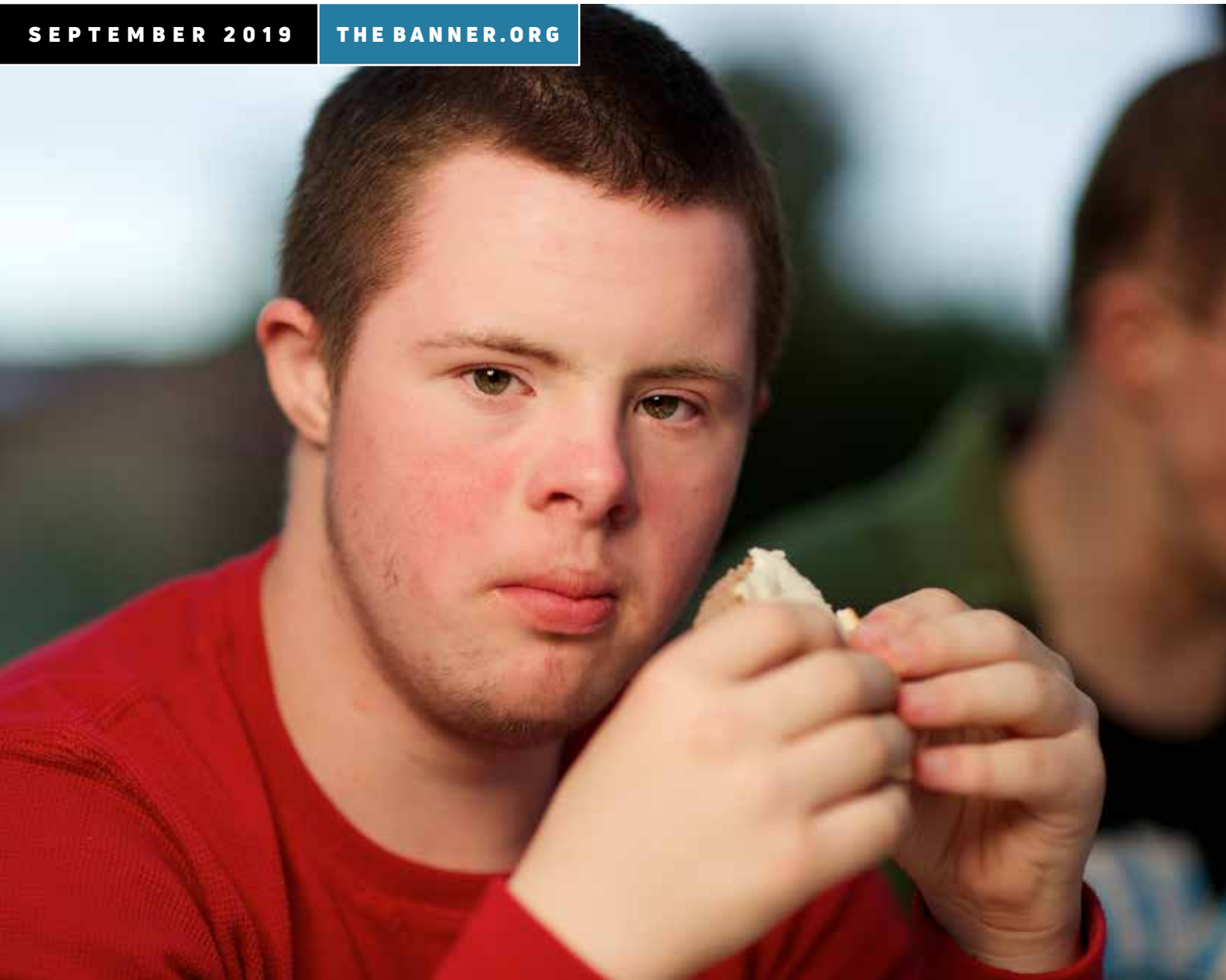


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SEPTEMBER 2019

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Photo by Gary Radler/iStock.

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**BANNER**

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# Judge Not

It is not God's wrath or judgment that leads to repentance, but rather God's kindness. How many people have ever changed for the better through experiencing other people's judgment?



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).

**AS THE BANNER EDITOR**, I often feel judged for what I choose to publish and don't publish. But God convicted me that I, too, have been judgmental of others.

In a 2007 Barna Group poll of young Americans (aged 16-29), 87% of non-churchgoers and 52% of active, regularly churchgoing youth agreed that Christianity is judgmental. There is clearly a disconnect between what Christians proclaim and what the world experiences.

What is judgmentalism? It is condemning other people's faults while downplaying our own, creating a sense of moral superiority. Judging is focusing on the speck in someone's eye but ignoring the log in your own eye (Matt. 7:3). It's playing the "your sin is worse than mine" game. It should not be confused, though, with holding people accountable or discerning between right and wrong or giving constructive criticism.


Our sinful nature predisposes us to being judgmental through two main ways. First is our negativity bias. This is our tendency to focus more on and be affected more by negative things than positive or neutral things. For example, I could get five compliments and one negative comment on my editorial and my mind will dwell on that one negative. Our sinful natures have a great ability to find and focus on flaws, even ones as tiny as a speck in someone's eye.

Second, we have a deep desire to avoid shame. Professor of Social Work Brene Brown, an expert on vulnerability, wrote, "What's ironic (or perhaps natural) is that research tells us that we judge people in areas where we're vulnerable to shame, especially picking folks who are doing worse than we're doing. ... We're hard on each other because we're using each

other as a launching pad out of our own perceived shaming deficiency" (*Daring Greatly*, p. 99). For example, if we are struggling with pornography in our lives, instead of dealing with it, we might subconsciously deflect our attention to judging people who have same-sex attraction or other sexual struggles. Our negativity bias coupled with our deep avoidance of shame make a potent recipe for judgmentalism.

How do we stop being judgmental? I believe we need to draw closer to God. The closer we are to God, the more likely we will see how sinful we are in relation to his holiness. We will be much more self-aware and humbled by our sins. Then, as Jesus told us, we need to first deal with the logs in our own eyes before we deal with the speck in our neighbors' eyes (Matt. 7:5).

We also need to be merciful, kind, and patient with others despite their sins and faults. Jesus commands us to be merciful just as God is merciful (Luke 6:36). The apostle Paul warns us that "at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. ... Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you towards repentance?" (Rom. 2:1, 4). It is not God's wrath or judgment that leads to repentance, but rather God's kindness. How many people have ever changed for the better through experiencing other people's judgment? Rather, it is through grace, love, and kindness that people are led to transforming their lives.

Let us turn the world's perception of Christianity from a judgmental religion to one of a gracious and kind religion. 



## REPLY ALL

### Enough Trouble

While I appreciate Syd Hielema's article grappling with anxiety ("Enough Trouble," June 2019), I am disappointed that it did not mention medication or therapy. I worry that readers will take away from the article that prayer is the solution to anxiety. Bullet point four reads, "Paul promises that the prayer of the anxious person will lead to peace." I would hate for a person in the grip of debilitating anxiety to not seek treatment because they believe that prayer will heal them. That's like saying a person with cancer shouldn't seek treatment because God is the great physician. I believe that God's grace and peace also come in the form of medication and therapy.

» Elizabeth Recker // Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Black Dog

Theresa Miedema gave us incredible insight into the soul of depression ("Me and the Black Dog," May 2019). Thank you, Theresa, for your candid and honest description and feelings. Thank you for your insights on how we can show Christian love to people who are ill with depression. May it make all of us more aware and compassionate.

» Joyce Steen // Suttons Bay, Mich.

### Easter Breakfast

I was sipping my coffee on Easter morning and reading my *Banner*. There was the wonderful article authored by Charlotte Otten ("Easter Breakfast," April 2019)! It was beautifully written in a gentle, thoughtful, even whimsical way. I was transported to those days of the first Easter. I captured a new and transforming vision of the power and significance of that momentous day. Thank you, Charlotte, for your skillful and poignant way of revealing more of the real meaning of Easter!

» William K. Stob // Hobe Sound, Fla.

### Saving Face

The disrespect that is so evident in today's culture claims one disaster after another ("Saving Face," May 2019). To be sure, honoring God, life, and others is not only biblical but a desirable environment for the future generations. As Christians, we need not only to demand respect but to model it. Hopefully the article can "arouse in us a fresh urgency" to speak up for honoring all of God's creation.

» Maxine Stiemsma // Rock Valley, Iowa

### Work of Justice

I was extremely disappointed by the glaring omission of the injustice done to the unborn ("The Ordinary Work of Justice," May 2019). (It says,) "(M)ishpat is what needs to be done in a given situation if things are to be restored to *tsedek* (rightness) so that everyone can flourish. ... For God's people justice is making sure everyone has what they need to flourish."

Should we not be MOST concerned about babies being denied any opportunity to flourish? Abortion at any time during pregnancy is killing a human being—a unique individual—made in God's image.

Where are your articles about the greatest injustice being done to our most innocent children?

» Carmen Reitsma // New Sharon, Iowa

### Vocation vs. Calling

I read with interest how vocation and calling are used interchangeably in the article written by Douglas J. Schuurman ("Big Questions," April 2019).

It is my understanding that we are called to be Christians and serve our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, 24 hours a day.

Our vocations are not about who we are, but what we do to earn a living for our

families. If we combine the two, then when we are done with our vocation for the day or the week, we may no longer feel the need to be God's hands and feet, and we feel we can resort to selfish activities that do not serve our Lord.

If we confuse the two, when we lose our jobs (vocations) we still have our calling to show us that God has a plan for us for our own good, even if it means changing vocations. (I have personally experienced this on more than one occasion.)

» Larry Hoekstra // Hull, Iowa

### Restorative Justice

Although the criminal justice system might first come to mind when thinking of restorative justice ("Restorative Justice: A Better Way," June 2019), the principles have been expanded into a larger discipline known as restorative practices. The International Institute of Restorative Practices offers training and graduate degrees in a model that can be used beyond criminal justice or when harm has been done. It offers a way to live and be together in community that honors and engages each unique person. From daily living together to making decisions to having difficult conversations, as well as responding when harm has been done, the science of restorative practices has a lot to offer churches.

» Bonnie Nicholas // online comment

### Intellectual Pride

Mr. Chong, in his editorial "Intellectual Pride" (May 2019), writes about a bout with depression that came as a result of his pride. For people who suffer from mental illnesses, and especially for those prone to mood swings, head knowledge may prove to be a spiritual anchor to sanity, in that if people doubt their salvation because they hear voices or they have the combined effect of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, they cannot



# Agents of Reconciliation

trust their state of mind for assurance of salvation. For such people, trusting in what the Bible and our traditions teach is the only way to rest in peace even while alive on this side of heaven.

» Michele Gyselinck // Montreal, Quebec

## Church Programming

About seniors/retirees feeling left out at church ("Big Questions," May 2019): Two years ago, some seniors got together to see what we could do. We started with a potluck one summer day at one of our senior's homes and passed a sheet around to write down what we would like to do as a group. We have gone on day trips, (had) coffee socials at church with hymn sings, and (played) games, plus (had) pizza, potlucks, and picnics in the park. We also have bus trips for the day, and Christmas dinner with devotions and poems. We get together once a month, have four couples who plan and phone everyone, and it is going very well.

» Jessie Jonkman // Wyoming, Ont.

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## As I Was Saying

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- » Shop Girl Aesthetic: Working Retail as a Spiritual Discipline
- » Even If We Didn't Vote for Trump, We Pray for Him
- » What Does Joy Spark?

*"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18).*

**HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT** of yourself as an agent of reconciliation?

One reason many of us are reluctant to embrace that ministry is that it is all about conflict, tension, alienation, and the distance between people.

For me, that hits close to home. Some members of my immediate family no longer speak to each other. Perhaps you too know parents who have become alienated from one or more of their children, or children who feel painfully disconnected from their parents. In our congregations we have seen families ripped apart over church conflict. And the current political polarization has caused many people to drift apart to the point where they can no longer be in the same room together.

It is tempting to think things will get fixed by trying harder, by bringing in experts, or by throwing money at the problem. I doubt there's a magic formula to make everything better. But that is not to say there isn't something mysterious available to us: the power of listening. What if the ministry of reconciliation is all about listening? Perhaps it's about listening in such a way that the story of the broken relationship is allowed to rise to the surface and is seen again, but perhaps in a new light.


This might not happen the first time we sit down together, perhaps not even until much later. But there's power in showing genuine interest in the other person's story without giving any advice, without trying to try to fix the situation.

A posture like that is possible only when we realize that it is God who is in charge, and that God does not need me or my intervention to make things happen.

A posture like that is possible only when we realize that it is God who is in charge, and that God does not need me or my intervention to make things happen.

With that understanding, we're free to say, "I have come to hear your story. And I can be with you long enough, and quietly enough, for you to dare to go down into the deeper places where the pain resides, where questions lurk for which there are no answers."

It helps to have experienced conflict and alienation in your own life, perhaps long ago, perhaps only recently. We receive the ministry of reconciliation when we personally experience healing in what once was a broken relationship.

Our job as agents of reconciliation is not to explain in great detail how reconciliation snuck up on us. Rather, our job is to be so quiet that reconciliation can sneak up on your friend as well—in God's due time, in God's way. By God's power. By the Holy Spirit. 



John Van Donk is a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church who has retired after multiple careers.



# Extra Costs Bring Extra Blessing

## Communities Should Support Christian Education of Children with Special Needs

Tony Kamphuis

**I**f you are the administrator of an independent Christian school, there are two fears that can spring up when a family arrives to enroll a student who has a disability. First, are we going to be able to provide the best situation for this student's education? What about her peers and classmates? Second, does our school have the financial resources to accommodate this young person?

