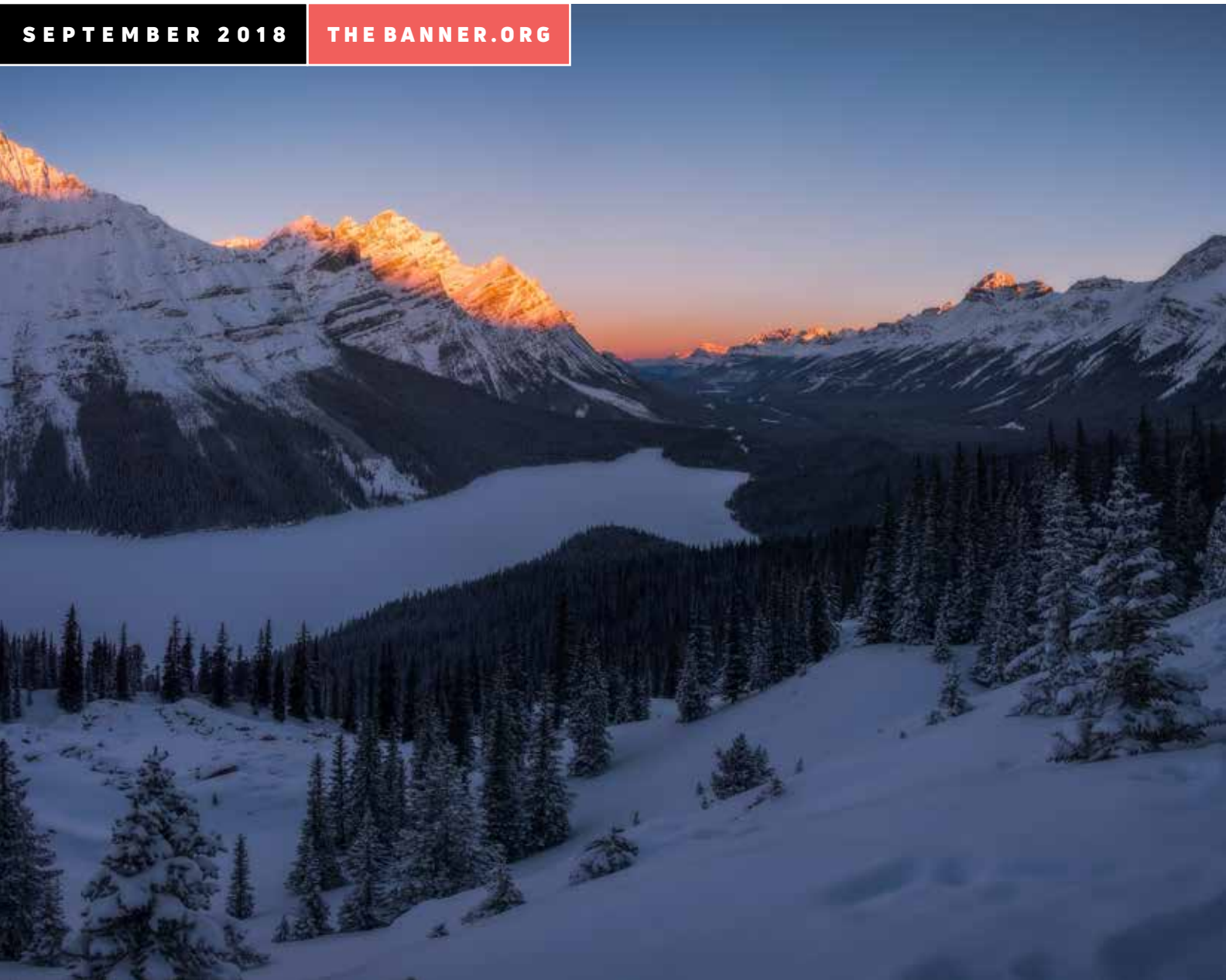


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BANNER

The Banner is the magazine of the Christian Reformed Church

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Classified Advertising 616-224-0725 classifieds@TheBanner.org

Display Advertising 616-224-5882 ads@TheBanner.org

Editorial 616-224-0824 editorial@TheBanner.org

News news@TheBanner.org

Published monthly (except August). Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Mich. Postmaster, send address changes to: *The Banner*, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407. Canadian publications mail agreement #40063614. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: *The Banner*, 3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1, Burlington ON L7R 3Y8. Copyright 2018, Christian Reformed Church in North America. Printed in U.S.A. *The Banner* (ISSN0005-5557). Vol. 153, No. 8, 2018.

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What Are We Afraid Of?

The rhetoric of our increasingly politically and religiously polarized world—from all sides—tends to exploit our sin-based fears.



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 are available at TheBanner.org.

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Este artículo está disponible en español en TheBanner.org/spanish.

THERE ARE FIVE UNIVERSAL FEARS.

That's what I learned over a decade ago while leading a student group discussion as a campus pastor. We were discussing a secular book on leadership that outlined five universals of human nature drawn from anthropology studies: the fear of death and its corresponding need for security; the fear of the outsider and the need for community; the fear of the future and the need for clarity; the fear of chaos and the need for authority; and, finally, the fear of insignificance and the need for respect. The book suggested that leaders need to deal with these universal fears by meeting their corresponding needs in order to unite and rally their followers.

My students quickly recognized how unscrupulous religious and political leaders might exploit these universal fears. For instance, they expressed concern at how some Christian leaders may have exploited these fears and needs among Christians to further their own agenda rather than the gospel. The need for community, for example, often is invoked at the expense of inflaming fears of a particular outsider group or enemy such as progressive liberals, fundamentalists, secularists, legalist conservatives, feminists, or various races and ethnicities. It has often been remarked that evangelical Christians in North America are known more for what they stand against than for what they stand for. My students identified political leaders in history who have similarly exploited these fears.

We also pondered if these universals are built into our human nature as God created us or if they are caused instead by our fallen nature. I am convinced that these fears are based

on our universal sinful nature. 1 John 4 teaches, "There is no fear in love. . . . The one who fears is not made perfect in love." And, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them" (1 John 4:18; 16). One of the most repeated refrains from God and his heavenly angels is "do not be afraid."

For that reason, I cannot see how any leadership that unites people by appealing to their sinful natures—their sin-based fears—is Christ-like leadership. It is not right to exploit these sin-based fears and distorted needs even for justifiable ends.

With God's help, we need to replace these sin-based fears and needs with redemptive, God-centered universals. Instead of fearing death and wanting physical security, we should fear God and love God, finding our security in Christ's love for us. Instead of fearing outsiders, we should love our neighbors as God commanded us, and thereby find genuine community. Instead of fearing the future, we should hope for God's new heaven and earth and practice wisdom to discern how best to collaborate in God's mission. Instead of fearing chaos and wanting powerful authority figures to give us law and order, we should trust in God's providence and seek Christ's peace and God's justice. Finally, instead of fearing insignificance and needing respect, we should embrace the truth that we are created in God's image and redeemed by Christ's sacrificial love. We are significant because we belong wholly to God (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

The rhetoric of our increasingly politically and religiously polarized world—from all sides—tends to exploit our sin-based fears. Will we be tempted to do the same? Let us Christians instead refuse to be played. Be wise and seek God's way. Let us not fight fire with fire, but radically choose love over fear—even love for our enemies (Matt. 5:43-45). **B**



REPLY ALL

God's Kingdom and the CRC

In his column "The View from Here" Mr. Timmermans has a wonderful message ("God Is Using the CRC to Advance His Kingdom," June 2018).

He wrote, "While the church is shrinking in North America, globally the church is growing." He points out that many organizations are in place to further the global advancement of the church of Jesus Christ.

The declining attendance and membership in our North American churches is very noticeable in many different denominations, also here in Canada. Why do we read so little about this sad situation and why are not some efforts especially focused to stem this trend? Would not the Holy Spirit guide any effort if it was put forward? Has this particular issue ever been put on the agenda of synod?

» Bram Wiersma // Grimsby, Ont.

Editor's Note: Synod 2017 addressed the issue of declining church membership in response to an overture. Synod 2018 received a report listing resources and a biblical theology for church renewal, church planting, and evangelism (Agenda for Synod 2018, pp. 64-75).

Mental Illness and the Church

In response to the article by Mr. Struyk ("Mental Illness and the Church," June 2018): I am the regional advocate for Classis Eastern Canada, and I have been serving in that capacity for about two years now. There is also quite a bit of material about mental illnesses on the CRC Network (<https://network.crcna.org/>) that church members can look up to educate themselves. Where there's a will there's a way. Even if people who are not living with mental illness will find it

hard to relate to, say, someone hearing voices, they should be able to empathize with the emotional distress that such an experience usually provokes.

» Michele Gyselinck // Montreal, Quebec

In the article "Mental Illness and the Church," the author puts autism in the category of mental illness, which it is not. Autism is a developmental disorder. I agree with the spirit of the article, but think the distinction is important.

» Beth VanStaalduinen // Jordan Station, Ont.

Editor's note: There is ongoing debate about whether autism is a mental illness versus some other kind of developmental or neurological state. However, both the American Psychiatric Association and the National Institute of Mental Health categorize autism as a developmental disorder.

Faith and Climate Science

Clayton Carlson's article "Faith and Climate Science" (May 2018) elicited a series of online comments that I found troubling, largely because they were rooted in various misinformation from the internet. Much of this misinformation is refuted easily by checking simple facts. As Christians, we are committed to values such as truth, and we have a faithful responsibility to use our capabilities to assess it. The Reformed tradition has exemplified this commitment by placing a high value on Christian education and sound reasoning. The best scientific reasoning humans have suggests that climate change will profoundly affect the poor. We may disagree about precisely how this will happen, but we have a faithful duty to acknowledge the truth, act, and not purposely ignore it.

» Colin Conrad // Halifax, Nova Scotia

I would challenge Carlson, who stated that climate deniers claim "the climate change movement is embedded with corruption and political agendas" ("Faith and Climate Science," May 2018), to approach the arguments from the other side with some humility and consideration. . . . The only point [on which] I could agree with Carlson was his imagery of scientists occupying a priestly position. They do have a moral obligation to be honest in their findings even if that means publishing something that sheds doubt on the consensus model.

» Karen Bastian // Montreal, Quebec

Church and Politics

My mind keeps returning to the question you raised in the editorial "Church and Politics—Again" (May 2018): "It is time we determine whether our faith is shaping our politics or our politics has been shaping our faith." I cannot imagine a more compelling issue, succinctly stated, for the CRCNA and for people of faith everywhere.

As a veteran policy analyst and governmental relations specialist for more than 40 years, it is my considered opinion that a large segment of the American people has been seduced into acceptance of a "new normal." It seems that there are no limits to the falsehoods and distortions to which we are subjected, and yet ANY questioning of the president's pronouncements are met with derision by much of the evangelical community, which is proud to consider itself the unwavering base of the president's support. Where will we find leadership that has not already committed itself to a single source of "news" and commentary, and, in the process, created a toxic environment for fruitful discussion?

» Gerrit L. DenHartog // Walker, Mich.

More Still

We need more Katie Ritsema-Roelofs ("We Need More 'Still,'" May 2018). It sounds like she could use another one of her too—pretty busy!—so I won't hold my breath. Loved that final page.

» Kathryn Waldyke // Makanda, Ill.

Off the Clock

Please pass on to Zach Vandenberg how much I enjoyed his article “Off the Clock” (May 2018). My family also relished the “holy” experience camping can be when we let go of many of life’s distractions and attune ourselves to God’s voice speaking through the weather, the landscape, the wildlife, and God’s Word.
» Kerri Howard // Hettinger, N.D.

Beyond Thoughts and Prayers

As a Canadian observing the U.S. political scene, I am often amazed at the cowardice of politicians when confronting the gun lobby to offer anything beyond thoughts and prayers to the victims of gun violence (“Beyond Thoughts and Prayers,” May 2018). Here in Canada, we have fewer gun-related deaths annually than in the U.S. (as a percentage of the population) because here owning firearms is not a constitutional right; it is a privilege. People must undergo a background check before they can buy a gun. We have had a number of shootouts, but nowhere near as many as there are in the U.S. Gun control is possible, but you need the political will to see it through.
» Michele Gyselinck // Montreal, Quebec

We would do better by finding some balance in our perspective about guns (“Beyond Thoughts and Prayers”). Police really need guns. Our Second Amendment creates legal rights (even if subject to reasonable regulation) for folks to have guns. And some folks have and use guns for legitimate reasons.

And, of course, the “removal of guns in our communities” wouldn’t remove crime—even murder—from our communities. To say it another way, the “removal of guns in our communities” will not create the “shalom” that this article suggests it will.

» Doug Vande Griend // online comment

Reach Out

DIVORCE ROCKED MY WORLD when my spouse left me. Now, as my 30s draw to a close, I’m alone and a single parent—certainly not by choice.

Where do I fit in with my family and community? Where do I fit into the church? Being a divorced single parent, I’m finding, is a tough, lonely spot to be. Like so many others, I long for someone to share my life with. But I had supper with an elderly person from church recently who said that someone who is divorced ought never to remarry because it’s a sin. That’s tough stuff.

I wonder how I fit into God’s kingdom. Is there grace for me? Will there be a place at God’s table for the divorced? For the lonely? For the desperately hungry? It seems easier for churches to welcome the recovering addict or the converted soul with a great story than it is for them to welcome someone who is divorced.

Trust me, I carry enough shame and misery to last several lifetimes. I’ve been rejected by family and sidelined by former friends. I don’t need more judgment from Christian men and women. The sting of divorce may not have hit your family, but statistics suggest it likely will at some point, so hold your fire. Take a deep breath. Extend grace. I didn’t choose my path, but I must keep walking it with my children, who are as confused and hurt as I am. Is there anyone in the church who can look me in the eye, reach out a hand, and walk with me? Is there anyone who will walk with my children and stick with them when they break down from the stress of life? Who will look at our story with love and hold back judgment?

Is there anyone in the church who can look me in the eye, reach out a hand, and walk with me?

It’s time for the church to stand tall and wrap their arms around people who are marginalized: the ones with hurting hearts, the ones who are mentally ill or who have disabilities, the ones with gender or sexuality issues, the divorced, the widows and widowers, the young adults who are trying to figure out how to live, the ones who look like they have it all together but are falling apart inside, the ones living in marriages that are crumbling, the teens who aren’t connecting, the children who have issues, the elderly who weep, the families dealing with estrangement, the wayward children (or wayward parents), the ones struggling with addiction or lost in grief.

Did you see yourself in that list? If not, do you know anyone who might fit in that list? Reach out, people of God. We need each other. We need Jesus. And we all belong to each other. It’s time to be bold and to love big. My kids need more love, and so do I. **B**

The author is a lifetime member of the CRC, parent of two children, and child of God. She lives and works in the Midwest.

