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## WHAT'S ONLINE

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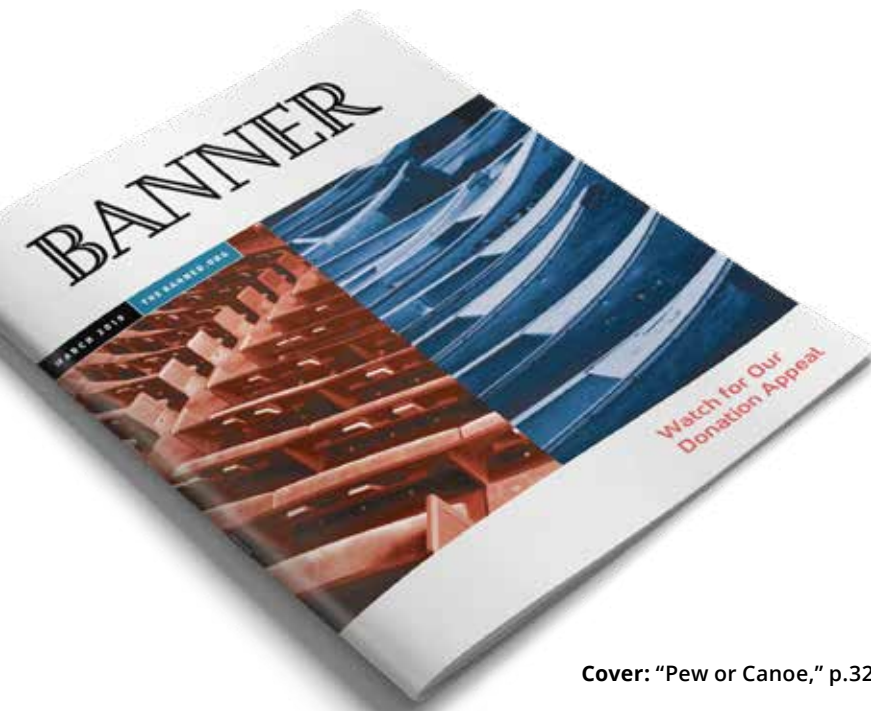
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# Prevention or Promotion

We have the power, especially with the Holy Spirit's help, to overcome our negativity bias.



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](http://TheBanner.org).

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Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

**AFTER READING** scores of manuscripts with a critical eye, I fear I may be developing a critical spirit. I guess it's an occupational hazard for an editor. But it's easy for our fallen sinful natures to focus on flaws and negatives.

Jesus recognized this when he called out our penchant to find the speck of sawdust in our neighbor's eye (Matt. 7:3). In other words, we can be counted on to find and even magnify the tiniest of flaws. Researchers call our tendency to pay more attention to and place more value on negative information than positive information a "negativity bias." For instance, one bad trait can easily override numerous good ones in our impressions of a person. This is why we so easily slip into being judgmental.

But we don't have to be stuck in negativity mode. Jesus called us to be better, which means we have the power, especially with the Holy Spirit's help, to overcome our negativity bias.

Researchers have observed that some people are prevention oriented (avoiding negative consequences) while others are promotion oriented (striving for positive outcomes). A promotion-oriented student, for example, is motivated to study to obtain a good grade, while a prevention-oriented student is driven more by avoiding failure. These tendencies are defaults; no one ever focuses exclusively on either the positive or the negative.

The body of Christ, according to Christian social psychologist Christena Cleveland, "seems to be plagued with a pervasive prevention orientation. We have heightened sensitivity to what we perceive to be the negative happenings in the church, and we are especially vigilant in

tracking those happenings" (*Disunity in Christ*, 133). We end up creating a culture of fear where a critical, speck-finding spirit reigns. In a recent LifeWay survey, judgmental or hypocritical church members were the second-most specified reason why young adults leave church. Are Christian Reformed churches facing this problem?

Theologian Mark Buchanan identified a similar contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees:

The Pharisees had an ethic of avoidance, and Jesus had an ethic of involvement. The Pharisee's question was not "How can I glorify God?" It was "How can I avoid bringing disgrace to God?" This degenerated into a concern not with God, but with self—with image, reputation, procedure. They didn't ask, "How can I make others clean?" They asked, "How can I keep myself from getting dirty?" They did not seek to rescue sinners, only to avoid sinning (*Your God Is Too Safe*, 108-09).

If we truly want to reach people for Christ, we need to risk getting dirty.

The apostle Paul, for instance, speaking in idol-filled Athens, started not by condemning the Athenians' idolatry but by praising them for being religious (Acts 17:22). Paul challenged the divided Philippian church to focus on positive, lofty ideals—whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Phil. 4:8). That seems a lot like a promotion orientation to me. If we seek to be more like Paul and like Christ, who dined with sinners, we need to overcome our negativity bias and prevention orientation.

Can we change the world's perception of Christians as primarily judgmental and negative into one of Christians as primarily life-affirming and loving? **B**

Watch for our annual appeal in your mailbox or inbox. Please consider a donation so we can keep the conversation going. Thank you!

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## REPLY ALL

### It Is a Toy

I just read the article “Actually, It *Is* a Toy” (Jan. 2019). Your picture and emotional attachment to treasures as a metaphor is so good, right on. God help us to keep transforming the Christian Reformed Church for what Jesus needs and wants to get done in our generation.

» Vern Vander Zee // Miami, Fla.

### Pro-Life Discipleship

I would like to add a thought to the article “Pro-Life Discipleship” (Jan. 2019). Through my work as a chaplain, I have discovered the importance of keeping the doors of communication open with women and families who are dealing with an unplanned pregnancy. It may be counterintuitive, but more compassion can be shown if abortion is legal, because it keeps the door of communication open and the discovery of options available. If abortion is made illegal, then the many channels of help will be closed; the professional would be required to report an illegal action rather than discuss options of hope.

» Mary Sandord // Camarillo, Calif.

### Missional Temptations

Well said (“Missional Temptations,” Jan. 2019). We too often do fall into the erroneous thinking of God’s work as empire-driven. May we cease from looking to saviors that cannot save and powers that cannot rescue. Faithfulness to God will pave the street to greater missional endeavors.

» Pete Byma // online comment

### Commemorating the Canons?

The 400th anniversary would be an excellent time to ditch the rigid, exclusionary, and insular Canons of Dort. The article “Commemorating the Canons” (Jan. 2019) and a previous editorial argue it still has value because of the emphasis on God’s grace; however, that doctrine is sufficiently covered in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. Let’s put the Canons on the history book shelf and look to address contemporary issues such as reconciliation among people of different races and to stand by people experiencing any form of suffering and need. A good place to start would be the adoption of the Belhar Confession as a confession of faith. Our sister denomination, the Reformed Church in America, did so in 2016. We should move forward in faith and unity.

» James van Hemert // Cowichan Bay, B.C.

### Worldly Amusements

Sometimes the question is wrong (“Big Questions” Jan. 2019). It is not the case (as the question indicates), that card playing, dancing and movie attendance were “forbidden.” As this answer correctly states, Synod 1928 warned about those worldly amusements (as well as drinking, I believe), and I would suggest the warning was appropriate given the “newness” of those cultural phenomena.

Not much has really changed from 1928 in many ways. Card playing can result in plenty of bad (illustrated by gambling addiction), as can dancing (some kinds of dancing by non-spouses are pretty racy and should be avoided), as can movie attendance (or watching the equivalent, porn videos, which are essentially movies). So have things really changed all that much?

» Doug Vande Griend // online comment

### Rebaptism

I was alarmed by the comments about rebaptism (“Big Questions,” Dec. 2018) stating that rebaptism “casts doubt on what God has done.” I was rebaptized after a lifetime in the church. The Lord led me through unwanted spaces to change my heart. What a witness to my children and grandchildren when my testimony was read aloud! To me, rebaptism is a public statement that the Lord will call, change hearts, and refocus pathways when hearts open to his call.

» Douglas J. Elenbaas // Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Creation

Each time I read about the controversy surrounding the creation story, my heart breaks. A recent example is the response to the Faith Formation question (“Big Questions,” Nov. 2018). The Genesis teaching of how God created things does not stand alone; confirmation by God of its literal truth is ample. Second Peter 3:5 confirms creation by spoken words in the context of describing some “last days” conditions. It tells of scoffers who deliberately forget how God created things. Is that the road we are on? Or will we join the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 by embracing the Genesis creation story as truth?

» Gene Zoerhof // Holland, Mich.

*Editor’s Note: The CRC’s official position on creation and science can be found online: [www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/creation-science](http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/position-statements/creation-science)*




# Submitting to One Another

**I READ ABOUT** a congregational meeting on a contentious matter. The initial vote was tied. When the chair announced the results, he said, “As chair of this meeting, it is my privilege to cast the deciding vote. I choose to abstain. The motion is neither carried nor defeated. We obviously need to spend more time in Scripture, in prayer, and in dialogue with one another. This meeting is adjourned.” When the congregation gathered a month later, the matter was decided by a decisive majority.

I think I understand the desire to make major decisions only with supermajorities: We want to maintain unity; we don’t want to move forward without strong support. But I wonder: Doesn’t the outcome often depend on the way the question is worded? Why say, *We will not make this change unless a supermajority supports it?* Why not say instead, *We will make this change unless a supermajority opposes it?* And what happens when you ask for a two-thirds majority and get 64 percent support? Haven’t you allowed a 36 percent minority to make the decision, potentially leaving the majority feeling alienated or angry?

I’ve learned that in the earliest Dutch Reformed churches, councils voted twice on all matters. The first vote determined the will of the majority. The second vote affirmed (made unanimous?) the will of the majority. This reflects the basic principle that a church council is a unified body. Whatever happened in the council room, once a decision has been made, it is a decision of the whole council. No council member may contradict the council’s decision within the congregation.

I wonder what it might look like to adopt or adapt this model for major congregational (and council) decisions.  
Vote twice.

I wonder what it might look like to adopt or adapt this model for major congregational (and council) decisions. Vote twice: The first vote determines the will of the majority; the second asks, *Can we submit to the will of the majority?* For the sake of unity and not moving forward without strong support, a supermajority could, or should, be required for this second vote. If the necessary supermajority is not able to submit to the will of the majority, the matter is left, for the time being, undecided; we obviously need to spend more time in Scripture, in prayer, and in dialogue with one another. 



Ryan Faber is lead pastor of Faith CRC, Pella, Iowa, and a PhD student in church polity and history at the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.



## As I Was Saying

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- » Who Is My Neighbor?
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# Sap

## When Words Fail

Heidi S. De Jonge

*Ineffable: too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words*

**E**xcuse my language!" This is often one of the first things people say when, in the course of conversation, they find out I am a pastor.

Whether they've taken God's name in vain or used barnyard expletives, when they juxtapose their speech with my vocation, they seem compelled to offer an apology. I find it fascinating and a bit odd that they associate my profession first and foremost with policing language. If someone really wants to confess their misuse of language to me, I'd rather they confess the lack of consistency between their words and their actions or their habit of gossiping.

I was brought up to be careful with my speech, and I am raising my daughters the same way. But could it be that there's a place for some of the words people apologize to me for saying? (Before you start writing letters to the editor, I want to be clear that I am not talking here about taking God's name in vain but about other not-so-polite language.)

The biblical argument for saltier language comes from the psalmists, prophets, and apostles themselves.

Every once in a while, they used offensive and scandalous language (at times obscured by our English translations) to shock us out of complacency and to shine a light on the pain, sin, and brokenness of our world.

There are certainly some pragmatic arguments for uttering expletives. In her provocative book, *Swearing is Good For You: The Amazing Science of Bad Language*, scientist Emma Byrne cites studies showing that swearing can help people endure pain for longer periods of time and face physical challenges more successfully.

Kate Bowler makes a different kind of argument. In her book *Everything Happens for a Reason (and other lies I've loved)*, Kate—a mother, a wife, an assistant professor of history at Duke Divinity School, and a Stage IV cancer patient—writes about how she took up cursing for Lent.

Wait, what? She didn't *give up* cursing for Lent; she *took it up*? That's right.

Kate had read an article about how grieving people swear "because they feel the English language has reached its limit in a time of inarticulate sorrow" (127). In the midst of cancer treatments and while confronting her own mortality, Kate found that the English language had reached its limits for her as well.

Kate reflected on her experience of looking for a Good Friday service when she was in Houston during Holy Week. But when she arrived, greeters wished her a "Happy Good Friday!" She noted that during the service, "Jesus stayed dead" for only about three songs. Then it was straight into the resurrection.

A few years later, this time experiencing Lent and chemotherapy side effects at the same time, she found other Christian communities similarly reluctant to lean into the reality of death. "Everyone is trying to Easter the crap out of my Lent," she said to friends "through gritted teeth and tears" (134).

And so she swears. *I swear about cancer. I swear about dry croissants and coffee that cools too quickly. I swear about the budding ulcers in my mouth from intense chemotherapy. I swear about the refugee crisis in Europe. . . . I swear about Curious George whining to the Man in the Yellow Hat. I am relentless. Last week I cursed at my mother-in-law in what I imagine was the halfway mark of her complaining about her wrinkles and her droopy parts* (127).

And then, she says, one Sunday morning at brunch, she stops—the drive to swear breaking "like a fever."

# Profos!#

There are times when our regular words are not enough.

I find Kate's strange Lenten discipline evocative. Even if I never take up swearing for Lent (and I don't plan to!), there *are* times in life when the English language—when *any* language—reaches its limit. These might be times of sorrow, fear, and anger. Or these might be times of joy, surprise, and delight. Whether we are standing in awe at the beauty of God's creation or curled up in horror at creation's brokenness, whether we are stirred into relief and joy at the grace and forgiveness of God or aching with longing for the new creation, there are times when our regular words are not enough.

Perhaps some of us are simply silent in these times. Others might cry. Some write, recite, or read poetry. And still others reach deep into the limbic system of our brains (where emotion, instinct, and swear words are stored) and, in a subconscious attempt to reach the limits of language, come out with words that would make our grandmothers blush.