In our work at the Christian School Foundation Canada, we are tackling the financial challenge, primarily because we think there is an even more important third fear that should outweigh the others: the fear of costing your students, your school, and

your community an opportunity that can be transformative.

Who should carry the cost of effectively including students with all kinds of needs in an independent, unfunded, or partially funded Christian school? (CRC Executive Director Steven Timmermans shares his own experience of funding the Christian education of his child with special needs. p. 26) We believe the entire school and the broader Christian education support community should carry the cost together. Why?

First, there is a practical rationale. A family with a loved one who has a disability often faces a variety of extra expenses in other aspects of their lives. Asking a family in this situation

to bear even more costs because they want their child to experience a Christian education seems onerous. It might prevent them from even considering a Christian education.

Second, there are theological reasons to share the cost. If yours is a covenantal school—one that includes students for reasons rehearsed at their baptism—how could you then tell people in this situation that their family will be left largely to their own devices—that your communal promises only go so far? If yours is a Christian school with more open admissions, are other schools in your area more open and welcoming than your school is to all children of the

King—even if those other schools don't acknowledge each child's royal status?

Some believe that if a family does have the resources to meet any extra costs, they should be encouraged to do so. I would turn that around and say that anyone with resources to help should pitch in. If the family itself has those kinds of resources, they, too, are part of the community and can contribute to the school's initiatives in this area, according to the ways God has blessed them. But it should still be the school community as a whole that sources and spends the funds in keeping with a vision of their school as a learning community of belonging.

The communal approach has other advantages. If parents pay for the additional support worker, who is in charge of that employee? Can the school's administrator assign that worker to other tasks or school priorities? What if the support worker has a different approach to education than the classroom teacher? Whose employee is the aide if the parents are footing the bill?

Perhaps I've started this article on the wrong foot. Perhaps I shouldn't have spoken of fear, but of mirrors and the Christian school community's view of itself. Believing their school to be a place of welcome, openness, and belonging can draw the people in it toward incredible opportunities. Imagine the richness of the Christian education the classmates and teachers of students with disabilities could experience. What do classmates learn about sensitivity to the needs of others, about reliance on others when each of us faces our own limitations, about care and compassion and friendship with those who are very much like us but not exactly like us? In other words, what do classmates and teachers learn about what it means to be a community where everyone contributes and everyone belongs? A community in which we don't just make room if a brother or sister with disabilities shows up, but a community that is weaker and less rich if they *don't* show up?

Believing their school to be a place of welcome, openness, and belonging can draw the people in it toward incredible opportunities.

Who wouldn't want their child to belong to a school with such a rich view of itself? What school administrator would want to lead a school that is anything less than all that it could be in this way? What administrator wouldn't fear having the school's students and its community miss out on this tremendous blessing?

Sara and Ralph Pot, friends of the Christian School Foundation Canada, have reminded us that it definitely did cost the Good Samaritan something in terms of effort and finances to help the injured traveler. But consider for a moment what it cost the priest and the rabbi who passed on the other side. Now that is something our schools should fear!


Of course, fostering a vibrant community of belonging in an unfunded or partially funded Christian school can be a financial challenge. But most actions and attitudes that create such a community don't have a price tag attached.

How is tackling the financial costs best accomplished in a Christian school setting?

First, collectively decide you want to be a community of belonging. Let the budget reflect this vision.

Second, don't keep the blessing to yourselves. In your broader community of Christian school supporters, invite donors to respond to the prompting of God and experience his blessing in the process. Donors, like all Christ-followers, want to respond to God's call to expand the influence of Christ's love and work of reconciliation in our culture. If God is calling them to support this kind of inclusive vision, we owe it to them to let them respond to God's call. The Christian School Foundation Canada's "Belonging Bursary" ([christianschool-foundation.ca](http://christianschool-foundation.ca)) is one example of allowing donors to take action in a way that spurs schools toward more effective ways of being inclusive communities.

Last, take advantage of any available broader community supports. We can learn a great deal from those outside our school community—Christian organizations and public ones—and we owe it to our students to make every connection possible.

Then step back and watch God at work. He is amazing at replacing fear with blessings. 



Tony Kamphuis is president and CEO of Christian School Foundation in Hamilton, Ont.

1. What has been your experience with families who have children with disabilities in Christian schools?
2. What do you think are some blessings or gifts that students with disabilities can bring to their fellow students and school community?
3. What are some ways that a church community can help families . . .

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

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Faith Formation

**A church placed furniture and toys in front of the sanctuary for children to use during the worship service. Does that belong in the sanctuary?**

“Pray-grounds” like the one you described have recently popped up in congregations in the U.S. and Canada. For many children, it can seem their main task in church is to sit still and be quiet or leave the service for other activities. Pray-grounds are a response to this. Having a dedicated space in the sanctuary is one way for children to feel welcome and to know they belong and can participate in worship. Pray-grounds are often set up in front of church so the children can see what is happening.

There are other ways, though, to meet that same goal that congregations might be more comfortable with. “Pew boxes” can be made for each row that include books, paper, and markers, or worship bags can be placed in the back of church for children to take into the sanctuary. Many parents already take to church a bag of things that fit their child’s interests.

However, these things can just be another way to distract children and adults from worship. It takes a delicate balance to identify what helps children to worship and what disrupts worship. People in churches that use pray-grounds say many adults enjoy watching the children, and the people it bothers often move to a place in church where they can’t see them.



Illustration for The Banner by Lauri Sienkowski

There are other ways for congregations to work toward being more child-friendly in worship: Does the pastor use words the children can understand? Do children take part in the liturgy through Bible reading, serving as acolytes, or helping collect offerings? Do adults feel comfortable whispering to a child in worship to tell them what is happening? Is at least one song child-friendly?

A friend of ours slid into the pew for an evening service with three little girls just before worship, feeling a little frazzled, and she immediately apologized to the older woman in front of her: “I hope we’re not too distracting!” The retired woman turned and said, “Nonsense! They belong here!” That’s the sort of attitude we want to convey to both parents and kids.

Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary. Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children’s ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

### Missional Living

**Creation care seems like a white suburban issue to me. Why should I care, as a Christian?**

It makes perfect sense that creation care issues do not appear to match pressing justice issues such as poverty, immigration, or abortion. However, as

a former urban pastor, creation stewardship matters in all geographical locations around the world, especially in cities.

I lived near the most polluted body of water in Michigan for more than 20 years. I saw people fishing for dinner, children wading in the waters, and homeless people sleeping near the creek. As a Reformed Christian, I believe God cares deeply about how we steward the Earth as faithful people of God. It matters that the creek becomes safe for all of God’s creatures. It matters that we redeem the creek. This is part of my faith because God holds me responsible for taking care of his good, green Earth.

Urban Christians must take seriously this creation mandate. The Lord cares deeply how we use the natural resources that contribute to the life, health, and flourishing of people in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. God’s Earth blesses all people no matter the race, color, or creed. We care because God cares.

Please find ways to immerse yourself in creation care at your church or in your neighborhood. Seek God’s guidance as you discern the best way to put your faith into action to redeem God’s gifts of earth, water, and sky.

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

**Ethics****In Matthew, Jesus tells us not to resist our enemies. Yet the Christian Reformed Church endorses just war. How does it reconcile these two claims?**

In the Beatitudes—the first 10 verses of Matthew 5—we read a few things relevant to our question, the most important of which is that we should “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” “Righteousness” is another word for “justice,” which can be understood to mean something like “treating each person, thing, or situation rightly or correctly.”

But the key idea in Matthew 5 isn’t justice; it’s perfection: *agape*, or sacrificial love. In verse 19, Jesus warns us not to set aside the commands of justice. That is the context for what follows, namely, how *agape* grows from and through justice, never against it.

When we come to Jesus’ “Do not resist an enemy,” it is reasonable to assume his first-century audience, steeped as they were in the numerous stories of just violence in the Old Testament, understood Jesus not to be condemning these, but adding to these. It seems implausible to me—as it did to Augustine, Calvin, and other teachers in our tradition—to imagine Jesus meant something contradictory like “Desire righteousness, but don’t try to prevent a would-be murderer from attacking your child.” Indeed, Jesus himself seems to qualify what he means in the next set of verses when he tells us not to hate our enemies because such hatred, though not expressed externally as murder, is still sin.

Just war theory tries to achieve what Jesus lays out here. As lovers of justice, we must “deter the lawless,” as our denominational position statement says ([bit.ly/2Lujk8P](http://bit.ly/2Lujk8P)), and to allow evil when we have a duty to be just is sinful. Nevertheless, even the law and the prophets (and the pagans!) know this. Christians, thanks to Jesus’ teaching, know more and must be more: we must love our enemies, even as we stop them; we must deter the lawless, even as we are willing to forgive them. This is the kind of “perfection” Jesus is talking about at the end of the Sermon.

Adam Barkman is a professor of philosophy at Redeemer University College.

**Relationships****Is it really up to me to decide my own identity? I’m 16 years old and getting more confused. Help!**

Your confusion is completely understandable. Think of it: A person’s development from adolescence to adulthood takes about eight years. During that time, a young person’s physical, emotional, psychosocial, mental, and spiritual development undergo profound changes. Vocational and other former interests can disappear, and your parents might have difficulty seeing their former child in the (taller) stranger now standing before them.

Since we are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” just one word—identity—cannot adequately describe all the changes you are now experiencing. Also, how someone becomes mature is uniquely complex to each person. Simply put, one size does not fit all. Each individual has a unique genetic makeup, social history, and

personality, and each teen will navigate this identity crisis in his or her own way.

Other important words that will add to your confusion are *genetic* and *gender*. We use the terms *genetic expression* or *gender identity* to describe how you would come to know and decide what it means to be identified as male or female, gay or straight. But even professionals such as psychiatrists, social scientists, and scholars in related fields do not all agree whether genetic differences are simply “variations on a theme” or whether these variations are alerting parents and doctors to a developmental abnormality that might need medical intervention (e.g., gender dysphoria as defined by the American Psychiatric Association). Under those circumstances, if you were *not* confused, you could be considered to be somewhat abnormal!

In the midst of confusion, Jesus calls us to identify with him—to become a “new creation,” to be “born again,” and to join the family of God. This offers some solid ground as you consider all these things, but it requires a decision on your part, too.

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



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.

# Questions and Challenges Amid Change

## NEWS

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## Inspire 2019

Inspire 2019, a denomination-wide ministry conference put on by the Christian Reformed Church, met Aug. 1-3 in Windsor, Ont. The event featured four keynote speakers, 94 registered presenters, and 44 ministry fair/expo vendors to equip servants in the church. The first Inspire conference took place in Detroit in 2017.

Inspire was funded in part by a gift from the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, and contributions from CRC families and businesses wishing to support the event. Affiliated organizations including Youth Unlimited, The Barnabas Foundation and GACX (a global alliance for church multiplication) contributed to cover the costs of keynote speakers.

Writer Maia VanderMeer attended for *The Banner* and wrote about one of the weekend’s central themes, incarnational mission.



Photo by Heather Brooks, [heatherbrooksp photography.com](http://heatherbrooksp photography.com)

For the 720 registrants at Inspire 2019, energy and uncertainty were in the air, anticipating inevitable change for the Christian Reformed Church. That change will happen is certain; how to engage it and what it leads to is still unknown. As workshop leader Karen Wilk put it, we live in an era where “we don’t know what’s next.” Mary Anne Wagenfeld, participant from Escondido, Calif., commented, “Things are going through change, even a little turmoil, in our denomination.”

During worship Friday morning, attendees heard of “incarnational mission,” a theme developed throughout Inspire. Speakers, catching the challenge of change, asked questions of participants and encouraged them to form their own.

Ed Stetzer, executive director of the Billy Graham Center, challenged each person to ask, “Why am I in *this* neighborhood?”

We live in our neighborhoods as citizens and ambassadors of the kingdom, he said. “You are reconciled, and now you have the ministry and the message of reconciliation. The world deeply needs this.”

In Wilk’s workshop, “The World Has Changed,” she said congregations are

Ed Stetzer was a speaker at Inspire 2019.

increasingly disconnected from their surrounding neighborhoods. The church is operating in a new context: attractions no longer draw people, the church no longer holds authority in culture, there is no universal language for spiritual matters, and 98% of most congregations commute to church in a time when local is the new goal. How can the church humbly respond?

“We can’t just have God in our church and do our own thing,” commented attendee Eric Slofstra (Immanuel CRC, Simcoe, Ont.). Recognizing the change discussed in various sessions, he said, “You can’t just do the norm, right? Do your term in office, and then expect everything to be OK. The church is struggling right now and this is why, because everyone just does their thing.”

“What if,” Wilk asked, “the church could be a sign, servant, and foretaste of the kingdom of God come near?” The kingdom-come-near, she stressed, is about a tangible presence, not a building.

A participant shared how neighborhood ministry uncovered possible common

ground with a Muslim business owner. A congregation's prayer walk stopped weekly at the local Middle Eastern market. Deeply impressed by their commitment to prayer, the Muslim owner now points out the CRC to others as "the church that prays."

Cathy Vedder (Calvary CRC, Ottawa, Ont.) doesn't find neighborhood ministry easy. "I've always been aware that to spread the gospel it has to be relational, but it's a bit overwhelming for me how I can do that



Mark Van Andel was co-presenter in a church-planting workshop.

as an introvert." Returning home from Inspire, she said she felt encouraged to focus more on kingdom mission, with a renewed interest in relationships she already has with newcomers to Canada.

