behind them; others have just a few years or none at all. They get together to share a meal and good conversation. And while they are all single, it’s not a typical “singles group.”

April Hodgson and Judy Schenk, members of First Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia, began the bimonthly breakfast, Table for Ones, in May 2017 as a way for single people to find connection and fellowship.

“I started attending church as a divorced adult without a Christian upbringing,” said Hodgson, “and quickly noticed that the cultural expectation/norm in the church seemed to be married with children.” New friends in the church assured her that she was not alone in being on her own, so she decided to set about finding others.

One of those new friends was Schenk, whose husband of 32 years had passed away about a year earlier. She and Hodgson discussed the idea—over breakfast—of gathering the “table for one” crowd to share one table together.

“There’s a bond you share when you’re on your own,” said Schenk. “Whether you’re divorced or widowed or have never been married . . . you kind of look at life through the same glasses. It’s about learning to live with just yourself, learning to be content with who you are.”

Both Hodgson and Schenk describe Table for Ones as a community, not a program or committee. There is no RSVP, no agenda or assigned topic of conversation, no Bible study, no expectation of seeking a partner. They simply put the invitation out in the church bulletin and on Facebook and see who shows up. “I started going to Table for Ones, and it’s a great way to meet and socialize with other singles,” said Frank Feenstra, also of First CRC Sarnia.

“It’s as simple as just being people and getting to know people that we probably never knew up until we all became single, or were already single,” said Schenk.

Hodgson agreed. “There is a wealth of knowledge, understanding, welcoming, and learning involved in being a single Christian . . . that comes out spontaneously and beautifully every time we gather.”

—Anita Brinkman

Students Receive Award for Conservation Project

Students at Calvin Christian School (CCS) in Hamilton, Ont., were awarded the Hamilton Conservation Authority's 2017 Education Award for their project on invasive species. Several CCS students and teachers accepted the honor at a December awards ceremony at the authority's main center.



Amanda Breimer

Hamilton Conservation Authority staff (left and far right) present award to three CCS students in December 2017.

The project began with a field trip to the local conservation area two years ago.

"Students were taken on a hike and were able to get waist-deep in their learning by exploring what actually lives in our waterways," explained Amanda Breimer,

the grade 6 teacher who planned and coordinated this project-based learning unit. To answer the project's driving question—How can we inform others about invasive species?—the class decided to create child-friendly, detailed task cards that could be posted or handed out at the conservation area.

They also received a grant through Toronto Dominion Bank's Friends of the Environment Foundation, worth \$7,500 CDN, to make their invasive species task cards into a durable sign. Copies of the informative sign will be posted at six Hamilton trail centers this spring.

"I hope it spreads awareness and that people will know what to do if they come across an invasive species," said Carly Sluys, one of the student recipients of this award and a member of Ancaster Christian Reformed Church.

"I am so proud of all the hard work that the grade 6 students put toward this project," said Breimer. "What a great way to end this project by seeing our sign installed and the students receiving this recognition."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

CRC Leader Disconcerted by Jerusalem Declaration

According to Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), the Dec. 6, 2017, declaration by United States President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital is a grave threat to future peace. The Christian Reformed Church is a partner member of CMEP.

Rev. Reginald Smith, director of the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Social Justice (OSJ) and of the Office of Race Relations (RR), said, "The president's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital is disconcerting. From the trip to the Middle East, I found grave problems with Israel's relationship with our Palestinian brothers and sisters. The president's move overshadows courageous efforts by Jews, Christians, and Muslims who are working for peaceful solutions in the region."

Smith was referring to a trip he took to the Middle East in November with Rev. Shannon Jammal-Hollems, racial justice team leader for the OSJ and RR, and Colin Watson, Sr., the CRC's director of ministries and administration. Funded by a grant, they visited Egypt, Israel, the West Bank, and Lebanon. The group met with representatives of Churches for Middle East Peace, spoke with people in Israel and the West Bank, and met Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas.

"We continue to pray for peace and the wellbeing of all residents of the Middle East at this difficult time," Watson said.

According to its literature, CMEP promotes a shared Jerusalem by Palestinians and Israelis and pursues an end to the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, West Bank, and Gaza. CMEP executive director Rev. Mae Elise Cannon said,

"Rather than being a broker for peace, the U.S. will be undermining trust and making the resumption of meaningful negotiations and achieving a viable solution all the more difficult, if not impossible."

CMEP, a coalition of 27 national church denominations and organizations, encourages U.S. policies that actively promote a comprehensive resolution to conflicts in the Middle East with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A few weeks after the declaration, the United Nations Security Council voted overwhelmingly to condemn the move by Trump, isolating the United States and forcing it to use its veto to prevent passage of the resolution.

—Gayla R. Postma



Roasted Roulade Raises Roofs

What do roofs and roasted roulade have in common? The gourmet fare is part of a Valentine's dinner held each year to raise funds to build roofs, latrines, and concrete floors for Honduran families in need.

Carpenteros and Friends, a ministry started by Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Flamborough, Ont., has been hosting the fancy banquets since 2004 to raise funds for community improvement projects for villages in Honduras. The Carpenteros Bistro includes dedicated volunteers who work countless hours to prepare and set up for the event, now fine-tuned to execute an impressive evening of good food, good music, and great fellowship.

The dinners have raised over \$225,000 CDN in the last 14 years.

The Carpenteros serve the neediest families identified by partnering organizations in Honduras. They work closely with World Renew-Canada and World Renew staff in Honduras, Diaconia Nacional, Alfalit, Harvest, MCM/Stewardship of Christian Ministries, and the Association for a More Just Society in Honduras to carry out these projects. Each year, one or two teams travel to work with local Hondurans in building or repair projects. With over 25 teams now sent from Calvary CRC and many repeat volunteers, the Carpenteros have built meaningful relationships with fellow Hondurans.

"What's really great are the friendships that have grown through this movement, a genuine connecting and a bond in Christ," explained Carpentero Ken Bosveld, member of Calvary CRC. "And as you build relationships, you can really see the needs."

The Carpenteros have set up other initiatives, including 60 community based micro-credit unions, a direct-trade coffee project, and an education fund to help transform communities in Honduras. They have also raised funds to build communal wells to provide communities with clean water for years to come.

"The Hondurans have taught us so much about hospitality, about prayer, and about trusting in God," said Bosveld. "It's been such a blessing. A blessing that flows in both directions."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Harold (Hal) Bode

1929-2017

Hal Bode had a love for people, especially those who were burdened by the difficulties of life. He devoted his time, energy, wisdom, and knowledge to chaplaincy in the Christian Reformed Church. Bode died on Nov. 26 at the age of 88.

Ordained in 1956, Bode served two churches in South Dakota and Iowa before becoming a chaplain in the United States Air Force in 1962.

In the military, Bode served in seven U.S. states and in the Philippines, Thailand, and Greenland. In 1974 he became the first full-time director of Chaplaincy Ministries for the CRC.

"Hal was our mentor and pastor as we struggled to be faithful to our calling," said one of many chaplains who describe being richly blessed by Bode's care for them. Bode also held positions of leadership in several national professional organizations dedicated to chaplaincy. He retired in 1994.

His first wife, Mary, died of cancer in 1973 at the age of 43. In 1975, he married Helen Vander Molen.

Bode is survived by Helen and by six children and spouses, 11 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

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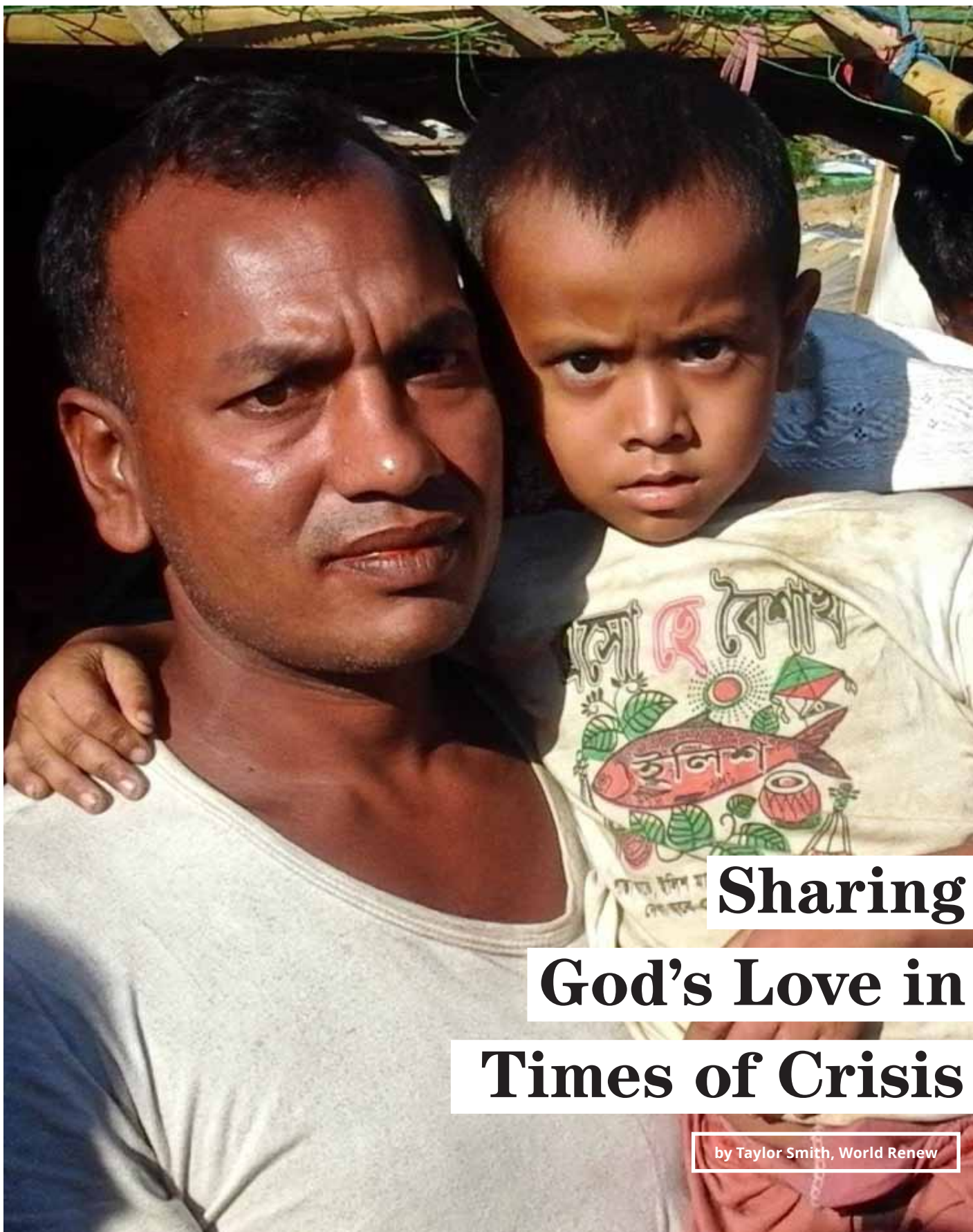
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Sharing God's Love in Times of Crisis