Now, Paul does say in Ephesians 4:29a, "Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths." English translations open up the Greek word for "unwholesome" (*sapros*) in a variety of ways: *evil, harmful, foul, corrupt, filthy*. Paul seems to prohibit "bad language." But might there be rare or understandable times when that same "bad language" is actually "helpful for building others up according to their needs" in order to "benefit those who listen" (v. 29b)? Some biblical authors—even Paul—certainly seemed to think so (check out the King James Version of Phil. 3:8).

I may be pushing the boundaries of what is permissible, but the deepest truth that I am dancing with is the ineffability of our experiences of God and the world. In the words of T. S. Eliot, *Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden, / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, / Will not stay still* ("Burnt Norton," *Four Quartets*).

Even the heavens, according to the psalmist, are torn between articulation and silence: *They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world* (Ps. 19:3–4).

In this Lenten season, when words slip and crack under the weight of our pain or under the weight of glory, I am thankful for the freedom to groan as in the pains of childbirth. I am thankful that the Spirit also

intercedes with wordless groans (Rom. 8:22, 26). And I am most thankful that our eternal God not only *speaks* to us, but also pierced the ineffability of God's being and the ineffability of creation and the fall with the Word made flesh, who made his dwelling among us.

Jesus is the Word not only heard, but seen. And not only seen, but touched. Jesus is the Word who not only lived, but died. Who not only died, but lives. Jesus is the Word who is not only at the right hand of the Father, but is with us. When our words fail and we crack with cuss words or slide into silence, may Jesus' effable words and ineffable presence be our only comfort. 



Heidi De Jonge is pastor of Westside Fellowship CRC in Kingston, Ont.,. She enjoys cycling, cake decorating, and digital scrapbooking. She and her husband have three young daughters.

1. What are your thoughts and feelings about swear words or "bad language"? Is such language ever permissible? Why or why not?
2. Were you aware that some biblical writers used "saltier language" that is obscured by our English translations? Do you know . . .

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## BIG QUESTIONS

### Ethics

#### What is wrong with gene editing in embryos if we can save children from horrible genetic diseases?

This scientific technology is so new that we do not yet fully comprehend all the possible implications and consequences—unintended or otherwise—to be able to evaluate it accurately. Simply because we can do it does not mean we should. Are we certain at this point that there are no negative consequences or side effects to the child from such gene editing? And if gene-edited embryos were to become normative, how would that impact our understanding of what it means to be human and to have a flourishing life?

Our Reformed doctrine of total depravity makes me wonder if human beings are able to restrict this technology to simply mitigating disease and for benevolent ends. The temptation might be too great to avoid using gene editing as a means to make people stronger, smarter, and “better” than their non-genetically modified peers, or for other insidious goals I haven’t imagined.

There are multiple safety, social justice, and theological questions at play with this technology. But for now I suggest Christians need to seriously examine the following underlying questions.

How should we approach pain and suffering in our lives? Are suffering and pain to be avoided always, at all costs? Why did God in Jesus choose to face suffering instead of avoiding it? What does it mean to live an abundant



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohorquez

or flourishing life? What does it mean for people born with severe genetic disabilities to live in Christ? Are we better or worse without suffering and pain in our midst and in our lives? Where is the role of trusting God with our lives and even with our children’s lives? Is the desire to control our children’s potential lives and futures rooted in our love for God, for the child, and for others, or rooted in fear of suffering, in avoidance of failure, in pursuit of comfort, and in striving for human success?

These foundational questions need to be clarified in order to ethically engage the question of embryonic gene editing.

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

### Faith Formation

#### My daughter and her husband attend a church that offers only Sunday school and not children’s worship. Our congregation has had both for years. What are my grandchildren missing?

There are many reasons why a church may choose one program over others: congregational history, a lack of adults to lead programs, families who would attend only one program, or even a lack of space. So we don’t want to

make assumptions about what is going on in this particular church.

We view the purposes for Sunday school and children’s worship as different. In our Sunday school we try to emphasize Bible knowledge as well as building relationships with adults. Children hear Bible stories from a Reformed perspective, but they also have time for the teachers to tell personal stories from their lives that fit the lessons. Both are important.

Children’s worship, on the other hand, is exactly as the name indicates: worship—a time when children, with an adult worship leader, meet to work with the stories of God, to pray, and to respond to what they have heard. This is done in a way that is developmentally appropriate based on the child’s age. Children’s worship uses a number of different names: Young Children and Worship, Godly Play, or Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, depending on the materials used. While the stories are aimed at young children, they are presented in a way that inspires both storyteller and listeners. Time is spent helping children learn how to be in worship and how to respond to God’s work in their lives. Relationships with caring adults are built here as well.

These programs have different goals, so having both of them makes sense but isn’t always practical. Many good things unrelated to specific programs happen with children in congregations. The faith nurture of your grandkids could also be supported in

other ways. Lessons about worship can be introduced to children in congregational worship. Bible instruction can occur at church during the week or at home in family devotions, bedtime readings, or storytelling. As grandparents, you can be part of your grandchildren's faith formation by establishing close relationships with them, providing and reading Bible storybooks, celebrating faith markers, and telling stories about God's presence in your life.

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

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

### Relationships

## **Why does the abuse of power by leaders in our churches and parachurch organizations seem to be more common than it used to be, and how can we best address this problem?**

It is true that our churches are plagued, like the rest of society, by the scourge of leadership abuse on occasion. The difference is that for too long in the past, this evil perpetrated against the vulnerable among us was tolerated, ignored, or swept under the rug. Thankfully this is no longer seen as acceptable.

Abuse of power does not happen in a vacuum. Leaders who are able to exercise enormous power because of their charisma might do much good, but may also give in to the temptation to "lord it over someone" just because they can, or because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Christian leaders are not exempt from temptations to sin any more than non-Christian leaders are.

When the abuse of power is sexualized, a leader feels an attraction to relationship-less sex (pornography) in combination with a desire to wield illegitimate power (lord it over). Such a

leader is concerned with using his or her influence for self-gratification above the common good.

As Christians, we know from Scripture that we must abhor the wielding of self-serving power and not accept "junk sex" as okay. We often assume that Christian leaders are tempted less than non-Christians to wield power illegitimately. This is a fallacy. Statistics have proven that incidents of abuse—physical, emotional, and/or sexual—occur at approximately the same rate in all institutions of society, including the instituted church and parachurch groups.

It is better to be drowned with a weight tied around one's neck, says Scripture, than to hurt one of these little ones for self-gratification. Leadership in Christian circles requires soul searching, self-sacrifice, and humility, not pride and narcissism.

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

### Missional Living

## **I have had awful times talking about justice with my family and friends who do not agree with my perspective. I love them, but my approach is not working. Any advice?**

You are not alone. The conversations around many dinner tables, church fellowship spaces, and coffeehouses have turned into shouting matches and resulted in hurt feelings and further polarization about issues including immigration, poverty, the role of denominational ministries, and refugees. How can Christians practice a better way of having conversations that does not devolve into suspicion and attacks?

First, listen with empathy. It's easy to argue our perspective as the right and righteous answer to any issue. But people are more than their arguments

and opinions; they are human beings with emotions and experiences that matter to them. When we give undivided attention to perspectives that differ from our own, we practice Christian hospitality and choose to humanize people who hold those perspectives as image bearers of God. By listening empathically, we are willing to put ourselves into their shoes.

Next, be curious. Jesus was genuinely curious about people he met along the way. His curiosity about people's lives made him ask questions instead of mounting debates. He asked questions of a Samaritan woman who had a tough time with relationships and religion. He asked questions of fearful Pharisees who defended their stature and position as Jewish experts. Asking questions reframes the conversation, shifting from the goal of winning and losing to understanding the other person's life without judgment.

Finally, stay connected. It is difficult to remain connected to people who disagree with us. The current cultural context insists we walk away, find our own echo chambers, and demolish our opponents on social media. Our Lord has called us to a greater responsibility. Staying in relationship means finding other ways of connecting when debating is not going anywhere. Keep talking. Keep open lines of communication. Keep trying.

Above all, pray. Only the Lord can change people—including ourselves. Celebrate small, gradual agreement as signs of the Holy Spirit and further opportunities to work together against injustice.

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



Got a Big Question for any of our panelists? Email it to [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org) with "Big Questions" in the subject line.

# Championing Youth Ministry in Illinois: Big Night of Worship

## NEWS

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September Big Night of Worship at Elmhurst CRC.

Andy Pasek doesn't wear a cape and he doesn't claim any superhero powers.

But for the two dozen or so churches in Classis Northern Illinois, a regional group of Christian Reformed congregations, Pasek is a champion when it comes to youth ministry.

Pasek, who has been youth pastor at Elmhurst (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church for the past seven years, is one of about 30 people across the denomination who hold the title “youth ministry champion.” Their role is to help churches in their regional assemblies with youth ministry initiatives.

An initiative Pasek has taken on is putting together large-scale events to help bring teens together. Last September at Elmhurst CRC, about 200 teens from six Chicago-area congregations turned out for what was dubbed “A Big Night of Worship.”

“We have slow days when it comes to youth ministry, like coming back from Christmas vacation or coming back from spring break,” Pasek said. “You have a lower number of kids showing up, and in youth ministry, if you have a low number of kids, the kids that are there feel very awkward. I was trying to figure out how to solve that.” Blessed with musicians at Elmhurst CRC, Pasek thought they could serve as a blessing to other churches, putting together a big event that might generate excitement.

Pasek and youth leaders from three other CRC congregations put together the event, the third they'd tried. Lombard CRC, Wheaton CRC and Faith CRC have all been involved, with Faith hosting one of the earlier events.

The Big Night of Worship has included opening with an ice-breaker game, a worship band leading in a time of singing, and a speaker, Pasek said.

Another Big Night of Worship is planned for this spring, around spring break.

While most of the churches in the Northern Illinois Classis are in the Chicago suburbs, the assembly also includes congregations as far west as near the Mississippi River, which can present logistical challenges for connecting youth ministries.

“A lot of what I do will be on the phone or over email,” Pasek said. “If [church youth workers] have questions, if they're looking for best practices, if they want ideas, I'm available essentially 24/7.”

While some youth ministry champions receive a small stipend for their work, Pasek said he does his work on a volunteer basis.

The “youth ministry champion” concept started with CRC churches in Canada several years ago and has slowly worked its way into U.S. churches. “It's still all very new. We're still figuring it all out and what it looks like here in the States,” Pasek said.

Pasek reports regularly to classis on various projects that are being worked on as well as what hot-button issues are being dealt with in youth ministry. He also sends out a monthly newsletter to churches in the classis. When a church recently lost its youth minister, Pasek got a call to help the church discern what the role looked like for the size of that congregation.

“I'm trying to be a resource, a sounding board, and an area of support for youth ministry,” Pasek said.

— Greg Chandler



## Church Includes Temporary Shelter in Multi-use Space



Photo by Amy Martin

When its main shelter is full in the winter, Flagstaff Shelter Services works with partnering churches to supply overflow shelter for a week at a time.

Hope Community Church in Flagstaff, Ariz., hosted an overflow shelter for its local emergency shelter, Flagstaff Shelter Services, from January 6 to 13. The Christian Reformed congregation shares its building with a Navajo church, Chinese and Korean ministries, and a Spanish-speaking group that is just getting started. Deacon Steve Hall said it can sometimes be difficult to schedule all of the activities, but the church recognizes serving its local emergency shelter as a priority.

"We have been a part of this for three years now and plan to continue doing so in the near future. The shelter provides the overseeing staff, and we supply the heated space for about 20 people to be able to have a warm place to sleep," Hall said. "We all cooperate and make do with the space that the Lord has provided us."

Flagstaff Shelter Services runs a year-round shelter for people experiencing homelessness. The organization also provides services to help people find permanent homes. During the winter months when the shelter facility is full, this arrangement with neighboring churches allows them to provide more beds. They call the overflow shelter "Sanctuary."

At each church, the men and staff stay for about 12 hours. Volunteers from the congregation supply breakfast, usually bringing egg and sausage casseroles that can be served warm.

"The Lord has been good to us, and we want to do everything we can to help our community," said Hall, who serves as the overflow shelter coordinator for Hope Community Church.

— Alissa Vernon

## Creating Tangible Lenten Experiences

As Lent begins on Wednesday, March 6, congregants of Community Christian Reformed Church in Kitchener, Ont., will begin their second year of marking this period of the church calendar with a tangible remembrance. Rev. Amanda Bakale, the church's pastor of faith formation, has initiated the practices for the 40-day season leading up to Easter. Bakale says a key to forming faith is connecting what is spoken and learned at church with what is lived through the week.

In 2018 Bakale put together "Lent in a Bag"—sets of devotions and corresponding objects that were kid-friendly and tactile, each connected to her sermon series of the time. Sand, for example, invited people to think about "desert" experiences in their lives; a seed suggested that times of darkness and waiting can bring growth. One family planted the seed in their backyard; the sunflower that grew from it reminded them well into summer of God's timing and promises.

For 2019, Community CRC is planning a Lent Passport. Each of the worship services during Lent will appear in the passport, which participants can have stamped at each service. The booklet will also include Scripture and suggested activities for each week.

"Devotions are important, especially in the home," said Bakale. "So we're finding ways to invite people to home faith practices so that it's an invitation and not a burden." The ideas for both Lent experiences came from an ecumenical group of women clergy of which Bakale is a member.

— Anita Brinkman



## Kenosis Groups: Understanding White Identity

*Kenosis*, a Greek word meaning “to empty,” is used in Philippians 2:7 to describe how Jesus emptied himself to take the form of a servant. Kenosis is also the name of community groups led by white people for white people to study how culture shapes their life in fellowship. Kenosis Community groups were developed by the Canadian Race Relations office of the Christian Reformed Church to initiate open and honest discussion about positions of power and privilege that can go unnoticed and unspoken by white Christians.

“It’s a way to lean into something [that has been] absent from the Christian Reformed denomination, an honest grappling with whiteness,” explained Kim Radersma, a Kenosis facilitator from St. Catharines, Ont. Radersma is currently pursuing a Ph.D. at Brock University in educational studies with a focus on anti-racist pedagogy.