"Street Psalms: Social and Spiritual Urban Transformation," a workshop led by Joel Van Dyke and Joel Kiekintveld, focused on how incarnational ministry needs to suit its context. "Cities are transformed the way they're created: relationally, in love," they said.

Kyle Brooks and Mark Van Andel, who led a workshop on "Models of Church

Planting," agreed that church planting is "deeply contextualized. There is no one way to do it."

Brooks stressed it takes commitment: "If this place never changed and you spent your whole life there, would you still love it? Would you still dive in, invest your life in it?"

"What you are in love with in your life depends on everything about your life," said author Ann Voskamp, Friday evening's keynote speaker. She challenged attendees to open their lives to those whose lives have fallen apart, staying present, witnessing their suffering, supporting them in daily ways, and offering self-giving love. This is the love of the Trinity, whose communion we are grafted into. Voskamp asked, "Will we reflect to the world the great hospitality of the Trinity?"

—Maia VanderMeer

## Noteworthy

**Rev. Sheila Holmes**, longtime pastor of Northside Community Christian Reformed Church in Paterson, N.J., was honored in May, by her city's branch of Operation CeaseFire, for her lifelong work in ending gun violence. Holmes has made "trauma awareness and resilience" the main focus of her ministry. This year Holmes also became one of two inaugural Crisis Intervention Chaplains with the Paterson Police force.



Crisis Intervention Chaplain Rev. Sheila Holmes. "I believe if cities, churches, communities, and families would have a proactive mindset, we could deal with a lot of the violence."

**The Christian Reformed Church released a statement July 19 on the U.S. refugee resettlement program.**

"A drastic reduction in the number of refugee resettlements allowed next year would prevent our churches from following our long-standing calling to extend hospitality to refugees," it read in part. For the full statement, visit [bit.ly/CRCresettlement](http://bit.ly/CRCresettlement).

On July 9, a **network of faith leaders released a statement** titled "Back From The Brink". Signed by more than 100 people, it called for **diplomacy, and not war, between the United States and Iran. CRC director of ministries Colin Watson, Sr. was one of the signatories.** For the statement, visit [bit.ly/IranBrink](http://bit.ly/IranBrink).

## Church Hosts Prayer Walks over Gun Violence

Pastors, church members, and parishioners of neighboring churches gathered over two June evenings in the Grand Rapids, Mich., neighborhood of Oakdale Park Christian Reformed Church to pray for safety and peace in the city.

The prayer walks took place in response to one shooting death and one gunshot injury to a young girl, both in the same month and less than 100 yards from the church property.

About 40 people turned out to knock on doors, meet with nearby residents, and pray with them for the violence to cease.

"I think what's going on is the deterioration of the family, a moral sense of life. A lot of these young people don't have a sense of what life is all about. They're living in a fantasy world," said James Jones, pastor of congregational care at Oakdale Park, who organized the prayer walks.

Jones said the church has hosted prayer walks in the past, but this is the first one where prayer walkers have met with residents and asked to pray with them. "We've never had anything like this before," said Jones, who has served the congregation as pastor for 20 years.

Arlan Palmer, neighborhood chaplain at Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, joined in to pray for peace in the city's neighborhoods. "We're all in this together," he said.

—Greg Chandler

James Jones (right) prays with a family on their front porch.



Photo by Greg Chandler

## Canadian National Gathering: From Emptiness to Fullness



Photo by Joel Slomp

One hundred nineteen participants from Christian Reformed congregations across Canada met together at the 2019 Canadian National Gathering in May. Meeting at The King's University in Edmonton, Alta., the two-day event was a follow-up to one held three years ago in Waterloo, Ont.

The gathering included representatives from about half of Canada's 263 CRCs. Canadian Ministries Director Darren Roorda said the purpose was to provide "a time of spiritual discernment and reflection to determine bold steps for the next phase of ministry locally and nationally for the CRC in Canada." Roorda was one of 40 denominational ministries staff, planners and worship team members supporting the Gathering.

Ahead of the weekend, participants had been asked to prepare by reading prescribed books, memorizing and studying Scripture passages, and practicing spiritual disciplines—praying, fasting, and meditation. Each element connected to the Gathering's theme, *From Emptiness to Fullness*. Classes (regional groups of churches) also had been surveyed to determine national and local ministry priorities.

Chaplain Harold Roscher, director of the Edmonton Native Healing Centre, one of three urban Indigenous ministries

operated by the CRC, opened sessions throughout the weekend with drumming and leading a song of invitation. "An Indigenous Christian expression of Christ's call to come into his living stream that flows from his throne," Roscher said—written by a Mohawk friend.

Jeremy Benjamin, a Christian Reformed musician who has been on a cross-Canada fundraising tour for World Renew, also participated in worship times with a band of musicians from local CRCs.

While there are many things to celebrate about the CRC in Canada, participants also shared hurts, anxieties, disappointments, and perceived shortcomings, which led to expressed lament. Brian Kuyper, one of the planning team members, led those assembled in a corporate confession, asking them afterward to stand open-handed, ready to be filled.

In breakout sessions, classis groups discussed the five most commonly mentioned priorities from the surveys, including a need to refocus attention on prayer and other spiritual disciplines and ensuring that the CRC and local congregations become places that reflect the



## Ontario Churches Unite in Backyard Mission

cultural, ethnic, age, and ability diversity of their communities and countries. Heading home, participants were encouraged to speak to their church councils in preparation for fall classis presentations. Roorda plans to attend each of these.

“The work you’ve done won’t stay here,” Kuyper said. “I hope your classis will listen and will try to implement what we (and God) have done this weekend.”

Reflecting on the Gathering, Hilda VanderKlippe, participant from the Village Church in Classis Niagara, recalled one of the prescribed Scripture passages, the feeding of the 5,000 in Mark 6.

“When faced with a big task, the disciples looked at their limited resources, and I often do that, too. Jesus knew very well that the disciples could not feed this large crowd, but he asked them to do it anyway. God-sized visions are always beyond our own resources. This forces us to rely on God instead of doing it on our own strength,” VanderKlippe said.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Each summer, groups travel all across North America to worksites and projects to volunteer their time in community service. First Presbyterian Church and First Christian Reformed Church in Chatham, Ont., noticed this trend and decided to join—but in their own community. Rev. Mike Maroney of First Presbyterian saw a need and began the Backyard Mission in 2009.

Since then, the two congregations have worked together each year to invite nominations and select a deserving homeowner to receive an outdoor residential transformation free of charge.

Volunteers work on the project for two days under the leadership of experienced local contractor Mark Labadie. This year, volunteers did projects for two local residents, replacing a ramp and wooden walkways for one home and scraping and painting the other.

“I think there’s kind of a general trend to think global and act local,” said Rev. Nate Van Denend of First CRC. “I like that this



Volunteers from First CRC and First Presbyterian work on 2018 Backyard Mission Project in Chatham, Ont.

is a chance to just look at our immediate neighbors and make a little bit of an impact on our own community.”

The mission has become a way to reach out to members of the Chatham community who might not otherwise connect with a church. The 2019 projects were funded in part by a CRC ecumenical grant available for Canadian churches.

—Anita Brinkman

## California Camp Encourages Racial Reconciliation

Since 1988 Camp Dunamis has been bringing children together to celebrate differences and grow in Christ.

Classis Greater Los Angeles and Classis California South, two regional groups of Christian Reformed congregations, founded the annual camp to address racial divides in Southern California’s diverse ethnic communities.

For one week each June, young people camp on the grounds of Camp Maranatha in Idyllwild, Calif., to eat, sleep, play, and worship together, to develop friendships and transcend racial differences.

Seven to 10 participants stay in cabins with two staff members. True to the camp’s purpose, each cabin is organized to include children from different churches and ethnicities. After that, it’s just camp.

Director Denise Tamminga said the churches continue funding the effort because the camp has had an “eternal impact in the



lives of so many.” In 2018, she said, 35 campers made first-time commitments to Christ, and 88 campers expressed a desire to recommit. There were campers of Anglo, Latino, African-American, Korean, Zuni, Navajo, Chinese, and Filipino descent.

Former leader and camper Saul Miranda, now 20, said Dunamis helped erase stigmas that developed in him because of a previous lack of exposure to diversity. Dunamis “not only accepts diversity but encourages a reconciliation, breaking barriers that society has long built.”

—Elizabeth Drummond

## Three Congregations Celebrate 125 Years

“On Thursday afternoon, October 19, 1893, a meeting was held in Leighton, Iowa, to organize a new congregation,” reads an anniversary booklet printed last fall. That congregation, **Leighton Christian Reformed Church**, now shares its pastor with Tracy (Iowa) CRC and is still ministering in its community after more than 125 years.

“We are a very small congregation and are very grateful and fortunate that we have survived as a small church,” said vice president of the church council Bernie Hardeman.

The Leighton CRC commemorations last October included a celebration communion service and an evening community celebration with music and memories.

**Peoria Christian Reformed Church** members in Pella, Iowa, marked 125 years of ministry in June. Three former pastors of the church came to celebrate, reflecting on Peoria CRC’s journey and God’s faithfulness. Rev. George Den Oudsten, the church’s current pastor, led the evening service, and vocal groups made up of current members and those who had grown up in the church participated. A highlight was reciting the Ten Commandments in Dutch, the original language of the church. The practice was suspended in 1918 after the Iowa governor’s proclamation against non-English language use in public.

A 1950s-themed carhop dinner and drive-in movie, sermons by former pastors, and a river tubing trip are some of the anniversary events marked by members of **Prosper Christian Reformed Church** in Falmouth, Mich., this summer. The congregation still meets in its traditional, steepled sanctuary built in the early 1900s, but anniversary commemorations have included those outside the church walls.

“The last 15 to 20 years, our focus has been more outward (toward the community), than inward,” said member Steve Ebels, whose great-great-grandfather was a charter member and whose great-granddaughter was just baptized at Prosper CRC. “We have the best news in the world . . . we can’t just sit on it.”

—Banner correspondents

## Youth Unlimited: ‘100 Years of Belonging to God’



Convention Photo Taken at the Sherman Street Christian Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan (Photo by Feingold)

Youth Unlimited, an organization helping churches challenge young people to commit their lives to Jesus Christ and transform this world for him, is celebrating “100 Years of Belonging to God.”

Still based in Grand Rapids, Mich., and serving churches across North America, Youth Unlimited has changed in form and in name over its century-long history. In 1919, associations of young Christian men formed the American Federation of Reformed Young Men’s Societies. The early founders were young Dutch immigrants to North America who met in small groups for the study of Scripture and personal spiritual growth. After a merger with a Reformed Young Women’s Society and a few subsequent iterations, the organization became Youth Unlimited in 1993.

Several events in 2019 will commemorate the centennial, including a golf outing and two celebration dinners this fall in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Woodstock, Ont. The organization’s executive director Rick Zomer, gave a brief presentation to the Christian Reformed Church’s annual general assembly in June and presented a workshop at Inspire 2019, the CRC’s denomination-wide ministry-focused conference.

Youth Unlimited currently supports churches in their youth ministries by organizing and carrying out short-term missions known as SERVE trips. Other programs from Youth Unlimited’s history include Compass 21, a youth ministry assessment tool developed in 1989, and longer-term summer mission experiences called SWIM (Summer Workshops in Ministry), which ran from 1962 to 2001.

As early as 1920, annual youth conventions were a big focus of the organization’s work. They ran for more than 80 years, with a brief break during World War II, said Elizabeth Bosscher, Youth Unlimited’s communications and events coordinator.

“One hundred years of ministry have created ripple effects far beyond what we can imagine this side of heaven,” Bosscher said.

—Eliza Anderson

## Celebrating 10 Years of Worship and Welcome in Basic English



Singers Esperance Mawazo, Delphine Dukandane, Olive Zabibu, and Esperance Nabintu celebrate the anniversary of the Basic English Service with other members of the congregation.

The Basic English Service at Church of the Servant, a Christian Reformed congregation in Grand Rapids, Mich., employs simplified English translations of Scripture, congregant-written prayers, and global worship music. Growing out of the congregation's refugee ministries and an awareness of the makeup of their neighborhood, the BES has been a place of worship for English-language learners for just over a decade. Church of the Servant celebrated the milestone in April.

Reflecting on how the Basic English Service has enriched the whole community of believers, one of the church's pastors, Andrew Mead, said what was "initially an outreach is now an in-reach."

—Emily Joy Stroble

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### IN MEMORIAM



*Frederick 'Fred'  
James VanDyk*

1934-2019

Growing up on a farm, Fred VanDyk enjoyed helping in the fields and tinkering with things mechanical, especially farm equipment. In ministry, he worked in fields from Texas to Canada to Nigeria, planting seeds, gently clearing weeds, and creating space for people to grow in the knowledge and love of the Lord. Vandyk, 85, died May 7.

After ordination in 1960, VanDyk served Missio Dei Church in El Paso, Texas. He went on to serve Burdett (Alta.) Christian Reformed Church, Highland CRC in Marion, Mich., and Paw Paw (Mich.) CRC before training pastors for eight years as part of the faculty at Smith Memorial Bible College in Baissa, Nigeria. After returning to the U.S., VanDyk pastored Hollandale (Minn.) CRC and Pioneer CRC in Cedar Springs, Mich. Following retirement in 1999, he continued to serve several churches.

A devoted husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, VanDyk encouraged those he loved through the seasons of their lives as much as time, health, and distance allowed.

He is survived by Bette, his wife of 65 years, four children and spouses, 12 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-granddaughter.