by Taylor Smith, World Renew

During the autumn of 2017, many hearts were heavy as the news of hurricanes Harvey, Maria, and Irma was broadcast around the world. High winds and heavy rain caused extensive damage and forced thousands of people to leave their homes. Many of those people are still displaced and face ongoing physical needs. They are also greatly in need of experiencing God's love.

Since its founding in 1962, World Renew has been training and sending volunteers to respond in times of crisis. They have learned many things about what it means to serve as God's hands and feet to disaster survivors.

Meeting Physical Needs

Tearing out flooring and drywall and removing waterlogged cabinets and furniture are some of the first steps residents like Sheila need to take to be able to move back home.

Sheila lives in Port Arthur, Tex., and is one of thousands of residents whose homes were flooded by Hurricane Harvey.

The night Hurricane Harvey made landfall, water rushed through Sheila's back door like a river and poured nearly four feet of water into her home. After the storm had passed and the water was gone, Sheila and others like her were left to fix their damaged homes. Beds and furniture were ruined, appliances stopped working, and the walls started to grow mold.

World Renew Disaster Response Services (DRS) volunteers are trained to respond to needs like these across North America. Through door-to-door "early assessments," volunteers canvas disaster-stricken communities to determine needs and to connect survivors with services.

Next, volunteers work alongside survivors in what is called "rapid response." This includes sorting through belongings, discarding items that have been ruined, and tearing out waterlogged floors and walls.

"First we have to get everything out of the house," said Lois Hecksel, a World Renew DRS volunteer who recently spent two weeks assisting in this type of work. "Then we can start tearing out the damaged floors and walls. We are taking it one house at a time. In each home, we are respectful of the

Nuru Islam and his family experienced a concrete expression of Christ's love through emergency food supplies in their refugee camp.

homeowner's belongings, recognizing that this is a very difficult situation."

It is a daunting physical and emotional task, but one that is appreciated by those who have survived the storm. But it is just the tip of the iceberg.

At the time of writing this article, World Renew's DRS volunteers had not yet begun to respond to other physical needs, but there will be many. Following early assessments and rapid response, World Renew volunteers are often involved in conducting an "unmet needs assessment," a community survey to identify those with unmet needs several months after the disaster. They also do home repair and reconstruction. It is a process that takes time.

In fact, World Renew volunteers will likely be responding in Port Arthur for the next few years to help survivors like Sheila repair and rebuild their homes and lives.

Dealing with Trauma

The response doesn't end with repairing and rebuilding homes. Survivors often have more than physical needs. They also have emotional and spiritual scars from the trauma they experienced. Sheila, for example, can still picture the night of the storm in vivid detail.

She will tell you the story of how she and her daughter managed to get out of their home and waded through chest-deep water to get into their boat.

A city bus, making its way down their street, created a large wave. The wave pushed Sheila's boat over, and her daughter was pulled under water. It was terrifying. Acting by sheer instinct, Sheila grabbed her daughter and pulled her back up to the surface.

Their horror was not over. According to Sheila, she and about 30 of their neighbors made their way onto a city bus in hopes of finding shelter. As they tried to drive forward, the bus would not move. Everyone had to get off and walk in the rain through the cold water until they got to drier ground.

Days later, when they were able to return home, Sheila and her daughter found most of their possessions in ruin. It was a sight that will stay in her memory forever and one from which she needs to heal.

"Disaster survivors have experienced intense trauma and need to repair their lives emotionally and spiritually in addition to physically," explained Bob Laarman, director of World Renew DRS. "Listening to their personal stories is often an important part of the recovery process," he said. "As they serve at disaster sites to meet physical needs, volunteers are often asked why they would do this work. This gives them a clear opening to share their faith testimony. Many times, they are able to pray with a survivor and provide spiritual comfort in that way."

When World Renew completes work on a home, they also conduct a special “last nail” ceremony where they sing and pray with a homeowner before the last nail is driven into the wall.

To help extend emotional and spiritual support after volunteers have left, World Renew DRS often tries to partner with local churches and community organizations. In Port Arthur, for example, World Renew is working alongside Mount Sinai Missionary Baptist Church. In this way, bridges are built between local churches and their communities.



World Renew DRS volunteers help residents of Port Arthur, Tex., clean out their homes.

Multiple shelters share latrines, and in some cases a single water pump is shared by nearly 200 families.

Extending God’s Love Across Borders

These same lessons are applied when World Renew responds outside of North America. Since its founding, World Renew has extended the reach of the Christian Reformed Church by enabling congregations to work together to respond to global crises.

As in North America, this response involves responding to physical needs, meeting emotional and spiritual needs, and partnering with local people for long-term impact.

Consider the recent situation of Rohingya refugees. The Rohingya are a minority Muslim population who have lived for hundreds of years in the Buddhist nation of Myanmar. Despite their long tenure in this country, they have been routinely denied citizenship. Recently things have become even worse.

Mass killings, torching of villages, and other violent acts against Rohingya families have caused more than 600,000 people to flee for their lives. They have crossed the border into Bangladesh and are living in temporary camps in shelters made from tarps, plastic, and bamboo.

Nuru Islam’s family is one of these. Islam is a small shop owner who escaped the violence in Myanmar with his family.

“Soldiers came to our village shouting and shooting their guns and setting our houses on fire. They were killing us!” said Islam.

He was terrified, so he took his family and fled into the jungle. Their journey to Bangladesh took six days, but thankfully Islam’s entire family of 25 people arrived safely.


Islam, his wife, and their two young sons now live in a refugee camp where conditions are very poor. Islam’s father, 10 brothers, and their families also live nearby. Essentials such as food, water, and shelter are limited, and poor sanitation has caused concern about the spread of disease.

World Renew Is Responding

“Jesus called us to cross to the other side of the road and help those in need, regardless of who they are and where they come from. As the crisis persists, World Renew is partnering with a local Christian organization to provide vulnerable families displaced from their homes with food,” explained Carol Bremer-Bennett, director of World Renew U.S.

This includes meeting the physical needs for food, water, and shelter. Through its partnership in the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, World Renew has provided nutrient-rich food to over 120,000 people.

The response won’t end there, however. When World Renew responds to international disasters, it coordinates its efforts with other nonprofit organizations, local churches, and locally hired people to ensure that physical, emotional, and spiritual needs are met for both the short and long term. This response includes providing emergency food and shelter, but it might also include trauma counseling, equipping churches to respond to needs, rebuilding infrastructure, or training people in business skills.

“During a time of great turmoil, World Renew is there so that God’s love will be felt as families receive assistance,” Bremer-Bennett said. “God graciously teaches each of us about love as we experience, day to day, his love through Christ. He expects us to extend that love to our neighbors. Through World Renew, the Christian Reformed Church is expressing that love by pursuing justice and serving those who are in need. Through unconditional, indiscriminating, and life-sustaining love, those that World Renew serves can see Christ and draw near to him, even in the midst of crises.” 

Chaplain Cares for Texas Hurricane Survivors

HURRICANE SURVIVORS have needs beyond their physical requirements for food, water, and shelter. Rev. Allen Schipper of Grand Rapids, Mich., knows this firsthand. As a chaplain, providing spiritual and emotional care in times of crisis has always been at the heart of his ministry.

“The Christian Reformed Church has 148 active chaplains, along with dozens of retired chaplains, serving around the world providing spiritual care to people in crisis,” explains Rev. Sarah Roelofs, director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministries. “Whether serving as a military chaplain presiding over a communion service in a combat zone or as a hospital chaplain called to the trauma bay in the emergency department after an automobile accident, chaplains extend the church’s ministry and mission to all people, no matter who they are or what they believe.”

Schipper, who attends Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, officially retired as chaplain in the Battle Creek, Mich., health system in 2010 but has never stopped serving. These days he uses much of his time to volunteer with populations in crisis through the American Red Cross as the organization’s regional advisor for Michigan.