READ MORE ONLINE



Dyess Chapel Vacation Bible School, U.S. Air Force photo by A1C Jennifer Romig

Creating Space to Serve

Lisa Van Engen

The film *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* begins with the phrase “The world is changed.” The world is changed—and it continues to change with rapid momentum. Keeping pace while living a life reflective of Jesus is challenging. The messages young people see and hear daily draw them to turn the photo lens toward themselves and curate a picture-perfect life.

But as we and our children are increasingly tempted to turn inward, we move further away from the servant heart of Jesus. How can we instead be intentional in teaching children and young people to serve rather than to be served, to look outward instead of inward, to give rather than to consume?

Proverbs 16:3 suggests a starting place: “Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (ESV). We tend to wear badges of importance that coincide with how busy our lives are. We thrive on being

overscheduled. We dangle on the edge of burnout as we work hard to scaffold grades, travel teams, social functions, college admission goals, and Pinterest perfection into our lives.

But in a world that is increasingly loud and busy, our full schedules sometimes cause us to run from the Spirit nudges that make us uncomfortable. Unless we deliberately set out to create space in our lives to be reflective and pay attention, such reflection is unlikely to happen.

We can begin that process within our families by sitting down together and asking some key questions:

- » Why are we choosing the activities we participate in?
- » Have we sat down and intentionally looked at our calendars?
- » Are we realistic about what we do each day?

Asking such questions can provide the young people in our lives with the direction and permission they need to leave uncluttered space in their own

lives. Slowing down, being bored, and having free days and open weekends can create spacious spaces for God to use. We need spaces where we can be quiet enough to listen to God’s direction—spaces where, underneath the expansive clouds, God might lay a dream on our hearts. When that happens, we have space to linger when a lonely person longs for their story to be heard. When extra hands are needed for a project, we have an hour to spare. When challenges pile up, we have mental space to sort them out. Open space has a way of unfolding and leading us to the place where God needs us most.

Aligning our priorities with the heart of Jesus requires us to love our neighbor. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11, ESV). In a world that molds us inward, we need to push back to turn outward. Teaching our young people to realize that our own lives are not the center of the universe is essential to servant living. What steps can we take to widen our view

and place ourselves in a bigger world? Together with our children and young people, we can ask these questions:

- » What can we learn from our neighbors, church family, co-workers, and classmates?
- » What can we read together to help understand other perspectives?
- » How can we expand our boundaries to include people who are different from us?
- » When can we listen rather than speak our own thoughts?

God created each of us with unique beauty, gifts, and stories, and all these intertwining parts are reflective of Christ. Our differences make our lives richer and deeper. Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" encourages us to open our lives to the stories of others. When we see Jesus in the lives of others, we can't help but turn from ourselves to them. In a world full of noise, truly listening to another is a gift in itself. Even better, we often learn the heart of God in the story of a life.

Giving our lives fully to Jesus in this way allows us to find true meaning and joy. "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11, ESV). We long for our young people to live out real, authentic lives where their gifts and unique strengths align with giving back to others—and not just as a task to check off a to-do list. We can help our children and young people discover what gives them meaning and joy by asking questions like these:

- » What interests you? What do you lay awake at night dreaming of?
- » What activities and moments in your life have made you feel truly happy?
- » What do you wish you had time to try?

» What skills are you interested in developing?

A beautiful gift you can give to young people in your life is helping them find that sweet space where their gifts meet a need in God's world. Share with them the things you have noticed God doing in them. Expose them to different experiences and

Slowing down, being bored, and having free days and open weekends can create spacious spaces for God to use.

provide chances to serve in various ways. Learn about spiritual gifts together. Complete personality inventories and discuss the results. Show them all the ways people make a difference through their vocation, interests, and volunteering. Soon they will grow to recognize small moments and big opportunities to give of themselves. Tell them about moments in your life when you felt the undeniable joy of serving.


We find the clearest direction of this servant life in 1 John 3:16: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." Jesus cared deeply about people. Keep that example before the young people in your life. Jesus washed his disciples' feet. He spoke to the woman at the well. He stopped to listen to Zacchaeus and the demon-possessed man. He healed the man with leprosy, the hemorrhaging woman, the paralytic. He fed the hungry with a boy's lunch of loaves and fish. He welcomed

children. As a family, talk about those examples using questions like these:

- » How can we imprint the stories of Jesus on our hearts?
- » In what ways do you want to follow the example of Jesus?
- » What is surprising or inspiring to you about Jesus' teachings?
- » What type of people did Jesus care about? What does this teach us?

Deuteronomy 11:19-21 encourages us to keep the Word of God before us while we are sitting and walking and lying down and rising up. Study the intimate passages of the extreme care, humility, and love of Christ together. A heart bent to service was Jesus' life's purpose when he died for us. If we long to give our lives to God, Jesus is our guide.

When our family's worldview is widened, we know that our own lives are not the center of everything. We are moved to serve as we are uniquely designed to do in an open space that allows us to give of ourselves. Our example is the expansive love of Christ.

Yes, the world is changing. But God's truths never change. 



Lisa Van Engen writes from her home in Holland, Mich. You can follow her work at lisavanengen.com.

1. What are some of the forces in our lives today that may tempt us and our children to turn inward and lose sight of following Jesus' servant heart?

2. Try to recall an experience of slowing down and having free...

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

BIG QUESTIONS

Faith Formation

Our church has mix of kids who know the stories of the Bible well and those who are hearing the stories for the first time. How do we effectively teach when children have different levels of Bible knowledge?

Teaching children with different degrees of Bible knowledge is a challenge for teachers in church education and in day schools. But while schools care about more than just achievement, their primary purpose is academic. Faith is not an academic achievement, however. It is a gift from God.

Knowing what the Bible says is important, both for those who have been in church for most of their lives and for those who are new to church. In class, leaders can acknowledge that some are hearing the story for the first time and others may already have heard the story. As followers of Christ, we listen to the Bible story more than once because each time we hear something new, and we get better at listening for how God is at work in the story. Come with questions about the story that aren't fact-based but help kids explore and make connections by retelling the story in pictures, drama, writing, or song. Invite conversation by talking about how people in the stories felt. What would you do, for example, if you were with Gideon facing an army with just a torch, a jug, and a trumpet?

While knowledge is part of our faith, there is more. Programs like church school serve the church by providing



Illustration for The Banner by Céline Malépart

a space, time, and place for learning God's story but also for building relationships. Intergenerational relationships are an important aspect of helping kids feel they belong in a congregation. Use the opening and closing parts of your class time to demonstrate that everyone belongs to your group. Ask each person in your class for a good thing that happened today or a place where they saw God in the past week. A child or teen will remember you and how you treated them much longer than they remember the name of Moses' wife or who caused the ax head to float.

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

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

Relationships

How can a couple married for 50-plus years keep romance and intimacy alive? Should they even try?

It is tempting for a long-married couple to think of sexual (romantic) intimacy in isolation from the rest of the relationship. Just as we think of light or sound in terms of both

particle and wave at the same time, so romantic intimacy is both a strong drive (like hunger) that "demands" expression and an intricate relationship dance that weaves itself through life over time, much like a wave. If either of these two primary aspects of a loving marriage is not concurrently enjoyed, then the relationship might need some help.

The answer to your question, therefore, is yes, they should try. But the answer is also: It depends. The drive and dance in a relationship may be primary, but secondary factors—the experience of desire (or lack of desire) for one's spouse, one's health or illness, or one's ability to process new information, for example—cannot be ignored. An older couple will inevitably move toward the "in sickness" part of their marriage vows because old age inevitably leads to death. However, if a couple is motivated by love for each other, adaptations to accommodate each other's weaknesses will match the Holy Spirit's gifts of kindness, gentleness, and self-control. And the expression of romantic intimacy can vary from little to much without violating some perceived standard.

If a couple experiences love, values companionship, desires to resolve differences with respect, and forgives each other's shortcomings on a daily

basis, then even if romantic intimacy has stopped, for whatever reason, the marriage can still be very much alive.

Judy Cook is a family therapist and a member of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ont.

Ethics

I know that we are not supposed to judge others (Matt. 7:1-5). But how do you not judge evil people like Hitler? We can't just let evil grow unhindered.

I define being judgmental as condemning other people's faults while downplaying our own, creating a sense of moral superiority. There is a difference between being judgmental and holding people accountable for their actions.

We need to discern between right and wrong, good and evil. That is not optional. Neither is holding people accountable for their actions. Evil acts need to be resisted so as to mitigate their harm—on innocent people especially. But these should be done humbly, fairly, and truthfully.

Remember that judgmentalism is rarely about bringing restoration, even though it is often disguised as such. Judgmentalism arises from our sinful desire to avoid our own faults by focusing on another's in order to make ourselves feel morally superior. Research has shown that we tend to judge people who are doing worse than we are doing in the areas we feel vulnerable to shame. For example, if we feel ashamed of our own bodies, we tend to judge other people's weight or appearance. If we feel ashamed of our own sexuality, we might judge other people's sexual lifestyle. It is a hypocritical, often subconscious way to deflect attention away from the plank in our own eye to the speck in our neighbor's eye (Matt. 7:3).

Therefore, although we do need to call out sin and evil, we must do

so with humility, graciously and truthfully. We must do so through proper channels while hoping for repentance. Our goal is restoration, not condemnation. Our motivation is for God's glory and the common good, not for our own moral superiority. Otherwise, we slip into judgmentalism. And it's contagious.

This is amply demonstrated by most of what occurs online and in social media. Are people condemning, attacking, and mocking others to make themselves feel better rather than finding solutions? And will Christians resolve to halt the contagious spread of such judgmentalism?

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

Missional Living

Am I alone in grieving every Sunday morning at the empty pews that were once full?

You are not alone.

Retired Christian Reformed pastor Henry Wildeboer once lamented, "I love the Lord and I love his church. So it grieves me to learn that the Christian Reformed Church declined in membership from 316,000 in 1992 to 245,000 in 2014. . . . These are not good signs. . . . Our efforts have not stopped membership losses or shortfalls in agency budgets. Unless God intervenes, we will soon face a crisis in which some churches' very existence will be in jeopardy. There is a problem. So how do we stop this trend? Where do we look for a road map that can lead us out of this morass? Perhaps our denomination is in need of revival" ("These Bones Can Live," Nov. 2014).

Wildeboer's comments urge our utmost attention and action. According to the Calvin Social Research Center's demographic studies on churches, our birth rate has slowed significantly, the saints are passing away at a greater rate, and

churches are closing. The denomination's own 2014 Strategic Planning and Adaptive Change Report revealed our struggles as a denomination and put evangelism front and center.

In response, Resonate Global Mission is expanding efforts around the world to grow the church by working with partners to plant new churches and renew established churches. Prayer and the strategic use of finances and human resources are crucial to these efforts.

I encourage you, along with all members of the church, to pray and work with your own congregation to bring in someone who does not know the Lord. I believe we can all bring at least one person to Jesus.

I challenge all 1,094 Christian Reformed churches in North America to invite each member to share the gospel with at least one person. It is no longer acceptable for any Christian Reformed congregation to record not a single new member added to its membership through evangelism outreach.

Sharing the gospel and inviting people to join God's mission in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) is paramount to our future as a denomination. Every church must be held accountable for growing the CRC with the good news of Jesus in their unique locales. I believe God will intervene.

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



Sisters' Summer Snacks Make a Difference in Sarnia

NEWS

For more news and longer stories about the churches and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church, visit *TheBanner.org*. Or get the free app by searching for "CRCNA Banner" in your app store.

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Abby, Paige, and Sydney Vrolyk saw a need in their community and decided to do something about it. On May 3, the sisters launched "Snacks for Summer," a campaign to raise \$5,000 to purchase snacks for local children and youth. The snacks were to be distributed from June 25 to August 28 through a local food bank. The Vrolyk sisters enlisted the help of family, their community, and their church, Redeemer Christian Reformed Church in Sarnia, Ont.

Abby (15), Paige (17), and Sydney (18) recognized that many of their peers relied on their school's breakfast programs and snack supplies during the school year but didn't have access to that support for the summer. As their campaign slogan noted, "Hunger doesn't take a vacation."

The girls' parents, John Vrolyk and Helen Van Slightenhorst, have been very supportive, said Paige, providing trips to the grocery store, help with details, and lots of encouragement. "This has been really good for the girls," said Van Slightenhorst. She noted that the girls have taken ownership of the campaign at every level, promoting it on the local radio station,



(Left to right) Sydney, Paige, and Abby Vrolyk

requesting help from the church council, writing thank-you notes, and approaching organizations for support. "We're very proud of all of them."

Sydney is an honorary deacon at Redeemer CRC, and all three girls are actively involved in the church. Within five days of their speaking to council about the project, said Paige, a room was fitted with shelving and transformed into a pantry. The church treasurer took on the responsibility of issuing receipts for donations.

—Anita Brinkman

New and Continuing College Students Blessed with Scholarships

Five students from Pease (Minn.) Christian Reformed Church are beginning their new school year with the support of scholarships from their congregation. Two different awards, totaling \$1,500 per student, are presented each June to graduating high school students and continuing college students attending a Christian institution. "I am very grateful and hope one day to support and give back to other students who desire to attend a Christian college," said multi-year recipient Molly Banks.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

High school grad scholarship recipients Zachary Ten Haken, Dylan Ash, Ellie Banks, and Marissa Peel

READ MORE ONLINE



Photo: Michael Ten Haken

Mission Trip to Guatemala Coincides With Volcanic Eruption

As the Fuego volcano erupted in Guatemala in June, a group from Michigan and Iowa arrived for a planned mission trip. Twenty-five young people and leaders from Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., along with nine people from New Hope Community Church in Sioux City, Iowa, worked with Paradise Bound Ministries to help construct homes and assist in a medical clinic. In spite of the devastation, the trip went mostly according to plan.

Erika Doorn, Hillcrest's youth group director, said that although the closest the group got to the volcano was 17 miles (27 km), the effect of the ash cloud was present throughout. "It was foggy," she said, "and it looked like everything was covered in dust." Student Zach Van Dyke said, "The cloud was like brown fog that covered everything. However, unlike fog, the brown cloud stayed on whatever it touched, leaving a residue on windshields and the road."

The group's planned activities were mostly unaffected except for some altered routes to some of the destinations and finishing the week assisting at a shelter for volcano evacuees. They spent three days in one village building homes for five families, dedicating



Driving through the ash cloud.

the homes, and sharing the gospel with the families. In two other villages they held day-long medical clinics with Paradise Bound's Guatemalan staff. The ministry's goal is "to do 'whatever it takes' to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to [people who are] lost and dying in Guatemala." Doorn said that God had worked throughout the whole experience. "All of those things were not only able to continue, but God worked miraculously through them as well. In a time when that country was heartbroken, God was able to comfort."

— Kyle Hoogendoorn

Highlights of Spring Classis Meetings

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional grouping of churches. Here are the highlights of classis meetings of the past few months.

Those **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** include seminary graduates Sarah Hoogendoorn and Ricardo Tavarez.