—Janet A. Greidanus

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. William 'Bud' Ipema*

1938-2019

Bud Ipema died April 14, leaving a 60-year legacy of urban ministry in Chicago, where he was instrumental in promoting racial reconciliation and social justice.

In 1968, while finishing studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, Ipema joined Young Life Urban Mission in Chicago, later moving to the city's Englewood neighborhood to minister among gang members there. He also served as the Chicago central director of Young Life and later as its national urban trainer. In 1975, he became associate pastor at Chicago's Lawndale Christian Reformed Church, a position he held until his death.

Ipema launched or played a leadership role in many organizations, foundations, and projects. He served as co-director of the Synodical Committee on Race Relations, from which emerged the CRC's Office of Race Relations.

He loved traveling, woodworking, 1957 Chevys, British comedies, a good debate, and summers in Holland, Mich. At the time of his death, he was in the process of finalizing his memoir.

Ipema is survived by his two children, their spouses, a daughter-in-law, and seven grandchildren. He was predeceased in 2012 by Donna, his wife of 52 years, and in 2013 by his son, Brad.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Gary Bekker Closes Years of Service to Global Mission

Gary Bekker, who has had a varied and faithful career within and for the Christian Reformed Church, retired in August.

In his last two years of ministry, Bekker directed the group of three leadership training ministries now known as Raise Up Global Ministries.

Bekker's commitment to living out a Reformed worldview was solidified at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., and Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich., where he received degrees. In 1977, Bekker went to the Philippines as a missionary, planting churches and teaching.

He earned a doctorate in education at Michigan State University and then taught missions and church education at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Mass. During this time, he also pastored a local CRC congregation for two years.

Bekker became academic dean at Calvin Seminary in 1995.

In 2000, he was invited to become the director of Christian Reformed World Missions. This would become Bekker's deep passion and his longest place of service (2001-2017).

Just 10 days after beginning the CRWM directorship, terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Center towers on Sept. 11, 2001, in New York. This single event changed the work of global missions, security, and the entire world's perspective on safety.

"It was a dramatic beginning," said Bekker, and its impact would not let up for the next 16 years.

Bekker's great joy was to visit missionaries in the field. He aimed to always improve accountability and responsible stewardship within the denomination, providing support and advice for continued reorganization and restructuring with a mind to the safety of field workers.



Photo by Karen Huttenga

Norma and Gary Bekker at the Synod 2019 banquet recognizing Gary's retirement.

Bekker's CRWM era culminated in uniting World Missions with Home Missions to form Resonate Global Mission. This unification was significant overall and important to Bekker as the church needed to gather its mission, purpose, and resources to meet the needs of a new global reality at home and abroad. Bekker is grateful to have been part of that arduous yet necessary process.

Bekker was honored at the June 2019 Synod (annual general assembly) during a luncheon with delegates and visitors.

"The CRC does well to pray," he reflected, "not for survival but for God's direction and an obedient heart and for a way of serving Christ with others. If we do so, we ought to be prepared for lots of God's surprises."

Bekker is grateful for the companionship of family during his years of service to God's mission. Norma, his wife of 42 years, his children, grandchildren, parents, and in-laws all have been a support. None of this would have transpired "without Norma's quiet, rock-solid faith in God and willingness to explore where he wanted us to go," Bekker said.

—Jenny deGroot

## IN MEMORIAM



### Rev. John Koopmans

1927-2019

John Koopmans, who died May 11, will be remembered for being genuine, grateful, and generous. He was a man of many gifts and interests. Books and photography were an integral part of his life. He used his artistic talents in various ministries. For example, he gave chalk talks (a presentation given while the speaker draws) on Saturday mornings to neighborhood children who were fascinated by his beautiful, biblical drawings. A mechanic, he designed and built a boat and camper trailer for family vacations. His love of languages and theology led him to study at Calvin Seminary and later at the California School of Theology, where he earned a doctorate.

After ordination in 1958, Koopmans pastored four congregations: Aylmer (Ont.) Christian Reformed Church; Bethel CRC, Brockville, Ont.; Sussex (N.J.) CRC; and Rehoboth CRC, Bellflower, Calif. He then served for 10 years as chaplain with the Seafarers Ministry in the port of Long Beach, Calif. For many years he was involved in prison ministry on Terminal Island, a federal prison in Long Beach. He retired in 1992.

Koopmans, predeceased in 2018 by his wife, Jennie, is survived by his seven children, 13 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus



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# Leading through Relationship

*The Story of Youth in the CRC*

By Katy Johnson and Paola Fuentes Gleghorn

**T**here's a vision in Isaiah 2 of a house on a mountain. Lifted high above the surrounding hills, the house draws all nations toward it. People climb the mountain together to learn God's ways and walk in his paths. As they approach amid so many different cultures and peoples, they become a bit wary as well.

On the mountain, however, there's a promise that all will learn a new way of being in relationship with God, with one another, and with the earth. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" (Isa. 2:4).

On the mountain of the Lord, there's enough—enough food to squash scarcity, enough peace to quell violence, enough room to hold difference.

Today, across the nations, guides draw us toward the mountain of God. Sometimes those guides lead through their decades of wisdom. And sometimes, thanks to God's mysterious wisdom, those guides lead us from their youth, with humble hearts fiercely dedicated to living justice and loving mercy.

### Youth and a Love of the Nations

For more than 50 years, World Renew has witnessed the leadership of youth across continents, cultures, genders, and needs. In Cambodia, for example, young people are working with a World Renew partner to take the initiative in changing their stories of drug addiction, childhood malnutrition, and visual impairment in their village into stories of hope and potential for the future.

In the slums of Bangladesh, thousands of young girls are bravely reframing cultural narratives that label them as "less" because of their gender. In Honduras, hundreds of adolescents are learning to tell their stories of trauma and abuse in order to bring healing, not only to themselves but also to their communities still scarred by civil war. And more than 1,500 young adults throughout Canada and the United States step up each year to ask what they can learn and who they can be for the cause of peace.

These are bold and sometimes surprising voices drawing us all nearer to the mountain of God.

Ben VanderWindt (left) has developed leadership skills through a variety of programs, including a trip to Uganda with World Renew.

"In our work, we have learned the voice of justice from even one of these guides can create a positive ripple of impact for generations," said Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo, co-director of World Renew. "When mouths are silent about abuse of power, hearts are broken."

Such is the case with Ben VanderWindt. Originally from Hamilton, Ont., VanderWindt has participated in a number of leadership activities within the denomination. He is a political science and religion major at Calvin University who has been a young adult representative at Synod. He's participated in Calvin Seminary's Facing Your Future (Now known as DIG) program and Fuller Seminary's Growing Young team. VanderWindt also has benefited from a variety of internships and programs with World Renew.

He said these experiences have triggered something deep within him: a calling that led him to advocate for global peace and church unity from Hamilton, Ont., to Kabale, Uganda; Uppsala, Sweden; and the New York headquarters of the United Nations.

Throughout his travels, VanderWindt has developed a particularly strong passion for how issues of migration and displacement shape the call of love for the Reformed church today. This passion, he says, flows from his experiences of church as a young boy as well as his broadening understanding of church thanks to congregations around the globe.

"The Christian Reformed Church loves people well, and I have directly benefited from that," he said. "I have also known love through the global church thanks to my time in Kabale, Uganda, as part of World Renew's Embark program. During that trip, we lived with the community, followed local church leaders, and learned from their leadership and development strategies. I learned a lot about the everyday, consistent grace of God, even in the way he provides bread and water. That's a love that God has for us that I have not always appreciated."

VanderWindt found himself particularly moved by the significant love of the Kabale church in advocating for justice in Uganda. Church leaders frequently gather around tables with government representatives and business owners to learn from each other and better communicate the needs of Uganda's citizens. In Uganda, VanderWindt experienced what he deems to be the very best aspects of a loving, Reformed faith: "informed, relevant, thoughtful and intentional shaping of culture, driven by justice."

That kind of faith has left an impression, inspiring VanderWindt's participation as a youth representative for World Renew at the ACT Alliance, a network of Christian nonprofits serving internationally. "ACT has really maintained my hope for the church in a global context. There are so many smart, passionate and faithful youth making a difference in their countries," he said.

Now interning with the ACT Alliance at the U.N., VanderWindt continues to extend the love of Christ in new contexts. Still, his first love and deepest hope for the gospel rests in the structure of the church itself and the way it will invite future generations to draw their communities toward God's love.

"There's a consistent problem for youth with feeling valued in the church," he said. "Together we get to keep asking, 'What does it mean for the church to empower young people, even when those youth may express their faith differently than the generation before?' We need to learn how to hear new ideas while also honoring tradition in order to bring the unified voice of the gospel: loving our neighbor as we love mercy, live justly, and walk humbly with God."

### **Mentors and Relationships Are Key**

For the past several years, Faith Formation Ministries has overseen a growing network of Youth Ministry Champions. Each of these champions, present in 30 out of the 48 classes (regional groups of churches), seeks to empower and encourage those working on the frontlines of youth ministry in Christian Reformed congregations. Many of them also serve in youth ministry in their own congregations.

This network of people has witnessed youth leadership in every area of the denomination. Some of those Youth Ministry Champions gathered in Chicago at the end of April and shared stories of doing ministry with young people.

Ron DeVries oversees the network of champions. "Hearing story after story from our Youth Ministry Champions about the amazing leadership of youth across our denomination, I am filled with hope and optimism about the youth in our congregations," he said. "We need to celebrate the stories of young people leading in our congregations."

A major theme emerging from these conversations was the importance of mentoring.

Ron Hosmar is the Youth Ministry Champion for Eastern Canada and commissioned pastor of youth and congregational life at Calvin Christian Reformed Church in Ottawa,

Ont. He started a mentoring program in his church about six years ago. All the youth in grades nine through 12 are paired with an adult in the church.

Hosmar was intentional about asking young adults to be mentors. He knows they have much to contribute to the life of the church and understands how important it is for everyone at church to form genuine relationships. The mentors and mentees meet monthly to talk about life and faith.

"As our youth graduate, we hold an evening of celebration with the mentors and mentees that includes food and sharing and praying for them," Hosmar said. "It's wonderful hearing how the mentor relationship has blessed both the mentee and the mentor. Youth ministry models are changing, and mentoring is a key component for any youth ministry moving forward."

Hosmar is now working with other churches in his classis to help them develop mentoring models that work for their unique congregations.

"Relational warmth is so important to youth ministry," DeVries said. "It is so important for churches to be continuously walking alongside the youth in their church through genuine relationships."

Research from Fuller Youth Institute in their *Growing Young* and *Growing With* books; from *Renegotiating Faith*, a report by five Christian organizations in Canada; and from Faith Formation Ministries' Family Faith Formation materials backs up what these youth ministry leaders are experiencing in their own corners of the denomination.

"Beyond the programs that our churches set up for young people, the relationships that we form with them are key to their faith formation and involvement. This is where mentorship plays a key role," said DeVries.

Many of the champions are young people themselves. They love the church, its ministries, and seeing other young people bringing their gifts to the community of believers to build a body of Christ that fully lives out the heart of the gospel.

"We want to celebrate the work and leadership of these young people," said DeVries. "We need each other to fully and faithfully follow Jesus Christ, and that includes both young and old, and it is a gift to see people from all generations working together to achieve that unity and fullness."

After all, it's only when we seek to hear every voice, when we climb the Isaiah mountain together, that we learn God offers enough peace and hope for all of us. **B**



## Putting a Face on Climate Change

**DEANNA GEELHOED**, 24, and Anneke Spoelma, 14, attended a Climate Witness Project Bootcamp this summer, a learning experience put together by the Office of Social Justice and World Renew.

Geelhoed and Spoelma each were already passionate about combating climate change, but by traveling to parts of Kenya and Uganda, the two said they observed first hand its far-reaching effects. The trip also allowed them to better understand the way these effects are felt in developing countries where many people make their living as subsistence farmers.

“Climate change has created new weather patterns, which impact people’s abilities to farm effectively,” said Geelhoed. “These changes can range from flooding to drought, and the resulting food scarcity can cause political and social destabilization. This further compounds the cycle, making it difficult for people to adjust their farming techniques.”

One man Geelhoed spoke with told her his community can now get eight months of rain in one day.

These dramatic weather shifts have necessitated new farming strategies.

“Conservation agriculture has taken hold in many communities,” Geelhoed said. “(It) uses the three pillars of minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover, and crop rotations/associations to reduce watering and increase yields.”

Prior to their trip and since returning, Geelhoed and Spoelma have talked with people in their home congregations, including those who doubt that climate change is occurring around the world.

Spoelma often explains to them, “Everywhere in Kenya and Uganda



**Deanna Geelhoed (left) and Anneke Spoelma (center) learned about conservation farming while on a Climate Witness Project Bootcamp trip to East Africa.**

(climate change) is known and accepted as fact. They don’t have time to argue about whether climate change is real or not because they are already living in the effects of it.”

Both women have enjoyed these intergenerational conversations with their fellow church members and are hopeful about the positive feedback they’ve received.

The trip also has reminded the two about how blessed they are. They feel compelled to respond to these blessings by faithfully speaking about climate change and encouraging others to address it.

At a recent Office of Social Justice event, Spoelma called attendees to dramatic action and declared that, in our role as creation stewards, we need to take diligent steps toward honoring the earth we’ve been given. Her presentations now include direct actions she does along with ones she

recommends, such as “creating a rain garden, composting, not using paper towels, and planting trees.”

Furthermore, Spoelma and Geelhoed call churches to love creation through worship, sermons, and reducing the congregation’s physical impact on the environment.