“White people have not been given tools in how to have conversations about what it means to be white,” Radersma said. Kenosis groups, meeting once a month for six months, were developed to provide these tools. The groups work through six modules using primarily two resources: a collection of biblical reflections and essays called “Cracking Open White Identity Towards Transformation” published by the Canadian Council of Churches, and a podcast called “Colour Code” from the newspaper *The Globe and Mail*.

Steve Kabetu, national director of Resonate Global Mission, had a hand in creating the collection of essays as he was co-chair of the Council’s Canadian Ecumenical Anti-Racism Network at the time. Kabetu wanted to find a way to “crack open the mountain” in naming and seeing privilege that comes with being white in Canada.



Radersma, as well as Peter Noteboom (a contributor to chapters in the collection and a member of First CRC in Toronto), and Danielle Steenwyk-Rowaan have all facilitated Kenosis groups in southern Ontario. Steenwyk-Rowaan, CRCNA Justice Communication Team Coordinator, appreciated the Canadian-specific resources and support provided by Race Relations coordinator Bernadette Arthur.

“There is a myth that anti-racism work is to improve areas for those who are racialized,” said Arthur. The journey is important for white Christians to unpack their racial identity so that the body of Christ can be unified and transformed.

Kenosis groups are homogeneous in racial identity to provide an environment where participants can engage honestly. “It creates space where the fear of saying something incorrect or offensive is mitigated and invites authentic, open questions,” said Radersma.

The topics and materials discussed at Kenosis also brought levels of discomfort. Though she found the discussions “a

beautiful, authentic community experience,” Steenwyk-Rowaan said it was difficult to recognize the continued legacy of colonialism and to disentangle that from one’s Christian identity. “It was confusing and hard to wrestle with what was done in the name of Jesus and what is still being done in his name,” she said.

Arthur hopes to establish more groups in Canada and is looking to incorporate facilitators perhaps just beginning to come to terms with their racial identity. “They don’t have to be experts of critical race theory, just be willing to model brave conversation,” she said.

Marlene Bergsma participated in a Kenosis group formed at Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines. “A big takeaway for me was that if there is going to be change—to be more just and inclusive—the privileged need to do work so we can all move in the direction of change,” she said.

— Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

**“Cracking Open White Identity Towards Transformation” is available as a resource from [councilofchurches.ca/resources/](http://councilofchurches.ca/resources/).**



## B.C. Church Celebrates the New Year Three Ways



Elements of Nowruz, the Persian New Year celebration, include signs of spring.

New Westminster Christian Reformed Church in Burnaby, B.C., rings in the new year with three distinct celebrations. The church and its members celebrate on January 1 of the western calendar, the Lunar New Year in February, and the Persian New Year (Nowruz) in March. These celebrations are born from the congregation's many multicultural ministries and initiatives.

Hyung-Jun Kim, pastor of discipleship and multicultural ministry, said, "Thanksgiving and Christmas are usually the time for our Canadian members to teach students and immigrant families about the meaning of different traditions related to those holidays. These two other New Year's Day traditions are times for our non-Canadian members to be a host, to be able to share their culture and food and what is special to them."

The New Year service on January 1 usually includes a brunch, and there is a focus on starting the year with meditations and prayer.

For the Lunar New Year, parishioners from several Asian cultures wear traditional clothing and decorate the church with traditional decorations. This event is a highlight for many of the congregation's international students who are away from home and their families.



Enjoying treats and sweets for the Lunar New Year 2018.

2019 will be the second time New Westminster CRC hosts a Persian New Year celebration. In 2018 Persian dishes were served, and a church member explained to the attendees the significance of the celebration and festival. Nowruz falls on the day of spring equinox, so growing wheatgrass is a traditional table decoration. Kim said it is a time during which people are expected make visits to the homes of family, friends, and neighbors. Visitors are welcomed and offered pastries, cookies, dried fruits, and other rich foods. These items were displayed as symbols of such hospitality.

"In a multicultural church, everyone needs to learn to be the host and the guest," Kim said. "It is not healthy to be a host all the time [or] to be a guest always. [Changing roles] is a great opportunity to learn the posture of humility."

— Dan Veeneman

## NOTEWORTHY



**Citizens for Public Justice**, a national organization of members inspired by faith to act for justice in Canadian public policy, hired a **new executive director** in January. An ordained pastor of Mennonite Church Canada, **Willard Metzger** begins his work at CPJ having previously served as executive director of his denomination; World Vision; and the executive of the Canadian Council of Churches.



**The Canadian Council of Churches**, an ecumenical organization focused on Christian unity of which the Christian Reformed Church is a member, is **marking its 75th anniversary**. The council begins this year with a new mission/vision statement and an updated logo with the tagline "Christ, Community, Compassion."

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## Congregation Draws on Immigrant Experience in Outreach to Chinese Newcomers

Founded by Dutch-speaking immigrants to Canada 65 years ago, Hebron Christian Reformed Church in Whitby, Ont., is drawing on its immigrant experience as it ministers to Mandarin-speaking newcomers to Canada. For the past three years, Hebron has partnered with Toronto Chinese Bible Church (TCBC) to provide a worship service in the Mandarin language each Sunday morning. Gradually the ministry has transitioned from a facility rental relationship in 2015 to the present point at which Hebron CRC is fully responsible for the Mandarin ministry while TCBC provides encouragement and advice as a spiritual partner.

Hebron's outreach to the 20,000 Chinese-speaking people in the Durham region goes back to 2003, said pastor Darren Hoogendoorn. The late Irene Bakker, spouse of Rev. Bernie Bakker, who was then the church's pastor, started an English as a Second Language program in the congregation's new building adjacent to a large public high school. Other programs including a Coffee Break Bible Study grew from there.

In 2015, leaders of the Toronto Chinese Bible Church approached Hoogendoorn about renting facilities for a new Chinese-language church plant. With the nearby school as a draw, the Chinese-speaking population was growing. Hoogendoorn realized that the Bible church's vision for the new congregation was very similar to that of Hebron CRC in everything but language; he saw that Hebron could grow as one congregation worshipping in two languages. Then-council chair Fred Engelage shared his vision, and the two men met with TCBC leaders to plan the Mandarin-language church plant.

"We can clearly see God's hand in this," said Engelage. "Darren saw the big picture, caught the vision, and our council bought it and put together a plan for implementing and leading our congregation. . . ."



Photo by Ron Rupke

Coffeetime fellowship at Hebron CRC.

Some of our senior members who were territorial about the church building at first are now enthusiastic supporters of our two-language congregation."

On Sunday mornings, members of both language communities mingle in the fellowship hall before the 10 o'clock worship services begin in separate rooms. Hoogendoorn leads the English-language service while commissioned CRC pastor Chunhua Zhao (or George, as he likes to be called) leads a gathering of 40 to 60 Mandarin-speaking worshippers. At an agreed-upon time in each service, young children leave the services for a combined English Sunday school program.

Most English-speaking members leave the building after joint coffee fellowship following worship, while Mandarin-speaking congregants remain for Bible study. Three separate studies are led by pastor George, his wife Jie (Janice) Shang, and by another young leader, Clarence Wang. The Bible studies are followed by a shared potluck luncheon until the Sunday fellowship concludes around 3 p.m.

### Ministry to seniors

The Hebron CRC vision "to glorify God by being passionate disciples of Jesus Christ making passionate disciples for Jesus Christ" shines in the outreach work of the young Mandarin-speaking fellowship. In particular, for Janice, that shows up as care for seniors. "In the Mandarin community, the children have come to Canada first. The seniors are living with their children. . . . They are not always connected well. For more than a year we have been praying for the seniors."

Janice thought they had made inroads to this population, but there's been a snag. After learning of a Chinese seniors club in the Durham region, the group was welcomed to meet at Hebron CRC, attracting up to 50 people on Saturday mornings. The connection at first was positive. "Besides Chinese games and exercises, we were teaching how to sing using worship songs [and] showing Christian videos; we ran an Alpha course for 13 weeks. Two seniors came to faith and we had baptisms at a combined worship service," Janice said.

However, disagreements arose about some of the proposed activities such as gambling for money and exercises involving spirit guides; some seniors objected to the Christian programming. In December 2018 George and Janice opened the church for the seniors program and were surprised when no one showed up: the seniors club leader had moved the program to other facilities without informing them. Although hurt and disappointed, Janice recalls the seniors who were led to a saving faith. "We will continue to reach out to the seniors of this region, one person at a time," she said.

— Ron Rupke

## REV Talks Showcase Pastors' Experience to Wider Audience



Beekeeping as a spiritual discipline. Spiritual care for people who struggle with drug and alcohol abuse. Navigating faith and marriage through a health crisis.

These are just a few of the topics tackled last fall by pastors from within Classis Georgetown, a regional group of Christian Reformed congregations in the southwest suburbs of Grand Rapids, Mich., as part of REV Talks—a speaker series patterned after the highly-successful TED talks held around the world.

“Classis Georgetown recognized that pastors tend to be a treasure trove of experiences and specialties,” said Marc Nelesen, one of the regional pastors for the classis and pastor of congregational life at Georgetown CRC in Hudsonville, Mich. “Much of the time, this experience and expertise is shared with the local congregation but doesn’t get a hearing in other places.”

Nelesen proposed the REV Talks series to the classis vision team, which has been actively pursuing opportunities for congregations to work together on various ministry projects. The team enthusiastically embraced the idea, and

In his REV talk, Forest Grove CRC pastor Jeff Scripps considers ancient and medieval schisms and how they might help us handle controversies in the church today.

classis coordinator Jim Roskam said it didn’t take long for speaker slots to fill. “Within two days, it was filled,” he said. “They came forward with their topics, with their ideas, and signed up just like that.”

Georgetown CRC hosted the series on Wednesday nights over a period of 12 weeks from September to December. Speakers received a stipend of \$150 for their presentations. Attendance varied, with a high of about 70. The archived talks have received close to 250 downloads.

Plans are being made for a second series this fall with some possible tweaks—such as having two pastors from different congregations taking on a specific topic or having the venue rotate among congregations throughout classis.

Find all 12 REV Talks from 2018 at [tinyurl.com/REVtalks](http://tinyurl.com/REVtalks).

— Greg Chandler

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Domingo Guzman Romero*  
1930-2019

Domingo Romero encapsulated his life by pointing to God’s faithfulness. Throughout times of danger, fear, hunger, and uncertainty, he fully trusted in God. Romero died on January 5.

Born and raised in a Christian home in Cuba, Romero enrolled at Los Pinos Nuevos Evangelical Seminary of Cuba at age 18. There was still freedom to congregate and worship when he began ministry. But as time went on and he served congregations in Calimete and Alacranes, relations between the churches and the Cuban government worsened. Ministry became increasingly difficult and dangerous. When the government decided to force adolescents, including Romero’s son, to leave school and work for the “motherland,” the Romeros decided to leave. No longer allowed to pastor, Romero had to work in agriculture for the state for the next three years. With only the clothes on their backs, the Romeros left Cuba in 1971.

Soon after arriving in the U.S., Romero accepted a call from Emanuel Hispanic Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich., where he served for 22 years until retiring in 1995.

He will be missed by his sons, Ariel and Omar, and their spouses and by eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by Mercedes, his partner in ministry and wife of 59 years.

— Janet A. Greidanus

## Churches Talk with The King's University about LGBTQ Issues

As Christian universities in Canada navigate offering post-secondary education that does not infringe on legally protected rights, some churches supporting those institutions struggle with the lack of articulated commitment to teach their biblically based understandings of gender, marriage, and sexuality.

Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Saskatoon, Sask., is one of those churches struggling with the issue as it relates to The King's University in Edmonton, Alta. Bethel asked Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan, its regional assembly of CRC congregations, to (1) urge King's to uphold the Scripture's teaching on marriage, gender, and sexuality as currently articulated in the CRCNA; (2) ask King's to issue a public statement defending that biblical view of gender and sexuality; and (3) request that King's remove links to LGBTQ-affirming organizations on its website and encourage it to partner with ministries that promote that biblical view of gender and sexuality.

The King's University (TKU) was at the time preparing a statement of inclusion, which it released in November 2018. Created in consultation with faculty, staff, students, and leadership, the statement is meant to provide "clarity on King's unique missional Christian role in Canada's higher education scene."

The discussion at the October meeting of classis was described as respectful. There were pastors who spoke for and against the requests of Bethel CRC. King's president Melanie Humphreys was given opportunity to speak, as was King's board member (at the time) Paul Verhoef, who is also the classis chaplain at the University of Calgary.

Describing the conversation, Verhoef said "TKU is saying that their way of being a Christian university is to root deeply in the Christian story ([as articulated in its] mission, vision, and faith commitment/values), while some at



classis were asking specifically for an ethical statement around human gender and sexuality to be added to that faith commitment."

"We believe that the role of a Christian university is to engage in discussions on important topics and challenging issues, not to take political or doctrinal positions," said Harry Kits, chair of King's Board of Governors.

In the end, the classis acceded to the first and third of Bethel's requests but not the second.

In a letter of response to the classis, King's affirmed its "commitment to Scripture and to a Christian world-and-life view" as articulated in its Statement of Faith. It also noted that it had taken steps to remove the LGBTQ links from the official King's website, instead linking to the independent Students' Association website where student groups provide the resources they choose. The letter also welcomed continued engagement with the churches.

The council of Nobleford CRC acted on this, inviting representatives to its January 2019 council meeting. Of those discussions pastor Frank Lanting said, "We had a very good and productive meeting in which we

all agreed that Christian education's calling included the task of upholding biblical teachings in matters regarding "marriage, gender, and sexuality"—the very issue raised in the overture (request). As far as our council is concerned, we are assured that TKU is working with us in advancing the redemptive work of Christ in the lives of our students."

The church that brought the requests to classis has withdrawn its support of King's. Bethel CRC's council was appreciative of the clear communication but disappointed that the university chose to not make an institutional statement on marriage and sexuality.