Ministers **transferring in from other denominations** were Michael Moore, Jesse Eng, and Enoch Jinsik Kim.

Minister released from a congregation:

Mark Kamper from Holland Heights CRC, Holland, Mich.

Released from ministry in the CRC: Steve Pearson and Chris Pool. John Douma was **dismissed**.

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

An emerging church does not have its own council and is under the care of a council of a neighboring CRC. An organized church has its own council.

New Hope CRC, Hamilton, Ont., will be **organized**.

—Banner Staff

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Henry "Henk" Smidstra
1943-2017

Missionary, church planter, and prison chaplain Henk Smidstra passed away in Langley Hospice on September 21, 2017, nine months after being diagnosed with glioblastoma, a type of brain cancer.

Born in the Netherlands, Smidstra immigrated with his family to Canada in 1949. He initially worked as a mechanic but later felt the call to ministry. After graduating from Calvin College and Seminary, he interned for a year at a Native outreach centre in San Francisco before serving for seven years in the Philippines as a missionary and church planter with Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission). After returning to Canada, he worked for several years in victim/offender reconciliation and prisoner restorative ministries. From 1991 until his retirement in 2012, he served as prison chaplain at two correctional centers for women in British Columbia.

Smidstra enjoyed biking and hiking. One of his great joys during the last months of his life in hospice was going out to a coffee shop with friends.

Left to cherish his memory are his wife, Grace; four children; and four grandchildren. Smidstra's commitment to his family, friends, and colleagues, and his passionate pursuit of justice, equality, and shalom will be his enduring legacy.

—Janet Greidanus

Controversial Attestation for Canadian Job Grants Adds Politics to Summer Programming

In Canada, many Christian Reformed churches regularly apply for and receive government wage-supplement grants to hire students for summer initiatives. A change to the application process this year and differing opinions on what it signified added complexity, confusion, disappointment—and, in at least one case, even opportunity—to the work of running summer ministries.

The 2018 Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) application form required applicants to attest “that both the job and the organization’s core mandate respect individual human rights in Canada, including the values underlying the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as other rights. These include reproductive rights and the right to be free from discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, race, national or ethnic origin, color, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation or gender identity or expression.”

“At first blush the attestation appears innocuous,” said Barry Bussey, director of legal affairs for the Canadian Council of Christian Charities (CCCC), a partner of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. “Who could be against the values underlying the Charter and the freedom from discrimination? However, behind that velvet glove is an iron fist,” he suggested. “The government is telling us that we must accept its values. The values of prenatal life and traditional marriage that many of our members attest are anathema to this government.”

“This attestation sets a very troubling precedent of requiring respect for values and rights in order to be eligible for a government program,” stated the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), another CRCNA partner, on its website. “This kind of values test violates the fundamental freedoms of Canadians guaranteed in the Charter, such as the freedom of religion, conscience, belief, speech, and opinion.”



Staff and leaders-in-training from Mountainview CRC’s day camp.

According to a government spokesman, the attestation was added because in the past some funded organizations had used their grants “to undermine the rights of Canadians. For example, funding was used to support organizations that distribute graphic images of aborted fetuses and organizations that do not welcome LGBTQ2 young people at their youth programs.”

Because the human rights in the attestation include “reproductive rights” and “the right to access safe and legal abortions,” many applicants felt they could not in good conscience check the box.

“The political tempest over the attestation requirement is a troubling example of wedge politics,” said Mike Hogeterp of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue. “We’re frustrated with it because it diminishes trust in this government that has done some important things in critical areas of justice—Indigenous rights and refugee protection, for example.”

A motion by the opposition party that raised thoughtful concerns about the attestation was defeated in Parliament on March 19.

For churches concerned about the attestation, the back-and-forth while deadlines passed created some stress and confusion. That was true for Mountainview CRC in Grimsby, Ont. Mountainview offers a six-week summer camp for children that is one of the few that accepts kids with special needs. In the past, the church has used its CSJ grant to hire camp counselors and support staff. The church decided in January to submit its application without checking the box and with an attached explanation. In April, the church received a response to the initial application: since the attestation had been modified, it was not acceptable. They were given 10 days to reply, signing the application with the attestation as written. The church sent it back the same way as previously with a request for an accommodation. While this correspondence was going on, the CCCC informed its members by email that some members’ “CSJ applications have been approved and funds granted despite their opposition to the attestation.” Confusing, indeed. However, the reports turned out to be misunderstood—anyone altering the application was not considered for funding.

On June 1, Mountainview received official word from CSJ that their application was declined because they had modified the attestation. That left Mountainview

in search of other funding. Here was the opportunity.

“God has provided abundantly,” said Christine Winter, children’s ministry and camp director. “We raised around \$20,000 from our congregation (\$11,000 in one Sunday morning offering alone) and a few thousand [dollars] more from the community to help pay for one of our special needs counselors. We raised camp fees from \$100 to \$125 a week.” Winter said the camp ran with 19 paid staff and about 25 volunteer leaders-in-training, filling more than 500 camper spots.

Not every Christian Reformed church responded to the CSJ application the way Mountainview did. A few completed the application process, checked the box, and

went on to receive funding for their summer staff. In those cases the applicants did not see the attestation as holding them to any political position—as their Member of Parliament offices assured them. Citing the potential misunderstanding on what has become a flashpoint issue, and the lack of space in a single quote to detail their perspectives, none wished to be identified for this article.

The Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue has encouraged churches and other Christian groups to consider the advice of the CCCC and the EFC over this issue. The Council continues to raise funds and review legal options to challenge the policy change.

—Janet Greidanus

Childlike Excitement for Reformed Doctrine in ‘Peanut Catechism’

Catechism at Coopersville (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church isn’t a class for bored teenagers or shy middle-schoolers but an exuberant reciting of Reformed doctrine with lively children ages 3 to 6. Pastor Lloyd Hemstreet leads Peanut Catechism, a class held on select Friday mornings for the past two summers.

Hemstreet uses material from *First Catechism* by Great Commission Publications as well as the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The young students’ progress is marked with stickers and cards declaring “Nailed it!”—a phrase borrowed from an enthusiastic participant who happily shouted it whenever she got an answer correct. Hemstreet gives each child an opportunity to share his or her understanding of catechism during snack time. He places a sticker on the Nailed It cards for every appropriate answer.

The 2017 Peanut Catechism included 12 kids, all from within the congregation or



“Nailed It” Cards keep track of progress in Coopersville CRC’s Peanut Catechism.

grandchildren of church members. “It is primarily an attempt to keep our baptismal vows and train little ones to know the truths of God’s Word,” said Hemstreet.

—Eliza Anderson

IN MEMORIAM



Morris N. Greidanus

1936-2018

Morris Greidanus was a sound and creative preacher known for his love, wisdom, grace, and wit. Eschewing the title “Reverend,” he wanted everyone to call him “Morris.” Morris died on June 14 after being blessed with five “bonus” years following a stem cell transplant for lymphoma. He had planned to preach from Psalm 121 the Sunday before his death.

A graduate of Calvin College and Seminary, Morris later obtained a M.Th. from Toronto’s Knox College. He served the Christian Reformed Church throughout Canada and the U.S. for 54 years in congregational ministry, campus ministry, and, from 2005-2006, as president of Toronto’s Institute for Christian Studies.

Morris loved participating in synod, classis, and other church meetings. A highlight was being involved for over 40 years in writing the original and updated editions of *Our World Belongs to God; A Contemporary Testimony*. He recently completed a history of the contemporary testimony that will soon be published. He also enjoyed reading, cycling, sailing, windsurfing, and times at the cottage at Big Star Lake, Mich.

He will be missed by Alice, his wife of 58 years; their three children and spouses; five grandchildren; three great grandchildren; and by seven siblings and numerous in-laws. He was predeceased by great-granddaughter Phoebe.

—Janet Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Robert (Bob) Brummel
1936-2018

Bob Brummel was a listener, a comforter, and a guide to people who were suffering. He had a quiet, purposeful tone and an ability to speak freely and frankly with people regardless of rank, race, status, or gender. Brummel died on May 9.

After graduating from Calvin College, Brummel taught high school biology for a few years before returning to school and graduating from Calvin Seminary. He then became a Navy chaplain during the Vietnam War. He served on ships off the coast of Vietnam, with the Marines in Okinawa, the Naval Air Facility on Andrews Air Force Base, and in various military hospitals, where his interest in hospital ministry deepened. After retiring from the Navy in 1979, he served as chaplain at Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital while pursuing certification as a supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education. From 1983 until his retirement in 2004, he was director of pastoral care at Ohio State University Hospitals.

An avid tennis player and a voracious reader, Brummel loved choral music, sitting in quiet communion with nature, and a good, cold beer.

He is survived by Mary, his wife of 57 years; and by their two children, five grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.

—Janet Greidanus

Moving Forward after Canadian Supreme Court's Law School Ruling

On June 15, 2018, the Supreme Court of Canada ruling regarding a Christian law school sparked discussion around the world about religious freedom in Canada. The case involved Trinity Western University's (TWU) proposed law school in Langley, B.C.

TWU began the process of opening a Christian law school in 2012 but faced opposition from the law societies of British Columbia and Ontario. The law societies refused accreditation to graduates of the proposed law school because of its requirement that all students must sign a community covenant including a commitment to abstain from sexual relations outside the context of marriage between a man and woman.

After dealing with continued opposition, TWU appealed to the Supreme Court, presenting their case in November 2017.

In a complex and detailed ruling, the Court upheld the decisions of the two law societies. While this decision places limits on TWU's rights of religious freedom, the Court ruled in favor of a proportionate balance to protect public interests, particularly those of the LGBTQ communities who could not gain equal access to legal education in Canada.

"Thinking about TWU, this has been a dream they have been building toward for many, many years. The disappointment, given all the work that was put into it—it's just devastating for Trinity Western," said Bruce Clemenger, president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) and an intervenor on this case. The Christian Reformed Church is a member of the EFC.

Clemenger and legal co-counsel Albertos Polizogopoulos spoke about the implications of the ruling in an online forum hosted by the EFC on June 27. Justin Cooper, executive director of Christian Higher Education Canada, also participated. Cooper served as president of Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ont., for 15 years and is a member of First CRC in Hamilton, Ont.

The forum addressed questions such as: What does this mean for religious freedom in Canada? What are the implications moving

forward? What does this mean for other institutions that have covenants or statements of faith?

"Contrary to [what] some [media] have been saying, this is not the end of religious freedom in Canada. This is a very specific and focused decision," Polizogopoulos stated. "Because the court relied on the 'reasonableness' of this case, this is not a binding precedent. It is a decision that is very specific to this set of facts."

Clemenger agreed. He said that judicial reviews on Canada Summer Jobs attestation may be more concerning and telling of implications for faith-based organizations (see "Controversial Attestation for Canadian Job Grants Adds Politics to Summer Programming," p. 16)

"The worst thing is to be striking back with unbalanced arguments. The best thing the Christian community could be doing is steadfast prayer," said Cooper. "This is a spiritual battle, and the Bible teaches us that our strongest weapon is prayer. Engage the public square and use the freedom we have in this land."

Along with those represented in the online forum, other groups continue to discuss implications for faith organizations that seek accreditation from governing bodies.

Cardus, a faith-based think tank with offices in Hamilton and Ottawa, established its Cardus Religious Freedom Institute in May.

"As a think tank, we are trying to understand the implications of the Trinity Western [decision] and are in active discussions with other organizations about what it means. Cardus is so passionate about researching and profiling how communities of faith produce a tremendous amount of good," said Michael Van Pelt, executive director of Cardus and a member of First CRC in Hamilton. "As some Canadians are less involved in religious exercises and distanced from their own religious heritage, it becomes easy to overlook the importance of the freedom of religion in our charter," observed Van Pelt. "I wonder

Marking 20 Years of Middle School SERVE

[if] when you've lived with religious freedom for such a long time, it becomes so embedded that it's easy to take it for granted."

Robert Joustra is director of the Centre for Christian Scholarship at Redeemer University College and editor of Public Justice Review for the Center for Public Justice in Washington, D.C. "Ultimately, the decision, coupled together with challenges like Canada Summer Jobs, signal that public morality is thickening. You could say the state is making its own community covenant, and wherever it touches other religions in public spaces, it will prevail. For those who do not share the state's community covenant on these issues, the TWU decision may signal for them a wake-up," he explained.

The message from key leaders is clear. Educate. Pray. Engage. It will take years and even decades to see the full implications of this moment in legal history and to answer the questions of what this truly means for Christian higher education.

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Many Christian Reformed churches participate yearly in SERVE trips, the annual summer service and faith formation ministry of Youth Unlimited (YU). While trips geared for high school students are more plentiful, YU has now been offering students in middle school the same opportunities for 20 summers.

Two middle school SERVE sites were available this summer, hosted by Friendship Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Mich. (their 13th year of hosting), and by Ann Arbor (Mich.) CRC. A regular participant in both high school and middle school programs, the Ann Arbor church has committed to three years of hosting SERVE teams; 2018 is the second year.

Ross Weener, coordinator of Ann Arbor CRC's youth ministries, appreciates the clear focus on integrating faith and service. He believes SERVE experiences can be a key piece in faith formation for all middle school and high school students. Although similar to SERVE for high school teens, the middle school SERVE program is one day shorter. It provides service

experiences for participants completing 6th through 8th grades and includes a modified curriculum promoting faith formation. The 2018 theme, "Love God, Love the World," was explored through small group and team-building activities; in approximately seven-hour days on various work sites; and in evening sessions of praise and worship featuring a special speaker.

The Ann Arbor site this July hosted students from CRC churches in Michigan and Ontario and from a United Methodist church in Ohio.

"My youth would say the week was life-changing," said Cindy Schreutelkamp, youth director at ClearView CRC in Oakville, Ont. Students made new friends and were challenged about breaking bread with others, serving strangers, and stepping out of their comfort boxes.

Youth Unlimited is a nonprofit, non-denominational Christian ministry organization focused on assisting local congregations in their youth ministry.

—Anita Ensing Beem

News Digest

Calvin Seminary Offers Online Courses in Spanish

Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich., is offering two master's-level online courses taught in Spanish this academic year. Taught by professor Mariano Avila, a class on Ephesians is running now and an Old Testament course begins in February 2019.

Calvin has offered Spanish-language courses on campus over the past seven years; it added the remote-learning option in response to requests from pastors and church leaders.

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Student to Student Ministry on Campus at GVSU

An intern program with the Christian Reformed campus ministry at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Mich., has helped the ministry expand over the last four years. Funded by a Lilly Foundation grant, the program affords student leaders greater opportunities to reach their peers, said campus minister Scott Stark. The interns meet as a group one Saturday a month for four hours to learn leadership and spiritual skills as well as to reflect on the connection between faith and vocation.