Sometimes in North America, it’s easy to avoid the full weight of environmental changes. But “as Christians we have a moral obligation to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ, even when they live on the other side of the globe in East Africa. Climate change is making hard-to-live-in places even more difficult,” Geelhoed said. “This trip gave me a face to the problem of climate change.”

—Victoria Veenstra,  
Justice Communication & Education  
Coordinator

## The View from Here

# Transferring Faith to the Next Generation

**OVER THE COURSE** of this past summer, two Reformed Christian colleges, Calvin and Dordt, became universities. During the official name change ceremonies, the leaders at these institutions explained the purposes for the shift in names. The reasons were similar to what was expressed by The King's University in Edmonton which made a similar change five years ago. I believe there's a message for all of us in these changes.

The term "university" includes the notion of an institution that provides a comprehensive array of learning possibilities: from accounting to art, from economics to engineering, from neuroscience to nursing. Truly, the world of learning opportunities that we need to offer our young people ought to be as broad and wide as Abraham Kuyper explained when he said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!"

In fact, God's sovereignty over all has long been the basis for Reformed Christianity's commitment to Christian education at all levels. Further, this commitment isn't to be held just by parents, but also by the congregation and the Christian community.

My wife and I recall a time when our son Paul was young and enrolled at the Christian Learning Center, necessary given his learning needs related to having Down Syndrome. At that time, the Christian Learning Center charged three times that which was charged for kids in the local Christian

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schools (something that changed a few years later).

While the charge was justifiable given the extra costs needed for special education, it hit us substantially, since our oldest was also in school. We were paying for the equivalent of four Christian school student tuitions.

One night, our pastor and elder came to our home and reminded us of the baptismal vows our congregation had taken. They informed us that the church would not allow us to pay the additional charge. Instead, our church would pay the extra amount.

I suspect there are dozens of similar stories every year of churches stepping in to assist families with Christian education costs. Why? Because our theology, as expressed in the "every square inch" statement, leads directly to a rationale that supports Christian education at every level for students of all levels of ability. We recognize that faith is formed during these critical years, and that broad as well as focused learning is required as young

people prepare for their lives and callings.

Remember, too, while God's sovereignty leads us to an emphasis on Christian education, it takes more than schools to help each child grow and develop a mature faith. As children move into their teen years and then into adulthood, it takes all of us to help them foster a deep understanding of what God is calling each of them to do. Faith-formative activities ought to emanate from our churches and homes—not just our schools.

Some churches assign a mentor to each child or teen taking steps toward profession of faith. I know of many grandparents who daily pray for each of their grandchildren. Mission trips, gap years, youth ministry retreats, catechism, and so much more are all part of the fabric of passing the faith on from generation to generation.

As Psalm 78 reminds us, "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD ... so the next generation would know them. ... Then they would put their trust in God."



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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# God's Transforming Grace

**WHEN SCARLET WAS EXPELLED** from school for bad behavior, she wanted to change but was worried that no one would accept her because of her past. She experienced God's grace at Emmanuel Christian Reformed School, a Resonate Global Mission partner in the Dominican Republic.



Through Resonate Global Mission partner Emmanuel Christian Reformed School, Scarlet realized that God made her in his image, loves her, and has a plan for her.

## Searching for Acceptance

Scarlet's parents separated, and her father left home when she was young. Scarlet was devastated. "I was very close to my father," she said. "When he left, I couldn't understand why. It left a big emotional vacuum in my life."

Trying to fill the hole her father left, she searched for acceptance from others and fell in with the wrong crowd. She was accused of trashing the school. She kept silent when her friend stole a cellphone. Eventually, she was expelled.



Students stand outside of Emmanuel Christian Reformed School, which is supported by Resonate Global Mission.

"(It) forced me to reevaluate my life and realize that this was not the life that I wanted to live," said Scarlet. "This did not reflect my character or my family's values. I knew I needed a change."

That change was Emmanuel, a school that is part of Resonate partner Colegios Cristianos Reformados.

## A Community of Grace

"Emmanuel (has) adopted the concept of being a 'community of grace,'" said Resonate missionary Stephen Brauning. "Through love and commitment, even the most difficult children are given a chance."

Carmen de los Santo, director of Emmanuel, wanted Scarlet to have a supportive community and an opportunity to work for a good future. Even though the director from Scarlet's previous school warned de los Santo not to accept Scarlet as a student, she invited Scarlet into Emmanuel's community.

But as Scarlet's first day at Emmanuel loomed closer, she shook with nerves. "I was very afraid that I would not be accepted by the other students, or that the teachers would give me a very hard time," she said. "But (that) was not the case."

## Loved and Accepted

Students and teachers welcomed Scarlet with a smile. Students befriended Scarlet and offered to help her with schoolwork. Scarlet experienced God's grace.

"I have come to realize that God made me in his image and loves me and has a plan for me," said Scarlet.

Resonate is thankful for the support of donors who give so students like Scarlet can experience the transforming power of God's grace in the classroom through Christian education. "Please pray for me since I still have [challenges] in my life," said Scarlet. "But mostly, give thanks to God for what he has done."

—Cassie Westrate,  
Resonate Global Mission

# Preaching and the Holy Spirit

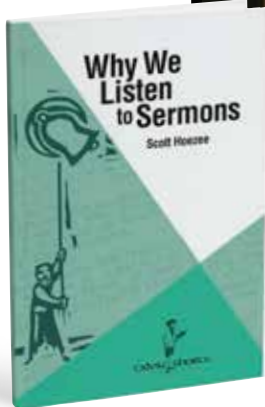
**INNUMERABLE TIMES**, Rev. Scott Hoezee has stood at the back of the church at the end of a service when someone approached to say they found his sermon to be very powerful—and it seemed they had heard an entirely different message from the one he thought he had preached.

In a question-and-answer session at Calvin Theological Seminary about his new book, *Why We Listen to Sermons*, Hoezee said he has come to see that these reactions are examples of how the Holy Spirit can use a preacher's words to mean different things to different people.

"The Holy Spirit is so active that it can offer people what you as a preacher would never in a million years think would come out of that sermon," said Hoezee. "The Spirit can touch people in as many ways as there are people in the room."

John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, interviewed Hoezee earlier this year at Calvin Seminary's annual President's Legacy Society luncheon. Hoezee, who has pastored churches and now serves as the director of Calvin's Center for Excellence in Preaching, wrote the book for the Calvin Shorts series. These are short books on topics connected to the work and interests of Calvin University and Calvin Seminary faculty.

Hoezee said he geared the book to a lay audience that listens to sermons to help them be better listeners and to "be able to discern what is being preached and be able to better



evaluate it," both for themselves and for giving feedback to the preacher.

"People need a vocabulary to use on which to hang their thoughts," he said. When a sermon strikes someone as powerful, Hoezee's book can help that person sort out what it was—the Bible verses and stories, the manner of the presentation, the use of language, or all of this—that helped make this happen.

The book also highlights that preaching needs to be seen in a wider context. Sermons should not be a one-way process. They are an expression of God's Spirit and God's work in the world, and there should be interaction and dialogue between the preacher and those who hear a sermon.

"When you preach a sermon, we are all on holy ground," Hoezee said. "A sermon is something deeply rooted in Scripture. It is not a speech or a lecture. It is teaching, but at the end of the day, each sermon needs to proclaim the good news. A sermon heralds God and deliverance. It is about hope and joy."

Too often these days, sermons have become opportunities to give people tips for better living. Or they provide only the message that we are dire sinners who need to turn from our fallen ways.

While good sermons can offer advice and certainly need to speak about sin and brokenness, they also need to uplift those who hear them. A good sermon points beyond our everyday concerns and challenges to deeper, more satisfying spaces and places.

People often come to church already burdened by sickness or by concerns about their jobs or family. They are looking for comfort and inspiration, not chastisement, said Hoezee.

"A sermon should not put too much focus on us," he said. "The focus should be on grace and how as a new person in Christ there is so much we get to do. A sermon needs to present grace as so beautiful that people want it. A sermon should present God's kingdom as being such a joyful prospect that you want to get in on it."

—Chris Meehan, CRC News

## A Risky Invitation



Matvei professes faith in Christ today because of hopeful messages of God's grace he heard on BTGMI's Russian radio ministry.

### **"CALL IN WITH YOUR QUESTIONS."**

For members of Back to God Ministries International's outreach team in Russia, this invitation sparks some of the best conversations between radio hosts and their listeners. But with no delay to their live, on-air radio shows, the invitation also comes with some risk.

"When one man called in and began his questions, he seemed to be on topic," said Rev. Sergei Sosedkin, BTGMI's Russian ministry leader. "The hosts were caught off guard when he suddenly went in a different direction, bringing up a controversial political topic."

"When that happens, we usually just hang up and seek to present a biblical perspective on the subject," added Sosedkin.

Usually callers who have harmful intentions only try to get on the air once. However, Matvei (not his real name) was different. Throughout the past year, this 13-year-old from Tomsk,

Siberia, called dozens of times to harass the producers.

"The first time he got live on air, he started swearing," Sosedkin said. "We were shocked. But we now believe this was his way of telling us he needed help."

Matvei called continually for several weeks. It got to the point where BTGMI's Russian ministry team had to block his number during the on-air sessions. But Matvei also called after hours, frequently leaving voicemails with angry messages.

Then his calls stopped.

Months later, Matvei's phone number appeared again on the radio station's caller ID. Members of BTGMI's ministry team had been praying for God to work in this young man's life over the months, so the ministry team knew they couldn't ignore his call. They were right.

It turned out that Matvei was listening to the short biblical messages

the ministry team recorded for their daily voicemail greetings—messages that speak of peace and hope in Jesus—and he began taking these messages to heart.

"After a long conversation, Matvei tearfully asked for forgiveness and thanked the team for the Christian messages they brought," said Sosedkin.

The radio minister who spoke with Matvei also pastors a church in Tomsk, so he offered to meet with and disciple Matvei, inviting him into the church.

Today Matvei professes faith in Christ. This change of heart took place because of hopeful messages of God's grace put in place with help from ministry shares. Praise God for the meaningful questions that BTGMI audience members ask on the air, through web comments, and in personal conversations.

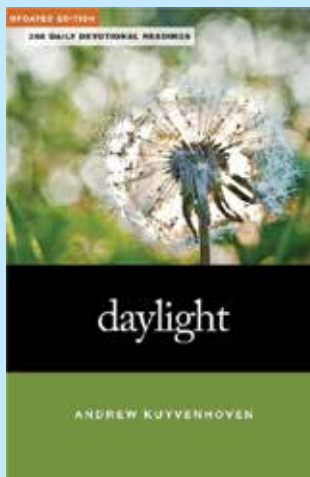
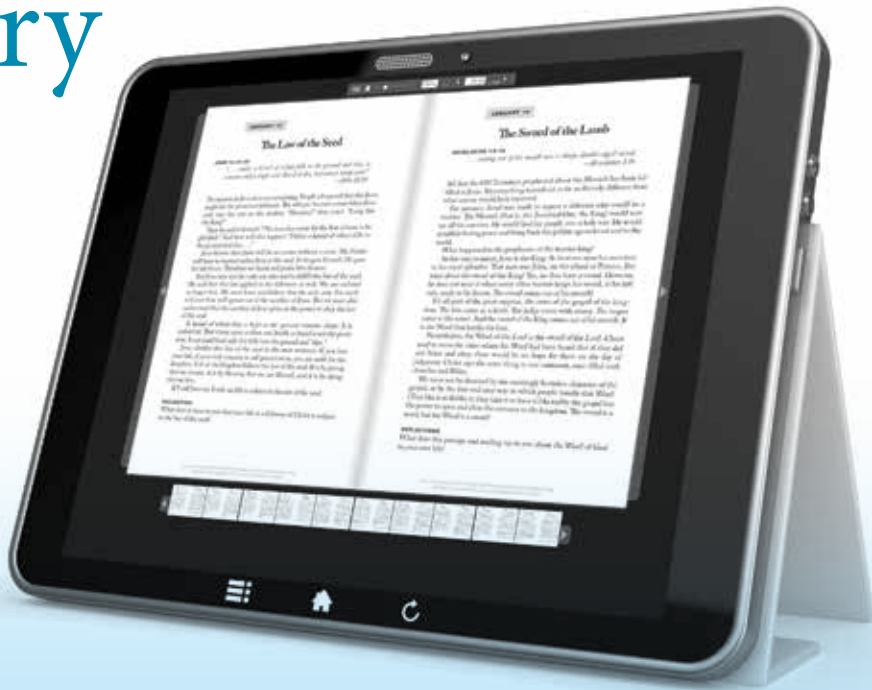
—Brian Clark,  
Back to God Ministries International

# Free Devotions in the Digital Library

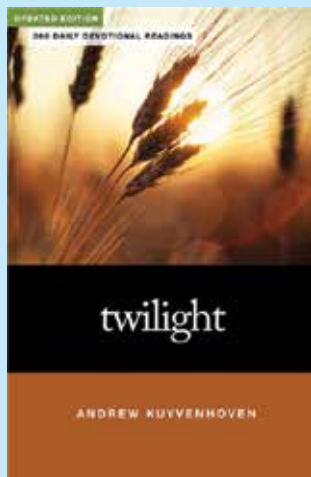
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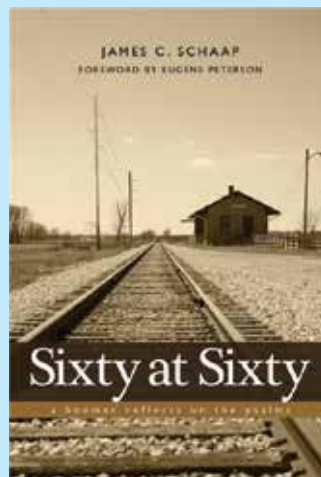
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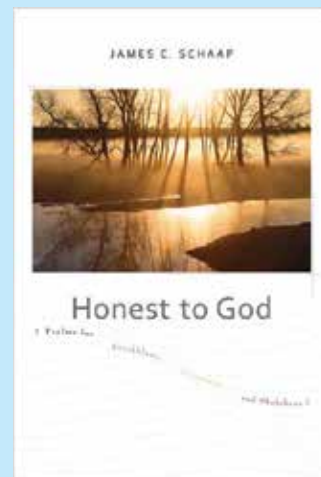
In this classic devotional book, updated with contemporary examples and questions for reflection, Kuyvenhoven uses Scripture to shed light on what it means to live in the presence and promises of God.