"Our council's primary concern has always been, and still is, that students at Christian universities who are experiencing same-sex attraction or questions about their gender identity are taught that they can, by God's grace and the Holy Spirit's power, resist sin and live holy and Christ-honoring lives. Unfortunately, the leadership at King's gave no assurance toward this end," pastor Rafik Kamel said. Not wanting to take the matter further, the council decided it cannot continue its financial support or promote enrolment at King's. "We are all saddened by this and do not take it lightly, but we do not feel that we can confidently entrust the sheep who are under our care to the teaching at King's," Kamel said.

Support from CRC churches makes up an average of 21 percent of the yearly fundraising total for King's. This particular classis does not contribute financially as a whole. King's relationship with the CRC goes beyond monetary contribution. "Our ties with the CRC and the classes in our region are strong and are valued by the university," Humphreys said. "In a day and age of polarized public discussion, I think King's story is one of staying at the table and not shying away from difficult conversations."

— *Alissa Vernon,*  
with files from *Janet A. Gredanus*



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**Leadership from the  
Classroom to the Pulpit  
and Everywhere  
in Between**

By Matthew Cooke

**M**y classwork and my internship have been connected in ways that, after I have learned something in class, I am able to go to the church I am working at and use what I have learned,” said Hannah Saxton, a second-year Master of Divinity student, about her education at Calvin Theological Seminary.

“The opportunity to use and apply what I have learned, to not only hear about ministry but also be a part of ministry, has helped me to practice and grow in my leadership abilities,” she said.

Like the other 270 or so students at Calvin Seminary, Saxton is not just growing in her knowledge about Reformed theology; she’s developing the skills and abilities she’ll need as a leader after she graduates.

Leadership development is a core part of the school’s mission statement: “Calvin Theological Seminary is a learning community in the Reformed Christian tradition that forms church leaders who cultivate communities of disciples of Jesus Christ.” But demonstrating how leadership development happens can be challenging. The methods for and scope of developing ministry leaders evolve and develop over time.

At its most basic level, leadership development begins in the classroom. Since its founding, the seminary has required coursework focused specifically on developing students for future leadership. In the “Leadership in Ministry” course, for example, students think through what it means to be a leader in a ministry setting. They do this through conversation about what they are learning in their other coursework, considering the ideas of prominent leaders, and reflecting on their own leadership skills and gifts.

But leadership development isn’t limited to a single course. In some ways, all Calvin Seminary courses aim to shape future ministry leaders. Throughout the curriculum, faculty ask leadership development questions such as: What does Ephesians teach us about ministry leadership? What does the study of ethics teach us about obedient ministry leadership? How can you show leadership through thoughtful pastoral care? Through mindful worship?

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Hannah Saxton is one of more than 270 students who are developing leadership skills at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Even the course activities students participate in can serve as leadership development. A group project can be an important tool, professor Sarah Schreiber said. “In a lot of ways it serves as an example of life in ministry,” Schreiber explained. “You have to learn to work and communicate with people who think differently than you.”

Other activities at the seminary also contribute to leadership growth. Self-reflection, for example, is a significant area of focus for students. They not only listen to lectures and write papers but take a self-inventory and use other evaluation tools to better understand their strengths and discover potential blind spots.

In recent years, students have been asked to take these self-reflection tools and use them in conversation with their contextual-learning mentors and with peer formation groups. In this way, they can discuss what they’ve learned about their leadership abilities and receive input from others about skills and gaps they may have missed.

A student’s internship setting is also a significant opportunity for leadership development. Since 2017, Calvin Seminary has had a director of vocational formation who works with students to pair them each with a mentor and place them in a two-year internship as part of their studies. These real-world experiences allow students to put into practice the things they have learned.

In a recent evaluation, one church considered the roles its intern filled over the course of the last year: “Our seminary intern has done a great job providing leadership in the area of young adults, all the while training a young couple to take over when he is gone,” read the report. “He’s been able to dabble in a lot of other areas as part of his learning experience, including preaching and leading worship a number of times.”

The report went on to say that the internship “helped clarify [the student’s] call as well, as it gave him opportunities to sort out his pastoral identity in a healthy way.”

Through contextual learning, seminary students are forced to consider their leadership identity within an actual ministry community.

**In some ways,  
all Calvin Seminary  
courses aim to  
shape future  
ministry leaders.**

Leadership development does not stop at graduation. Being a “lifelong learner” is encouraged in most professions, so it is not surprising that pastors and other ministry leaders often are looking for ways to grow professionally. Seminaries don’t exist only to serve traditional students; they can be important hubs of learning for current church leaders as well.

Calvin Seminary has a number of resources and institutes available to help ministry leaders continue to grow. The Calvin Symposium on Worship, conferences and workshops hosted by the Center for Excellence in Preaching, and other public lectures and conferences are just a few examples of regularly offered learning opportunities. Calvin Seminary is also finding new ways to collaborate with and learn from current pastors and ministry leaders, such as by training current leaders as seminary intern mentors.

Geoff Vandermolten, director of the seminary’s vocational formation office, believes simply that effective mentorship comes from strong mentors. His office provides support for these ministry mentors, coaching them on how to effectively work with future church leaders but also providing space for them to consider their own leadership skills and how they can continue to grow.

These are just a few of the intentional ways leadership development happens at Calvin Seminary. While some of these initiatives are new and continue to evolve, all grow from the long-standing mission of Calvin Seminary.


What’s next? The Master of Arts in Ministry Leadership has just been approved for full online access, providing a new way to connect with Calvin Seminary faculty and resources regardless of where students live.

Other initiatives such as the Certificate in Latino/a Ministries program and the new Global Leader Scholarship are creating new opportunities for Calvin Seminary to provide leadership development outside of traditional Christian Reformed circles.

Partnerships with other Christian Reformed agencies and other churches and ministry organizations also will become more frequent as the seminary looks to provide students with ministry experience.

The process of forming church leaders is anything but simple. But through its multifaceted approach, Calvin Seminary equips graduates for leadership in the complexities of day-to-day ministry.

Saxton is already recognizing this in her ministry education. “Because of Calvin Seminary,” she said, “I will be equipped not only to teach and to share the Word, but also to love and to walk beside people as they go through life.”

This is what the seminary is all about. 

## Vulnerable Pastors Make Great Leaders

**WHAT DOES A GREAT PASTORAL LEADER** look like?

Many believe the finest pastors must be great preachers, compassionate caregivers, fastidious theologians, missionally engaged evangelists, culturally savvy exegetes, and more. So when search committees begin their search for a new pastor, it’s likely that several people harbor hopes that their next one will check nearly every box on that list.

Rev. Mandy Smith recently authored *The Vulnerable Pastor*, in which she asserts that these hyperbolic expectations of pastors in every category of ministry are impossible to meet. In fact, Smith argues, the entire enterprise of pastoring does not depend solely on skills, theology, leadership acumen, or other learned material. Rather, the best pastoral ministry relies on all of these valuable tools being used in utter dependence on God. Citing numerous biblical examples, Smith argues that God works through human limitations.

*The Vulnerable Pastor* was assigned reading for all students in Calvin Seminary’s capstone leadership course last fall. Designed to be taken in a student’s final year of M.Div. studies, this course is designed to raise students’ self-awareness of their own strengths, weaknesses, and

limitations as a foundation for navigating ministry leadership.

As part of their work, students in the distance-learning section of the course were asked to record a three- to five-minute video in which they imagined themselves in conversation with Smith about her book, asking her challenging and insightful questions.

The students didn’t know that their videos were shared with Smith, who responded with her own videos personalized for each student. Smith, who pastors a church in Cincinnati, speaks and writes for Missio Alliance, and cofounded the SheLeads Summit, told students it was an honor to engage in honest conversation about challenging matters of leadership in ministry.

The students also found it meaningful. They expressed gratitude for this unexpected interaction with Smith as well as for the opportunity to think about their weaknesses and how they might be able to be effective ministry leaders despite their limitations.

—Geoff Vander Molen, Director of Vocational Formation



## Called to a Different Kind of Ministry

**FOUR YEARS AGO**, Sarah Hoogendoorn pulled out of the ministerial candidacy process. She had acquired her Master of Divinity degree and had begun working at a church in Alberta but discovered that she was not called to church ministry. Discouraged and uncertain, Hoogendoorn took a hiatus from ministry and moved back to South Dakota to live with her parents. She didn't yet realize the new path to ministry that God had in store for her.

"(It was) probably one of the hardest things I've ever done," Hoogendoorn said about her decision. "I had been working toward candidacy for so long, and I felt like I was not only failing myself, but also letting down all the people who had supported me along the way."

Hoogendoorn credits her family and church for helping her find another path. After moving back home, she became a janitor at her parents' church and helped lead the youth group there. Through this, Hoogendoorn met many new people from different ministries within the church.

"Through those people, God reminded me that I am called into gospel ministry, that I am passionate about God's kingdom, and that I have been gifted to engage with people on deep levels," she said.

Hoogendoorn began a yearlong residency in clinical pastoral education (CPE) at the Sioux Falls Veterans Affairs Medical Center. This was her first real exposure to chaplaincy, and she quickly discovered that she had a gift for ministering to veterans.

"One thing I like," Hoogendoorn explained, "is that veterans have a rough edge to them. They are so



willing to examine their sin, to lay it out on the table and really explore it, and have a deep desire to change their way of being."

The year of CPE was affirming and enlightening for Hoogendoorn. After her residency ended, she became a full-time chaplain at the VA center. She has since become an endorsed chaplain and was officially ordained as a minister of the Word in May 2018.

Hoogendoorn is the first woman to be ordained in Classis Iakota. While not everyone in her church believed that she should become ordained, many still supported her through interaction, encouragement, and prayer. She has found these acts of support to be incredibly meaningful and inspirational in her ministry. They are a reminder that even though church members might not agree on everything, they can rest in the same faith.

"I've been called by God into this ministry of chaplaincy, and this call has been affirmed externally by my church, my family, my friends, and by the denomination," Hoogendoorn said. "I remind myself of the good work I

engage in on a daily basis and how I see God's hand in it."

In addition to being a chaplain, Hoogendoorn is in the three- to five-year process of becoming a certified educator for CPE students. She's training others—many of them older than her—to understand themselves, analyze the spiritual care they provide, and deepen the theology with which they minister.

While Hoogendoorn's ordination did not follow the path she originally thought it would, she recognizes God's hand in the process and the value that she and other chaplains provide to the denomination. In a time when fewer people are attending Sunday morning church services, there is a great need for ministers who can bring the grace of Christ to nontraditional places. Through the support of chaplains such as Hoogendoorn, the church is developing leaders to meet these needs.

—Matt Hubers,  
Chaplaincy and Care Ministry

## The View from Here

## Leadership in Confusing Times

**OUR DENOMINATION-WIDE** ministry plan, *Our Journey 2020*, speaks of our desire as the Christian Reformed Church to grow leaders for our churches and ministries: “*Our churches and ministries will grow new leaders of many kinds. At all levels—local, regional, denominational—we discover the talents, skills, and strengths in our ordained and lay people. We cultivate those gifts through education, hands-on ministry opportunities, and guidance from mature leaders in order to raise new leaders who have deep roots and yield abundant fruit.*”

Yet we know that living into this statement of intent can be difficult. Our congregations and ministries don't exist in self-contained bubbles. We serve as Christ's representatives in communities, nations, and a world where many beliefs compete for our attention and acceptance.

Gone are the times when truth was universally found in a transcendent God or even in rational thought and science. Instead, we live in a time of “fake news” and competing narratives where truth can be understood from within each person's own construction.

We serve as Christ's representatives in communities, nations, and a world where many beliefs compete for our attention and acceptance.

This becomes especially challenging as our world presents us with more and more issues to navigate. With issues ranging from babies genetically edited before birth to complex immigration policy, it often seems that the church is faced with a cacophony of competing voices telling us how Christians should respond.

Leadership becomes especially important in these confusing times. And the characteristics of these leaders are also important. As Christians, we need gifted, faith-filled leaders who can direct our spiritual walk, foster civil dialogue, discern the Spirit's leading, and guide our participation in the world.

We need men and women of God who understand the times in which we live and can show us how to witness to the faith we have in Christ, just as in the Old Testament there were those “from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do” (1 Chron. 12:32).

Whether it takes the form of parents around the dinner table reading the *Today* devotional booklet, volunteers leading a GEMS or Cadets group or discipling others during a Coffee

Break session, deacons fostering community outreach, or pastors leading a congregation, leadership—from a variety of people and at all levels—is important to our congregations in many ways.

This leadership doesn't stop with today's challenges. As we look to the future and the new issues, challenges, and opportunities that may arise, it is also essential that we as a denomination raise up a new generation of leaders.

Let us seek out those with leadership potential in our congregations' youth groups, among emerging immigrant congregations, in college classrooms or InterVarsity Christian Fellowship groups, and in any other place they may be found. Let us openly identify the leadership gifts we see in these men and women and provide them with opportunities to develop and use those skills. Let us encourage them to continue to grow, then walk alongside them by lending faithful support to seminary education, online learning, mentoring, and prayer.

Only through such efforts will we be able to achieve the desired future in *Our Journey 2020* of raising up new leaders who “have deep roots and yield abundant fruit.”



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](http://TheBanner.org).

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# Traveling to Inspire 2017 for Inspiration

**THREE OF US RODE TOGETHER** to Detroit, Mich., to Inspire 2017 with much anticipation. I'm not sure what I was looking for, but I do know I needed to be inspired.

I needed to know that the Christian Reformed Church in North America is alive and well—that my efforts at being a church member, a committee member, a Coffee Break member, and a Story Hour leader were worthwhile.

We have a good church here in Western Springs, Illinois—a good preacher, good music, and good leadership in many areas. Our church people show love and concern for one another (I learned that when my husband, Ted, was sick and going through cancer treatments). But are we alone in this? I had to know.

So I was prompted to meet with 800 people in a lovely hotel in the heart of Detroit. Was I inspired? Yes, even more than I might have anticipated!