In this role, Schipper works alongside a diverse group of faith leaders to provide spiritual and emotional support following times of disaster. He has been deployed 20 times within Michigan and has also served in South Carolina, Texas, and Puerto Rico.

“A common phrase within disaster response is ‘No disaster is ever the same,’” Schipper explains. “This requires each spiritual care provider who works as a chaplain to be adept, agile, and willing to adjust at a moment’s notice to help meet the most basic human needs. It is essential that they not hold tightly to rigid



expectation as they respond to bare-bones human needs.”

Schipper recently returned from Beaumont, Tex., where he was working with the American Red Cross after Hurricane Harvey.

He said there is never a “typical” day in this line of work. Most days last 12 to 15 hours and are filled with visiting people at the local temporary shelter, helping out at a local food pantry, making home visits, caring for volunteers, and collaborating with various service providers to care for those in need. He might also meet with local clergy to figure out ways to provide long-term spiritual care for residents.

“Often survivors’ greatest spiritual need is to tell their story, which begins to integrate the trauma they have experienced into their own life narrative,” Roelofs explains. “Al and other spiritual care providers facilitate this sharing by drawing out their story through asking open-ended questions as survivors search for meaning.”

“Survivors often ask many questions as they struggle with meaning, guilt,

Despite being deployed more than 20 times, chaplain Allen Schipper still wants to improve his skills. He recently attended an American Red Cross course about spiritual care during disasters.

and shame,” adds Schipper. “Why did I survive, and no one else did? Have I been abandoned by God? As a chaplain, it’s important not to quickly answer the question but instead to listen to their trauma as they uncover spiritual resources.”

Sometimes when recounting their stories survivors also talk about needs that the Red Cross or other nonprofit agencies can help with. People like Schipper are then able to point them toward these services.

“Each day, CRC chaplains further the kingdom of God and extend the mission of the church to people and places where God’s presence is often not recognized,” said Roelofs. “Because this often comes at times of crisis, the ministry of chaplaincy also extends God’s love at times when it is most needed.”

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

The View from Here

Proving Our Love for Each Other

"I have come to realize that the health of an institution is more about relationships than it is about governance or structure."

—Debra Brown, president of Governance Solutions

THE OTHER DAY when I cut out early from a speaking engagement, a faithful friend and Christian Reformed pastor followed me to the car. As we stood by ourselves in the parking lot he said, "In my several years of ministry as a pastor, I have often wondered (and recently spoken out loud) about a time in the future when the Christian Reformed Church will no longer exist and we will instead do ministry in a post-denominational world."

My heart sank. "Stop saying that!" I passionately interrupted.

My friend continued, "But today as you described the initiatives and relationships of the denomination with my setting in the local church, I heard for the first time a word of encouragement that makes me believe differently."

We hugged. I said, "Thank God," and we said our goodbyes. I love that pastor and I am glad he is beginning to *really* believe the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) staff love him and his church.

Herein lies the central thrust of ministry that is part of the CRCNA in recent years: the hard work of relationships. As a denomination, we've been working on orienting ourselves and our churches, ministries, initiatives, and governance in ways that are meant to appropriately restore the relationships of all parts of our Christian Reformed Church.

For example, even while reducing staff overall, the CRCNA is about to kick off a major program to better serve the people of local congregations. Internally we are calling this initiative, "One Click, One Call." That's because this two-part system includes a newly created web space (one click) and a phone-in space (one call) meant to help all church leaders and laity find a plethora of resources to address their local and specific ministry challenges. Never before has the CRC had such a simple and centralized location for help!

Both tools were created with a relational emphasis in mind. They are designed to foster healthy relationships between local churches and the denominational ministries who desire to serve them.

These tools are just one example. Many more initiatives are happening across our denomination than can be described in this brief column. Each has been built to serve local churches and to foster healthy relationships within churches, classes, and the denomination as a whole.

Truth be told, many CRCNA staff have been saying "I love you" to local churches for some time. Recently, however, it has begun to be felt. As with any relationship, when a person wishes to prove their love to another,

it takes some time before the receiving partner believes it and a healthy relationship ensues. Trust takes time to earn.

One hopes that eventually the loved person reciprocates. That's where you come in. Perhaps we can all start by noticing the differences and simply lean into the opportunities this new relationship provides.

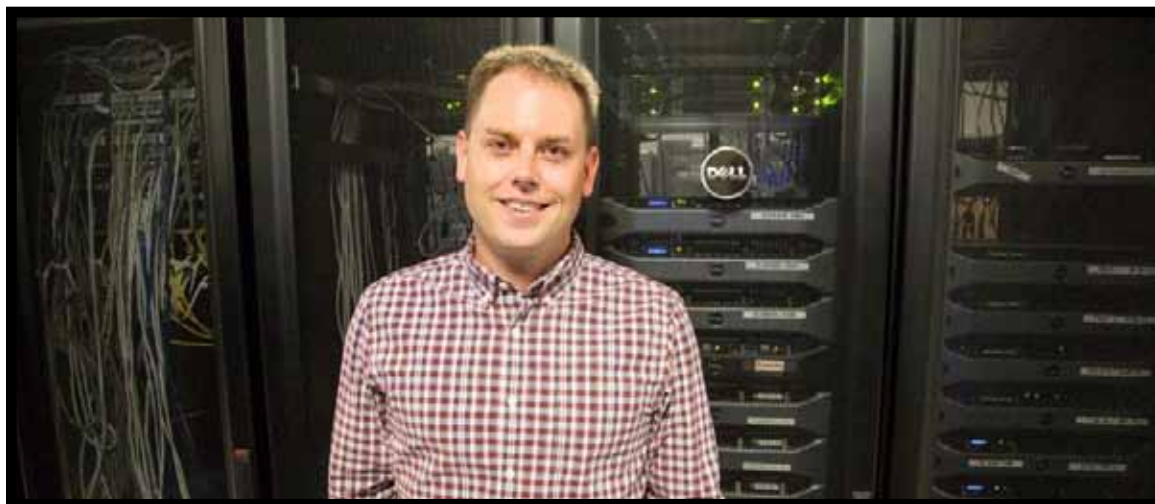
I suspect it will make the relationship—and your local church—even better. And perhaps we can all say "thank you" for the work Christ is continuing to do in the Christian Reformed Church. That seems fitting with the concluding relational component of the Heidelberg Catechism framework: gratitude.



Darren Roorda is Canadian Ministries Director for the Christian Reformed Church.

Spanish and Korean translations of this available at TheBanner.org.

The Power of FEWSION



Ben Ruddell directs a project that collects data to map food, energy, and water supply chains.

AS HURRICANE HARVEY POUNDED HOUSTON, news commentators warned that the disaster would raise gas prices across the country.

Ben Ruddell begged to differ. He knew that while residents of Chicago, Louisville, and Tulsa would see price spikes, he and his fellow citizens in Flagstaff, Ariz., would see little, if any, increase.

Ruddell directs a project at Northern Arizona University that collects data from sources such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Energy Information Administration to create a map of the nation's complex food, energy, and water supply chains.

Called FEWSION, the project was made possible when the National Science Foundation awarded Ruddell and his team \$3 million, the agency's largest grant thus far to researchers exploring the topic.

"Emergency managers spend most of their time thinking about their supplies of food, energy, and water in a disaster," said Ruddell, a 2002 graduate of Calvin College.

"Our maps will help them understand much better than before how distant events could affect them and whether they need to make changes before disasters happen."

Because it is funded by tax dollars, the public will have access to FEWSION's data. By this winter, Ruddell plans to have online a visualization system that will allow people anywhere in the country to see how their cities are supplied with food, energy, and water as well as commodities such as forest products, textiles, and electronics.

"There's a lot of interesting data," Ruddell said, "and now we have a plan to make that data actionable in local communities."

The plan is a citizen-science extension of the project called PLACE4FEWS. "We'll train people to do some sleuthing and find out who makes the decisions in their communities about where their food, energy, and water come from," said Ruddell.

"When they meet real people who make these systems work and get them involved, then there's the possibility to effect change."

He added, "Calvin alumni are the most likely people to take the lead on this next step of supply-chain management."

For more on FEWSION, including its citizen-science project, visit fewsion.us/education.

—Gayle Boss, Calvin College

Education Provides Hope for the Future

HERE IN CANADA and the United States we live in a culture that values quality education. Within the Christian Reformed Church, this is especially true.

But we are not alone in this.

In a remote village in Meghalaya, India, a mother named Martha Marak works hard to provide for her children and dreams of sending them all to school. After her husband abandoned her, she was forced to start over with absolutely nothing.

Many years ago, Martha was introduced to World Renew and its life-changing programs. In the beginning, her greatest challenge was providing enough food for her children to eat. So Martha enrolled in an agricultural training program to help her increase her yield and diversify her crops.

Over the past few years, Martha has participated in numerous trainings, equipping her to produce enough food so that she has extra to sell at the market. This extra income from sold crops means she can achieve her dream of sending her children to school even after the ninth grade, starting with her oldest daughter, Wanchy.

Over the years, Martha has received a quiet witness of Jesus Christ from World Renew staff and volunteers. In some countries and cultures including Martha's, staff members cannot speak openly about Jesus. In these situations, they share the good news through their consistent love and ongoing support of the people with whom they work.

Wanchy said that she loves her new school and wants to continue studying to become a teacher. And as World Renew continues to work alongside Martha, there is hope that she will embrace God's call and live in joyful obedience to our Creator.

To find out how you can help more mothers like Martha achieve their dreams for their children, visit worldrenew.net/freefamily.