Dordt College Receives Final Ruling on Healthcare Injunction

A June 12 court ruling granted Dordt College a permanent injunction against certain requirements in the Affordable Care Act mandate; specifically, covering the costs of certain drugs and interventions intended to interfere with pregnancy. Howard Wilson, vice president of the Iowa institution, was grateful for what he called "a long-awaited victory." "Our faith governs all spheres of life, including healthcare, and we want to provide our employees with comprehensive healthcare but within the bounds of what we understand as biblical principles and ethics."

—Banner correspondents

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Louis F. Baker
1924-2018

Pastor, chaplain, gardener, carpenter, inventor, and fisherman, Louis Baker was a man of deep faith who reflected deeply on issues of faith. After several years of living with Parkinson's disease, Baker died on May 4. He was 93.

After serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, Baker graduated from Calvin College and Calvin Seminary. He received an M.Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1954. He pastored several Christian Reformed churches before taking chaplaincy training at St. Luke's Hospital in Milwaukee, Wisc. He then established the Pastoral Care Department at Evanston General Hospital. From 1985 until his retirement in 1990, Baker served Hull CRC in Hague, N.D. During his retirement years in Saugatuck, Mich., he was pastor of visitation at two churches in Holland, Mich. He also served on the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and was Stated Clerk of Classis Wisconsin.

Baker had a dry wit and a playful sense of humor. He enjoyed the outdoors and long walks. He was also very frugal. "Beneath that frugality," his daughter explained, "lay a deep-seated stewardship of God's creation."

Baker is survived by Trudy, his wife of 65 years; their four children and spouses; and six grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

—Janet Greidanus

Redeemer Appoints President After Year-Long Search

Robert Graham has become the fourth president of Redeemer University College. The Board of Governors of the Ancaster, Ont., institution announced the appointment in June, following just over a year-long search. Graham has a Master of Gerontological Studies from Miami University and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Cincinnati along with 10 years of leadership experience in Christian higher education. The presidency had been vacant since Hubert Krygsman stepped down midterm in 2016. Fred Verwoerd, the school's vice president of administration and finance, served as interim president from December of that year.

"It's been a challenging process, and we wanted to be thorough. The search committee was made up of members from the board, faculty, and alumni. We really tried to draw from Redeemer's community," said Jason Schouten, the current chair of Redeemer's Board of Governors and co-chair of the president search committee.

The committee employed an executive search firm to aid the process, having the firm screen applicants using a detailed profile and providing analysis on the top leads to the committee. After interviews this past spring, Graham was the clear choice. His success at Grove City College and Waynesburg University, two Christian institutions in Pennsylvania, demonstrated his leadership capabilities. His leadership style also set him apart from other candidates.

"He prefers to lead through listening, caring, and connecting. It was clear that he takes the time to really listen to people and takes notice of how people are feeling," explained Schouten. "Also, he sees the importance of bringing people and departments together, a commitment to connecting the whole, seeing the broader view."

Upon hearing the recommendation of the search committee, the Board of Governors unanimously appointed Graham as Redeemer's next president.

Redeemer has faced significant changes since 2012, when it experienced a drop in



Robert Graham

enrollment: shifting faculty and administration, restructuring program offerings, and working to reduce long-term debt.

"We've had to make a lot of hard decisions, but we have seen real commitment from the board, administration, faculty, and staff. The financial situation has stabilized, and enrollment is showing a slight increase," said Schouten.

Graham recognizes these struggles. In a press release issued by Redeemer, he noted, "I have become increasingly aware of the unique and evolving challenges facing Christian education. My experiences supporting different Christian institutions have prepared me to be a strong advocate for Redeemer University College."

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

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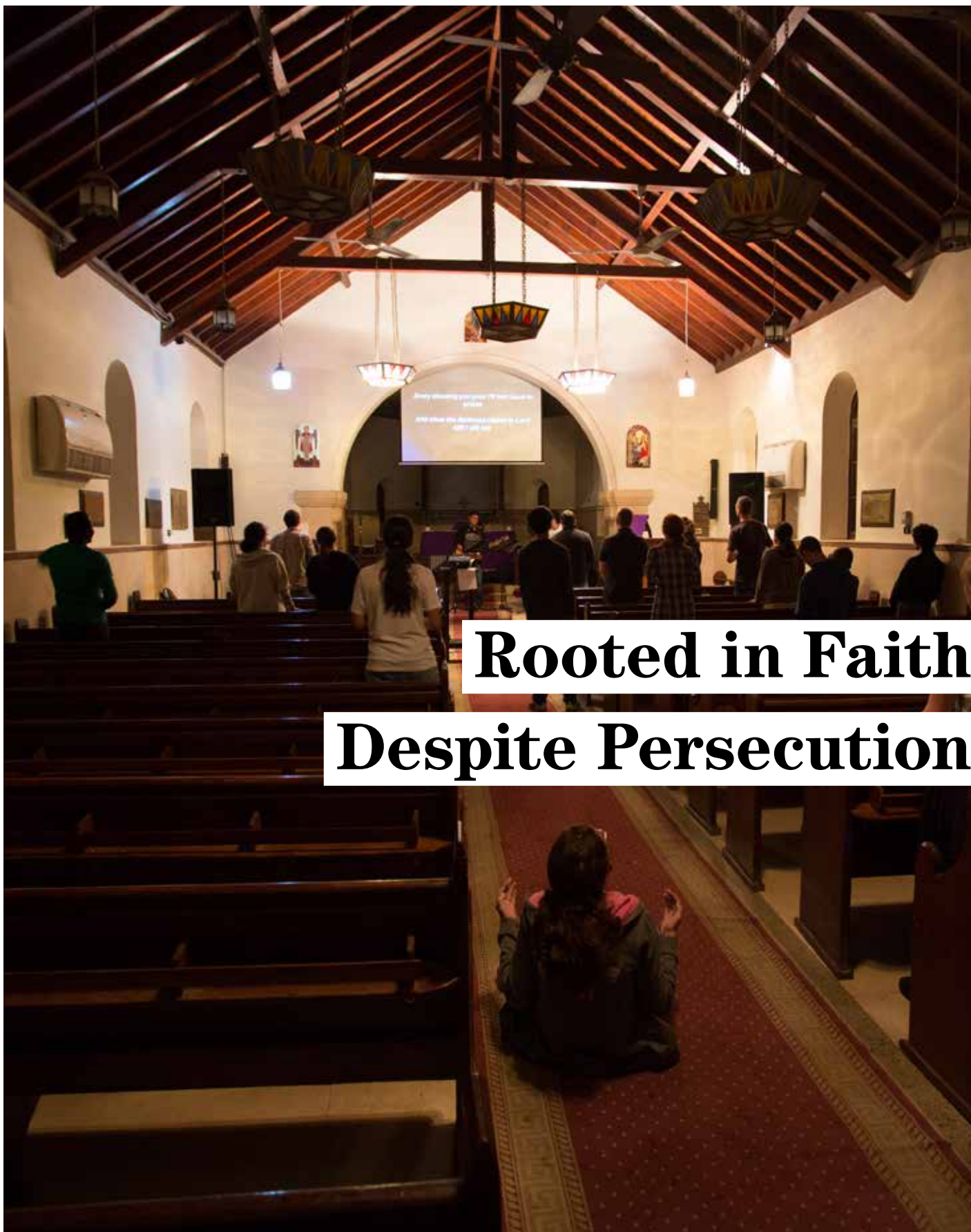
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CALVIN
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Rooted in Faith Despite Persecution

by Brian Clark, Allyson Wierenga, and Cassie Westrate

When thinking of the persecuted church, you might picture a small gathering in a dark room at night. Christians in North Korea, Afghanistan, or Somalia may jump to the front of your mind—for good reason.

But persecution takes many forms and happens in some unexpected places. For example, both Julio and Yuriiko know what it means to be persecuted for their faith. They've also experienced how God is using the Christian Reformed Church to draw them into God's love.

Cultural Pressure in Mexico

Fourteen-year-old Julio's family lacked a solid religious foundation. They identified as Catholic, but only in name. This all changed about three years ago, when Julio and his two sisters heard about the Saturday Kids Club held at Jesús El Salvador Church in their hometown of Juárez, Mexico.

The year-round vacation Bible school ministry led by Blanca Gifford, a missionary with Resonate Global Mission, offers children a home-cooked meal and teaches kids about God through Bible lessons, crafts, and other activities.

Julio and his sisters loved it so much that they became regular attendees.

Still, Julio wanted to go deeper in his faith.

He began attending worship and Sunday school on his own to learn more about church. As his faith strengthened, he and his sisters began to ask their parents why they didn't do things like pray before meals or read the Bible at home.

Julio's parents were pleased and intrigued about the changes they were seeing in their kids.

"Julio's mom was always grateful for the wonderful program we were providing for the kids in the neighborhood," Gifford said. "Once in awhile she would say to me, 'I will come to church when I'm ready. I would like to come, but not yet.'"

Mexican culture and society does not always make faith an easy step.

"In Latin America, Roman Catholics tend to lump all Protestant and evangelical churches with the cults. 'Sects' is the word used," said David Gifford, Blanca's husband and fellow Resonate missionary. "The persecution here is usually just verbal—mockery. But it can also manifest as not

getting a job or a promotion, or, in extreme cases, being evicted or rejected by one's family."

Julio's family's story took a turn when their landlord threatened to evict them if they kept attending Kids Club.

David noted that the United States and Mexico have very different histories. While the U.S. was founded on religious freedom, the Roman Catholic Church had a monopoly for centuries in Latin America.

Other churches were not allowed to come into Mexico to evangelize until the 1900s. As a result, Mexican culture and society is influenced heavily by a Catholic culture that's not open to evangelical Christianity.

Despite the threat of eviction, Julio's parents encouraged their children to keep going to Kids Club. "They had seen so many positive changes in their behavior in different aspects of their lives," Blanca said.

The family was evicted a month later. Yet they were not left homeless.

"God was so faithful and provided another place for them in the neighborhood," Blanca said. "Before Christmas last year, we were surprised to see the whole family coming to our Sunday service. Since then, they are all growing in the faith, having devotions at home, and sharing the gospel with their friends and extended family members."

Julio and his family know what it means to be persecuted for their faith—but they have also experienced God's faithfulness through their trials.



When children take part in a Kids Club led by Resonate's Blanca Gifford, their whole family notices a positive change.

Family and Community Pressure in Japan

While Julio experienced overwhelming support from his family in his new faith, families can also be the reason for hiding one's faith. In 1991, a Japanese woman named



Yuriko has experienced pressure to stop being a Christian, yet she's regularly encouraged through BTGMI listener events.

Yuriko said she believed in Jesus. But it took her nearly 26 years to be baptized because of pressure from her family.

"It may sound incredible to Western people that a grown adult needs permission from her parents, but it happens quite often in Japan," said Masao Yamashita, Japanese language ministry leader for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI).

Yuriko recognized that her new faith

would cause division in her family. Her rural village placed a stigma on Christians, which would affect her whole family. So she tried to hide her relationship with Jesus.

"I kept my faith a secret but my parents found out," said Yuriko. "My mother was shocked and couldn't get out of bed. My grandmother thought about sending me to a temple to marry a monk so that I would remain a Buddhist."

This strong reaction caused Yuriko to end contact with her church, but God found ways to reach her in a part of the world where only 1 percent of people openly profess faith in Christ.

First, Yuriko had a coworker who prayed with her during her lunch break. Then one day, Yuriko turned on her radio. She heard a hymn, and that was enough to bring her back to the same station for the next few days. There she heard several of BTGMI's programs, and she realized that she wasn't alone in her faith.

"I listened almost every night," Yuriko said. Soon Yuriko wasn't just listening; she was engaging with the content, writing the ministry for advice, and even attending some of the in-person events for dispersed believers like her.

Encouraged in her faith, Yuriko began attending church again until a troubling interaction with another congregant made her retreat.

"A woman [from church] kept telling me that I should just leave my parents and that they will be saved when they see my faith," recalled Yuriko. "I told her that by leaving my parents, people will think of Christianity as a bad religion where people leave their families."

Despite not regularly attending church, Yuriko continued to deepen her faith, listening to BTGMI programs and attending events and occasional church services. In 2017, Yuriko decided to take a brave step forward in her faith and was baptized.

Yuriko hasn't disclosed exactly what her relationship with her family is like since her baptism or whether she has even told them. Oftentimes, Christians in Japan don't publicly declare their faith until their parents pass away.


For now, Yuriko continues to go to church occasionally while still engaging with media ministry made possible by the Christian Reformed Church.

"Someone told me that I am like a rootless wanderer, but I'm not. My root is in Jesus," said Yuriko. "In Japan, people work to spread God's words through TV, radio, publications, and the Internet."

"Many people also support such work through prayers and offerings," Yuriko added. "I'm not saying it isn't necessary to go to church and worship with sisters and brothers in Christ. I hope that one day I will be able to go to church every Sunday and welcome others with joy."

Praying for the Persecuted Church

Both Julio and Yuriko were able to overcome stigma and embrace their Christian faith because they had a community to support them. For Julio, it was his own family and church; for Yuriko, it was a community of dispersed believers that connected through media.

Please pray for persecuted people, whether they are worshiping in secrecy or have fled their homes for religious freedom. Pray that they will stay rooted in their faith and find community despite persecution. 

Brian Clark, Back to God Ministries International; Allyson Wierenga and Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission

More Than 200 Christian Reformed Churches Set to Remember Persecuted North Korean Believers

AN UNPRECEDENTED number of Christian Reformed churches will mark the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church this year, just two years after synod encouraged churches to mark this day (*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 862).

“We were so pleased by the number of bulletin insert orders this year,” said Paola Fuentes Gleghorn, communications specialist with the CRC Office of Social Justice (OSJ), which produced resources for churches to use on November 4 or 11 to commemorate this day. “Last year we printed 3,500 inserts, and this year we are planning to print more than 23,000.”

This year’s materials focus on the persecution of Christians in North Korea. “North Korea has been—and continues to be—a nation that commits some of the most horrific human rights abuses in the world,” said Shannon Jammal-Hollemans of OSJ. “What is highly disturbing is the suppression of communication that silences the voices of Christians in North Korea in order that the stories of their suffering would go untold. This suppression needs to end.”

In the words of synod’s Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty, “To build a movement against persecution, the most fundamental thing the church must do is preach and practice a theology that religious freedom is for all persons” (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, p. 466).

To order bulletin inserts for your church or to download supplemental resources including a litany, prayer, Powerpoint, and suggested songs, visit justice.crcna.org/DayofPrayer.

Religious Persecution in North Korea

- » Christians in North Korea, estimated by the United Nations to number between 200,000 and 400,000, often practice their faith in secret for fear of being reported to the authorities.
- » According to a South Korean nongovernmental organization, there were 1,304 cases of violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief by North Korean authorities in 2017, including 119 killings and 87 disappearances.
- » According to the United Nations, between 80,000 and 120,000 people are detained in political prison camps in North Korea. Arbitrary arrest, torture, forced labor, and public executions are common.
- » Technically the country’s constitution allows for freedom of religious belief. There are a very limited number of government-permitted religious groups and some forms of religious education are permitted (including several programs for training Protestant and Buddhist clergy).
- » Based on the North Korean government’s reports, the number of people practicing any religion in the country has dropped precipitously since 1950, but since many worship in secret, the real number of Christians in North Korea is difficult to know.