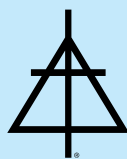
This updated companion to the bestselling *Daylight* devotional guide leads readers through an entire year of meaningful moments with God. Each month's meditations follow a book of the Bible or a biblical theme.



At his storytelling best, James Schaap presents a collection of 60 devotional readings based on the psalms. Written especially for his fellow "baby boomers," Schaap's meditations are a blessing for anyone looking for the hand of God in everyday life.



In this devotional guide, James C. Schaap delves deeply into the psalms, leaving space for readers to respond by journaling or drawing. *Honest to God* is an inspiring daily faith exercise—and a thoughtful gift for the creative people in your life.



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# Roots and Branches

Illustration for The Banner by Anita Barghigiani

**TREES ARE AMAZING!** They make food from sunlight. They are the tallest living things on earth. And they provide homes and food for all sorts of animals. A tree is made up of three parts. The roots underground help the tree to take in water and nutrients (food). The trunk helps the tree stand tall. It has tubes for water and food to move up and down. The crown is the part where leaves grow and use sunlight to make sugar (tree food).

You can't see the roots, so you might be surprised to know that a tree is as big under the ground as it is above the ground. It's true! A tree needs lots of very deep roots to be able to support its big body—kind of like how tall people have big feet so they don't fall over. Having strong roots helps trees to stay strong and upright even on a windy day. And it lets them reach down deep to find the water and nutrients they need. Strong, deep roots mean a healthy tree.

## Try This!

Find a tree in your neighborhood or in a local park and find the branch that reaches the furthest from the trunk of the tree. Follow the branch until you are standing under the very end of it. Look down. What do you see? Probably nothing. But underneath the ground beneath your feet are the roots of the tree! Even though you can't see the roots, they are just as important as the part you can see to keep the tree healthy and strong. Now try to imagine how big the tree really is if you include the roots under the ground!

## Strong Roots = Strong Faith

Did you know that trees can teach us something about our faith? The Bible often uses examples from creation to teach us about our faith. Here is a verse that talks about being rooted in Christ:

“And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him.

Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness (Col. 2:6-7, NLT).

Just like a tree, we need strong roots. By studying God's word and trusting in Christ, we can have strong roots that help us to stand strong and do what is right, no matter what. **B**



Susie Vander Vaart is an environmental educator and ecologist who spends most of her time outside exploring creation.



## A Bold Gospel

Harry Spaling

**A**fter 10 years of integrated ministry, the Christian Reformed Church closed its mission among the Krim people in southern Sierra Leone because of lack of conversions, among other factors. Unlike its better-known mission among the Kuranko people in the north that resulted in a flourishing church, the closure of the Krim mission in 1991 abruptly ended the evangelism work of World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission) and development work of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (now World Renew).

Today, decades later, there are churches in six Krim villages, each with a pastor. How does a church emerge decades after a mission field is closed due to lack of response to the gospel? Is it possible that the seeds of good news were planted during the decade when the mission was active—only to lie dormant and sprout much later?

The term “integrated ministry” means that evangelism and development work are carried out together in each village. Through evangelism that included telling Bible stories and baptisms, along with community development programs in agriculture, primary health care, and adult literacy, those who ministered alongside the Krim people hoped an indigenous church would emerge.

As a result of this ministry, food security and adult literacy among the Krim increased and child health improved. But conversions and baptisms were rare as the grip of Islam and traditional religion continued. With bleak prospects for the emergence of an indigenous church, the denomination decided to close the Krim mission.

In March 1991, three months after the mission closed, a brutal civil war broke out that lasted until 2002. Most of the Krim people fled. But not Julius Jabah, one of the mission’s former evangelists. He confronted approaching rebels, challenging them to not kill or steal but to lay down their weapons.

Krim church leaders singing and dancing to “Christ the King”

Some did so. It seemed a bold gospel was needed. Jabah later became a worship songwriter and the pastor of the Kpanguma church.

After the war, the evangelists met and decided to continue their church-planting work on their own. This time, people were more receptive; many accepted their invitations to follow Jesus. Post-war hopelessness, dismal poverty, or a new generation might have contributed to this new interest in the gospel, but the resolve of the local evangelists was key.

Pastor Samuka Bonnie, a former Muslim, received Bible training from a pastor who had hosted his family during the war. He returned to start a church in his home village of Mano and also in nearby Karleh. In these and other villages, small gatherings of Christians started meeting regularly to sing, pray, and hear the Scriptures. By 2010, Krim evangelists had established six churches.



Attendance at these churches today varies from 50 to 120 people. Most meet in open, thatch-roofed structures where the music and preaching is not confined by walls. Neighboring churches celebrate events such as Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas together, inviting the entire village and feeding everyone after the service.

Did the CRC mission somehow contribute to the emerging Krim church? Today's church leaders are sure it did. Pastor Samuka attributes his own conversion from Islam to the Krim mission: "I made up my mind to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, because of the mission work," he said. He baptized 15 new Christians, including his sister Martha, in January 2019.

Pastor Tommie Lebbie, now retired, said, "The work we started is bearing fruit. We broadcast the seed—not all is choked or on rocky ground; some will germinate, as slowly as it may. The seed sowed is now sprouting." All the pastors of the Krim churches claim training by the mission as a critical factor in their work today.

The Krim church continues practicing an integrated ministry, sometimes in unexpected ways. After the war, accusations and discord existed in some villages as participants from both sides returned home. The church played important roles in discouraging revenge and practicing forgiveness and reconciliation in the community.

The Ebola virus devastated Sierra Leone from 2014 to 2016, resulting in 3,955 deaths nationwide. But none of these deaths occurred in places where the Krim churches had participated in community awareness campaigns. The region's remoteness undoubtedly helped keep Ebola at bay, but the church was crucial in preventing this contagious and deadly disease.

Giving birth is always a risk to mother and child. When a birth goes wrong, the nearest hospital might be five hours away by river. Hannah Momai, a former health worker for the mission and a member of the Mano church,

## How does a church emerge decades after a mission field is closed due to a lack of response to the gospel?

arranges emergency boat transport, and the church helps pay the fare.

Parents know the importance of educating their children, but the one school in Kpanguma was not enough. So parents and pastors started Christian schools in three other villages. The pastors do double duty as teachers. Only Pastor Francis Gormoh is a certified teacher, and the schools receive no support from the outside.

A "hungry season" occurred every June to August because the rice yield, traditionally grown in the rainy season, was too low. In the 1980s, the agriculture program tried introducing irrigated rice in the dry season, but did not succeed because of the inputs and technical expertise required. The church recently recalled this way of growing rice and asked the Ministry of Agriculture for training and seed. As a result, during the dry season of December 2018 to March 2019, 53 farmers from five villages grew rice, with harvests expected to eliminate or shorten the hungry season.

Today, an integrated ministry continues to thrive in the Krim church. Some remnants of development work introduced 37 years ago are being recovered, but the church is also discovering its own ways of serving the community. When an integrated gospel takes root, it branches out everywhere.

The vision for the Krim church is no different from that of the original mission: people worshiping Jesus and having healthy babies, enough food,

education for children, and adults who can read and write. For that, "the church will need people to be trained in communicating the message of Christ," said Pastor Tommie, "so that a holistic word-and-deed ministry that shows so much care and concern in the wider community will continue."

The needs for this vision are great. Pastors need training in interpreting the Bible, in Christian-Muslim relations, and in other pastoral skills. Churches need Bibles, church school materials, and recording devices (or an app) to learn locally written songs. Women want literacy training to read the Bible and dresses for Sunday worship. Worshipers long for proper church buildings, including mud walls, zinc or tin roofs, and latrines.

Help may be at hand. The Krim church now knows about the Christian Reformed Church of Sierra Leone that resulted from the successful Kuranko mission in the north. Pastor Samuka has met one of its trainers, and plans are underway for Timothy Leadership Training. The Krim churches also are considering joining the CRC of Sierra Leone. This CRC could replace the one that left.

The Krim mission began with a hopeful vision of an integrated gospel taking root. That happened—but not in the way mission agencies or anyone else could foresee. A small group of Krim Christians, acting on faith, planted Christ's church and began to love their neighbors. The CRC left the Krim, but the Spirit stayed—and the seeds planted long ago are still bearing fruit today. **B**



Harry Spaling lived and worked in Sierra Leone as an agriculturist on the Krim team and then as country director for CRWRC (now World Renew) and World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission) from 1982-1988. He is a professor of geography and environ-

mental studies at The King's University, Edmonton, Alta., and a member of Fellowship CRC in Edmonton.

# Christ in the Midst of the Fluke

As a broken dad,  
I want answers,  
but I need Christ.

**IT WAS LATE SUMMER** or early fall—beautiful, breezy weather.

We had been in a season of life that was rich with abundance. We had recently accepted a position with a ministry that included free lodging. We were stocking up funds this way, living simply, loving our new place and new town. We had a baby girl, and God had laid it on our hearts to pursue adoption. We were five months, one home study, and \$5,000 into the adoption process, completing trainings and talking to people who had adopted. We were expectant in the way a couple is in the nine-month process of pregnancy.

That afternoon, I took my daughter to the store with me to pick up some ginger beer and give my wife a break. It was a Saturday, and I was in no hurry. I cradled the six-pack in my arms across the store, stopping once for a sample of guacamole. I had just paid for my purchase when it registered suddenly that there were red-and-blue lights in the parking lot, and they were near my car.

I'd left my baby there.

To this day, all I can come up with is that I forgot. I was a young dad focused on something else, unused to caring for a baby. She had fallen asleep on the way over and was quiet in her car seat. I have silly reasons like this to account for the terrible thing I did.

I sprinted across the parking lot, wrenched the car door open and unlocked the straps. She was wailing but unharmed, and I drew her to my chest and held her. I heard the man who had called the police say, "There he is, and he was buying beer." Illogically, I retorted in my head: *It's non-alcoholic.*

The police were matter-of-fact. They took my name and details and said things like, "That's a pretty important thing to forget," and "We're going to have to call this in," and over and over I said I was sorry. Not to them—to her.

When they left, I took my daughter home. My wife held me and we talked for a long time, and she didn't blame me. In fact, she named me, affirming that this didn't define me as a dad, that I was still a good dad. Inside, all I could think was this: a good dad doesn't forget his baby; therefore, I am not a good dad.

The truth? I'm actually not. I never have been. I shout at my kids when they need a kind word or understanding. I carry unrealistic expectations of them. I value my alone time more than making memories with my children. I interrupt my son instead of hearing him out. The mistakes, whether small, large, or in-between, are always happening. This one was huge.

At the end of the week we got a call. The person who took our case was kind and positive and said that this happened more frequently than we might imagine, and that to him it was obvious we were good parents. He told us it was a fluke. We asked him about the adoption. If "they" also decided our case was just a fluke, we could continue. If they decided we should be watched, we would get a five-year black mark on our record—and the adoption would be off.

So we waited.

To this day I don't understand why God allowed this to happen. It would be easy to say that I needed to learn something or that I needed to be punished for some sin. I believe this from time to time, but then I have to push the



Chris Wheeler writes about faith, art, and fatherhood for a variety of publications, but mostly at [chriswheelerwrites.com](http://chriswheelerwrites.com). He and his wife, Linnea, live in Middlebury, Ind.



Photo by V Margineanu/iStock

thought back, because it only makes me resentful. The questions surface: How could God put my child in danger because of my forgetfulness?

Job, the great sufferer, asked God “why” 1,000 times. Satan killed all of Job’s children in a single day, and in the midst of Job’s agony, his three “friends” told him God was doing this to produce piety. They suggested it was Job’s fault because he had sinned. They said he needed to humble himself and accept this trial as due punishment.

Job rebuked his friends because they reduced his anguish to what only their human minds could gather. Job knew their reduction did not stand, but in the end, he didn’t remember his place. His desire to know the reasons for his suffering escalated into a demand.

In the end, Job was left only with the fact that he was human, not divine. This is not a hollow idea, for in it is the reminder that God loved humans enough to come to Earth and take on flesh, “the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Pet. 3:18). Jesus went through agony we will never know, and he didn’t deserve it or need to learn anything. He asked the Father to take away the suffering, and God said no. Then Jesus walked straight into the anguish of the cross because in order for us to be with him forever, he would have to take our


suffering on himself. He chose suffering so we might be God’s children.

The phone call came a week later. Our case worker said he was sorry, but there was nothing he could do.

When we got the news that our adoption was annulled and I had been labeled a five-year hazard, I believed the entire year had been a waste, and I was the one who had wasted it. I believed this knowing what I know as a Christian in my head. And in that moment, in spite of my doubts, Christ held us. He let us cry, let us question, let us doubt the usefulness of his plan. He was simply *there*. It was enough, because Christ is enough.