—Taylor Smith, World Renew



Martha Marak works hard to provide for her children.

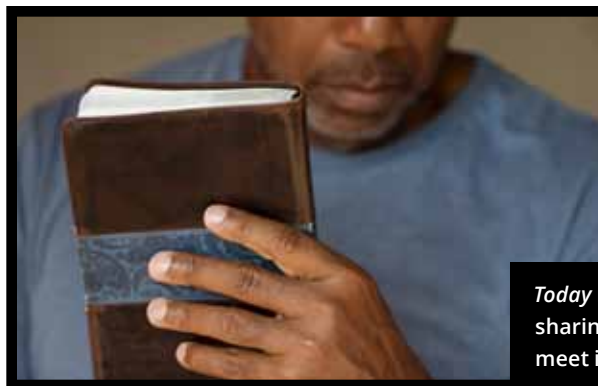
‘What I’m Supposed to Do’

LANCE ORTON doesn’t like to be in the limelight. The 61-year-old Vietnam veteran is a humble man “just trying to be who God wants me to be.”

“It took me a long time to get where I am spiritually, and I have a long way to go,” he says.

Orton was raised by Christian parents in New York City’s Bronx, but admits he’s been through “some heavy-duty stuff” in his life.

He remembers a very difficult time around 1999 when God was trying to get his attention. He sought spiritual guidance and discovered a *Today* devotional published by Back to God Ministries International. Reading



Today readers like Orton are sharing the gospel with people they meet in their daily walks of life.

Today continues to be an important part of his daily regimen.

“I like the prayer and the variety of pastors who relate current events to the Bible,” says Orton, who has a real heart for the world.

“Sometimes the best I can do is to pray. One of my main prayers is to tell people about the Lord.”

As a street vendor, Orton has many opportunities to speak with people. Some “stop and ask me questions about the Bible,” he said.

Orton also prays for those who are “in pretty bad shape. People I didn’t know came by and told me, ‘You prayed with my friend; could you pray with me?’”

He knows praying helps because it helped him.

“I want to make a difference when I can,” Orton says. “I’m just doing what I’m supposed to do.”

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

Recently on the Network: Child Protection Policies

THE NETWORK IS A WEBSITE where people from across the Christian Reformed Church in North America can connect to share their ministry questions and find answers. Started in 2010, The Network has had more than 15,000 people post on it, and now averages more than 60,000 page views a month.

Ministry Q&A is a regular feature of The Network. It allows users to post a ministry-related question or offer a response. People have asked questions on such topics as church rental policies, finding resources for funeral liturgies, how best to call a pastor, and what other churches do in conducting background checks for volunteers working with children.

On this topic, one person recently asked, “The church I work in is looking at its child protection policies. . . . We

are at the point where we could likely do all of our training in house using staff. How do we know our training will be sufficient for insurance companies? We are a small church.”

At the time of writing this article, the question had received five responses.

Doug Vande Griend, an attorney and CRC member, encouraged the poster to “directly ask [her] insurance company, and to get an answer in writing.” He added that “at least some insurance companies will have specific requirements that become a ‘condition of coverage’ such that they will deny coverage if later a claim is made and they discover that the condition wasn’t fulfilled.”

Bonnie Nicholas, director of Safe Church Ministry, agreed. She encouraged the poster to “check directly

with [her] insurance company” and also reminded her that “Safe Church has resources on [its] website, which may be helpful in training staff and volunteers.”

Nicholas added, “Since laws that apply to churches can change, and since they vary from state to state and province to province, every classis is encouraged to have a safe-church coordinator and local safe-church teams to help address these issues. For more information about the classis coordinator position and safe-church teams, please don’t hesitate to contact Safe Church Ministry.”

Do you have a ministry question you’d like to have answered? Visit crcna.org/network to post a question, share a story, or read comments from others.

—Chris Meehan, *CRC Communications*

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Sing to the Lord!



The **red-eyed vireo** is known for singing a lot—more than 22,000 songs in a day!

THE HEBREW TITLE for the book of Psalms is *Tehillim*, which means “songs of praise.” Psalm 150 says, “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.” It is good to sing praise to the Lord because he is our God and King. To praise God means to give him our thanks and love. We praise God for his amazing creation and for his amazing love for us.

Your Voice

Put your fingers against your throat and swallow. Feel that bump moving up and down? That’s your voice box. It’s called a larynx. Keep your fingers there and say “Ahhhh.” Can you feel your vocal cords vibrating? Those vocal cords are small bands of muscle inside your larynx. The air you breathe out makes them vibrate. The buzzing sound they create changes as it travels up to your mouth. Your tongue and lips turn that sound into words—words to ask a friend to play or to sing praise to God!

Read Psalm 66:1-4. How can you use your voice to praise God?



Rachel Lancashire grew up in the Christian Reformed Church but currently attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont.



The **superb lyrebird** of Australia is said to be the best mimic of all. In addition to imitating other birds, it has been known to copy the sounds of car alarms, chain-saws, and cameras! With a parent’s permission, check out the video at tinyurl.com/b9ffgvz to hear the lyrebird sing.



Some birds add to their own songs by mimicking other birds’ songs or other sounds they hear. The **gray catbird (above)** is thought to mimic at least 44 other birds as well as such sounds as a tree frog and a creaky door.

Made to Sing

People aren’t the only ones God made to sing. Instead of a larynx, songbirds have a special two-sided voice box called a syrinx. This allows them to sing with two voices at the same time, creating beautiful sounds and songs that people can’t.

The wonderful things God made remind us how awesome and powerful he is. Read on to hear about some amazing bird songs. Next time you hear a bird singing, remember to use your own voice to sing to the Lord! **B**



Profile

Ny Ly: 'Life Is All the Proof I Need'

by James C. Schaap

By way of a life unimaginably full of war and horror, Ny Ly, once a young Buddhist monk in Cambodia, came to believe in the God of the Bible, a God he knows loves him.

His story holds mysteries so incomprehensible that he claims the questions they raise can be answered only by faith in a sovereign God, ruler of heaven and earth. That he still draws breath, Ny Ly claims, is itself vivid proof of God's love. "What else is there?" he asks, an engaging smile

spreading over his face even in the wake of suffering few of us can imagine.

To understand Ny Ly's story requires a bit of Southeast Asian history.

In the 1960s, Cambodia's ruler, Norodom Sihanouk tried to keep his country out of the Vietnam War. But when North Vietnamese troops planted training camps in Cambodia's eastern provinces, Cambodia was caught in the crossfire—from 1965 to 1973—between U.S. forces and the North Vietnamese, Cambodia's enemy for generations. That violence bred

insurgent Cambodian forces, who eventually made possible Pol Pot's five-year reign of terror, remembered by many as "the killing fields." When Pol Pot grabbed power in 1975, he and his henchmen, the Khmer Rouge, initiated a bloody genocide that eliminated millions of Cambodians.

Meanwhile, Ny Ly grew up on his family's ancestral land near Kampot, a seaport village in southern Cambodia, in a family of 14 children. Because his father was unable to work, Ny Ly's mother needed her youngest son to barter whatever they could find every day for food and fuel. Survival became a way of life.

In 1970, Ny Ly's mother, a pious Buddhist, became anxious as civil war came to the neighborhood. At war were Sihanouk's nationalist forces, the communists aligned with the North Vietnamese, and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge.

She told Ny Ly, just 15, to run to the temple and become a monk to escape the killing. "I was a kid," Ny Ly said. "All I wanted to do is play." Three years later, in 1973, the Khmer Rouge grabbed him from the temple, dressed him in a uniform, and put a rifle in his hands. He never saw his mother again.

"If you fight," he said, "at least you can eat"—an elementary equation. For a year Ny Ly fought wherever the Khmer Rouge went into battle. He's amazed now, he said, at how effortless it was to kill other human beings. There's a scar at the top of his chest where he took shrapnel in a blow that knocked him down and almost killed him. When he opened his eyes, the other Khmer Rouge fighters had fled. He stumbled to his feet and grabbed mud from the jungle floor to blot the blood running down his throat. Then he ran, zigzagging through trees, enemy fire zinging all around.

His friends were stunned when he showed up. "We saw you die!" they said.

So why didn't he? That's a question Ny Ly still asks. So many times, like so many others, he should have died.

In 1975, the Khmer Rouge controlled the government through the Pol Pot regime and its leadership, called Angka. Although the war had ended, the suffering had only begun under what Angka called Year Zero. The government forcibly relocated the entire country to collective farms and labor camps where thousands died of starvation or worse. "This is what we must do to build a new Kampuchea," Angka told them daily.

For a time, Ny Ly and others labored to break ground in the jungle to create more rice paddies—slave labor with no pay and little food, forever under armed guard in a prison without walls.

Then, for no clear reason, Ny Ly and others were sent to an island where Angka claimed it needed men to protect the homeland. "Vietnam is armed to take over," Angka told them. "You will be our defense."

"It was all monkeys and trees," he said. "Nothing but ocean all around." Why Angka had sentenced them to an uninhabited island with no tools or provisions remains a mystery, but once again the battle before him was survival. Remembering those years on the island, Ny Ly said, "I didn't know that Pol Pot had killed 3 million people. We didn't know."

With no food or medicine, death stalked the islanders. Once again, Ny Ly asked himself why he wasn't among the dying. "When I think about it," he said, "through all of this, I can't help thinking, 'God is saving me.'"

In 1979, Vietnamese bombing runs created horror on the mainland and convinced the islanders that the assault Angka had warned them about three years earlier was finally coming.