Something precious happened on that weekend. I was challenged to live out my faith in such a way that others can see Christ in me. The Holy Spirit seems closer to me now. Electrifying for me was the enthusiasm shown, for instance, by Kizzy Thomas, whose love of God was evident through dramatic readings spoken with rhythm and cadence.

The people who attended Inspire were a diverse group. I sat next to a man who emigrated from Lagos, Nigeria. A South Korean woman sat next to me at a Coffee Break event. At the main gathering, we sang a song or two with phrases in several languages. A praise team up front led us in upbeat songs and traditional hymns.

An especially meaningful time was when we all sang "It Is Well." Friday evening, we were introduced to a



lively song by a gospel choir put together for the event. If you think that CRC folks are a stuffy lot, think again. There is nothing more inspiring than hundreds of people singing heartily to the glory of God.

The main speakers gave us much food for thought:

**Richard Mouw:** "It is well with my soul, but it is not well in our cities. We long for the day when it will be well."

**Liz Curtis Higgs:** "Passion grows the more you worship, the more you study, the closer [Jesus] becomes to you. Jesus paid it all, and we get it all."

**Ruth Padilla DeBorst:** "We need to face our own fears and learn to trust in God. Perfect love drives out fear. We can step out in humble boldness, recognizing that it is God's love that enables us to be involved in God's reconciling work."

**Harvey Carey:** "Anyone can depict peace in a tranquil setting, but peace in a violent scene is true peace. We must not forget where we've come from. What is your story? There are people who are going through so

many challenges that only Someone holy can help them face. Don't go back home the same as you were before. Be inspired to bless."

For more on what was said, visit [crcna.org/gatherings/past-gatherings/inspire-2017](http://crcna.org/gatherings/past-gatherings/inspire-2017).



Sharon Bulthuis, member and Story Hour leader at the Christian Reformed Church of Western Springs, Ill.

## Be Inspired Again

Inspire 2019 will be held in Windsor, Ont.

**When:** Thursday, Aug. 1 through Saturday, Aug. 3

**Where:** St. Clair College Centre for the Arts, 201 Riverside Drive West

**Who:** Anyone involved in ministry at a Christian Reformed Church

For more information visit [crcna.org/inspire](http://crcna.org/inspire).

# Redefining Leadership through Campus Ministry



**NADEANA WAS NOT A LEADER**—or at least that's what she believed before beginning her internship with Western Campus Ministry. Now she's encouraging other students to be leaders too.

Western Campus Ministry is a Christian Reformed campus ministry in Ontario supported in part by Resonate Global Mission. When the team launched a Bible study, Mike Wagenman, campus pastor and Nadeana's mentor, encouraged Nadeana to lead it. But she was intimidated. She had never been in a leadership position, and she said no.

"In my head, [leaders] had to have a theological degree of some sort," she said. "You had to have documentation to show that you could lead. I [didn't] want to have the wrong answers to people's questions."

Then one of Nadeana's friends told her, "Just be who are you are, and God will use you as you are." With Mike's influence and her friend's

encouragement, Nadeana finally agreed to lead the Bible study.

Over the course of the semester, conversations with Mike and students in her Bible study challenged and transformed Nadeana's understanding of leadership. Now she follows a leadership style that focuses not only on her own strengths but on the strengths of many.

Nadeana inspires other students to lead.

"One of my greatest takeaways [was to] accept help and feel free to delegate," she said. "Accepting a helping hand or sharing the load is not 'weakness.' I have come to see it as a wonderful microcosm of what the church essentially is. We are called to be one body, but we are made of many unique parts."

Through her leadership, Nadeana was attentive to the students she was leading. Recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, she created leadership opportunities for them. For instance, many students in Nadeana's

Mike Wagenman (right) encourages students through Western Campus Ministry.

Bible study were new Christians. While they all had unique gifts, they were not confident in their ability to lead. One student who had a heart for praying lacked the confidence to pray out loud.

Week after week, Nadeana asked her to pray. Now the student often leads prayer in small groups.

"You don't become a leader overnight," Nadeana said. "It's from a series of small opportunities of leadership."

Nadeana knows stepping into leadership is intimidating. But with campus ministry support, she took a step of faith and is now helping other students embrace their leadership potential too.

—Cassie Westrate,  
Resonate Global Mission

## They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love

### WORLD RENEW HAS BEEN SERVING

and walking with communities in Tanzania for more than 25 years. Partnering with the local church, the African Inland Church Tanzania, World Renew seeks to see God glorified, churches strengthened, and people moved out of poverty.

Not far from the shores of Lake Victoria in northern Tanzania, World Renew has joined the group Reconciled World as they equip churches and communities to respond to their needs with their own resources. This kind of development work focuses on Truth Centered Transformation (TCT), a holistic training and discipleship program centered on God's essential and powerful role in transforming lives.

As rural churches are disciplined by trained local facilitators, they learn to apply God's truth to their lives and serve communities. Through this service to their communities, churches are growing in both size and depth of faith.

The church of Mwembeni began TCT training and moved to engage in what the TCT program calls "acts of love," often simple, one-day projects accomplished with the resources people already have. These are powerful exercises in obedience, dignity, and service.

Before embarking on TCT, church members did not understand or demonstrate acts of love to community members or church members who were not attending Sunday services. The church evangelist focused on prayer and preaching, not visiting or serving those who were in need.



The church of Mwembeni began engaging their community in acts of love after training centered on God's role in transforming lives.

As the church focused on the truths of God's Word, members began to understand the importance of caring for others and decided to start showing acts of love to their families and neighbors. They began visiting house to house and providing food such as maize and cassava to vulnerable children, widows, and the elderly. They donated clothing, carried water from water sources, and repaired a widow's house that had been damaged by rain.

Not surprisingly, the Mwembeni church began to attract new members. The membership grew from 30 to 45, and offerings also increased. Church members testify that showing and receiving an act of love brings people to God.

—Jim Zylstra,  
World Renew, Tanzania

# RESOURCES

for you and your church!

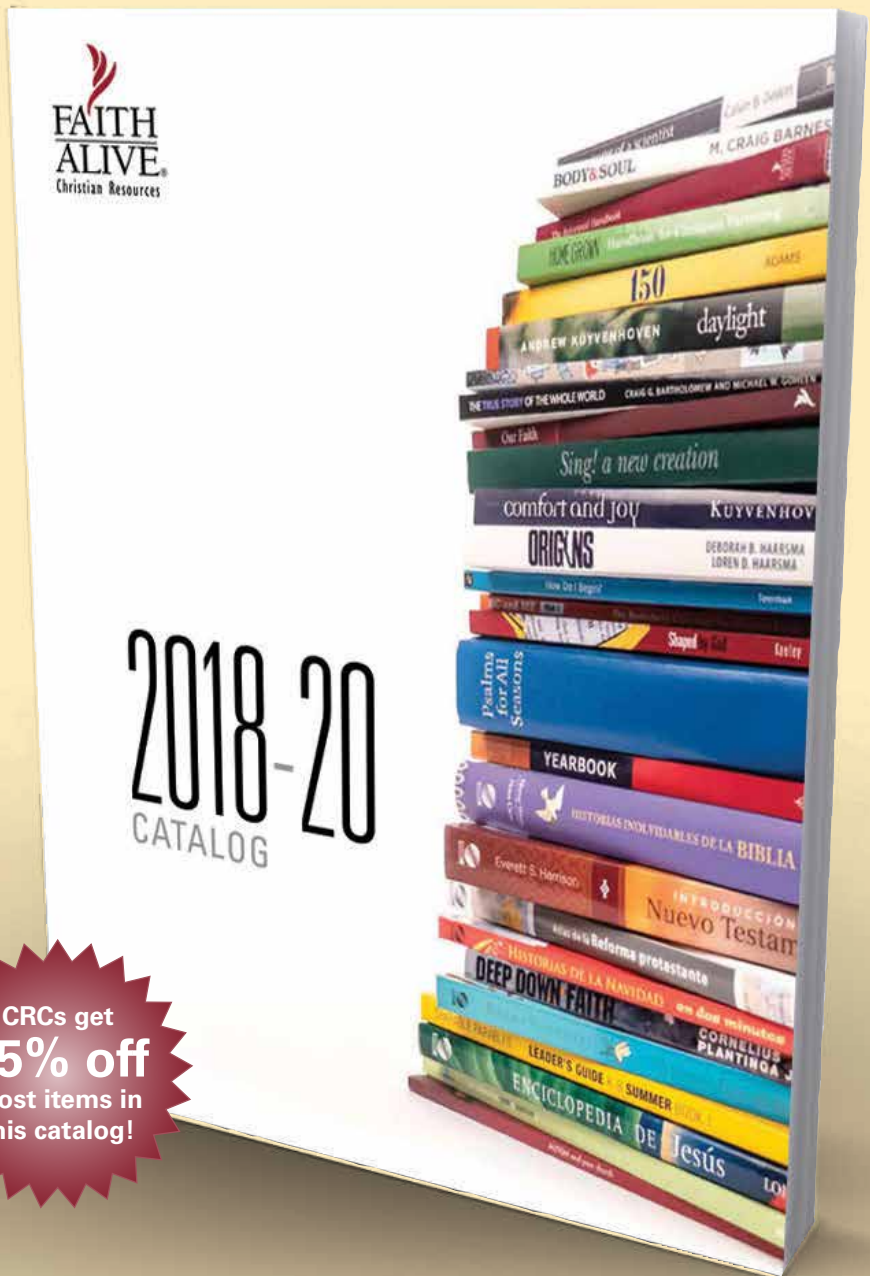
Faith Alive offers a variety of resources that support faith formation for people of all ages, from preschoolers to adults, including

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Reformed materials in Spanish are available from Libros Desafío.

# The Secret Life of Seeds

**CHIA SEED**, pepita, dandelion, maple key, peach pit, coconut, acorn . . . Seeds come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. All are our awesome God's amazing handiwork!

## All About Seeds

A seed is the part of a plant that can grow into a new plant. It holds and protects a future plant and the food it needs to start growing. The seed is dormant. That means it is waiting for just the right conditions for the plant to start growing. Some seeds are just waiting for a little bit of water and the right temperature. Others are fussier. They need cold temperatures for a while and then warm temperatures. This keeps plants in cooler regions from sprouting right before winter.

For some seeds, the seed coat that protects the future plant is very hard and needs to be softened before the seed can sprout. This might take the stomach chemicals of a seed-eating bird or animal or even the intense heat of fire.

Not all seeds are small. The coco de mer, or double coconut, can weigh 40 pounds (18 kg). But some seeds are very tiny. Orchid seeds are so small they look like specks of dust, and a single flower can produce millions of seeds.

## Seeds on the Move

You probably know that plants spread when their seeds sprout, but how do seeds get around? Here are some of the ways:

- » Wind blows fluffy seeds like dandelion and cottonwood around.
- » Some plants, such as the burr marigold, have seeds with little hooks that can catch a ride by

sticking to the fur of a passing animal—or your clothes!

- » Seeds surrounded by yummy fruit, such as berries, get eaten and dropped somewhere else by animals and birds.
- » Trillium seeds have nutritious little packets attached to them that ants love, so the ants carry them away to their nest.
- » People plant some seeds in their gardens!

## Stuff to Do

Check out this YouTube video to watch a bean plant grow from seed: [bit.ly/2GdHQVs](https://bit.ly/2GdHQVs)

Try planting some seeds from fruit in your fridge! Find instructions online for planting seeds from avocados, lemons, limes, and more.


Make seed jewelry! Next time you eat a cantaloupe, save the seeds. Rinse them and let them dry for a few days. Then soak them in water with food coloring. Let them dry again. Use a needle and a doubled piece of thread to string them into a unique bracelet or necklace. 

Illustration for *The Banner*  
by Anita Barghigiani



Rachel Lancashire is a freelance writer with an educational background in wildlife. She attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont.



# Pew or Canoe: The Unexpected Black Hole

Gary M. Burge

**I**n 2007, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Ross Werland raised a provocative rhetorical question in the title of an editorial: “A pew or a canoe: Not a tough choice.” He cited statistics from the Barna Group, a Christian research firm, indicating that fewer and fewer men are attending their local churches, and he made an argument for skipping church altogether. “My other choice,” Werland wrote: “I can hop in my canoe and paddle up the White River in southern Wisconsin and within minutes find an unspoiled spot that looks like it’s right out of the original Garden, precisely as its creator intended it. For me, the

better option is to savor the peace-giving, faith-inducing wonders of nature, the official art form of the deity.”

Werland made me think. Not long after, I was fly fishing on the Eau Claire River in central Wisconsin, and it was, well, inspiring. When I turned 60 (about Werland’s age), I noticed that my perception of what transpires at church had changed and had been evolving since I was about 50. I have a hunch that a few thousand other men and women are where I am.

## The Black Hole

As someone who has attended church since I was born, I’ve clocked quite a

few hours in the pew. If we only count Sundays since I was 18, by the time I was 55, averaging 50 Sundays per year, I’d heard at least 1,900 sermons. But I find that the church and its work have increasingly begun to miss the mark for many of us looking to the rivers of Wisconsin or Michigan.

First, the local church rarely knows what to do with us. Ministries abound for children, teens, and college students, and young married groups are a staple of congregational life. If you have children and are between, say, 25 and 35, immediately you are an active part of the kids’ program. Even parents of high school students have a place. Every youth minister knows



that a well-networked parent group is an invaluable asset.

But something noticeable happens when the kids leave home and you're an empty nester. You're about 50 to 60, active in the peak of your career, and you have an entirely new set of questions (more on that later). But the church really doesn't find you again until you retire or spend some time in the hospital. It's the 50-something "black hole." You're not young, but neither are you elderly, and the natural bridge to the church's children and youth ministries has disappeared.

Second, I often find myself attending church simply because I always have. Sixty years make for some pretty firm habits. But on occasion I think back to the sermons I can catalog that have repeated the same themes time and again—the evangelical staples of personal piety, evangelism, raising kids, world mission, prayer, and sin. I wonder how many times I've heard sermons on the parables of the sower or the prodigal son.