Sources: Human Rights Watch World Report 2017 and the U.S. Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report for 2017.



Praise God for the bravery of those who dare to worship him in North Korea despite persecution.

Prayer Suggestions

- » For broadcasters like the Far East Broadcasting Company that seek to reach North Koreans with the message of the gospel.
- » For those detained in North Korea for their faith or for other reasons. Pray that they may be miraculously protected from harm, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were protected in the fiery furnace (Dan. 3).
- » For people in both North and South Korea who don’t know where their family members are because of the division of families during the Korean War or the detention of family members in North Korean prisons or work camps.
- » For those who dare to worship God in North Korea despite persecution.
- » For the reunification of North and South Korea and for a true and lasting peace to be established with full freedom of religion for all Koreans.

The View from Here

Joining with Other Faiths for the Sake of Religious Freedom

WE SEEK TO LIVE faithfully in a hurting, divided, and broken world. It seems, more and more, that being a Christian puts us in a category of being irrelevant, weird, or even hatemongers. Like me, you may worry that there is a steady erosion of our religious freedoms. How should we respond?

The Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty that reported to Synod 2016 provides helpful guidance. In its report, the committee observed, “While the rule of law in North America and other Western countries often prohibits the worst kinds of persecution, real tests of faith can and do occur in these environments.”

We can point to many real-life examples of these tests, including a recent decision by the Supreme Court of Canada to uphold the decisions of two provincial law societies that deny membership to graduates of Trinity Western University’s law school. This decision was based on the belief that the school’s community covenant, which includes a commitment to sexual intimacy only in the context of heterosexual marriage, is not constitutional.

Other examples include people from Muslim-majority countries facing more travel restrictions than those from other groups, or Indigenous leaders seeking restoration of sacred burial grounds that have been bulldozed for road construction.

The 2016 report explains that in situations like these, “[t]here is a genuine public limit on the freedom of individuals or organizations to act on their faith. By our definition, each could be a type of persecution. But suffice it to say here that in all of the

As Christians we have a responsibility to know Christ, follow Christ, and proclaim Christ at home and in the public square.

recent cases in North America, the constraint on freedom pales in contrast with the real violence and abuse that many Christians and people of other faiths experience.”

In other words, while we should not claim we’re being persecuted to the extent that some are in other parts of the world, limits on religious freedoms are a growing reality even in North America. We are increasingly being tested because of our beliefs and should respond accordingly. This includes individual responses to these tests, but also joining with people of other faiths to focus our joint attention on governmental policies that relate to freedom to practice one’s religion.

Consider, for example, the Trinity Western University decision. Is a limit on one school’s ability to enforce a community covenant something that people from all religions should be worried about? Is it the first step down a slippery slope of denying people freedom of religion?

In the same way, should words or legislation that seem to unfairly target people of Islamic faith concern Christians and other faith groups?

Again, the 2016 report gives us some advice: “Christians should not only

expect but actively safeguard confessional diversity as part of the proper task of government in a world marked by the fall. Christians should reasonably expect to live and work alongside persons of diverse and contradictory faiths, who are partners—as surely as our Christian brothers and sisters—in our work to build just societies.”

It also points out that “the mission of God’s people transforms not merely human hearts and minds but also societies and cultures. Religion is practiced not just in private but also in public space. Its freedoms are both individual and corporate, personal and institutional—and both aspects must be safeguarded.”

In other words, as Christians we have a responsibility to know Christ, follow Christ, and proclaim Christ at home and in the public square. As we do so, we link arms with those of other faiths in pursuit of more just communities where our freedom to live and express our faith is protected.

I think that we have the *following* and *proclaiming* part of this responsibility in hand. I suspect that *linking arms* to live out our religious freedom is something we all still need to work on. Yet as we strive to do so we will be bearing witness to our hope in Christ.



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

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

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en TheBanner.org/spanish.

A Divine Connection

OUT OF ALL THE DOORS Amir* and Hassan* could have knocked on, they chose David Kromminga's. That was exactly the door they needed.

Shortly after moving from Iran to Berlin, Germany, father and son Hassan and Amir walked out of the Iranian refugee center they called home to the ministry center of the Berliner Stadtmission (Berlin City Mission) located right in their backyard.

They arrived just as Kromminga, a missionary sent by Resonate Global Mission, was walking out the door of his apartment in the facility.

"My father became a Christian six weeks ago," said 17-year-old Amir, speaking English. "I want to find out what it means to become one too."

Amir could not speak German and was navigating a new culture and country. Yet there was a church—and Kromminga—right in his backyard.

"Well, what can one say?" Kromminga said, expressing his awe at God's providence and divine timing. "I was able to talk to them about Jesus and what it means to follow him. We prayed together in the church sanctuary—I in English, with the son translating into Farsi for his father."

Though Kromminga is an English-speaking pastor, he is connected to a vibrant Iranian congregation.

He introduced Amir and Hassan to Stefan Rostami, pastor of the Iranian church that Kromminga mentors with his wife, Mary Buteyn. As Hassan and Amir took part in their first worship service with fellow Iranian believers, Amir stood up and walked to the front of the church.

"[Pastor] Stefan told me in German to come up and pray," Kromminga said. "[Amir] wanted to give his life to Christ."

Kromminga prayed for Amir, and Amir dedicated his life to following Jesus. After the service, both father and son enrolled in the church's six-month baptism preparation class.



David, Mary, and Stefan

The following day was Easter Sunday. After worship, Amir, Hassan, and another Iranian family from the refugee facility joined Kromminga's family for dinner.

"There we were," Kromminga said, "jammed in our little apartment, speaking in different tongues—but all brought together by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead and the Holy Spirit of God."

"We shake our heads in wonder at how God brings such people into our lives and how we get to live out God's kingdom with them. We are also thankful that we are connected to partners—here in Berlin but also in North America and elsewhere in the world—who are sharing the resources of the kingdom with people like Amir and Hassan."

**Names have been changed.*

—Brian Clark and Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

Kids Corner Shapes Mekai's Faith

MEKAI BAILEY, 7, listens to *Kids Corner* every night to calm himself down after a busy day.

Mekai plays hockey and basketball, takes drum and guitar lessons, and participates in "Joy Jam" every Sunday morning at Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont., where he also attends the Cadet program for boys.

"*Kids Corner* helps me in my faith because it inspires me to do good things and brave things to help people who might not be Christians," said Mekai.

Mekai's mother, Anna Lensink Bailey, family and youth coordinator at Jubilee Fellowship, agreed. "I love that he can turn his attention to a beautiful, fun story that has a biblical theme or message. I often hear him quietly singing the songs from *Kids Corner* along with the episode

that's playing, and I love that it's the soundtrack of his dreams."

Mekai describes himself as "a fun, active, adventurous guy." That's why he likes Liz, the main character in the *Kids Corner* stories. "He's kinda like me," says Mekai. "He gets himself into trouble, but he finds a way to get out of it, and he's adventurous."

He adds, "I like that *Kids Corner* uses stories about lizards to sound like a Bible story or lesson from the Bible."

"That's our goal," says Ron VandenBurg, *Kids Corner* producer for ReFrame Media, the English-language outreach of Back to God Ministries International. "We want kids to identify with the characters and learn to be lifelong followers of Jesus."

The Baileys have been listening to *Kids Corner* since Mekai was 3. "At first we just listened to [the CDs]



Mekai Bailey shows off *Kids Corner*.

when we went on trips in the car," Mekai remembers. "Now I listen to it all the time on the app."

"I can say that *Kids Corner* has definitely contributed to Mekai's faith formation," said Anna. "We talk about the stories, and I often hear him singing along to the songs from his bed."

—Nancy VanderMeer,
Back to God Ministries International

Student Athletes Attend Christian Leadership Retreat

EVERY AUGUST, some 30 Calvin College student athletes travel to the mountainous Gainey Ranch in Montana for a weeklong retreat on Christian leadership. The group—nominees from each of Calvin's 21 varsity teams along with seven staff members—engages in a range of outdoor activities, worship services, and lectures on faith and leadership.

"The retreat is a mountaintop experience," said Nancy Meyer, Calvin's senior associate athletic director. "[It's] a unique and intense five to six days of reflection, training, making friends, and making connections."

Students spend two days reflecting on leadership, their relationship with God, and their personal identity. As a gateway to the next section, they have a four-hour solo hike. Then the focus shifts to practical leadership skills, group exercises, and lectures by coaches.

"The Gainey Leadership Retreat is a fantastic opportunity for our student athletes to learn about themselves, their relationship with God, and how to lead teams," said James Timmer, the athletic director and a kinesiology professor at Calvin. "We say a lot that we are a school that integrates faith

into every part of our students' experience, and the retreat is a tangible commitment to making that real."

Amber Warners, another kinesiology professor and Calvin's volleyball coach, says the retreat is making a difference for her team. "It's so nice to be able to have my players come back from Gainey and have this bigger picture about what faith-based leading is all about," she said. "To have that foundation and have them be on board to want to do things with the team has been a huge blessing and help."

—Connor Bechler,
Calvin College

The Ripple Effect...and Waiting

IN AUGUST and September 2017, three major hurricanes hit the United States that caused a ripple effect of difficulties for many people.

Hurricane Irma stormed through the Florida Keys in September 2017. In April 2018, a World Renew Disaster Response Services needs assessment team interviewed more than 500 individuals and families affected by Irma.

Iris* cleaned homes in the Keys before Irma struck. The storm damaged or destroyed all of the homes where she worked, leaving her without a job.

At the time of the needs assessment, Iris could no longer pay her rent. Instead, she and her brother, who lives with disabilities, were sleeping in their truck.

Another young family* from the Keys was doing fine until Irma destroyed their home and one of their vehicles. The family of four became homeless, living in their remaining car. Finally, after five months, they were able to move into a studio apartment.

"We still feel like we are drowning financially, but at least we have a roof over our heads," they said.

Daryl* is 80 years old and, like many other people in the Keys, lives on his sailboat. He rode out Irma on the water by tying his boat to some mangrove trees. "It was terrifying," he said.

His boat was badly damaged, and some of its safety features were destroyed. He has nowhere to go, and he does not have the funds to fix his boat.

To cope with his losses, Daryl is fixing a small diesel motor to use to take the boat elsewhere to find work.



Hurricane devastation.

Hurricane Harvey was similarly destructive in August 2017, leaving many Texans struggling.

"Ten months after Harvey hit, we found many people living in moldy homes," said World Renew volunteer Yogi Haasdyk, who led a needs assessment team in Galveston, Texas, in May 2018.

Some of the houses had been gutted, but the homeowners had nowhere else to go, so they were still living in the bare shells of their houses. Others living in hotels "temporarily" were still trying to get back home.

The World Renew needs assessment volunteers helped identify needs like these. With the information they gathered, a local recovery group can start responding.

"Most people appreciate being offered emotional and spiritual support and prayer. We shed many tears together," said Haasdyk.

"We cannot promise people anything concrete in terms of rebuilding, but the local recovery group is looking forward to supporting their neighbors now that they know what needs their community members still have," he said.

A third storm, Hurricane Maria, devastated the entire island of Puerto Rico in September 2018.

Linda's* home was destroyed. She was at risk of losing her children because they were homeless. World Renew is partnering with a Seventh Day Adventist group in Linda's community, and volunteers from both organizations built her and her children a new home.

World Renew is committed to helping hurricane survivors for the long term. Please continue to keep this work in your prayers.

* Names have been changed or withheld.

—Kellie Scholma,
World Renew

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- Friday, September 21
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- Friday, October 26
- Saturday, November 3 (Fall Fest)
- Friday, November 9 (Trinity Arts Event)
- Friday, December 7

2019 VISIT DAYS

- Monday, January 21 (MLK Day)
- Friday, February 15 (President's Day)
- Friday, March 1
- Friday, March 22
- Friday, April 5
- Friday, April 26

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Salt of the Earth



WHAT DO PRETZELS, French fries, and the ocean all have in common? Salt.

What is salt?

Salt is a natural mineral made up of sodium and chlorine. When these elements come together, they form the tiny cube-shaped crystals that make pretzels taste so yummy.

Salt can be found underground and on the earth's surface. But the biggest source of salt is the ocean. In Thailand, sea water is allowed to flood "salt fields." The water then evaporates into the air, leaving behind the salt that was in in the water.

just too salty. But God gave some birds the special ability to drink salty sea water without getting sick. These birds, such as penguins, albatrosses, gulls, and pelicans, spend most of their lives near the ocean. When they drink sea water, the salt gets absorbed into their blood and moves to special salt glands over their eyes. The extra salt then leaves the body through the bird's nostrils.

The Salt of the Earth

In Matthew 5:13, Jesus calls his followers the "salt of the earth." That's because in Jesus' time, like today, salt had two very important uses:

Did You Know?


People and animals need salt. But having too much salt or not enough can cause problems.

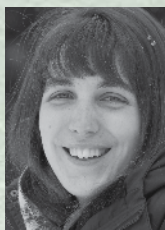
Animals get most of the salt they need from what they eat. If they need more, they will look for another source. That could be a natural salt lick in rock or the salt that is spread on roads to melt ice. A man in British Columbia, Canada, once found a moose in his garage licking the road salt off his car!

Like people, most animals can't drink sea water without getting sick. It is

flavoring food to make it taste better and making food last longer before it spoils.

Followers of Jesus act like salt: seasoning the world with goodness and love just as a sprinkle of salt gives flavor to food and makes it taste good. God's love should overflow from us into all those around us, whether they are believers or not. It is a big world, but a little salt can go a long way.

So the next time you reach for the salt shaker, remember that as a follower of Jesus you are the salt of the earth. 



Rachel Lancashire is a nursery worker (plants, not kids) and freelance writer with an educational background in wildlife. She grew up in the Christian Reformed Church.



When Words Can't Do It Justice

Jim Payton

I recently spoke with a friend who had just seen the Grand Canyon for the first time. Articulate and eloquent as she is, she recognized that what she'd beheld was so awe-inspiring, so jaw-dropping that words couldn't begin to do it justice.

To celebrate a special anniversary, my wife and I flew to Alberta and drove south from Jasper to Banff on a highway through the Rocky Mountains. Years before, I had seen mountains in Germany and Switzerland, but I had never been as close as this road took us. Initially I prattled on about how impressive the mountains south of Jasper were, but the further we drove—past ever-higher mountains, with peaks disappearing further and further into the clouds—the less I said. Before we got to Banff, all I could do was gape in awe. My wife had seen these mountains before; she knew what we were going to encounter. She smiled the whole trip, recognizing that sooner or later the words would stop and wonder would overwhelm me. Together we reveled at what God had allowed us to see and experience.