The men—there were no women—determined to swim to the mainland. Some tied coconuts to their arms to keep themselves afloat; others created rafts from bamboo or fashioned

canoes to drift through what would be a long night in the Gulf of Thailand.

Many made it to the mainland only to realize they had no idea what was going on. What they saw was the scarred face of war. Home was no haven.

"I trust God because
I know he was
showing me the way
even if I didn't
know him."

Their first taste of rice came when they stumbled into a deserted village with food the island refugees hadn't tasted for years. "We didn't know where we were going," he said. "All we know is to try to stay alive."

At sundown a day later, they came to a river too wide to cross easily. Maybe if they tied clothes together they could create a rope line, they thought, but before it was completed, the night air screamed with bullets. "All around me—zip, zip, zip," Ny Ly said. The river flowed with blood. "You don't look back—you just go!"

Today, as a follower of Jesus, Ny Ly tries to understand what happened. "I can't help but think a bad spirit ran loose in Cambodia," he explained. The Angka leadership had made all religion illegal. "That bad spirit is what allowed three million people to die because, like Israel, they forgot—they kicked out God. They forgot God."

"That's what I believe right now when I read the Bible. And I think maybe that somehow God chose me. . . . But why me and not the others?" He shakes his head. "I don't know."

Once the rain of bullets ceased, he climbed into the jungle on the other side of the river in complete darkness. The firing continued. "What I know is, I'm alive," Ny Ly said.

On the bank of that river, he had no idea whom he was running from or where he might be running to. What he knew was that he and a company of ragged survivors had to run barefoot through the jungle, up into mountains and then down again in a frantic race to escape death's crosshairs.

One day a bag of rice, a miracle, appeared along the path. The men were famished. Everyone rejoiced when Ny Ly poured equal handfuls into the scarves each of them wore.

When the bag was nearly empty, he asked his friend to pour out the last bit. That's when the grenades blew. The bag had been booby-trapped. Ny Ly was thrown like a rag doll, but his friend was simply gone, and many others were bleeding because of shrapnel.

Whole villages were moving east to Thailand, mountain after mountain, day after day. The chaos Ny Ly remembers is impossible to imagine. No one knows who is the enemy, he said, because in some ways everyone is—even those without food, even families. Unable to care for their children, distraught parents left them behind. Refugees killed each other for food and deserted the sick and weak.

Three months of ceaseless travel continued before Ny Ly's group came to the long-disputed border with Thailand—three months of running into and through jungle wilderness, over successive mountains, often followed by a spray of bullets.

When the gunfire stopped, Ny Ly remembers, he had the chance to think about something other than sheer survival for the first time in his life. He began to consider what was going on around him, with his people, with his country, with him. Why was

he still alive? Once he had trusted Angka, but no more.

Cambodians by the tens of thousands were risking death to escape their country for Thailand. All those thousands of refugees made Thai officials so wary that they shut the door.

In the camps that formed along the border, people fought each other when the Red Cross drove up and threw out packets of rice. They had to. Regularly, refugees were commanded to stand—men here, women there—while Thai men shopped for sex slaves. Brothers could do nothing; fathers were powerless. Women never returned.

In the camp, in the midst of this evil and corruption, Ny Ly said some voice—God’s own?—told him to try to work with the Thai officials instead of against them.

God simply took hold of his life. Long before Ny Ly ever knew of Jesus Christ, he said, his Savior was somehow directing him to do the right thing. He was hungry, yes, but when he ate just a little, he somehow didn’t demand more. “God showed me the way,” he said.

One day three buses full of orphaned children came into camp. Ny Ly was standing nearby, heartbroken at the sight of the children, when the director pointed at him for reasons that are still a mystery.

“Hey, you!” the director said, pointing at Ny Ly. “You want to watch these children? I’ll give you a job.” He was offering compensation and food if Ny Ly would organize the children’s lives and keep them clothed and fed—an opportunity he believes came from God.

“The kids were my people,” he said. For the first time Ny Ly had responsibility not just for himself but for other human beings. The survival of a hundred orphaned children had become his responsibility. Somehow his world had grown. Now he had


enough time and sufficient resources to care about lives other than his own.

But the horror and dying did not abate. Life in the camps was no better than it had been in Cambodia. The director, the same man who had hired Ny Ly to take care of the children, had been keeping food and relief supplies from the very people he was supposed to serve. Ny Ly and others who daily witnessed the corruption resulting in the deaths of innocent people orchestrated a plot to kill the man—a plot that was carried out.

Also in that Cambodian camp, Ny Ly met Wendy, the woman who would become his wife. That’s where their stories came together. Ever so slowly, Ny Ly and Wendy were moved through a succession of camps. Eventually they became eligible to leave Cambodia and go to America. Angka had always taught Cambodians that America was an evil nation. It was difficult for Ny Ly to accept the United States as his family’s destination.

“God has blessed me a lot,” Ny Ly said. “I really don’t understand, but I am sure that God showed me the way here, that God brought me here for a reason.

“I trust God because I know he was showing me the way even if I didn’t know him.” For Ny Ly, faith was never a matter of choice: “God took me. I didn’t die.” Life is proof enough for trusting God. “So now if I do die, I’m with God—and that’s okay. I know God, and God knows me.”

Today, at 60 years old, Ny Ly is no longer just surviving. In every way he’s flourishing. 



Today, Ny Ly is a Cambodian American, a resident of Salt Lake City, Utah, and an elder at The Community CRC, a Cambodian fellowship.

When he and Wendy first arrived in Salt Lake City, they were met by folks from First Christian Reformed Church (now Life in Christ), several of whom were immigrants themselves, who had made it their mission to welcome others.

Ny Ly said he and Wendy will be forever indebted to the help they and many others were given.

“Here, in America,” he said, eyes flashing, “for the first time in my life, I got paid”—by the restaurant where he washed dishes. “For me, this is the ‘Promised Land.’”

“When I started [working],” Wendy added, “I got \$3.35 an hour for cleaning 13 rooms a day at a motel.” She beamed. “For two weeks I got \$100 and more.”

Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet, chose the Great Salt Lake Basin for his people, but Ny and Wendy Ly believe *they* were chosen for *it*. Ny Ly is more confident than ever that he is where God wants him to be. For the last 26 years, he’s been doing general maintenance at Detroit Diesel. Wendy works there too. They drive to work together every day.

A longer version of this story is available online.

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)



James C. Schaap is a writer who lives in Iowa.

A Different Kind of Faith

The cross and the resurrection of Christ are more real and more definitive than anything I am thinking or feeling.



Daniel Boerman is a member of Forest Grove (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church.

THERE MAY BE TIMES when your prayers appear to do nothing more than bounce off the ceiling. You pray for healing from your cancer, but it keeps getting worse. You ask God to fix your broken marriage, but your spouse files for divorce. When God is not responsive to your needs and his promises don't seem to be true, can you still believe in him?

Perhaps we need to think more carefully about faith. You're probably familiar with what I call triumphant faith. This is the kind of faith that can tell a mountain to be thrown into the sea, and it will obey (Mark 11:23), or brought healing to the woman who had a bleeding problem for 12 years (Luke 8:48), to the leper (Luke 17:19), and to the blind beggar (Luke 18:42). Jesus explicitly tells each of these people that their faith has healed them. This is triumphant faith—the kind of faith we all want.

But there is also a different kind of faith. I'll call this *coping faith*. Job maintained his faith in God even though he suffered all kinds of calamities for no obvious reason. "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (Job 13:15). Job was able to believe in God even when God was not answering any of his prayers.

Another example of this coping faith is the apostle Paul. Paul experienced tremendous persecution and suffering because of his faith. In 2 Corinthians 11:24–26 he lists many of his difficult experiences: five floggings, three beatings with rods, one stoning, three shipwrecks, and all kinds of dangers on land and sea from Jewish opponents, from Gentiles, and from false brothers. On top of that, God refused to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh even after Paul asked God to

do so three times (2 Cor. 12:7–9). In spite of all this pain and suffering, Paul maintained his faith in God and his commitment to his task as an apostle to the Gentiles.

As in the case of Job and of Paul, there is often in my experience a gap between the promises of God and my own situation. God promises to answer prayer, but it doesn't always happen the way I want it to. God promises to be present at all times, but there is no observable evidence that he is. If my faith depended solely on my own experience, I would conclude that God was not real. But the cross and the resurrection of Christ are more real and more definitive than anything I am thinking or feeling. My faith is based on what God has done in Christ.

Maybe you too lack a victorious or triumphant faith. If that's true, don't give up your faith simply because God is not answering your prayers in the way you want him to.

The good news is that the salvation God has accomplished in Jesus Christ does not depend on its making sense to you. Your coping faith can sustain and nourish you through hard times. And it can be a powerful testimony to those around you. **B**

1. Recall times or events when God seemed unresponsive to your prayers. How did you feel during those moments? What did you do?

2. Triumphant faith, as the article suggests, is attractive. But...

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Detour to Contentment

I did not wake up one morning and randomly decide to spend my days as a single woman in a world of couples.



Cecilia Lynne is a full-time freelance writer and blogger. She belongs to Ministry of Life Fellowship in Kerrville, Tex.

I AM LIKE MANY WOMEN you may know. I am in my forties and the mother of three wonderful children. I fancy gardening and estate sales and am partial to dark chocolate. I live in a rural community and have recently embarked on the adventure of running a small bed-and-breakfast from my home. I exercise regularly and scour magazines for nutritional recipes. I budget carefully and hunt for bargains to make ends meet. Yet in the last several years I have discovered something about myself that is decidedly different from many other women.