Simply put, I yearn for something other than reruns. I yearn for depth, for ideas that will make me think harder about life and about God. I yearn for Christian speakers and writers who will think ahead of where I am and challenge me to follow. I recognize that these sermons about basic discipleship are important for the church, particularly for younger Christians. But increasingly I find myself wandering outside the fold to look for thoughtful voices.

Third, I am asking new questions now. There once was a day when I had a binary theology. I believed every question had an answer, and most

When I turned 60,  
I noticed that my  
perception of  
what transpires  
at church  
had changed.

answers were black and white. But today I see more of the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties of life. I've seen a fair bit of suffering by now—even a couple of church splits—and a good number of unanswered prayers. I've seen too many lapsed Christians, including a former student who recently told me he's abandoning the faith altogether.

I've also noticed there are fewer theological hills on which I'm willing to die. This doesn't mean that I've stopped believing. It simply means that I might believe less today, but I believe it more firmly. And rather than debating those who want all the t's crossed, I simply look at them with amazement. Not long ago I was at a party where an intelligent and passionate evangelical layperson argued that support for the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment was a Christian spiritual duty. I remember thinking that I must be at the wrong house. Someone else recently told me that "not all Republicans are Christians, but all Christians ought to be Republican." I'm not devoted to either party, but I'm less drawn to such formulas.

What I am looking for instead is someone to help me address deeper questions about life and its meaning—standard fare for 50-something adults. Is life simply about the accumulation of prestige, wealth, influence, or knowledge? How do I evaluate a "good life" when I see it?

How would I know if my life had any meaning? I'm no longer satisfied with the usual resources I find at Christian bookstores, especially those popular books promoted like *The Prayer of Jabez* once was. For the most part, I have found satisfying reflections among such non-Christian fiction writers as Wallace Stegner, Geraldine Brooks, and Barbara Kingsolver. The great voices of the church—Augustine, the medieval mystics, Luther, Barth, Bonhoeffer—have now found a new hearing too. But a long list of contemporary books are now gathering dust.

### Filling the Black Hole

This is the point where my inner editor cautions: Don't just whine; offer some solutions. And there it is—the reflexive thought that every problem has a solution, that we can't simply leave the paradox or dilemma because it might create tension. But I've found that adults who are headed toward 60 are willing to live with fewer quick fixes.

It doesn't take long for the 50-something, "black hole" pilgrim to hear the usual solutions. The answer the church often gives is "leadership." We'll put you on a committee, or elect you to the council, or have you coordinate the church's programs. And if you now have disposable income, you can become some of the church's most important financial supporters. In other words, this is a

---

time to give, not take; to teach, not be taught; to lead, not follow.

To a degree, this is true. If I have heard 1,900 sermons, I'd darned well better be able to teach something in church school or have something to say on the church council.

Thirty-plus years of voluntary church attendance does accrue some debt to the church, some obligation to give something back. And if I find myself with increasing wealth, instead of building a million-dollar home in a suburb, perhaps I should offset the limited ability of 20-somethings to give money to the church. The logic is flawless. But the usual solution fails to address the reason this spiritual black hole of upper middle age exists in the first place. The truth is that 37 years of sermons also included 37 years of giving. The 50-something pilgrim is looking for something more.

First, we need connection. Having children is a lot like having pets: They give you a natural bridge to your neighbors, both next door and in the next pew. Without them—without school sporting events, high school plays, or debate teams to cheer for—it might be difficult to find like-minded adults. I recently volunteered to be a character actor at vacation Bible school just to remind myself how it was to be with little kids. I ended up meeting 30-something parents. It was a good move.

Ideally this connection happens when adults age together within the same congregational cohort. They share experiences with other adults through every stage of life, and if they remain in the same church, they live in a gathering of 50-somethings who have long memories of life experiences together. But these days we see a lot of transience. Adults at age 45 or 50 often change jobs or towns, and those who don't sometimes change churches. How can they enter such well-established cohorts? One mid-40s friend who moved with her family to a new town five years ago recently

told me that entering an intimate cohort as an outsider is almost impossible.

Many churches do not have such age-based cohorts. In that case, what structures are in place to help this age group meet other people who are in the same place in life and asking the same questions? Evenings with young married couples are nice, but older adults tend to slip into a parental role. Many mature adults are lonely but embarrassed to admit it. It takes energy to meet new people—just look how younger people gush at each other when they meet or how they have so many connections. (I once mentioned this need at a church and the answer came quickly: Why don't you head up a committee to organize this? Perfect.)

Second, many of us have likely reached the near-apex of our careers. Some may still be competing for professional positions or social leverage, but others have begun to ease off the throttle of life. We are learning descent and deceleration as new Christian virtues. To put it another way, many are looking for significance instead of success.

How, then, can the life of faith contribute to this new life quest? Here is one key: our contribution must in some manner match our capabilities. A 57-year-old executive may not find significance in organizing the coffee hour on Sunday, but she might find it when she mentors a young person going for his first interview, when she offers a business suit to a young woman who has never owned one, or when she travels to Tanzania and organizes microbusiness loans for women. She needs a way to use her tremendous abilities not just in her career, but in her giving.

Third, I hear from my fellow pilgrims a hunger and thirst for complexity—for a satisfying theological diet that targets some of our own life issues. We've had enough exhortations about quiet times, enough stories about

witnessing on airplanes. Most 50-somethings want to explore life's meaning, service, suffering, loss, wealth, and hope without the usual clichés.

Last, I find myself increasingly interested in social justice. When I hear others engaging in doctrinal debates—and I'm happy they do—my mind wanders to themes such as universal health care, poverty, the environment, immigration, war, and the obligation of the church to speak truth to power in a way that might flirt with politics. This makes many of my evangelical friends nervous. It sounds like a "liberal agenda," and evangelicals tend to emphasize personal piety as the mainstay of faith. But for others like me, asking what the church has to say about global topics or how we might leverage the truth of the gospel in response to those who would corrupt or exploit our society is vital.

There is hope for the church to engage the 50-something. These pilgrims don't have to run to the rivers of Wisconsin or Michigan. While the Eau Claire or the Au Sable are inspiring rivers, they should not become a replacement for the church and its life. But it will require thoughtful pastoral leadership and innovative strategies to keep many maturing Christians off the northern rivers. **B**



Gary M. Burge joined the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary in 2017 after teaching at Wheaton College for 25 years. He worships at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich.

# The Slow Thief

In slow motion,  
the thief seems  
not to be at work  
at all, but then you  
realize he's just  
changed his focus.



Tom Prinsen serves as an associate professor of public relations at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa.

**TO:** My loving wife

**FROM:** Your husband

Parkinson's disease doesn't just sneak in and take all of your stuff. That might be easier—you could make adjustments and move on. No, Parkinson's starts out taking small stuff you hardly even notice. But you do notice. And adjust. And repeat.

Perhaps the first thing to go is your reach. How often, really, do you need to reach? Not often. Once your reach is gone, you move on. A month can go by and you think the thief has forgotten you, but he hasn't. He's stolen your jewelry. You could buy new jewelry with larger clasps, but you're not sure you want to because it just isn't the same. Your friends and I assure you that you are beautiful without it. Still, the jewelry is gone.

Time passes and a few more things are gone: our motorcycle, our camper, and your hunting boots.

The thief, emboldened, demands that we make choices. Will you go to church with your family and cramp and shake and walk out early, or will your family go to church without you? Will I stay home and worry about our children or go to church and worry about you? Hard choices.

We fight back by building a wall—deep brain stimulators to keep the thief at bay. But they don't. They just slow the thief a bit.

In slow motion, the thief seems not to be at work at all, but then you realize he's just changed his focus. Not only has he been stealing things, but also—more devastatingly—he has been stealing people. Has it really been two years you've been asking those people to lunch without them coming?


You used to be so close. A professional basketball player might wish for the blocking skills of the new mother who turns her back when you try to share a moment with her and her baby.

Someone asks, "Why don't you go on cruises and vacations while you still can?" We explain that we take a couple of days every three months to visit Cleveland—that is, the Cleveland Clinic. We know where to get the good stuff: the world's best corned beef, quality barbecue, and a place to stay for a quiet night following surgery.

The thief hasn't stolen our language, but he has changed it. "Let's go do X" is now "Let's watch X." It's a subtle change in language but a significant change in behavior. You were a college athlete; now you take my arm as we climb the bleachers.

Then there's me. I wonder if it's a good day for an excursion, but maybe it's not. If I ask and it's a bad day, I worry you'll feel even worse. If I don't ask, I'm afraid we'll have missed an opportunity. All of this thinking can make me feel more like a caregiver than a husband. The thief has stolen a part of me.

But the thief has not stolen you from me. To say that I see glimpses of the old you would be to diminish who you are today. You are a whole being. A cherished being. You are gentle-spirited, with a kind and supportive word for all who will listen. You are beautiful inside and out. You are generous with all that you have and who you are. You are my love.

**TO OUR FRIENDS:** Thank you for your help when the thief comes knocking. Sing "It is well with my soul" today as you face your own thieves. And let's keep one another in our prayers. God bless! 

# Kings, Chronicles, and Political Disagreements

Our evaluations of certain candidates and policies might not be the same as our neighbor, family member, church member, friend, or coworker—and those differences might be okay.



Ben Taming is a Bible teacher at Calvin Christian High School, Grandville, Mich. He attends First Christian Reformed Church in Byron Center, Mich.

## WE IN THE REFORMED TRADITION

acknowledge the richness of having not just one witness, but four—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—telling the gospel story of Jesus Christ. But as an Old Testament enthusiast, I often wonder if we've been neglecting a similar richness in the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 and 2 Chronicles (henceforth referred to simply as "Kings" and "Chronicles," as they were one book each in the original Hebrew). Perhaps considering both versions of this one political history might help inform our own political discernment today.

To begin, what makes these two stories "different" from one another? The book of Kings strikes a negative tone. It begins with the violent rise of Solomon to the throne as the ailing King David gives Bathsheba's son specific orders about whom to kill in order to solidify his reign over the 12 tribes. The story ends with the kingdom of Judah falling to Babylon, the temple looted and burned, Jerusalem destroyed after a devastating siege, and multitudes dead in the streets with the rest either abandoned or carried off into exile in Babylon (2 Kings 25; also see Deut. 28 and the book of Lamentations)—all following the same steps as the kingdom of Israel to the north, which had been exiled to Assyria over a century before (1 Kings 17).

Between these two graphic points, the anonymous author of Kings strives to convey why this traumatic national tragedy occurred by narrating the individual stories of the kings of Israel and Judah and noting with disapproval how most "did evil in the eyes of the LORD." The northern kingdom of Israel is plagued by assassinations

and coups as generals murder their kings, slaughter their descendants, and take their places as rulers only to see themselves or their descendants suffer the same treachery. The southern kingdom of Judah does not fare much better: Solomon's idolatry had led to the division of the united monarchy to begin with, and although God keeps his promise never to forsake the house of Judah out of his love for David (1 Kings 11), the southern kings also ultimately fail. Hezekiah and Josiah are among the covenantal bright spots in what otherwise begins to feel like an inevitable death march toward Babylon.

But when we turn to Chronicles and read carefully, we find an overall more positive tone. The writer (also anonymous, but often called "the Chronicler") modifies the existing account of Kings in order to speak hope to his audience. Rather than beginning with a hit list of settling old scores, Chronicles opens with nine chapters of genealogies tracing Judah's lineage all the way back to Adam, the first man. And instead of concluding with the horrific fall of Jerusalem, the Chronicler closes with Persian King Cyrus's decree that any of the exiled Jews who wish to return to rebuild the temple "may go up" (2 Chron. 36).

Between these more hopeful beginning and ending points, Chronicles also reshapes the narrative of the kings of Judah—ignoring the disgraced Kings of Israel—to fascinating effect. Two of these ways of reshaping the narrative deserve highlighting.

First, while the author of Kings narrates all of the shady misdeeds of Solomon (and David, in 1 and 2 Samuel), missing in Chronicles is

nearly every trace of wrongdoing by either ruler. Gone are the sordid tales of adultery, murder, mercenary service for Philistines, prisoner-of-war executions, and forced labor. In their place we find an extended description of the preparations David made for building the temple (1 Chron. 22-29), which Solomon dutifully carries out after he is crowned king (2 Chron. 1-9). In Chronicles, then, David and Solomon represent the golden age, a model for returned exiles to strive for as they rebuild the temple.

Second, where the author of Kings usually presents more succinct (and negative) summaries of the reigns of individual rulers, the Chronicler often elaborates on how even the “good” kings sometimes failed to measure up completely to its reimagined David/Solomon standard and on how even the worst of the “evil” kings could still repent. For example, where Kings goes so far as to blame the excessive wickedness of King Manasseh himself for the exile to Babylon (2 Kings 24:3), Chronicles narrates the amazing story of how Manasseh actually repented while a prisoner in Babylon, even commanding Judah to serve the Lord alone after God heard his prayer and allowed him to return home (2 Chron. 34).


What can we take from these two approaches as God’s new-covenant, returned-from-exile people today? The church is a multinational family united in Christ alone, so we should never attempt to draw a direct connection between Old Testament Israel and any modern nation-state. But the book of Kings teaches us that it’s helpful and even necessary to critique our own leaders in secular government. Yes, we are called to respect those in

authority over us (Rom. 13; 1 Pet. 1) as God-ordained leaders. But a healthy respect for leaders also includes a willingness to challenge them when they are failing at their task. It includes calling out idolatry and social injustice wherever we see it, as modeled by the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Whether we identify as conservative, liberal, or somewhere in the middle, our political leanings should not blind us to the faults of our elected leaders, even the ones we may have voted for.

But it’s equally important to remember the positive, hope-filled witness of Chronicles in our current divisive political climate. For from that beautiful post-exilic, returned-home perspective, even David—an adulterous, murderous, vengeful ruler—can be viewed anew as the model king for all the others descended from his line. As Christians casting ballots, participating in civic life, and evaluating our leaders, we also should be encouraged that God’s purposes can be accomplished in and through even the most depraved of leaders as we await the fullness of his kingdom. Just look at King Manasseh’s change of heart to see the possibilities.