A broken world wants answers, but it needs Christ. As a broken dad, I want answers, but I need Christ. If I am in Christ, no moment is a waste, no failure severs me from his presence. He restores every situation—not by changing it into what we humans wish it could have been, but by revealing his presence in it.

It is more than six years from that day. We’ve moved twice since then, and my daughter is now a coltish little girl with huge, curly hair. She calls me “Daddy,” as she has every year since she could talk. Every day, she, my three other children, and my wife name me a constant. I am a dad, it’s true. And

every day, by his death, resurrection, and continued presence, Christ names me his child. 

*Editor’s note:* Every year, children are accidentally left in the car. To prevent this from happening to your child, experts suggest leaving an item you’ll need at your next destination—a cellphone, a purse, a briefcase—in the backseat.

# Hope for 'Bad' Evangelists

How will God be merciful to all? What about the wasted seed, the wilted plants among the rocks, the thistle-choked, the seed snatched by the bird's beak?



Robert Vander Lugt owns a hardware business and is a member of East Paris Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

**I AM A BAD EVANGELIST.** I know this through experience. For instance, many years ago, a coworker saw my Bible on my desk and asked if he could borrow it. Of course, I said, and then waited anxiously, wondering what questions he'd have and if I'd get the Bible back. He returned it, of course. Who would steal a Bible? Handing it over, he asked, "What does that quote you wrote in the front mean?" I had to open the cover and look. There it was, 1 Peter 3:15: "Always be prepared to give an answer for the hope you have." I wasn't prepared. My coworker lobbed a fat one as I stood, bat in hand, and watched it sail past. Having not even swung and missed, I stammered a brief explanation of the text but never explained my hope. Decades later, I still remember my coworker's confused look.

Another time, I found myself volunteering at a huge arena-evangelism event to counsel people who answered the altar call. Responders were slow to appear, but eventually a man led a teenage boy toward me. I congratulated the young man and began to ask him a few questions. But my training failed when the boy only shrugged in response. Finally, the other adult stepped in and without a script guided the conversation. I rallied enough to lead our little circle in prayer and send the boy off with a hug and a handful of literature.

My evangelistic challenges don't end with casual friends and strangers. I'm better at sharing the reasons for my hope with people close to me. Still, some of the people I care most about care hardly at all about Jesus. They're good people. They often love their neighbors in ways I fail to. They just don't engage with Jesus or his church.

Judging by the empty seats in my congregation's auditorium and the statistical decline in church attendance, I suspect I'm not the only bad evangelist. This is not to say that the Holy Spirit doesn't use our churches or even individuals like me to introduce people to Jesus, but I do wonder what's wrong. Have we made the gospel less compelling than it was when the apostles sprouted churches across their known world? Is our message at fault?

Perhaps. While we can't control how people respond to the gospel, we can control our message. Jesus sends 72 disciples out with a message remarkably different than the script I recited during my brief arena experience. Jesus tells them to announce the coming of God's kingdom (Luke 10). Later in the New Testament, Paul's letters urgently announce a coming reality where God makes sin-dead people into new creatures fit for his new creation. Compare that to our go-to evangelistic catchphrases. It's worth considering how well we proclaim a God-is-near message today.

But even if we have the message right, even if we live it as much as we tell it, there's still the troubling fact that not all respond. Jesus considered this, too, telling his first evangelists that if a town didn't welcome them they should shake its dust from their feet as a warning. But, he said, be sure of this: "The kingdom of God has come near." The kingdom's coming isn't always easy to see or understand.

Just like me, those first evangelists struggled to understand. Between the stories of Jesus sending the Twelve and then the 72, we read about messengers returning from a Samaritan town that rejected the disciples and their message. Perhaps they hadn't

heard the instructions on dust-shaking; perhaps they thought it didn't apply to Samaritans. But the disciples suggested to Jesus that they could call down fire on those unbelievers (Luke 9:51-56). Jesus, the one who comes to save, not destroy, rebuked them. The kingdom is God's kingdom, not ours. God determines its outcome. God brings it.

This isn't the first time Jesus points this out. He begins his preaching ministry with a story about a farmer casting seeds. Some seeds never get a chance; some grow and struggle; some wither; others grow to fruitful maturity. Same seeds, same farmer, different soil.

What can a bad evangelist take from this story? We're not told to refine our seed-tossing skills, or to avoid the rocky ground, or to head to the garden center for fertilizer. Jesus presses his point with more stories. In one, the farmer plants the seed and, night and day, it grows, even though the farmer doesn't know why. In another, a tiny mustard seed grows into a tree, a shelter for birds and their babies. The first story matches our expectations. The next two reveal the mystery of growth. Jesus begins these two stories with "The kingdom of God is like ...". The first story is the way things are. The others reveal the way things will be.

Mercifully, Jesus is not only a storyteller. Unlike us, he announces the kingdom *and* he brings it. His tools of persuasion are a cross and an empty tomb. He's the living proof that God's kingdom has come. The two retreating to Emmaus see it as their dinner guest breaks bread. Peter grasps it when his nets stretch with fish. Three thousand people hear it while a handful of strangers preach on Pentecost. Saul of


Tarsus believes it when he's knocked back on his zealous heels. You know it when the Spirit awakens you in a taste of bread, a sermon, a book, or the witness of a trusted friend.

When will those tossed seeds sprout? When will our prayers over empty pews and indifferent loved ones bear fruit? Does it depend on us? We must spread the correct seed; we must proclaim the true good news. We often manage to muck it up, to reduce it to morality, to conflict it with false witness. Still, Jesus' seed stories suggest that the fruitfulness of each seed depends on conditions beyond us. Evangelists—good or bad—are absent from the story.

Faced with that message, one might conclude that our hope and prayers are little more than wishful thinking. Instead, God's Word announces this certain hope: Someday, "every knee will bow, ... and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father" (Phil. 2:10-11). One day, in spite of all the bad evangelists, God's salvation will be revealed and received. God's kingdom stretches beyond human imagining.

Paul demonstrates kingdom imagining in Romans 11 when he concludes his long argument for a salvation that includes Jews and Gentiles alike, declaring, "God has imprisoned everyone in disobedience so that he could have mercy on everyone" (Rom. 11:32, NLT). Then Paul turns from theology to song. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33).

How will God be merciful to all? What about the wasted seed, the wilted

plants among the rocks, the thistle-choked, the seed snatched by the bird's beak? Paul's swing into song suggests a big, hopeful reading. So now, when someone asks me about the reason for my hope, I abandon scripts and try to explain the wonder of God's love in Jesus and its unsearchable depths that I find myself swimming in. 

1. Have you ever had an evangelistic opportunity, like the author? What happened, and how did you feel?
2. How do you feel about evangelism? Do you practice it? Or are you fearful of failing?
3. How would you explain or describe the wonder of God's love in Jesus ...

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# Why Country Music Is Obsessed with Alcohol

**SONGS ABOUT ALCOHOL** in country music are nothing new. Country music legend Hank Williams wrote hits such as “There’s a Tear in My Beer” as well as several other sorrowful, liquor-infused tunes. He sang about his life experiences and died from alcohol addiction at age 29. Williams was followed by an army of country singers who explored alcohol from every angle, singing of both its harms and its virtues—but mostly its virtues. Jimmy Buffett’s song “Margaritaville” is an ode to sun-soaked relaxation, but it also includes elements of tragedy that are often lost on the listener.

But a more recent phenomenon within country music is portraying alcohol as the ultimate solution to the listener’s problems. This new attitude is summed up by the chorus of Christian country artist Thomas Rhett’s 2019 song “Beer Can’t Fix”:

“Ain’t nothing that a beer can’t fix  
Ain’t no pain it can’t wash away  
From the moment that it hits your lips  
Makes those clouds look a little less gray.”


Other artists echo these claims. Luke Combs currently has a song called “Beer Never Broke My Heart” rising on the Billboard charts. And country acts Florida Georgia Line, Kenny Chesney, and Darius Rucker don’t just sing about alcohol. They each started selling their own brands of whiskey and rum.

Country music has turned alcohol into Andy Crouch’s definition of an idol. In *Playing God: Redeeming The Gift of Power*, Crouch explains how every idol promises two things:

1. You shall not surely die.
2. You shall be like God.

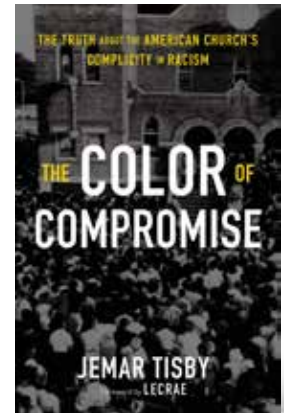
Contemporary country music raises alcohol as an idol, promising it will take away human suffering and provide feelings of incredible pleasure. But, as Crouch explains, every idol eventually demands more until the idol is asking everything of its worshipers while providing nothing in return.

This idol is demanding more of musicians and fans. Several artists sing songs celebrating alcohol despite their own addiction struggles or precarious sobriety. Some artists pretend to drink onstage to maintain a particular image. Tailgating and binge drinking at country concerts are the norm. In order to belong, to be “country,” fans feel they need to drink heavily and appear they are having a great time all the time.

Christian listeners might be tempted to overlook idolatry in country music because of the many songs in the genre that use Christian imagery. Others might argue that alcohol is a good part of God’s creation. However, when humans use anything to try to avoid death and become like God, it becomes an idol. Listeners must listen discerningly and remember that while “Beer Can’t Fix” it, God is the ultimate healer. 



Micah van Dijk is a popular-music expert who speaks and writes to help audiences understand the effect popular music has on their faith and identity ([micahvandijk.com](http://micahvandijk.com)).

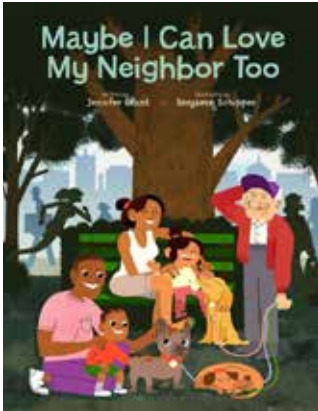


## The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism

By Jemar Tisby

Reviewed by Mark Vanderwerf

In this timely and powerful book, each chapter recounts a different era of American history, beginning with the colonial era and the American Revolution and running up to the modern era. The reader is invited to see how matters of race in each period of America could have gone differently had the church not been complicit in racism—even at times actively working for racism rather than standing up against it. The book concludes with a hopeful yet urgent call to action. With Jesus, the great barrier-breaking reconciler, as our guide and his Spirit working in us, we are empowered to live out a “courageous Christianity.” (Zondervan)

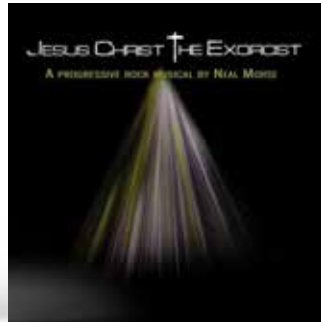


## Maybe I Can Love My Neighbor Too

By Jennifer Grant,  
with illustrations by  
Benjamin Schipper

Reviewed by Alison Hodgson

A little girl learns from her mother that every person in the world is her neighbor and wonders, "How can I love that many people?" Going about her day, she begins to notice how others show care and kindness: a construction worker helps his coworker, children share toys at the park, strangers try to support refugees, neighbors give freshly baked bread, a boy catches an old man's runaway dog. These simple acts give her confidence that she can love her neighbor, too. Jennifer Grant's simple yet thoughtful language combines with Benjamin Schipper's happy, beautifully diverse illustrations to make this inspiring picture book a wonderful addition to every library. (Beaming Books)



## Jesus Christ the Exorcist: A Progressive Rock Musical

By Neal Morse

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

Since Neal Morse became a Christian almost 20 years ago, the former driving force behind the prog-rock band Spock's Beard has connected his faith to his music. In the first half of this almost two-hour rock opera, Morse explores instances of Jesus casting out demons. The songs sung by the people on the receiving end of these healings are uplifting and encouraging. "Free at Last," sung by the "woman of seven devils," and "Love Has Called My Name," sung by "the madman of the Gadarenes," wonderfully evoke the joy and the peace Jesus brought to these two lives. A wonderful musical retelling of Jesus' story. (Frontiers)



## Bless This Mess

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Picked up for the fall television season, this sweet new sitcom follows a fish-out-of-water city couple as they move to Nebraska to farm. Mike (Dax Shepard) and Rio (Lake Bell) are completely inept at farming or at managing any kind of dwelling situation that doesn't involve calling a landlord to fix their problems. But they're plucky, young, and in love, so they charge ahead with high hopes and a healthy dose of naivete. As with any comedy, this one needs time to bake. For now, the show balances warmhearted sweetness with zingy one-liners for a winning combination. Hopefully, the charismatic cast and the show's talented writers will give viewers more cud to chew this season and beyond. (ABC)

### The Lowdown

**Stranger Danger:** How do we interact with and try to understand (or not) people we don't know? Malcolm Gladwell probes in *Talking to Strangers*. (Little, Brown and Company)

**Stiff Upper Lip:** The hotly anticipated *Downton Abbey* movie (Sept. 20) picks up with the Crawley family awaiting a visit from the king and queen. (Focus)

**Based on the Book:** Distilled from the *Stumptown* graphic novel series, a new TV drama with the same name follows Dex Parios (Cobie Smulders), an army veteran turned private investigator. (ABC)

**Inspiring Documentary:** The late Christian author Kara Tippetts shares her experience of dying in *The Long Goodbye*. (Netflix)

# Can We Be Good Without God?

Jesus shows us that God desires *us*. This is made possible through a far greater and divine goodness that sets judgment aside and propels Christ into the world with outrageous forgiveness.