You don't need to travel to the Grand Canyon or drive through the Canadian Rockies to have this kind of experience. Try to describe a beautiful sunset or the joy of a young child playing with a puppy or the delight of a delicious taste of food. We can't pile up words enough to communicate what is right before us. It's "there," but we can't do it justice. We can experience it, but we can't explain what we're experiencing.

Something similar happens when we step back and reflect on how we relate to God and God's ways toward us. We want to have a solid grasp on what we should believe and practice, and we want to pass that on by teaching and preaching to others. But do we ever pause to wonder whether we're trying too hard to explain what can't be explained?

I believe those of us who have been raised in the tradition of Western Christianity can learn from our fellow Christians in the Eastern Orthodox tradition how to pause and savor the mystery of our faith.

For the past 1,500 years or so, until the early 20th century, we in Western Christendom didn't know much about the Orthodox despite sharing with them the Scriptures, the Nicene Creed, the ancient church, and the wisdom of the Church Fathers (a group of ancient Christian theologians). But as the Roman Empire in Western Europe came to an end (sometime in the 400s), communication between the two halves of Christendom broke down. Misunderstandings (and misrepresentations) arose, and a breach occurred, with mutual denunciations in 1054 and then the Fourth Crusade of 1204, when crusaders sent from Western Christendom sacked and destroyed Constantinople, the major center of Orthodoxy. That breach has never fully healed.

The Western and Eastern segments of Christianity went their separate ways without much communication—and even less understanding—between them. The Roman Empire in the East (known to us as the Byzantine Empire) continued for another thousand years, until the mid-1400s. Orthodoxy flourished in the Byzantine Empire



Peyton Lake, Banff National Park, photo by Mark Basarab on Unsplash

and among the peoples it evangelized, but by the late 1400s, Russia was the only Orthodox people group who had not been swallowed up by hostile empires. That changed in the early 20th century when the communist revolution in Russia led to oppression of the Orthodox. Many of them fled to Western Europe and, eventually, to North America. As their scholars began teaching and writing about Orthodoxy, we in the West finally had the opportunity to learn about the faith they had taught and practiced since Christian antiquity.

The Orthodox approach to the Christian faith has been different in some significant ways from the general patterns shared among Protestants and Catholics. In spite of the many disagreements that exist between Catholics and Protestants—and between different Protestant denominations—Western Christians share some fundamental starting points and ask the same kinds of questions even though we come to some sharply different answers. Orthodoxy has a different starting point and asks different questions than we in the Christian West do. And when you ask different questions, you get different answers—still rooted firmly in the Scriptures and the heritage of the ancient church, but

Perhaps we
need to rein in
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our grasp.

coming from different perspectives that offer insights into the Christian faith we share.

One such perspective is revealed in the Orthodox approach to dealing with the mysteries of the Christian faith. We in the Christian West try as hard as we can to explain and articulate as much as we can of who God is and how God relates to us. “Mystery” for us is what’s left over after we have done our darndest to say everything we think we can. We know we can’t really explain it, but we give it our all. And once we’ve exhausted ourselves in the attempt to

understand—whether in a discussion or in teaching a catechism class or in preaching—we may acknowledge that there’s still something more that is beyond our knowledge.

Western Christians are obsessed with trying to understand, grasp, analyze, know, explore, and explain the Christian faith. That’s a significant reason why Western Christianity now has more than 40,000 denominations: We argue for and divide over a variety of explanations of doctrine or practice. Almost all those divisions are a result of differences over those explanations. For us, “mystery” is to be solved.

Not so for Orthodoxy. In Orthodoxy, mystery is to be celebrated. From the Scriptures that portray the unfathomableness of God (Job 11:7; Ps. 145:3; Ps. 147:5; Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33), to the Church Fathers’ insistence that God’s ways are beyond our abilities to explain, Orthodoxy sees the mystery of who God is and how God deals with us as beyond explanation. So they don’t try to explain it. This doesn’t make them careless about doctrine, of course, but they don’t believe that we Christians, no matter how sanctified or learned about the teachings of Scripture, are up to the task of explaining God and God’s ways. An Orthodox person might

respond, "Celebrate the mysteries? Yes! Explain them? Are you kidding?"

Make no mistake: Orthodox Christianity teaches and proclaims the faith and has done so through long centuries of repression. The fact that the Orthodox have managed to hold on to and continue to practice the faith as they have received it from their ancestors back to Christian antiquity is an indication that their approach has worked. They have followed the apostolic summons to "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). At the same time they have assiduously avoided attempts to "explain" God or God's grace to us. That is mystery to be celebrated, not solved—to be gratefully received in faith and wonder, not analyzed by argument and reason.

With this approach, the Orthodox have never had an argument or church split over baptism or the Lord's Supper. (In Western Christianity, we have had scores of them, with a host of different explanations and lots of splits.) Because Orthodox Christians recognize that God is the one acting in the sacraments, and God's ways are beyond our comprehension, they don't attempt to explain the eucharistic declarations "This is my body" and "This is my blood," or what Scripture means when it calls baptism "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). How that is accomplished is up to God, who is faithful. What God promises, God will do. Faith is believing those promises, not trying to explain them.

To Western Christians, who are so used to trying to explain what Scripture says, this may all sound naive or strange. But though the Orthodox communion of roughly between 200 and 250 million

people is distinguished through various national churches, it is not divided in teaching or practice.


Kallistos Ware, a revered contemporary leader within Orthodoxy, summarizes this approach to the mystery of faith: "God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder." In this he follows the lead of the Church Fathers. Irenaeus of Lyons (second century) said, "God cannot be measured by the heart, and he is incomprehensible by the mind." In the fourth century Gregory Nazianzen taught, "The divine nature cannot be apprehended by human reason, and we cannot even represent to ourselves all its greatness." Meanwhile Gregory of Nyssa (also fourth century) declared, "He who transcends the universe must surely transcend speech." Awe and wonder are the appropriate response to God and God's glory; lots of explaining words, not so much.

How God deals with us in grace is also beyond our intellectual grasp, according to Orthodoxy. We can celebrate it but not comprehend it. "As his greatness is past finding out," Irenaeus taught, "so also his goodness is beyond expression." This encompasses all God's mercies toward us, as John of Damascus (eighth century) confessed: "All the things of God are above the natural order and beyond speech and understanding."

I am not suggesting that we Western Christians need to scrap all our attempts at understanding doctrine or the sacraments. But perhaps we need to rein in our propensity to explain or understand what must, after all, remain beyond our grasp. If words can't do justice to the Grand Canyon, the Canadian Rockies, a sunset, or a child's joy in playing with a puppy,

maybe we Western Christians, who delight so much in explanation, can back off a bit. Maybe we can drink in anew the wonder of who God is and rest secure in God's love for us.

Perhaps the next time you are in a Bible study or listening to a sermon, take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line on it. On one side, write "explanation" and on the other, write "mystery." For every word you hear that fits with explanation ("comprehend," "explain," "understand," "instruct," "figure out," "grasp"), make a mark; do the same on the "mystery" side ("wonder," "mystery," "awe," "beyond us," "amazement"). Then count them up and see where we really put our emphasis. Perhaps you'll discover that we would do well to make more room in our piety, our preaching, and our teaching for sheer delight in the mystery of God and God's ways.

If, as Irenaeus taught, "The sublimity and greatness of God is beyond the power of expression," we can give ourselves over to less feverish attempts to explain God and make more room for wonder, silence, and praise, joining our Orthodox brothers and sisters in celebrating the mysteries of God. 



Jim Payton served as a Christian Reformed pastor and is now professor emeritus of history (Redeemer University College). He is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC, Ancaster, Ontario.

The God Who Pushes and the God Who Pulls

The Word God speaks falls into the rich soil of human life, and there it continues to grow. We have not yet heard the whole Word.



Clayton Libolt, longtime pastor in the Christian Reformed Church, served most recently as the interim pastor of Mill Creek Community Church in Mill Creek, Wash.

I HAVE COME TO THINK that one of the most important theological distinctions—a distinction with vast implications for how we understand God, our world, and ourselves—is the difference between the God who pushes and the God who pulls.

Conventional theology tends toward the God who pushes. The God who pushes sets things into motion. When we open the pages of the Bible we find God doing just that: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). The Hebrew word *bārā*’ (create) is supplemented by many others in the Bible that are similar, such as *ʾāsā* (make), *yāšar* (shape), and *qānā* (originate). These are verbs that push: God shapes, makes, creates. But if we read Genesis 1 carefully, we discover the picture is more complicated.

The third verse is where the action begins: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). This is not God making or shaping, but God speaking and summoning. This is the God who pulls, who by the power of his Word draws out of chaos something new. The summons God utters is not limited to that moment. “Let there be light” echoes throughout history and will so echo until all is light, until darkness is chased away. We meet this God not only at the beginning of the Bible but at the end, where the one who is seated on the throne says, “I am making everything new!” (Rev. 21:5).

We need both perspectives. It is characteristic of the Bible to say both/and, not either/or. One of the most troubling things about much of theology is that it tries to make us choose between things that are equally affirmed by the Bible as if we can have only one or the other. Thus the church

divides between those who believe that God chooses and those who believe that we choose, even though both actions are amply represented in Scripture. Or we’re asked to choose between the Bible and the church, as if we could have one without the other. And so it is here: We need both the God who pushes and the God who pulls. It’s when we have one without the other that we get into trouble.

In Reformed tradition, the perspective of the God who pushes has been dominant. The biblical story is often presented in four movements as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This shorthand can mislead us if we do not also have the perspective of the God who pulls. If all we have is the God who pushes, we tend to look backward toward what we have lost.

In this view, salvation has the character of restoration—getting back to the garden, as songwriter Joni Mitchell puts it. This idea of restoration puts a premium on our view of what we and the world were at the beginning. The Bible doesn’t say much about this, but we have our own ideas. We divide the present world into the things we regard as “natural” and those we regard as “unnatural.” By “unnatural,” we mean those things that, in our opinion, weren’t there at the beginning.

There are two problems with this point of view. First, we are the ones doing the deciding about what is natural and what is not. Nature is complicated. If we go by observation, many things are natural. But this is not what we mean by “natural.” What we mean is what we think proper to nature. We want to get back to the garden—*our* view of the garden. In times past, people thought many things were natural that we no longer regard

as natural. So when people trot out the nature argument, they are usually talking about their own predilections.

The second problem with the restoration idea of salvation is that the Bible suggests salvation goes beyond creation. Take, for example, the contrast between Genesis 2 and Revelation 21. In Genesis 2, the first people live in God's garden, where God strolls in the cool of the evening. In Revelation 21, we live in the New Jerusalem, descended from heaven, where God takes up permanent residence with his people.

Clearly something has changed between Genesis 2 and Revelation 21. Instead of garden life (or rather, in addition to garden life) we have city life. Garden life, especially in Genesis 2, is about the beauty of nature; city life is about the beauty of human culture and creativity. In the first, we have plants and animals; in the second, we have art and music. This is a remarkable perspective, a redemptive one, when we remember that according to Genesis 4 city life began with Cain and his descendants.

If all we have is the God who pushes, it's hard to take account of all this. But if

we also have the God who pulls—who stands at the end of history and summons us and all creation toward his new creation—then we have a perspective from which to understand that all things have not yet been revealed. There is more to be discovered—new possibilities for human life. It's as if God stood at the far end of time and said, "Let there be human life in all its abundance and with all its delights," and for all time human life continues to respond in new ways to the divine summons.


Of course, as in Genesis 1, the forces of chaos and darkness continue to resist the call of God. It sometimes seems that history proves nothing except the remarkable ability of human beings to resist the divine Word. But it is not so. God still calls, and one day all will hear and obey.

Fundamental to any understanding of the Word of God in history is a metaphor found in Isaiah 55:10-11:

As the rain and the snow come
down from heaven,
and do not return to it without
watering the earth and making it
bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out
from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I
desire and achieve the pur-
pose for which I sent it.

In a remarkable way, this passage draws together the perspectives of the God who pushes and the God

who pulls. The Word God speaks falls into the rich soil of human life, and there it continues to grow. We have not yet heard the whole Word. This is the good news: not the gospel of going back to the garden, but the gospel that "no eye has seen [and] what no ear has heard" (1 Cor. 2:9).

This leads us to live our Christian lives facing forward, not backward. It's not about what we were, but about what we are becoming. As Jesus promised, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:12-13). 

1. What insights do you gain when reflecting on how the biblical story begins with a garden (Gen. 2) and ends with a city (Rev. 21)?
2. How would you describe the difference between the God who...

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Yet This I Call to Mind

Where is the church? How might we hope-bringers respond in a context where threats and lies and lack choke out hope?



AJ Westendorp is a connector of people from Holland, Mich., with a heart for his wife, for Guatemala, for urban neighborhoods, and for a shared meal.

WE SERVED AS MISSIONARIES for two years in Bethania, an urban *barrio* in Guatemala City. One of our greatest hopes for our friends in Bethania is that they might believe, think, and act outside the myth of scarcity and live instead into the liturgy of abundance. The Bible teaches that God is abundant and utterly reliable, but the myth of scarcity convinces people not to trust, not to hope, not to take hold of a purpose or passion for their life.

The myth of scarcity struck me poignantly in Bethania when a visiting group from Florida was telling wide-eyed fourth graders about their careers—what it’s like being a doctor, a secretary, an owner of a paint store. After one presentation, the *maestra* (teacher) stood up and said, “Thank you for coming and sharing with these kids about that which they will never be able to achieve.” There was silence. *Did she really just say that?*

On one hand, she was right. The *maestra* had lived in Bethania for years and had seen the myth of scarcity played out. The majority of kids don’t move up and out. The culture is characterized by fear, anxiety, and survival. Why bother dreaming about what can’t be achieved?

The issue is not only about achievement, though. It’s about hope. When Lia’s life is marked by scarcity, crisis, and extortion by gangs, she learns not to hope for good things in life. There are no systems in place to bring about the justice or peace we want to see. Hope comes so hard and flees so quickly. For David, an orphan who has no loving arms to run to, who was forced to kill at age 10, the darkness of what is seen shrouds the hopeful unseen. For Teresa, who has no money to flee her community after being raped, whose home was

burned down and whose husband was shot, the darkness of what is seen shrouds the hopeful unseen.

Why is there no help for them? Where is the church? How might we hope-bringers respond in a context where threats and lies and scarcity choke out hope?

First, with honesty. We can cry out with raw emotion and lament, like Habakkuk, “How long, O Lord? Why this, God?”

Second, we need to remember the gospel and have hope like Jeremiah does in Lamentations 3:21-22, “Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.”

Christians need hope. Even in the midst of conflict and turmoil, God calls us to subscribe to a reality of love and justice and peace because Jesus has overcome the darkness of the seen. We need to call this truth to mind daily and bring this good gospel to those who have been wounded and paralyzed by the myth of scarcity that breeds hopelessness.