I've discovered that I am sincerely content to be single.

I'm not talking here about a recent breakup. I have been single for more than 15 years, and in that time I have had one—yes, one—date. To quote a line from a '90s movie, it was “a distant second to a good book and a warm bath.” This is usually the point in the conversation where I receive skeptical expressions, raised eyebrows, and sometimes remarks of abject sympathy. People have a hard time believing I am not lonely or that I stay busy socially.

Not so long ago I was having dinner with a group of women who were also single parents. Though I was acquainted with most of the women, there were a few I had only just met. As if on cue, the conversation turned to inquiries about recent dates. When it became obvious that I was the last one to speak, I honestly responded, “You know, I haven't dated in a number of years—I'm just really content on my own.”

My answer was met by an awkward silence followed by murmurs of *What?*

and other disbelieving exclamations usually reserved for heated debates regarding religion or politics. As we left the restaurant, I heard one of the women I had recently met exclaim to another of our group, “That is just pathetic! I do not want to live my life alone!”

I laughed about that dinner conversation later with one of my closest friends, who, like most of my friends, happens to be happily married. Though not the most sensitive of comments, it wasn't the first time I'd heard that kind of remark and probably won't be the last. I am surprised how often other women want to “fix” my desire to remain single.

It seems that in our society it is acceptable to be single as long as you're in the process of trying to remedy it. I realize my lifestyle is not the norm. It is natural to desire companionship—and to this end, I do spend a lot of time with friends. I have come to accept that only those closest to me can appreciate that I am not just putting on a brave front but am truly happy. After all, I was still in my 30s when I started this journey.

I am not a martyr, nor am I a member of some wacky cult. I did not wake up one morning and randomly decide to spend my days as a single woman in a world of couples. I have been married twice and unfortunately experienced infidelity, abandonment, and abuse in those relationships. I have some regrets, but rather than being bitter about my experiences I have chosen to forgive and move on. I won't pretend it has always been easy. I have struggled, and my second marriage was the result of not allowing myself enough time to grieve and heal from the first.



However, my struggles have made me a stronger person. I raised my kids on my own, and while being a single parent has had its challenges, we survived, and I treasure the close relationships I share with my children.

I facilitate a support group for single parents in my community. Like my former dinner companions, many of the women I have encountered have been married multiple times, and most are actively seeking a mate—with an emphasis on actively. For some of them, as was true in my own experience, truly learning to know themselves and allowing adequate time to recover from the ravages of divorce are not given priority. More often than not, this only results in a vicious cycle of broken relationships.

After my second divorce, I decided I would focus on raising my kids. I wanted to offer them as much stability as I could provide. When they were younger, it was a rare occasion for me to have time alone. My family lives in another city, and although we spend holidays and special occasions together, calling them up to babysit for an afternoon was simply not an option. There is little time for mourning your lack of social life between carpooling to ballet lessons, choir activities, and Scouting events. I daily prayed for strength. Some days I felt those prayers were answered; on other days it seemed as though my prayers were hitting the ceiling. By God's grace, I persevered.

As my children and their social lives grew, I began to carve out some "me"

time. My friendships were no longer limited to the parents of my kids' friends. I took an aerobics class, went to movies with friends, and took time to enjoy myself. I began to care less what others thought of me and realized I actually enjoyed my own company. Though it surely was a process, it gradually dawned on me how content I was—and still am.

Is my life perfect or without problems? No. Am I thankful for each day, for good friends, and for navigating the oncoming empty nest season? Absolutely!

True contentment, I've discovered, is not the absence of problems but instead is the peace that's available in spite of them. It's the sense of fulfillment that comes when you discover your life is very different from what you may have once imagined but is even better because of the detours.

These days I cherish long phone conversations with my young-adult daughters and marvel at the connection we share. My best friend and I laugh until teary whether we're escaping to the latest movie or reflecting on more serious matters of the heart. I revel in the fact that at age 16, my son still unabashedly hugs everyone he knows.

When the house is empty and it is early morning, I go outside, breathe in the scent of flowers, and embrace the solitude—just me and the birds. I contemplate the beauty of the garden, remembering when the only thing that was visible was a vast expanse of dirt and rocks. I recollect the various projects and landscaping tasks the kids helped me with over the years, symbolic of so many other milestones we've tackled together. And as I meditate, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and awe. I reflect on these things and thank God that I am content. B

Growing Pains

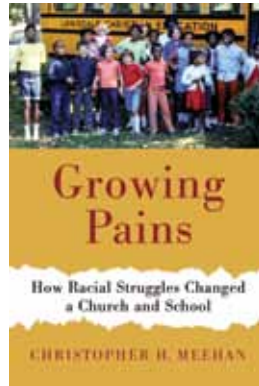
CHRISTOPHER MEEHAN'S book *Growing Pains: How Racial Struggles Changed a Church and School* (Eerdmans) documents the impact of a group of African-American parents from Lawndale CRC who sought to enroll their children at Timothy Christian School in Cicero, Ill., in the 1960s. The book is filled with historic pictures, excerpts from archival documents, and first-hand accounts from many of the key players in the story.

Lives were
disrupted,
relationships were
strained, hopes
were dashed.

Yet it is more than just the recounting of an effort to integrate a school, Meehan asserts. "I began to realize this was a story about racism—when it lives in our hearts and plays out in our everyday lives," he says.

It does not take long to realize that this is neither a pretty nor a simple story. The book takes a hard look at the politics of race in a particular community in a particular time in U.S. history and in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. People took sides. Lives were disrupted, relationships were strained, hopes were dashed, and the convictions of faith and conscience were tested.

Ultimately, the African-American Lawndale parents lost their fight to enroll their children at Timothy.



Many—both African-American and white—emerged from the conflict with emotional scars, but some emerged with a deepened faith and a heightened determination to work for racial reconciliation in the church and beyond.

Meehan does not seek to place blame, though it is a great temptation to the reader to want to find fault somewhere. The book is not about blame or shame; it is about truth telling and understanding. It takes readers back to a painful time in the history of the CRC.

However, careful readers will find that the book is not just about the past but also about the present and the future of the church. The book ends on a note of optimism and points to some positive changes that came out of this painful time. The future will depend on the lessons we learn from our past. **B**



Michelle Loyd-Paige is the executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Reading People: How Seeing the World through the Lens of Personality Changes Everything

by Anne Bogel

reviewed by Adele Konyndyk

Anne Bogel pulls from years of research and offers up her personal experiences with popular personality frameworks such as the Enneagram and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Understanding personality through such typing systems, Bogel says, is like "holding a good map" in the quest to make sense of the complex layers of human identity. This worthwhile work can equip us to improve our relationships, clarify our vocations, and refine our spiritual lives. *Reading People* is an entertaining, astute, and actionable personality primer that can help us more fully understand how God has uniquely made us and those around us. (Baker Books)



Draw the Line

by Kathryn Otoshi

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Two little boys draw two happy lines. When the boys bump into each other, they discover that their two lines can become one. They jump and dance and run with their long line until the fun of pulling the line turns into a tug of war, and what brought so much joy deteriorates into a wide divide. This simple, wordless story deals with the complexities of human relationships. With Otoshi's uncomplicated use of line and color, *Draw the Line* encourages conversation and reflection on finding solutions to conflict and growing friendships. Ages 4 and up. (Roaring Brook Press)



One of Us

reviewed by Kristy Quist

This documentary follows three young people who have left behind the enormous Hasidic Jewish community in Brooklyn because of painful personal histories. All have been hurt by their community, but they also discover it hurts terribly to be alone, bereft of the close-knit community. The film demonstrates the deep longing we all have for community as well as some of the reasons we find it difficult. While it doesn't say so, the documentary reinforces what we already know: Christ's love is the one thing that can hold us together. No amount of sameness, rules, preaching, or even family ties will bind a group together if we have not love. (Netflix)

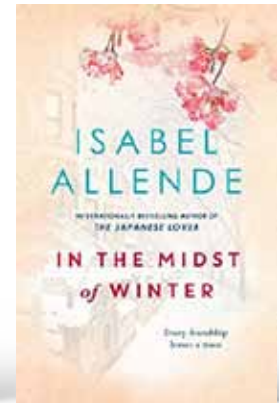


Songs of Experience

by U2

reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

As U2 was preparing this album, lead singer Bono experienced a health scare that had a profound effect on him. The songs became letters from Bono to his wife, his children, the rest of the band, and to those of us who listen. U2 continues to create songs that often can be heard both as a personal note to someone close and as a declaration of God's place in the world. The band closes the album with "13 (There Is a Light)," a meditation on Psalm 13, which, like most lament psalms, ends by expressing trust in the unfailing love of God. *Songs of Experience* is U2's most compelling album in over a decade. (Interscope)



In the Midst of Winter

by Isabel Allende

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When a massive snowstorm shuts down Brooklyn, N.Y., for several days, the lives of three people intersect in life-altering ways. A university professor smashes into the car of an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala, and a visiting professor from Chile comes to their aid. The three are sequestered in the storm, and they share their stories. In this riveting novel, which contains sexual scenes, Allende explores the reality that violence, murder, human trafficking, and domestic abuse know no national borders, but neither do compassion, love, and a willingness to seek truth and do what is right. (Atria)

The Lowdown

All Set: *En la mesa de Dios/At God's Table* is a bilingual picture book from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship that explains communion. It includes suggestions for adults and a visual scavenger hunt to help children explore Joel Schoon-Tanis's striking illustrations. (Calvin Press)

Ladies' Choice: An array of talented women are putting out albums: *See You Around* by I'm with Her (the recently teamed Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz, and Aoife O'Donovan), *Evergreen* by Audrey Assad, and *By the Way, I Forgive You* by Brandi Carlile are all due out this month.