In Scripture, the Holy Spirit offers two versions of the same reality. We modern Westerners don’t usually like this way of thinking, preferring “either/or” thinking with which to bolster our own opinions and put down others in heated personal conversations or agitated Facebook posts. But given this biblical reality, can we acknowledge that our evaluations of certain candidates and policies might not be the same as our neighbor, family member, church member, friend, or coworker—and

that those differences might be okay? Maybe part of the way forward through the present political mud-slinging lies in remembering that as Bible-reading Christians, we’ve inherited not just one “correct” perspective with which to evaluate our leaders, but two.

I don’t pretend to have all the implications of this figured out. And I still have questions when I read these two accounts in Kings and Chronicles, much as I do when I read the four gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. But just as we rejoice in having not only one, but four accounts of the life of the Davidic Messiah, so we ought to give thanks that God granted us two versions of the royal lineage that, through all the twists and turns, brings us to King Jesus. 

1. What were your previous impressions or thoughts about the books of 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles?
2. Where do your own views fall between the more pessimistic view of Kings and the more hopeful view of Chronicles? Why?
3. How should we challenge our leaders—in church and/or in government—when they fail and . . .

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)

# 6 Tips for Choosing Children's Ministry Curriculum

**LAST YEAR I HAD** a big bout of buyer's remorse. The children's ministry curriculum I'd purchased was beautiful, affordable, and claimed to be low maintenance—all perfect ingredients for our slow summer months. But two weeks in I was doing a lot of supplementary work to make up for the shallow lessons.

Here are some things I wish I had intentionally looked for while selecting material to help teach children to follow Jesus and grow in their faith:

- 1. Grace-based messaging.** It's tempting to turn rich and complex stories about God's vision of hope into morality tales. If we simply tell kids what it means to be a nice person without the radical message of unconditional love from the Creator, we lose the breadth of the gospel.
- 2. Themes about God rather than people.** We want to teach children to see their place in God's story, not the other way around. When children's ministry is all about individuals, we feed children more of our culture's narcissism and miss out on the comfort of deeper knowledge about a God who is bigger than we can imagine.
- 3. Contextualization.** I might not use this term while speaking to kids, but explaining how verses and stories fit into the overall biblical narrative is so essential. If we don't offer these insights in every lesson, we risk confusing the kids, proof-texting, and missing the broader

story of God's redemption through Jesus.


#### 4. Engaging interaction.

Dramatizations, creative exploration, and spending plenty of time in active praise music and interactive prayer can all be ways of helping kids learn they can worship God in everything they do.

- 5. Hospitality to newcomers.** It's easy to assume that biblical events and characters are familiar to everyone present, but these assumptions can exclude visitors or people who are newer to their faith journey. This doesn't mean we can't offer "spiritual meat" or delve into complex, age-appropriate issues. It does mean that we give necessary background information and rearticulate the basics of the gospel to be accessible for someone who has little knowledge of the Bible.

#### 6. Reminders of the big picture.

Here's a good experiment to try from time to time: Ask the children in your ministry, "What is the good news?" We want to continually cast the vision of a loving Creator who lives in and around us and a God who was one of us, who died and conquered death to rescue and save this world.

*Note:* For more help in choosing curriculum and other faith formation needs, visit the Faith Formation Ministries page at [crcna.org](http://crcna.org). 



Melissa Kuipers writes fiction and nonfiction. She is also director of family ministries at Central Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont.



## Washington Black

by Esi Edugyan

reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In 1830 Barbados, 11-year-old George Washington Black is forced to become Christopher Wilde's manservant. When "Wash" is unwittingly ensnared in a tragic event and a bounty is placed on his head, he becomes utterly dependent on Wilde for his survival. He embarks on an epic journey during which he discovers his gifts, searches for his identity, and has the opportunity to leave his mark on the world. This surprise-filled novel for adults offers profound insights into the hearts of people and portrays the vast reaches of the earth, contrasting immense beauty with stark harshness. Edugyan's grasp of science, art, geography, and history makes this lengthy novel a satisfying read. (Knopf)



## Different Kind of Love

by *Dave Pittman*

reviewed by Paul Delger

Dave Pittman offers a soulful, upbeat sound on his sophomore release, *Different Kind of Love*. "The main theme of my life has been hope," the former *American Idol* contestant said, "and I wanted that to be evident throughout this album." The title cut starts the album centered on God's steadfast love. The song "Fight to Win" was written for his wife and celebrates their commitment during both good and tough times. He finishes with the hymn "I'd Rather Have Jesus." Pittman has Tourette syndrome, a neurological disorder causing involuntary repetitive movements and sounds; his music and story have found a place in the hearts of many listeners. Available for digital purchase now. (Independent)



## Transit

reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Georg (Franz Rogowski) finds himself fleeing from a reimagined present-day, Nazi-occupied Paris without documentation. He stumbles on the opportunity to take the passport and visa of a deceased author who had planned to escape via Marseille. After taking on this identity, Georg tries to find a room in Marseille, waits in queues to confirm documentation, and becomes involved in the lives of refugees whose situations are more desperate and hopeless. Then the author's wife comes to meet up with her husband. Though the German film is subtitled, director Christian Petzold successfully creates a situation in which the viewer is intentionally left out of conversations. *Transit* is a timely film that addresses many of the current complexities of and confusion around our global refugee crisis. Recommended for high school student viewing. Opening this month in some U.S. theaters after a fall debut in Canada; on disc in June. (Music Box)



## Pay Attention, Carter Jones

by *Gary Schmidt*

reviewed by Kristy Quist

Life isn't easy for Carter Jones. He's in middle school, his father is far away with the army, and his family is still reeling from his little brother's death. Things take a turn when a "gentleman's gentleman" shows up. At the start, the butler seems to be like Mary Poppins, swooping in to bring order and happiness. However, rather than encouraging child's play, he supports Carter in becoming a strong, responsible young man who pays attention to his life and those he loves. Possibly taking a cue from Reformed philosopher James K.A. Smith, he says, "We are what we love, young Master Carter." Schmidt entertains with humor and wordplay even as he slowly reveals the depths of Carter's pain. A witty and compelling story that will appeal to children and adults alike. Ages 10 and up. (Clarion)

### The Lowdown

**Worldly Theology:** Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun have teamed up to argue that theology needs to get back to basics in their book *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*. (Brazos Press)

**Wonderful:** Worship leader Meredith Andrews releases her first live EP, *Faith and Wonder*, on March 8. (Curb Records)

**Booked:** The film *Green Book*, hailed by some and hated by others, will be available on disc March 5. Read the *Banner* review at [thebanner.org](http://thebanner.org). (Universal)

**Here She Is:** Book club favorite *Where'd You Go, Bernadette* appears in film form in theaters March 22. (Annapurna Pictures)

### Farewell to Kristy Quist, Mixed Media Editor

This month we're sad to say goodbye to Kristy Quist, Mixed Media (and before that Tuned In) editor since 2006. Thanks, Kristy, for providing us with insightful reviews of books, movies, and more for so many years. You will be missed!

# Why Did Jesus Have to Die on a Cross?

Jesus Christ fulfills the roles of both Moses and the lambs of the Exodus story.



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

## IT'S THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE

symbol of the Christian faith—the cross of Jesus Christ. Crosses are hung on necklaces, embroidered on sleeves, tattooed on arms, faded into hair-styles, painted on fingernails, branded on belt buckles, stuck on car bumpers, mounted on church steeples, engraved on tombstones, printed on coffee mugs, and posted on Instagram. Crosses are everywhere. Yet ironically we struggle to know why Jesus had to die on a cross.

The Assyrians were the first to publicly execute people, impaling them on swords. The Romans continued the practice by adding a cross-beam and nailing people to the cross by their hands and feet. Any empire that publicly executed people—Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Roman—did so to punish criminals and insurgents and to deter others from revolting.

So did Jesus have to die on a cross, beaten and humiliated by Roman soldiers, because he was a criminal? No. In fact, the opposite is true. Followers of Christ are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:19). This description of Christ helps us understand why he was crucified and sends us back to the Old Testament, to a time of slavery, hardship, and salvation.

The people of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for more than 400 years. The pharaoh who replaced the ruler of the time of Joseph did not look favorably upon God’s people. He began to oppress the Hebrews, and they cried out to the Lord for deliverance. The Lord heard their prayer and raised up Moses to be Israel’s deliverer. After the pharaoh refused to free the

Israelites even after enduring plagues, God finally instructed Moses to tell the people to slaughter lambs and paint the blood on their doorposts.

Jesus Christ fulfills the roles of both Moses and the lambs of the Exodus story. Just as Moses was raised up to bring God’s people out of slavery in Egypt, so Jesus Christ was raised up to bring God’s people out of captivity to sin and death. The only way God’s people could be set free from their captivity was through the sacrifice of a spotless lamb, a substitute to atone for the sins of each household. Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of all who belong to the family of God. He became our substitute, giving his life on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

Jesus Christ died not because he was a sinner, but because he was sinless. The reformer Martin Luther called the death of Christ “the great exchange.” Through his death and resurrection, our Savior took upon himself the penalty of our sins. In exchange, God placed on us the righteousness of Jesus Christ: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus died for us and was raised up to new life so that we can be forgiven of our sins, rescued from captivity, and set free to express our gratitude for all that Jesus has done.

Yes, the cross of Christ can be found everywhere. But more importantly, it is imprinted on our hearts, souls, and minds. **B**



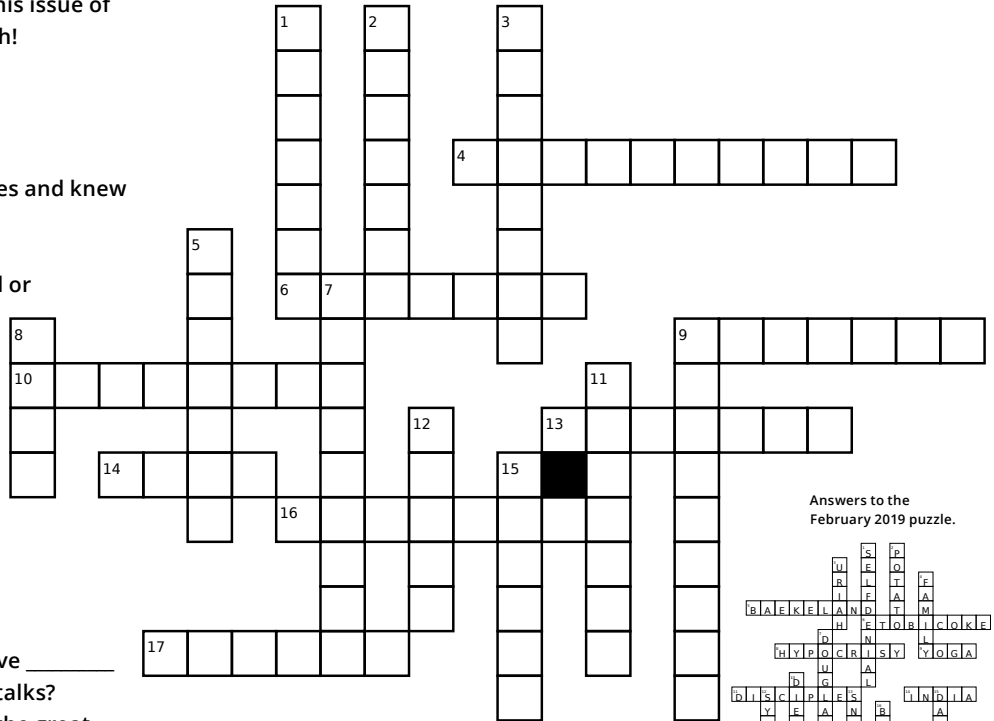
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

**Down:**

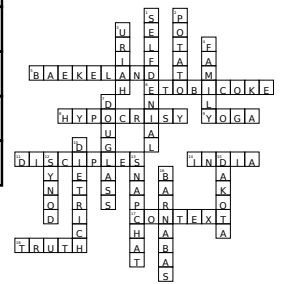
- 1. Big Night of \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Where Inspire 2017 was
- 3. Where men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do come from
- 5. A river in Michigan
- 7. Too great or extreme to be expressed or described in words
- 8. The part of a plant that can grow into a new plant
- 9. The orientation that strives for positive outcomes
- 11. Where Nadeana learned leadership
- 12. A popular female vocal artist
- 15. Persian New Year

**Across:**

- 4. The "slow thief"
- 6. Former American Idol contestant Dave \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Who shared from experience in REV talks?
- 10. Martin Luther called Christ's death the great \_\_\_\_\_
- 13. Greek word meaning "to empty"
- 14. Theologian Miroslav \_\_\_\_\_
- 16. An Ontario church has a Lent \_\_\_\_\_
- 17. Pay Attention, \_\_\_\_\_ Jones



Answers to the February 2019 puzzle.



# Think you can change the world with a melody?

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**CHANGE** can be big, like symphony orchestra big. Or it can be small, like living room jam session small. It's about what you choose to do on the one hand, and who you are on the other. We are more than our jobs, and God has a calling for each of us, wherever we go.

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**General**

**AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2019** Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda: a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15 and must first be processed through the local council and the classis. b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15. Materials will be included in the printed Agenda if received before the synodically established deadlines. Steven R. Timmermans Executive Director

**ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER** Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 13, 2019) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to assemble to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. Councils are reminded that if it is judged that the observance

of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U. S.), they have the right to change the date of service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U. S.) is Thursday, May 2, 2019. Steven R. Timmermans Executive Director

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY**

We are pleased to announce that **DANIEL CRAPO** 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**

**ELIGIBLE FOR CALL** The Council of All Nations CRC is pleased to announce that Rev. Bert Vanderbeek is eligible for call. Please contact him at [bert.vanderbeek@gmail.com](mailto:bert.vanderbeek@gmail.com).