How true is it, then, what the *maestra* said? In terms of the seen reality, she’s right. But the unseen truth tells another story: even if Bethania’s kids do not achieve worldly success, if they can live in hope that springs from knowing God’s love and salvation, they will live in true abundance.

Hurt, corruption, poverty, and injustice—these things actually *illuminate* the gospel. They show us how much we need the gospel and how the church needs to bring that gospel—the real hope—into dark situations. It’s a tall task. Yet this we call to mind, and therefore we have hope. **B**

The Pull of Porn: Three Key Predictors

PORNOGRAPHY USE is exceedingly widespread both within and outside of the church. Scientists at the University of Montreal launched a search for men who had never looked at pornography; they couldn't find any. Additionally, 50 percent of pastors are either currently using or have used pornography. Women now make up over 30 percent of porn users.

A glut of data tells us pornography is a problem. As an ordained Christian Reformed minister and licensed mental health counselor, I wanted to understand the "why" behind our collective use of pornography. To do that, I completed research on over 3,600 men and women wanting to quit using porn. What my data showed was that the use of pornography and the specific videos or pictures people pursued were not random or capricious.


So why do we watch porn?

1. A lack of purpose. Men who struggled with a lack of purpose were seven times more likely to increase their use of pornography. The more confused or stuck a man felt in life, the more porn he watched.

2. Shame. It might sound obvious, but shame, not pleasure, fuels the use of pornography. Men were 300 times more likely to pursue pornography for each unit of shame they experienced. Women were 546 times more likely. Shame convinces

us that we are unwanted, and we pursue behaviors that confirm it.

3. Sexual Abuse. The heaviest porn users had sexual abuse scores that were 24 percent higher than those who had not been abused. Victims of abuse often pursue pornography later in life because it recreates some of the original sexual experiences they underwent: secrecy, arousal, and shame.

If you want to find freedom from porn, identify the unique reasons that bring you to it. The use of pornography exposes our sin, but it also reveals the stories that await love. God is neither surprised at nor ashamed of our sexual behaviors, but understands them to be the very stage through which the work of redemption can play out in our lives. 



Jay Stringer is a licensed therapist and pastor of Awake Church in Seattle, Wash. His book *Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing* (NavPress) is available September 4.



First Reformed

reviewed by Otto Selles

Ernst Toller (Ethan Hawke) serves dutifully as the pastor at First Reformed, a historic church in upstate New York that attracts only a dozen people to worship. In an opening scene, Toller leads a service by asking the few congregants about their "only comfort in life and death." The search for comfort is indeed the film's focus. We soon learn that Toller, a retired military chaplain, had convinced his son to enlist. But the son died in action, and Toller's wife left him soon afterwards.

While critics' warm accolades and the general plotline might be appealing, the film will definitely not be to everyone's taste. Director Paul Schrader holds to the transcendental style, in which a director will use "withholding techniques" to get the viewer to "lean in" to try to figure out independently what is going on in a character's life. The camera will remain fixed on a particular scene, with moments of dead time when a character leaves a room. The only music you hear may be the sound of a car radio playing or a church choir singing in a scene. The payoff occurs when the director pulls out some stops to bring the character—and the viewer—to a transcendent moment, a spiritual experience. While this all may seem a bit intellectual, *First Reformed* is first of all a work of art, beautifully filmed and acted. On DVD now. (A24)



Everything Happens for a Reason (and Other Lies I've Loved)

by *Kate Bowler*

reviewed by Thea Leunk

Kate Bowler is a theology professor, a church historian, a wife, and the mother of a baby boy; she also has stage IV colon cancer. The author's honest accounts of the reactions of others and their well-meaning words and prayers invite us to laugh along with her even as our hearts ache for her. More importantly, Kate struggles with her—and our—desire, as people who believe in a loving and omnipotent God, to find a “good” reason for the tragedies in our lives. This is a book for all of us who struggle with understanding why bad things happen to good people. (Random House)

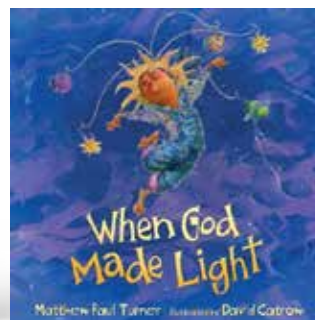


We'll Fly Away

by *Bryan Bliss*

reviewed by Adele Konyndyk

This sobering young adult novel begins and ends with the first-person musings of a teenage boy on death row. Luke is writing letters from prison to his best friend, Toby—a practice encouraged by the compassionate nun overseeing his care. With each missive, the reader learns more about the history between these two troubled and abused boys. Bliss treats his protagonists' stories with tough-hearted mercy, and his intense novel will likely unsettle readers. But a literary work that so powerfully calls for a more redemptive way forward is surely worth any heaviness of heart. Ages 14 and up. (Harper Collins)



When God Made Light

by *Matthew Paul Turner*

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

The creators of *When God Made You* have teamed up again to offer young children a God-honoring, zesty, rhyming picture book, this time celebrating and describing our Creator's gift of light. Matthew Paul Turner's words dance, and David Catrow's illustrations sing with energy, inviting children into the world of God's good created order: sun, moon, constellations of stars, fireflies, lightning, and more. The book reminds children that God gave them his light so they can shine in a dark world. (Waterbrook)

The Lowdown

Now Read This: Need some reading inspiration? Try Sarah Clarkson's *Book Girl: A Journey through the Treasures and Transforming Power of a Reading Life*, which offers thoughts on why, how, and what to read. (Tyndale)

Quiet Power: *Deaf Out Loud*, a documentary that follows three predominantly deaf families, will air on A&E on September 5.

High Hopes: Popular Christian singer Lauren Daigle is looking to bring listeners hope with her third studio album, *Look Up Child*, out September 7. (Centricity)

Second Serving: *Overcooked 2* ups the excitement of the original *Overcooked*, a cooperative chef game with unexpected obstacles. Available for most platforms, it is rated E (for everyone). (Ghost Town Games/Team 17)

13 Things You May Not Know About Hell

Only God knows who will end up in Gehenna. Don't judge, warns Jesus (Matt. 7:1).

MUCH OF WHAT we “know” about hell stems from the imagination of poets and artists. But how much is true? Let's drill down to the bedrock of biblical fact. Here are 13 things you should know.

1. The closest thing to “hell” in the Old Testament is Sheol, the place where all dead people go. Unlike their neighbors, Israelites knew that the same God who ruled heaven and earth also ruled Sheol (Ps. 139:8).
2. The New Testament calls the place where mortals go before Judgment Day “Hades.” The place of divine punishment for those actually convicted is “Gehenna” (from Old Testament “Ge Hinnom” or “Valley of Hinnom,” Matt. 5:22).
3. Ge ben Hinnom is a cemetery with burial caves where Israelites would go to burn their children as sacrifices to their not-gods (Jer. 19:5)—a fitting image of Godforsaken hell. The worst deal about Gehenna isn't the cold (“outer darkness”) or the heat (“lake of fire”), but our omnipresent God choosing not to be there (Matt. 25:41)—truly terrifying.
4. So Gehenna is where the devil is and God isn't, maybe in outer space or another dimension (Rev. 20:14-15). Gehenna is also in this world where Christ's kingdom is not yet (Eph. 2:1-2). It re-enters our lives when we show God the door and invite the devil in (Eph. 3:17-18). Then we live in a hell of our own making.
5. The Apostles' Creed confesses that “Jesus descended into hell.” The word used refers to Hades, not Gehenna.
6. Jesus went through hell for us on the cross (Mark 15:33-34). His pain was immeasurably multiplied



Bob De Moor is a retired Christian Reformed pastor living in Edmonton, Alta.

by the horror of being forsaken by the One with whom he had lived in perfect love and unity for eternity.

7. After suffering Gehenna for us, Jesus passed into Hades, breathing the words of a Jewish child's bedtime prayer: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).
8. Only God knows who will end up in Gehenna. Don't judge, warns Jesus (Matt. 7:1).
9. Don't worry, believers are not going there. The Father appointed Jesus, our own Lawyer, to do the judging. God will judge everyone fairly, including animists, Muslims, and agnostics who never had the chance to know about Jesus (2 Cor. 5:10). Those who receive eternal life do so because of Christ's work, not their own goodness or religious practices: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).
10. Jesus and his disciples visited Caesarea Philippi, which boasted a temple built on rock and dedicated to the underworld god Pan. Behind it was a cave widely advertised as “the gate to Hades”—hence Jesus' declaration there that “the gates of Hades shall not prevail” (Matt. 16:18, ESV) against the church he's building on the bedrock of his disciple's confession.
11. Gates are used for defense. Jesus places his church on the *offensive* to boldly attack and destroy evil all the way to hell (and back).
12. We shouldn't scare people into heaven by making them fear hell. Through Word and Spirit we are brought into relationship with God, who *is* love. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).
13. Our loved ones who have “fallen asleep” in Christ are fine. Whether they pass through Hades into heaven or remain there until Jesus returns doesn't matter—they are with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:14): eternally loved, safe, and awaiting Resurrection Day. **B**



Artist's statement:

Working conditions that [clothing] factory workers deal with are terrible. In countries such as India and Bangladesh there have been many accidents and a great deal of blood spilled by workers who have had to deal with these conditions. For many people, working in a factory is the only way to earn a living. We need to stop these injustices.

Forced Sacrifices

By Hannah Vanderlaan,
Grade 12, South Christian High
School, Grand Rapids, Mich.

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IT'S THE QUESTIONS YOU'RE WILLING TO ASK**



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TO BUILD A NEIGHBORHOOD
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Church Positions Available

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRIES Modesto, CA CRC is seeking a full time Director of Youth Ministries. See detailed description at <http://www.modestocr.org>

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

PASTOR Calvary Christian Reformed Church of Lowell, Michigan, a rural community that is growing. We are seeking someone that is devoted to Biblically Sound preaching while striving to build Quality Relationships with members of all ages and needs. Someone who also has a strong desire for community Outreach and Evangelism Please send letters of inquiry to Jim Folkersma, President of Council. Call 616-240-1890, or Email at JFolke@comcast.net or the church office at Office@calvarylowell.org.

PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP/YOUTH Community Christian Reformed Church of Roselawn, Indiana, is seeking to fill a newly created position in the areas of discipleship and youth. A detailed job description for this position can be found on our website at ccrcroselawn.com.

Calvin College Seeks a Vice President for Enrollment Management

This key leadership position will serve as a change agent on campus as Calvin becomes a university by 2020. The position is critical for shaping the future of how we promote and energize each step of the recruitment process from undergraduate through postgraduate, both nationally and internationally, all with a strong tradition of Reformed Christian engagement and practice in an increasingly diverse cultural landscape. Additionally, the Vice President will work collaboratively with a highly engaged cabinet team, providing senior-level leadership and insight to the President.

To review the full position profile or to nominate a candidate, visit calvin.edu/go/vp-enrollment. Formal applications can be submitted through Calvin College employment at employment.calvin.edu.



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WORSHIP LEADER The Ann Arbor CRC is looking for an individual to help plan, facilitate, and lead worship services. This individual will help the AACRC learn the language of reformed worship through practice and participation. And, help create a culture of hospitality and openness in our worship services. Contact hr@aacrc.org for more information.

LEAD PASTOR POSITION Britt, IA CRC is searching for a full time lead pastor. Interested persons should contact the search committee at cburrrcollins@gmail.com or view our website www.brittcrc.org for more information.

DUNCAN CRC on beautiful Vancouver Island BC 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

WORSHIP COORDINATOR Faith Community CRC in Wyoming, MI is seeking a part-time (25-27 hrs/wk) Worship Coordinator. Please e-mail office@faithcommunitycrrc.org with inquiries, cover letter and resume.

DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP Faith Christian Reformed Church, Tinley Park, IL, is seeking a part time Director of Worship. This position (approx. 25 hours/week) involves planning and implementing worship services in consultation with the Pastor. The ideal candidate will demonstrate a firm faith commitment, the ability to organize and lead, have an understanding of principles of Reformed worship, and possess a strong background in music and corresponding technology. Contact the church office for a full position overview: tpfaithcrrc@sbcglobal.net or 708-532-8300.

SEEKING PASTOR Charlottetown CRC, PEI Canada, is looking for a "Pastor of Preaching and Equipping" for our Co-Pastor team. Contact us at peircsearch@gmail.com

LEAD PASTOR Grace Fellowship CRC in Pella, Iowa, is looking for a highly relational leader and pastor. See more details at <https://www.vanderbloemen.com/jobs/grace-fellowship-lead-pastor>

PASTOR Upon the retirement of our present pastor, Ocheyedan IA CRC is seeking a full time pastor to help us grow in God's Word so we can serve God and others. Visit ocheyedancrc.org for more details.

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR Escalon CA CRC is looking for a full-time experienced individual who will increase the organizational strength of our church by overseeing general administration, finances and technology. Candidates must have excellent communication skills, be well organized, be a self-starter and have the ability to multi-task regularly. For a full job description and more information, please visit escaloncrrc.org. Send applications to jobs@escaloncrrc.org by Sept. 15.

THE WORTHINGTON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH in Worthington, MN is seeking passionate and energetic pastor candidates to help lead our church into the next chapter of our ministry and walk with Christ. Church profile is available upon request. To obtain a copy, contact Scott at 507-360-0686.

PASTOR OF DISCIPLESHIP CrossPoint Church, Chino, CA (35 mi E of Los Angeles) is seeking a Pastor of Discipleship. Visit www.crosspointcrrcweb.org/employment to obtain a Ministry Description and Church Profile.

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Congregational

CHURCH'S 125TH ANNIVERSARY

FIRST CUTLERVILLE CRC of Michigan, is privileged to celebrate 125 years of God's faithfulness. Former members and friends are invited to attend a celebration service at 9:30AM, September 23,2018. To God be the glory!

CHURCH'S 75TH ANNIVERSARY

DCCRC TURNS 75 Join Washington, DC CRC in America's capital city on November 3-4, 2018 as we celebrate "God's Faithfulness to All Generations: 75 Years at DCCRC." Send questions or memories to anniversary@dccrc.org.

CHURCH'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

FAITH CRC - PELLA, IA is celebrating its 50th Anniversary. Please come and celebrate with us on October 14, 2018, at the 9:30 AM worship service.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY

We are pleased to announce that **Steven Berkenpas** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **CHADD HUIZENGA** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **ERIC SNYDER** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **JOSIAH YOUNGQUIST** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director.

ELIGIBLE FOR CALL

We are pleased to announce that **GALE TIEN** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Dr. Steven Timmermans, Executive Director

NEW ADDRESSES

REV. HARLAN & SANDRA VANDEN EINDE 5255 W. Sunfield Ln., Holland, MI. 49423. 616-377-7010.