By Popular Demand: Christian novelist Francine Rivers returns to her roots with the romance *The Masterpiece*. (Tyndale House)

Best of 2017: As award season continues, visit thebanner.org to check out Top Five lists from Banner reviewers.

READ MORE ONLINE

Is There Truth in Other Religions?

Hospitality,
humility,
kindness,
equality: all
things true,
beautiful, and good.

A FEW WEEKS AGO I HAD LUNCH at the local Sikh temple (Gurdwara). I live in British Columbia, where Sikhs are the largest faith group after Christians, so I was keen to have a chat with temple leaders to discuss ways we could mutually encourage the university to support students through chaplaincy programs.

I dropped by the Gurdwara just as the service was finishing and joined a stream of people heading into the hall for a common meal—what Sikhs call *langar*. Over conversation and lentil curry, I watched families and friends laughing and eating, old men ladling out rice to kids, a few migrant workers waiting for a free meal, and everyone—men, women, and children—seated on the floor as equals before God. Hospitality, humility, kindness, equality: all things true, beautiful, and good. Who could doubt that there isn't truth in Sikhism or any other religion?

In fact, many Christians do doubt the presence of truth in other religions. In the past, some theologians even declared other faiths as demonic or idolatrous, insisting on Christianity as exclusively true. I think a better position keeps at least three things in view.



Todd Statham is the Christian Reformed campus minister at the Okanagan campus of the University of British Columbia.

First, to appreciate truth and goodness in other religions is not to endorse them as paths to salvation. Reformed Christians have always confessed that salvation is God's gift to undeserving sinners, realized through the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and mediated through the Spirit. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, NRSV). Let's keep this truth distinct from the

question of whether truth exists in religions other than our own.

Second, to affirm that there is truth in other religions in no way diminishes the greatness of our God or his gospel. For if the Father's creating and saving grace is as wide as we confess, if Christ's lordship is as total as we claim, and if the Spirit is as free and sovereign as we profess, then shouldn't we expect to find fingerprints and footprints of our triune God throughout his broken world and not just in the church?

When I worked as a missionary in Malawi, African friends often reminded me that God was present in their land long before European missionaries arrived in the 19th century. God was inspiring stories, teachings, and rituals as hints of the gospel that would later transform their culture. Yes, the gospel has been entrusted to the church to proclaim. But it's not ours to possess. It's bigger and deeper than the institutional Christian religion.

A third point closely follows: We detect truth in other religions *through* the gospel and not apart from it. It's not as if we have a general idea of what is true and good and beautiful, which we then find scattered throughout the world's religions. I come across this thinking frequently on campus among students who dabble in faith traditions, picking and choosing the "best" parts depending on personal taste. When I took part in the *langar*, I was drawn to displays of hospitality, generosity, and the like because they resonated with the gospel. As Christians, we discern truth in other religions through a biblical, Christ-centered perspective. I like how the great Reformed missiologist Lesslie Newbigin calls Jesus "the decisive clue" by which we evaluate and explore the world around us, including other religions. Through that clue, we can see truth in other religions, even as we invite adherents of other faiths to join us in pursuit of the fullness of truth that is in Christ. **B**

Bad Ideas for Winter Olympics Church Tie-Ins

Topical gimmicks are great—except when they're not.

The Olympics are an exciting international event where people from around the world meet and compete across the lines of nation, race, language, and other things that divide us. That sounds like something the church might resonate with. And there might even be some good ideas out there on how to join in that sense of wonder at human abilities, the diversity of the world and of people's skills, and the way folks come together to create something exciting and fun and to overcome differences.

I'm not here to help you with those, though. I'm here to offer some bad ideas instead, because that's more fun.

1. Figure skating events offer their own sense of functional fashion—skaters' outfits tend to include more sequins than your typical church service. Maybe we need to replace the pastor's robe and stole or conservative Sunday attire with a glamorous figure skating costume!
2. Part of the fun of the Olympics is the medal ceremonies. What if potluck contributions were scored and medals awarded? Second-place recipients would of course be required to cry.
3. Produce a few soft-focus video profiles of choir members and their road to alto-dom. End with the featured singer jogging in with the Christ candle.
4. Biathlon practice in the fellowship hall. A little skiing and shooting will make everyone's Sunday more exciting.
5. Speed hymn singing—like speed skating but with more hymnals and fewer skates.
6. Balcony jump. Self-explanatory.
7. All-church curling tournament in the parking lot. Actually, no, this is a great idea—somebody please do this. **B**



Bethany Keeley-Jonker is an associate professor of communication arts at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill.

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DEADLINES: 2/6/18 for March; 3/6/18 for April. Subject to availability. Details online.

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Denominational and Classical

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2018 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda:

- a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15 and must first be processed through the local council and the classis.
- b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod, as well as the completed information sheet on each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes as soon as possible but no later than March 15. Materials will be included in the printed Agenda if received before the synodically established deadlines.

Steven R. Timmermans Executive Director

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 14, 2018) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to assemble to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. Councils are reminded that if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U. S.), they have the right to change the date of service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578).

PRICES: Most ads are \$0.40^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.32^{US} per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER (U. S.) is Thursday, May 3, 2018. Steven R. Timmermans Executive Director

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY

We are pleased to announce that **CARI FYDIRCHUK** 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

RETIREMENT

The Congregation of First Christian Reformed Church of Hoppers, IA congratulates **PASTOR MARVIN** and wife Martha Leese on their recent retirement. We thank God for their 6 years of faithful service to our congregation. We wish them many blessings in their retirement

THE CONGREGATION OF MIDDLEVILLE CRC congratulates Pastor Tom on his retirement. We thank our Lord for the faithful ministry of Pastor Tom as our pastor for the last 16 years. We will miss him and Yvonne. May our Lord bless them as they now serve Him in new ways.

Miscellaneous

CCHS CELEBRATES 100 YEARS! Chicago Christian High School will celebrate it's 100th Anniversary on April 20th at 6pm at the Tinley Park Convention Center. Free event - donations accepted. To register and for more information, go to [www. SWChristian.org](http://www.SWChristian.org). 708-388-7656

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

Birthdays

95TH BIRTHDAY

ANN NOTEBOOM (JANSSEN) celebrated her 95th birthday on January 23. Praising God for her faith filled life and countless ways God uses her in other's lives are her step-children: Marjo(Rick), Mieneke(Steve), Grace, Jane(John), Tineke(Harry), John(Beth), and families. Cards may be sent to 1919 Boston St SE (Apt A-314), Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

90TH BIRTHDAY

MARIE DE BIE of Ripon, CA will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 15. Celebrating with her are her children: Dale and Bonnie De Bie, Jennifer and Marvin Pater, Michelle De Bie, six grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. Cards may be sent to 917 2nd Street, Ripon, CA 95366.

EARL LOGTERMAN, will celebrate his 90th birthday on March 8. Praising God for his faithful life and witness are his children Kim (Ken) Hengeveld, Susan, and James; grandchildren Daniel Hengeveld, Elisabeth Hengeveld, and Rebecca (Aaron) Olson; and a great-granddaughter. Cards may be sent to 6450 S Boston St #2333, Greenwood Village, CO 80111.

REV. SIERD WOODSTRA celebrated his 90th birthday on February 4. His children, grandchildren and great grandchildren praise and thank God for his long and blessed life! Greetings may be sent to 2024 Mallard Dr. GR MI 49546

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Anniversary

RUSTHOVEN Bob and Marilyn(Oostman), 1802 Foxwood Dr., New Lenox, IL, 60451 will celebrate their 60th anniversary Feb. 15. Children: Kimberly & John Wolff; Brian & Leigh(Taylor, Chase, Ian); Robert & Christine(Emma, Anne, Sarah). We thank God for His love, faithfulness, and many blessings! To God be the glory!

Obituaries

DYKHOUSE, WILMA, age 84 of Ripon CA passed away on Dec. 11, 2017. Wilma is originally from Prospect Park, NJ and spent her married years in Midland Park, NJ. She was a long time member of the CRC. She is survived by Ken and Cheri Dykhouse, (Kara and Christian Chan, Erin, Tony, Deshawn and great grandchild Carter Chan). She is also survived by Janet and Randy Engel,(Janelle and Greg Mulder, and Kelly). She was preceded by her husband Garret J. Dykhouse and will be lovingly remembered.

STUART DIRK EPPINGA, SR. age 92, of Grand Rapids, went to be with Jesus on December 14, 2017. He was preceded in death by his wife, Helene, and infant son, William. He is survived by his children, Stu (Vicky) Eppinga, Bill (Arlene) Eppinga, Marla (Scott) Huizing, 9 grandchildren, and 13 great-grandchildren. "Sing a new song unto the Lord".

TRIEZENBERG- Robert W. "Bob" Triezenberg, age 84, U. S. Army Korean War Veteran of Palos Park, IL went to be with his Lord on December 28, 2017. Beloved husband for 59 1/2 years to Bettie, nee Wiltjer. Loving father of Tom Triezenberg and Linda (David) Visser. Cherished grandfather of Bridgett (Ben) Ipema, Danielle (Scott) Loerop, Samuel (Lindsey) Visser and Brielle (Matt) Pausma. Dearest great-grandfather of Sydney, Wyatt, Avrie, Brynn, Gavin, Logan, Parker, Hudson and Sawyer. Dear brother of the late Gladys Voss. Dear uncle of many nieces and nephews.