**FINANCIAL AID**

**CLASSIS KALAMAZOO** The Student Aid Fund of Classis Kalamazoo invites students from their classis who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC (undergraduate or graduate level) and are in need of financial assistance for the academic year 2019-2020 to apply no later than April 30, 2019 by contacting Rev. Phil Kok, 269-327-1570 or [philkok@charter.net](mailto:philkok@charter.net). Undergraduate students must be at least in their junior year during 2019-2020. Students presently receiving aid must reapply.

**Church's 50th Anniversary**

**SILVER SPRING CRC** in Maryland is celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness on the weekend of April 27-28. For RSVPs or to share memories please visit our webpage at [www.ssrc.org/anniversary](http://www.ssrc.org/anniversary).

**Retirement**

**DR. DANIEL B. MOUW** pastor of South Grandville CRC, is retiring after 39 years of ministry. A farewell service of praise and recognition is planned for February 24, 2019, at 10:00 a.m. A luncheon will follow the service. Thank you, Pastor Dan and Pat, for many years of faithful ministry!

**Birthdays**

**100TH BIRTHDAY**



**BENJAMIN YPMA** 100 years old on February 5, 2019. Benjamin Ypma continues to live a life of the Lord's goodness and mercy for 100 years and then there is the dwelling in the Lord's house forever more yet to come. Benjamin was a graduate student of Calvin College and Calvin Seminary. His family rejoices with him: Daughter Ruth and Dan DeHamer and their

extended family. Daughter Mary and Bradley Koster and their extended family. Benjamin Ypma. 671 Waterview Ct. Grandville, MI 49418

**95TH BIRTHDAY**



**MARK J AUKEMAN** of 2991 Hope St Hudsonville, MI 49426 turns 95 on April 4. His family thank God for his faithfulness and unconditional love.

**90TH BIRTHDAY**

**BETTY PUNT (DEYOUNG)** will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 24. Widow of Rev. Neal Punt. Mother of 6, grandmother of 13 and great grandmother of 3. Her family is grateful for all of her love and cookies. Greetings can be sent to: 2105 Raybrook St SE, Unit 1027, Grand Rapids, MI 49546

**MICKY DYKHOUSE** will be celebrating her 90th birthday on March 23 with an open house from 2-4 pm given by her family at Shawnee Park CRC (2255 Tecumseh SE, Grand Rapids, MI). Family and friends are invited to share this special day. No gifts please.

**Anniversary**

**70TH ANNIVERSARY**

**WICHERS**, Will and Dina of Room 333 2015 32 nd Ave. W. Bradenton, Fla. 34205 celebrated 70 years of marriage on Feb. 23, 2019. We are thankful for and respectful of our parents who have exemplified how to live not in service to self but to others. God continues to bless them and make their lives a blessing. Louis (Charis), Sandra (Fred), Deborah (Don), Will, and Tom (Tara).

**60TH ANNIVERSARY**

**WOLTERS**, Bob and Millie celebrated their 60th anniversary on January 30, 2019. They are the godly, well loved parents of Jim and Dawn Schutte, Brian and Diane Klooster, Deborah Wolters and Pastor Dan and Kristy Wolters. Bob and Millie are blessed with 11 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren. "The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places, indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance." Psalm 16:6

**50TH ANNIVERSARY**

**50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY** Leon (Chip) and Faye Schaddelee celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on January 25, 2019. Children Bob and Rachel Ratledge and Ryan Schaddelee, along with 3 living grandchildren, are thankful for their 50 years together!

**Obituaries**

**DYKSTRA** Evelyn, 91, of Hull, IA, and Byron Center, MI, died Dec. 28; widow of Rev. Allan Dykstra. Survived by 3 children, Barbara Nieuwsmma, Daniel Dykstra, and Timothy Dykstra.



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- Agriculture-Pro-Tech
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- Music (Instrumental)
- Music (Organ Studies)
- Nursing

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

[www.dordt.edu](http://www.dordt.edu) — About Dordt — Job Openings

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**EGEDY**, Gerrit of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on January 22, 2019. He was preceded in death by his son, Michael, and granddaughter, Micaela. He is survived by his wife Arlene Egedy (Van Wingeren); his children, Douglas Egedy (Cherie), Karen Egedy-Bader (Michael), Diane Vander Wall (Jim); his daughter-in-law, Donnajeane Hornik; and 10 grandchildren.

**FLASMAN**, Alice, nee De Hoog, of South Holland, IL, went to be with her faithful Savior on January 14 at the age of 102. She was the beloved wife of the late Albert, dear sister of the late Henry De Hoog, loving aunt, great aunt, and great great aunt of many.

**HISKES** Audrey Mae, nee DeHorn, age 82 of Munster, IN passed away peacefully, Friday, January 25, 2019. Beloved wife of George Hiskes. Loving mother of George (Elaine) Hiskes, Jr., Jayne (Andrew) Griffin, and Mark (Carol) Hiskes. Proud grandmother of 9 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren. Dear sister of the late Cora (late John) Scheeringa, Cornelius (late Grace) DeHorn, Gertie (late Herm) Beukema, late Dina (Alfred) Recker, and Sandra (late Ed) Cooper. Kind aunt of many nephews and nieces.

**HOUSKAMP**, Richard "Dick" of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Jan. 23, 2019. He is survived by his wife, Alyce (Swierenga); children Beth (Randy Bartman) Houskamp, John (Beth) Houskamp, Kathy (Joel) Ruiters, and Bill (Amy) Houskamp; sister Jeanne (Don) Rood and brother Bob (Joan) Houskamp; siblings-by-marriage Bob (Dianne) Swierenga, Ray Swierenga, Don (Mary) Swierenga, Grace (Gary) Nyland, and John (Virginia) Swierenga; and ten grandchildren.

**HUISJEN**, Pat (Catherine Vree), 94, of South Holland, Ill., died on Jan. 8, 2019. Preceded in death by husband Martin Huisjen. Survived by children Marty (late Janet) Huisjen, Cindy (late Lee) Kleidon, Henry (Janine) Huisjen, Michael Huisjen, 6 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

**JONGSMA**, Edward, age 90 of Wheaton, IL went to his eternal home on January 16, 2019. survived by his wife of 67 years, Eleanor (nee Stob), Children: Ed Jr and Ellen, Sandy and Bruce VanDommelen, David, Beth, Bob and Kim, Kimberly, Karen and Rod Tos, Anne and Matt Vanderkooi. 22 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. Proceeded in death brother Herman. He is survived by brothers Ray, Art and Judy, sister in laws Judy Gezon & Elaine Stob.

**POEL** Harvey met his Savior face to face on his 95th birthday, January 1, 2019. Beloved wife of Jeanne and immediate family of 63. See obituary at <https://www.sytsemafh.com>

**VAN DYKE** Dr. Louis, of Grand Rapids, previously of Sioux Center, Iowa, entered his eternal rest on January 14, 2019 at the age of 90. He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Tina (Buys), by children Steve and Vonnie, Alan and Cyndie, Joan and Terry Crull, Mike and Lillian and Wayne, 9 grandchildren and 15 great grandchildren, and brother Duane. He was preceded in death by his parents, brother Ray, sister Ardith and an infant brother. He devoted his life to Christian education, teaching at Lynden Christian High School, Watson Groen (now Shoreline) Christian School in Seattle and Dordt College, where he taught history for 32 years. He served

in the U. S. Army during the Korean war as a counterintelligence agent stationed in Germany. He was a faithful servant of the Lord and a loving husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to World Renew, Spectrum Health Hospice or the Louis and Tina Van Dyke History Scholarship Fund at Dordt College

**VAN EERDEN** Katie Louise, Grand Rapids MI, passed away January 23 2019, and now joins her husband Jack. She is survived by her children, Mary (James) Rosema, Suzanne (Cliff) Wright, Andrew (Dianne) Van Eerden, Harold (Susan) Van Eerden and Daniel (Ann) Van Eerden; 16 grandchildren; and 22 great grandchildren.

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## Just for Kids: A Baker's Dozen



Just in time for spring—a FREE resource to share with your favorite kid, grandkid, or student. The newest member of our study series family, *A Baker's Dozen* inspires both kids and kids-at-heart to delight in and celebrate God's amazing creation. Written by Joanne De Jonge, *The Banner's* beloved award-winning nature writer for kids, this collection features 13 of her favorite Just for Kids columns.

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**VAN WYLEN**, Barbara, age 89, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on January 20, 2019. She is survived by her husband Wayne; children, Kris (Bruce Vande Vusse) and Tom (Mary); six grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

#### Church Positions Available

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**PASTOR** Terra Ceia CRC in Pantego, NC is seeking a dynamic, personable, full time pastor committed to help us grow in God's word and make a difference in our community. We are committed Christians seeking a strong leader. For more information please contact the search committee at [bkelder23@gmail.com](mailto:bkelder23@gmail.com), please visit [terraceiacrc.org](http://terraceiacrc.org). Address: 3298 Terra Ceia Rd. Pantego, NC 27860

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**PASTOR** Luctor CRC of Prairie View, KS is seeking a full-time pastor. Inquiries can be directed to Jay VanDerVeen at [jayvdv@icloud.com](mailto:jayvdv@icloud.com) or by calling 785-973-8028.

**SEEKING PASTOR** Trinity CRC, Fremont, MI. Our former pastor has retired and we have begun the search for a pastor. If interested, please contact Todd DeKryger at [tdekryger@ncats.net](mailto:tdekryger@ncats.net) or (231) 286-8778.

**DIRECTOR OF YOUTH AND WORSHIP MINISTRIES** - Strathroy East Christian Reformed Church seeks to hire a full-time musically talented Director of Youth and Worship to lead the youth and young adult ministry programs and inspire dynamic worship. The successful candidate must be able to work with the Pastor, Praise Team and Worship Committee providing support, encouragement and resources where appropriate. A detailed job description is available on request. Interested applicants should send a cover letter and resume with references to Harry Verburg, 27 Buttery Cr., Strathroy, Ontario Canada N7G 3H7 [hverburg12@gmail.com](mailto:hverburg12@gmail.com)

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teers for frontline ministry, evangelism initiatives, community relationships, multi-ethnic ministry, transportations ministry, shared pastoral ministry, occasional preaching, and any other tasks necessary for the effective implementation of God glorifying outreach ministry. Inquires and questions, or letters or application and resumes, can be directed to: [office@firstchristianreformed.org](mailto:office@firstchristianreformed.org).

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**PASTOR** Zuni CRC is seeking a pastor to lead us in worship, encourage us in our growth, and to be a

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**PASTOR** Drenthe CRC, a family centered church in rural Zeeland, MI is seeking a full time pastor to help us grow our church family both spiritually and physically. Our vision would be a pastor to help us **Look Up** by leading us in Biblical, God centered worship and praise. Someone who can inspire us to **Grow Deeper** in our faith walk with Jesus through teaching the truths of the Gospel. And, a pastor who can lovingly help us **Reach Out** to share God's love within our congregation and our community as we move into the next chapter of a long Christian heritage in our church. Please contact Doug Walcott at 616-886-4752 or email: [Drenthesearch@gmail.com](mailto:Drenthesearch@gmail.com).

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# On Kesha (and Truth Proclaimed in Unexpected Places)

I wonder: If we  
open our eyes,  
what truth might  
we see around us?  
What truth is  
being told by  
unexpected voices  
in unexpected  
places?



Maaikke Mudde grew up attending Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., and is a recent graduate of Calvin College. She currently works as a college adviser and cross country coach at Montague High School in Montague, Mich., where she also worships with a small Episcopal congregation.

**MY SPOTIFY PLAYLISTS** are organized by the seasons of the church calendar. There's Lent, Advent, Epiphany, and Pentecost. My playlist "Common Time" happens to be almost exclusively made up of female artists. They're mostly pop stars with something to say to the patriarchy: Misterwives, Solange, and Kesha.

I grew up with Kesha. I came of age to Kesha. My basketball team in high school would warm up to "Tik Tok," singing proudly that we "brush our teeth with a bottle of Jack" without truly understanding what that meant.

About a year ago, Kesha released her album *Rainbow*, her first music since I was a teenager. When I heard the inaugural single of the album, "Praying," for the first time, I felt as if I had been gut-punched (in the best way). I pulled up the music video on YouTube and watched it on my small iPhone screen probably 16 times in a row, screenshotting the scenes that felt especially significant and beautiful.

Vulnerable piano ballads are not usually groundbreaking. Many pop stars have written them. Many pop stars have performed them. But for an artist I knew only for her glittery, superficial club bangers to open up about meaningful topics and pain—this felt profound.

One of the screenshots I took from the "Praying" video freezes Kesha standing on a giant, colorfully painted rock formation. Bright paint spells the words "God is love" in enormous letters behind her, and you can see Kesha walking upward to the word "God."

I should say here that Kesha's spirituality, in the context of mainstream

Christianity, is unorthodox. She's a bisexual, platinum-selling pop star recovering from sexual and emotional abuse and an eating disorder, so I'd guess her life experience itself is somewhat unorthodox. So when I watched this video, I was shocked to see "God is love"—a core Christian truth—blatantly proclaimed in the video of a song on the Billboard Top 100.

Perhaps I shouldn't have been shocked. Culture—all aspects of it—has been proclaiming truths by tucking them into song, literature, and theater for a long time. In Acts 17, Paul quotes pagan poets to the Athenians (the specific line was "We are God's offspring"), showing that their religiosity was authentic but just needed guidance. The Athenians could name and identify truths; they just needed to root them in the narrative of the God who became flesh.

So I wonder: If we open our eyes, what truth might we see around us? What truth is being told by unexpected voices in unexpected places? Maybe a pop star whose songs are popular in clubs understands who God is better than we do. Maybe the pizza delivery guy has something for us to learn in our two-minute interaction with him. Maybe the men and women behind the pulpit don't have a monopoly on proclaiming hope and grace. And maybe bisexual, platinum-selling pop stars recovering from sexual and emotional abuse and an eating disorder are actually the perfect people for the job. **B**

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