Birthdays

100TH BIRTHDAY

SIDNEY A LINGER will turn 100 years old on September 8, 2018. His family will host an open house in his honor from 1-4 on the 8th at Brookside CRC, 3600 Kalamazoo Ave SE. We are thankful for his health and faithfilled life. His address is 2248 Banner CT SW Wyoming, MI 49509.

90TH BIRTHDAY

SEA BAKKER 5005 124th Pl SE, Everett WA 98208 - Sea will celebrate her 90th birthday on September 16. She previously lived in Comstock Park MI, Spokane WA, and Moscow ID. Birthday celebration will be on September 16 at First CRC in Everett after the morning worship service.

JENNY (LEYSTRA) POST Celebrated her 90th birthday on July 31st. Wife of the late Dick Post. Mother of Teresa

Hughes, Gert & Allen Heerema and Gerald & Gina Post. 5 grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren. Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Notes sent to 3460 Saratoga Ave #116, Downers Grove, IL 60515

HENRIETTA (KRAMER) VIS looks forward to celebrating her 90th birthday September 27. Thankful to God for her example in living a Christian life are her five children and their spouses - David and Carol (Vis) Wynstra, Jack and Sharon (Vis) Vaandrager, Donald and Nancy Vis, David and Mary Vis, Wayne and Donna Vis, 16 grandchildren (1 deceased) and 32 great-grandchildren. Birthday greetings can be sent to her at 368 S. Wilma Ave., #6, Ripon, CA 95366

RENA VAN WIEREN celebrates her 90th birthday on September 4. Thankful to God for her love and faithful Christian life are her four children Bob & Trudy VanWieren, Don & Tracey VanWieren, Al & Sharon VanWieren, Pat & Jim Eriks, 10 grandchildren, 28 great grandchildren, 1 great great grandchild. Greetings may be sent to 3506 41st Pl, Highland IN 46322.



VAN DENEND ALVINA (HUIZINGA) VAN DENEND celebrates her 90th birthday on September 30, 2018. Born in Groningen, The Netherlands, and calling the west suburbs of Chicago home, Alvina was God's blessing to her husband Melvin (deceased) and continues to enrich the lives of her five children

and their spouses (George and Luanne, Charlotte and Rick, Raymond and June, Michael and Loni, Alyce and Bob); 27 grandchildren; 45 great-grandchildren; and two great-great-grandchildren. Wrote Frederick Buechner: "In his holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a pocket handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints."

85TH BIRTHDAY

JONGSMA Rev. Allan Jongsma of 1157 Bayshore Drive Byron Center MI 49315 celebrates his 85th birthday September 7. Thanking God for his 85 years are his wife Joyce and family.

Anniversaries

65TH ANNIVERSARY

WIGBOLDY Rev. Homer and Betty of 1912 Pine Cir., Lynden WA 98264. August 21, 1953. Because of God's grace, they have been able to serve people, churches and communities. Together with family: Carol (Todd Goyt), Brenda (Lee Fennema), Kenneth (Paula), Shirley (John Steigenga), Linda (Bryan Kamps), Nancy (Victor Wolffis), Susan (Harmon DeJong), 22 Grands (& in-laws), and 10 Greats, friends, and those blessed by them, we give thanks. To God be the Glory

STIENSTRA Pastor Art and Wieke celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on August 13. We thank God for keeping us together and giving us five wonderful children.

60TH ANNIVERSARY

BERGSMA Henk and Diny (Teeuwesen) 278 Hurst Dr. Apt.2 Barrie, ON L4N 0Z3 will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on August 22, 2018. Children: Fred & Donna, Henry & Sharon, Will & Helen, Jerry & Kari, Bernice & Paul (Van Loenen). 14 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. Thankful to God for His goodness & faithfulness! Psalm 84:11b

HIELEMA Jack and Alice (Nicolai) with gratitude in their hearts they will have celebrated their 60th anniversary on August 29, 2018. We thank God for His faithfulness.

VANDER MEER, John & Donna (Helms) of 1047 Helen St NE, GR, MI 49503 will celebrate their 60th anniversary on September 13. Children: John & Lesa, Ruth & Karl DeYoung, Mary & John van der Veen, David & Michelle. 17 grandchildren(6 married) 2 great-grandchildren. We love you and thank God for His faithfulness

Obituaries

CARTWRIGHT Carolyn June (Van Dellen) of Bremerton, Washington went to be with her Lord and Savior on 7/20/18. In Heaven, she joyfully joined her parents, Roger and Nelliejeane, brother Roger Jr. and many other saints. She is loved and missed by her husband of 43 years, Pastor Tim Cartwright, children: Andrew (Kristin) Cartwright, Rachel (Royce) Sternquist, Tim Jr. (Gina) Cartwright, and Peter (Ashlee) Cartwright, sister, Joyce Van Dellen, and brother, Dr. Al (Gwen) Van Dellen. She loved her Lord, her husband, her family, her 10 grandchildren, her church, her friends, and teaching kindergarten. We are thankful to our Lord for His love and faithfulness which shone brightly in her life. Donations can be made in Caroline's memory to Back to God Ministry International.

DEKKER Adriana "Ada" Johanna (nee Tiemersma) lived in the Chicago area all her 101 1/2 years, finishing her earthly sojourn on May 23, the last of her siblings to die. Widowed of her beloved husband John Adrian Dekker in 1984, she leaves behind children Marilyn (Peter) Roeters, Beth "Betsy" (Henry) Kluck, Rev. James (Rose) Dekker, five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren and aunt of many nieces and nephews. Re-named "Great Dekker" by first great-grandchild Stephanie, many fittingly and endearingly so addressed her since. When asked why she visited Oak Forest Hospital monthly on Sundays for 50 years, Mom claimed "I'm working for stars in my crown," even though she knew Grace knows no stars, just grateful, imperfect saints like she was. In fact, her last words for some time before Jesus welcomed her were "Thank you" and "Good." It doesn't get any better than that. Thanks be to God.

DETERS, Kenneth W. age 75 went to be with His Lord and Savior on June 14, 2018. He was born to Henry and Ann Deters on July 12, 1942. Surviving are his wife Carolyn, his children John, Tom (Laurene) and David (Elizabeth), his grandsons Caleb, Micah and Gabriel. His twin brother Robert (Mary) and brother Gary (Sue), sister-in-law Alyce Leach and brother-in-law Bill Miedema (Linda), his nieces and nephews.

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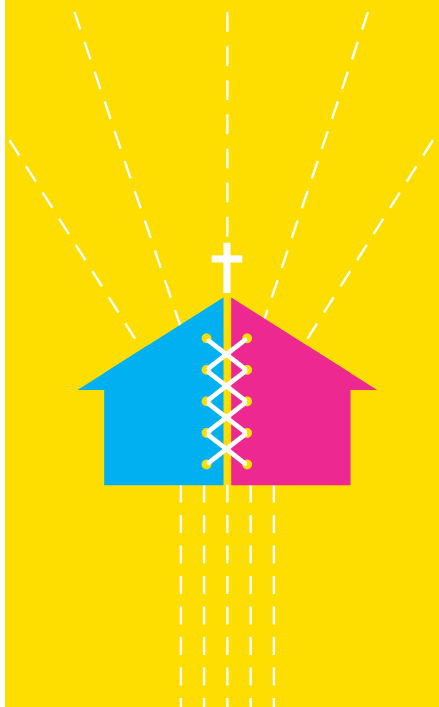
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GRIMBERG, BARBARA Age 64 passed away suddenly June 25, 2018 to be with her Lord. Wife of Kenneth, mother of Kevin (Tiffany) Grimberg, Laura (Jeremy) Ooms, daughter of Fennetta (Kuiper) Stoub. The late Sidney Kuiper. Sister of Theresa (Len) Boer, the late Howard (Dorie) Kuiper. Grandmother of 2

HOLTROP Donald, 79, West Olive, Michigan, July 10, 2018. Survived by his wife, Barbara (Schuitema); sons Dennis, Berkeley, CA; Dean (Faith Begay), Albuquerque, NM; and Mike (Kim Maningo), Chicago, IL; 4 granddaughters; sister, Etta Bosscher Van Wingerden, Jenison, MI. GRCHS Class of 1956, Calvin College Class of 1961. Memorial service was July 20 at 2nd CRC, Grand Haven. Memorial contributions to Donald & Barbara Holtrop Family Scholarship at Calvin College.

KNOL Gerald, age 91, went to be with his Lord on June 26, 2018. Preceded in death by his son Jack and grandson David. Remembered with love by his wife, Hilda, sons Bern (Becky), Harry (Faye), Rob (Linda), 9 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren.

LUNDELL Irving, Muskegon, MI, former denominational Cadet Corp president, lived for Jesus. Devoted to wife Donna (d. 2003) and to Kris (Lon) Vredeveld, Mark (Ellen), Julie (Don) DeBoer, John (Karen), 10 grands and 5 greats.

MARTHANN VELDMAN, nee Vos, 88, went to be with her LORD on July 13th, 2018, 4224 Central Ave, Western Springs, IL 60558. Beloved wife of the late Richard "Moon"; loving mother of Ginny (Jim) Van Til, John (Jane) Veldman, Vicki (Tim) Zwier; devoted grandmother of Chris (Becky) Van Til, Robyn (Nathan) Popp, Dan (Katherine Barg), and Ben (fiancée Jenna Nold) Veldman, Jessica (Jeff) Jantos, Megan (Jeremy) Zuidema, Abby (Lucas) Tillman, and the late Mike Veldman; great-grandmother of Tristan, Reese, Tyler, and Tripp Bowne, Mia, Haley, Zac, and Samantha Van Til, Emma, Gabe, Michael, and Annie Jantos, Della Zuidema and step great-grandmother of Grayson and Easton Popp; fond sister of the late Edward (the late Dorothy) Voss. Memorials to The Christian Reformed Church of Western Springs are appreciated.

MENNINGA Bernie, age 91, went to be with his Lord and Savior on May 1, 2018. He was preceded in death by his wife of 59 years, Grace (Aardsma). He is survived by his children Mary (Robert) Boll, Harold Menninga, Wanda (Jack) Grochala, Joel (Leslie) Menninga, and Peter Menninga. He was blessed with 11 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren.



PALMER Elsie "Peter," 95, died July 26, Norfolk, VA. Wife of Rev. Edwin H. Palmer (pastored CRCs in Spring Lake, Ann Arbor, GR; led NIV), d.1980, who led her to Jesus. Sons Timothy, Mark, Glenn, Randall; 14 grandchildren; 17 great-grandchildren. Eastern Christian HS (NJ) teacher. Long member Preakness CRC, then URC, Wayne, NJ. Board member ECHS, Back to God Hour, NJ Right to Life.

SLAGER, Alice K., of Grand Rapids, MI, age 100, passed away on July 16, 2018. She is survived by her husband of 68 years, Kenneth, seven children and their spouses, 21 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren. She was loved for her laugh, faith, wisdom, and ability to stretch a dime. We miss her. "Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come." Proverbs 31:25 (KJV)



SLAGTER John Slagter, Grand Rapids, went home to be with his Lord and Savior July 26, 2018 just prior to his 96th birthday. He passed away on Thursday, July 26, 2018. John leaves behind and will be dearly missed by his wife of 72 years, Eleanor (Wiersma), son Rick, of GR. and Barbara & Jerry Andreas of CA. Along with 5 Grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. Sisters; Lois Huizenga and Thelma Snoeyink. In laws, Andy & Millie Cammenga. Marge Wiersma, Betty Wiersma, Herm & Joan Zylstra. John was proud to serve in WWII Army, D-day survivor, Para-

trooper, Concentration Camp Liberator, skilled carpenter, painter and outdoorsman. John was proud to be part of men that started the CRC Calvinist Cadets program in the 60's. John was preceded in death by his parents, Joe and Marie Slagter and brother Jack & Marian Slagter, brother in law Bill Huizenga, Cal Snoeyink, Kenneth & Ruth Wiersma, Robert Wiersma, John Wiersma. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Thanks be to God! A Memorial Service will be held at a later date.

Employment

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SALEM CHRISTIAN HOMES CEO Salem Christian Homes (Chino, CA) is a \$7.5M nonprofit organization providing quality care and opportunities for individuals who have a developmental or intellectual disability. With 19 residential homes, 172 staff, and a successful camping program, Salem Christian Homes is seeking a CEO who will lead the organization forward with specific plans for growth and expansion of services. The board is praying for an experienced organizational leader with a strong faith and proven financial acumen. Tommy Thomas and Laura Coverstone of JobfitMatters are assisting Salem Christian Homes in this important search. To view an Introductory Video about the search and the full Opportunity Profile with Process of Candidacy, see the posting at www.jobfitmatters.com/salem.

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Back to School Psalm

Kids have asked me to pray about death, cancer, natural disasters, living in foster care, violence, a parent in jail, divorce, and bullies. I've also been asked to talk to God about goldfish, bulldozers, and fried chicken.



Natalie Hart is a freelance writer and editor as well as the director of children's ministries at Grace Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

ONE OF THE BEST PARTS of my week is the time I spend praying for the children and volunteers in the children's worship program I run. After I've set up each room, made sure the stories are complete, and accounted for the snacks and cups, then I get to pray. I like it best when nobody else is at church so the building is quiet while I walk slowly from room to room praying for the following Sunday.

In each worship center I take the nametags off the wall and lift up to the Lord every child who has come through our program. Sometimes I ask for something specific, but most often I ask that they will know, way deep down, that God loves them and that they can be secure in God's love.

We like to think of childhood as a carefree time, but often it isn't. Kids have asked me to pray about death, cancer, natural disasters, living in foster care, violence, a parent in jail, divorce, and bullies. Of course, I've also been asked to talk to God about goldfish, bulldozers, and fried chicken.

I want the kids to be so secure in God's love that they will come to God with everything, whether silly or serious. To help them do this, we write psalms together—after all, many psalms are about what someone is experiencing at a specific moment.

We use these prompts: What's happening in your life? How do you feel about it? What do you want help with? What do you know about God? What are you going to do now?

Whether they are proud or would rather have been playing with dinosaurs, I pray that this practice plants the seed of turning to the Lord with whatever is going on, with whatever they are feeling. That's

what I'm doing when I pray for them. I am reminded of God's love for them and for me, and it brings me peace.

Back to School Psalm (by 3- to 7-year-olds)

This week some kids went to school for the very first time

and some kids had their eighth day of first grade.

We played with dinosaurs and we got tattoos.

Some of us are excited to have some days off school, and others are sad.

Some of us are happy about school; others are nervous and sad.

We need your help with singing when it's superfast.

We need your help with school and especially with sharing.

We know that you made all natural things

and you provided materials and made people who can make things like this table.


We know that you are here, here, here, here, and everywhere!

We know that you love us.

You love us so much that you know all our prayers—

there are no prayers where you say, "Nah, I don't want to look at them."

Because of that, I'm going to give hugs. I'm going to say "I love you" to people.

I will always say, "DONUT forget that God loves me!" 

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