Church Positions Available

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

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.

SENIOR PASTOR: First CRC of Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, is looking for the pastor God has prepared to continue on as shepherd of this flock. We are looking for a praying pastor to grow us in the Word so we can live relevant Christian lives in a changing world and reach the lost. To learn more about who we are go to our church website. <http://www.firstcrrcrocky.ca/> To pursue this opportunity please contact Case Krover. cmkrover@hotmail.com or call: (403) 729-2185.

DIRECTOR OF MUSIC & WORSHIP Modesto, CA CRC is seeking a full time Director of Music and Worship. See detailed description at <http://www.modestorcrc.org> 209-523-1906

DUNCAN CRC ON beautiful Vancouver Island is seeking a full-time, dynamic pastor who would be a caring shepherd ministering to all ages in our congregation. More info available on our website duncancrc.org or by contacting the search committee at search@duncancrc.org

FULL TIME SOLE PASTOR Our pastor at Christ Community in Tualatin, OR is soon to retire. We are a small, warm congregation engaged in renewal and excited to see what The Lord has in store for us. Please email ericml@aol.com

MINISTER OF FAITH FORMATION Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI seeks a full-time Minister of Faith Formation. This pastor will work as part of a collaborative team ministry, leading the congregation in developing a culture of discipleship and faith formation, with a particular emphasis on leading our youth from middle school through post-high school. We encourage interested individuals to review the job description at the Calvin CRC website: <http://www.calvincrc.org/>. Send cover letter and resume as email attachments to jobopenings@BakerPublishingGroup.com, including the words "Minister of Faith Formation" in the subject line. Alternately, mail these materials to the attention of "Human Resources/ Minister of Faith Formation" at Baker Publishing Group, 6030 E Fulton, Ada, MI 49301.

LEAD PASTOR: Faith Community Christian Reformed Church, located in the beautiful Yakima Valley in South Central Washington, is seeking a full-time male pastor who is passionate about preaching and people. We are a family of believers who desire to know God and make Him known, grow in our walk with Jesus, and attract others to follow Him. Please visit our church website at www.zillahfaithcommunity.org to view our profile or contact us at faithcommunitychurch@embarqmail.com

SENIOR PASTOR Covenant CRC in Winnipeg, Manitoba is seeking a senior pastor for preaching, spiritual leadership and pastoral care. We have a strong desire for church growth and seek leadership to realize that vision within our community. Position is available in June, 2018. To gain further information regarding this position and about our Covenant community go to: covenantcrrc.ca



MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

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River Terrace Church
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**FOURTEENTH STREET CRC, HOLLAND, MI**, an intergenerational church with a liturgical flavor, is seeking a full-time pastor to join us in our mission to celebrate God's gifts, tell God's story, and renew God's world. Position to open Summer 2018. See [14thstreetcrc.com/pastorsearch](http://14thstreetcrc.com/pastorsearch) for more information.

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# Expectations

Lately I've been finding God's grace in being wrong in ways that feel all right.



Jordan Petersen is a recent graduate of Calvin College. He works as an auditor at Crowe Horwath LLP's Grand Rapids office and worships at Sherman Street Church in Grand Rapids.


*Expectations are the enemy of contentment.* On face value, this seems like a harmless platitude: Manage your expectations, and you'll more readily avoid being disappointed. Or perhaps a more nihilistic interpretation: Don't expect anything to be good, and you will never be disappointed.

Either way, I have found this statement to be both unhelpful and untrue, if for no other reason than that expectations are unavoidable. We're bombarded with information designed to build our expectations: the trailer released before the movie; the single released ahead of the album; the advice freely proffered before high school, college, a new job, or the birth of a child. All these suggestions of what truth is make it impossible not to project our own vision of what truth is.

Even if we can't avoid expectations, they may still harm our ability to be satisfied with our reality. But I have often found my expectations being met in a different way than just sheer disappointment. Usually I've found that my expectations run alongside a reality that is neither a complete contrast nor a direct match: bad in ways I hoped it would not be but also good in ways I had not even thought to hope for.

As a recent college graduate, this has been especially true. I have spent a lot of time over the last few months looking back and realizing the ways in which the last four years did not bring about everything I had anticipated while also bringing more than I could have hoped for. Around every corner of my college experience lie unfilled expectations about who I might be or what I might do that are quickly replaced by something I did not know to want but would not now trade away.

It is in these times—not wholly disappointing but not quite fully satisfying times—that I think we see a fuller version of truth. I think it speaks to who we are as people and who God is as God. It is in our nature to expect and yearn for things, just as it is in our nature to be wrong about such expectations and yearnings; it is in God's nature to be all around us—all of creation pointing to divine truth.

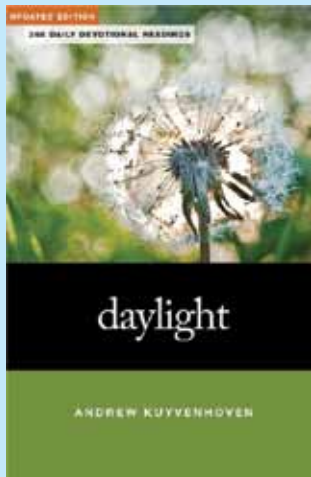
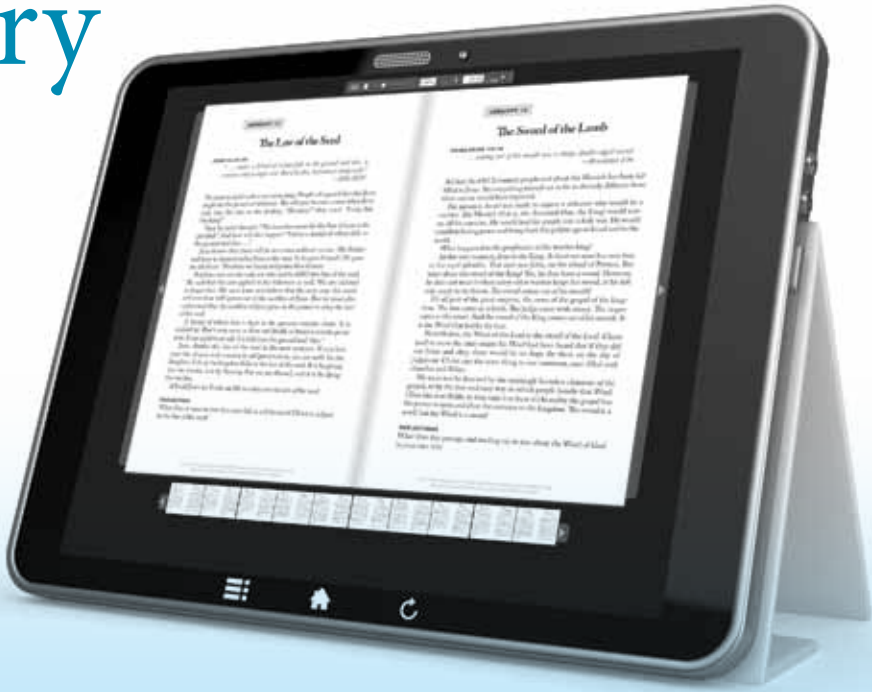
Lately I've been finding God's grace in being wrong in ways that feel all right: watching a new *Star Wars* movie that offers little new in terms of plot but a plethora of potential in new character conventions; listening to a new album from the pop artist Lorde that doesn't sound how I expected but reveals itself to me in new ways with each listen; or any other time I find myself thinking, "This isn't what I thought it would be, but wow, this is awesome." In those times when I would not wish away my incorrect expectations *or* the differing outcome—those are the times I witness the reality of a truth that is already here and the promise of a truth that is still yet to come. 

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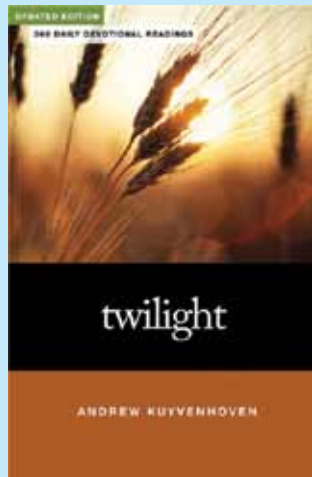
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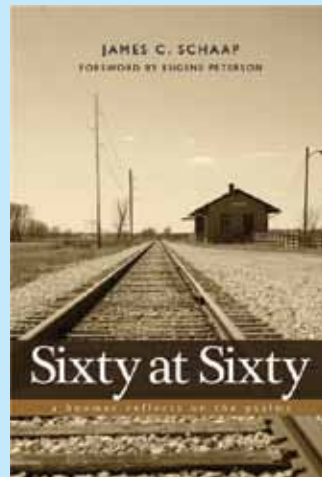
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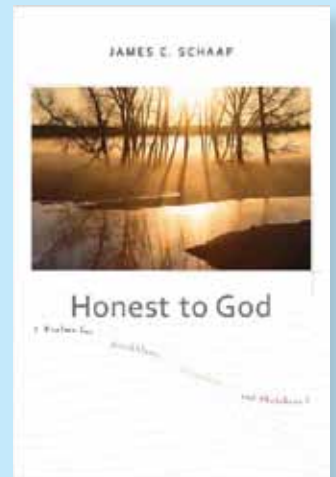
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