Mike Wagenman is the Christian Reformed campus minister and professor of theology at Western University in London, Ont., and part-time New Testament instructor at Redeemer University College.

**AS A CHRISTIAN** at a public university, I am most often asked: “Can we be good without God?” People naturally assume they’re pretty good. The psychologically healthy have a humble recognition of the good in themselves. The world is filled with good parents, good kids, good employees, good students, good friends. Many are good nurses, good teachers, good bankers, and good architects—regardless of whether they’re Christians, Muslims, Hindus, or atheists (on the ground, these labels don’t map onto goodness very well). Otherwise, the world would be in even worse shape.

Jesus knows that ordinary people can be ordinarily good (Matt. 5-7 and Luke 6). I don’t find it helpful to try and take this away from people when evangelizing them. I use it as a stepping stone to something beyond ordinary goodness that’s possible through the gospel.

Jesus faced this same question from a thoughtful Jewish lawyer (Matt. 19:16; Mark 10:17). In reply, Jesus points to two different ways to think about goodness: horizontally or vertically. Are we good relative to others (horizontal) or relative to the highest possible ideal (vertical)? The ultimate possible goodness we could call God.


This explains why God is often pictured as a judge. The ultimate ideal, no matter what it is, always functions as unwavering, demanding perfection. And because I am far from perfect in comparison, I cower in fear before it. The ideal always shows the imperfection of the actual. Compared to the ideal, our goodness always falls short at some point (Rom. 3:23).

But Jesus reveals something surprising about who God is. Even though perfect and ideally good, God is not fundamentally about judgment. Instead, Jesus reveals to us that God is fundamentally forgiving and reconciling

love (1 John 4:8). In Jesus, we encounter goodness not just as a theory or a philosophical concept, but as a *person*. Not even our failures are an obstacle to fellowship with this God, because this God wants a relationship with *us* (who we are as *persons*), not our performance relative to an abstract ideal.

Being a Christian isn’t about being good—or “better” than our non-Christian neighbor—in our roles as parent or citizen or person. And it’s not about telling non-Christians their ordinary good isn’t really good. When we think or behave this way, we perpetuate the false idea that what God wants is our performance. That leads to self-righteousness—the very thing Jesus condemned so forcefully because it blocks the flow of God’s healing grace in the world.

Jesus shows us that God desires *us*. This is made possible through a far greater and divine goodness that sets judgment aside and propels Christ into the world with outrageous forgiveness. This unexpected forgiveness is what leads us to repentance. And when we experience this loving reconciliation with God, we discover a humility growing in us so that, like Paul, we come to know deep down that we’re the worst of sinners and more in need of God’s forgiveness than anyone else. But deeper yet, what outshines the darkness of our failures is the brightness of this loving union with God’s very self. It is this marvelous union with God that works a transformation within us. Over time, we become good like God is good, which is far beyond merely performing perfectly.

Yes, you can be good without God—up to a point. But in Christ you can come into loving and transformative union with God. And this is the highest good possible in the world. 



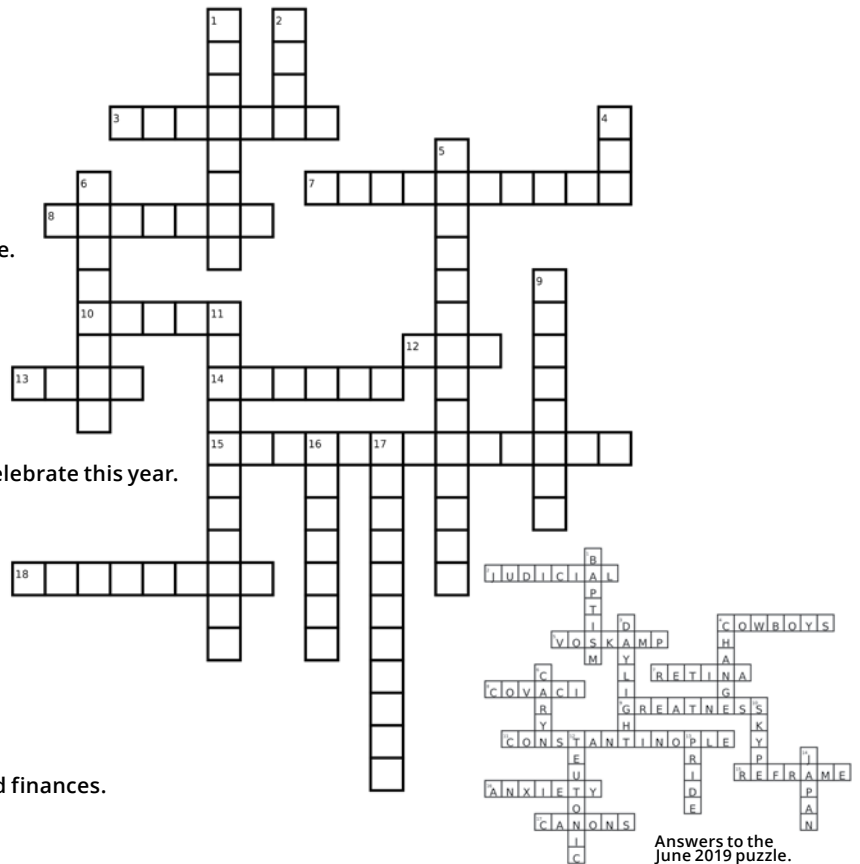
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

**Down:**

1. Chatham, Ont., churches carry out mission in their own \_\_\_\_\_
2. There are churches in six \_\_\_\_\_ villages in Sierra Leone.
4. Job asked this of God 1,000 times.
5. Listening can lead to this.
6. Maybe I Should Love My \_\_\_\_\_ Too.
9. Meeting city of 2019 Canadian National Gathering.
11. They announce the kingdom of God.
16. A camp to bridge racial divides.
17. A milestone three churches and Youth Unlimited celebrate this year.

**Across:**

3. A keynote speaker at Inspire 2019.
7. What Calvin and Dordt became over this summer.
8. This and relationships are key to youth ministry.
10. Isaiah 2's vision has this on a mountain.
12. Name of the wife in "Bless This Mess."
13. What country music has turned alcohol into.
14. Always be prepared to give this.
15. Helping an injured traveler cost this man effort and finances.
18. God's \_\_\_\_\_ leads you towards repentance.



Answers to the June 2019 puzzle.

Think you can change the world one neighbourhood at a time?  
**We do.**

**CHANGE** can be big, like eradicating poverty big. Or it can be small, like doing dishes after a potluck 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. That changes everything. Starting with you.

[redeemer.ca](http://redeemer.ca)



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**DEADLINES:** 9/2/19 for October; 10/7/19 for November Subject to availability. Details online.

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**Denominational Announcements**

**ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY**

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

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

We are pleased to announce that LL 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.

**25YRS OF MINISTRY SERVICE**

PASTOR GREG JANKE is celebrating 25 years in Christian ministry and will be honored by

Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church on Saturday, October 5, 2019. There will be a special dinner at 5:00 p.m. at Midlothian Country Club, special music, and testimonies. On Sunday, October 6, 2019 there will be a special worship service in Palos at 9:30 a.m. with guest Pastor Laryn Zoerhof preaching, personal testimonies, and special music. Shortly after there will be a casual picnic with games and other special activities for kids and adults. Contact Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church for further details at (708) 448-0186 or email Vicki at [vduh@paloschurch.org](mailto:vduh@paloschurch.org)

**Church Positions Available**

LEAD PASTOR Bauer CRC of Hudsonville, Michigan is looking for a full-time, CRC ordained lead pastor who is committed to preaching the Word and leading our congregation to be the vibrant church God wants us to be. To submit a resume or for further information, contact [nbrower@att.net](mailto:nbrower@att.net).

LEAD PASTOR Long Beach CRC in Long Beach California is seeking an Ordained Minister of the Word to be our lead pastor. We are a congregation of 250+ members that desire to make new and better disciples of Jesus, for God's glory. The people of LBCRC seek to engage with God, God's family and God's world. We are praying for God's guidance as we seek his will in finding our next Pastor. If you are interested in learning more about the Lead Pastor position and our congregation, please contact us at [searchcommittee@LBCRC.org](mailto:searchcommittee@LBCRC.org).

LEAD PASTOR Modesto CRC in Modesto, CA is seeking a Lead Pastor for our church family. Please contact Jan Viss at 209-402-6716 or email at [janiceviss@sbcglobal.net](mailto:janiceviss@sbcglobal.net).

PASTOR Emo CRC, located in Northwestern Ontario, is searching and praying for a full-time pastor who is willing to get to know us, who preaches a solid Biblical message that applies to our daily walk with God, and who loves encouraging people of all ages in their faith. Contact Harold Kelly at 807-482-1431 or email [emocrc18@gmail.com](mailto:emocrc18@gmail.com) for more information.

PASTOR Rimbey CRC, located in Central Alberta is seeking a full time pastor to lead us in our current vision of making more and better disciples and equipping them for service in Jesus Christ. Contact: Will Weenink 403.843.6867 or [gutterguy3784@gmail.com](mailto:gutterguy3784@gmail.com).

PASTORAL OPPORTUNITY open at Second Church in the small but quickly growing town of Allendale, Michigan. We are searching and

praying for our next Senior Pastor. We invite you to access our Church Profile for details of who we are as a church family at [secondchurchallendale.org](http://secondchurchallendale.org) or to email Nels Johnston at [nj38@gmail.com](mailto:nj38@gmail.com) with more questions or to submit a resume. We look forward to hearing from you!

YOUTH MINISTRY LEADER Jennings Creek CRC in Lindsay, ON is searching for a part-time youth ministry leader. We are searching for an individual to join us in the faith formation of our youth through discipling, mentoring and building relationships. If you love God, and have a desire to help teens grow into the person God intended them to be - then you are the person we are praying for. To learn more about this opportunity contact [jenning-screekcrc@gmail.com](mailto:jenning-screekcrc@gmail.com)

**Congregational Announcements**

**150TH CHURCH ANNIVERSARY**

EAST SAUGATUCK CRC of rural Holland, MI is celebrating 150 years of Jesus as our Rock! A special celebration weekend is being held on October 26-27, and we invite all former members and friends of ESCRC to join us. To RSVP, please visit our Facebook page event, or email us at [admin@espoint.org](mailto:admin@espoint.org).

**140TH CHURCH ANNIVERSARY**

EASTERN AVENUE CRC of Grand Rapids, Michigan, is celebrating 140 years of God's faithfulness. Former members and friends are invited to celebrate with us: a dinner on Saturday, September 14 and a worship service of celebration on Sunday, September 15 at 10 AM. To learn more: email [eacrc@eacrc.org](mailto:eacrc@eacrc.org) or visit our web site [www.eacrc.org](http://www.eacrc.org).

**50TH CHURCH ANNIVERSARY**

CROSSPOINT CHURCH in Chino, California, formerly known as Calvary Christian Reformed Church, invites you to join our 50th Anniversary Celebration activities on October 19 & 20. For more information and to rsvp, visit [www.crosspointchino.org/anniversary](http://www.crosspointchino.org/anniversary)

**CHURCH CLOSURE**

FAITH ALIVE CHURCH (FORMERLY SUMMITVIEW CRC), Yakima, WA, will hold a closing service October 6, 2019, at 9:30 a.m. We, along with former pastors, will celebrate & thank God for 50 years of worship. Our goal is to launch a new church by Oct. 2020. Please pray for our bold witness & commitment to grow the family of believers as we plan & launch our church restart.



**MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES**

LEAD PASTOR  
Southern Heights Christian Reformed Church  
Kalamazoo, MI

LEAD PASTOR  
First Christian Reformed Church  
Hanford, CA

CAMPUS PASTOR  
Thrive Ministries  
Fulton, IL

For information on these and other opportunities from ChapterNext, visit [www.chapternext.com](http://www.chapternext.com) or email [info@chapter-next.com](mailto:info@chapter-next.com).

## Birthday

### 100TH BIRTHDAY



ADRIANE MARIA LOOF-VAN WELY will celebrate her 100th birthday Sept.15, 2019. Adriana was born in Terneuzen, The Netherlands, Sept.15, 1919. She married Willem Van Wely April 21, 1949. A few weeks

later, they immigrated to Canada. Willem passed away Sept.6, 2018. Adriana continues to live in their home, in Grimsby, Ontario. She enjoys coffee and chocolates, reading, listening to music and her favourite shows on TV but the highlights of her days are the visits of family and friends. We, her children, John Van Wely, Mary Carney, Rob & Jane Van Wely, Sue & Art Schaafsma and Theo Van Wely & Kathrin Dettmann, along with her 16 grandchildren and 29 great grandchildren, give thanks to God and celebrate the life, the love and faith of our dear Mom, Oma and Omama!

### 97TH BIRTHDAY

EDWARD BUSHOUSE long-time resident of Grand Haven, MI, will be celebrating his 97th birthday on September 4. We thank God for his many blessings over the years and his example of faithful service to God. Greetings can be sent to 3701 Chandler Dr. Apt 422, Minneapolis, MN 55421.

### 95TH BIRTHDAY

HUYSER, Pastor Bill. 95 Years old on August 3, 2019. Wife, Alvina, and the Family give Thanks for God's goodness

WILBERT WICHERS, SR of 2015 32nd Ave. W. unit 333, Bradenton, FL. 34205 celebrated his birthday Aug 21, & we praise and thank our God for this blessing. Psalm 103 is one of his favorites. There are 5 children, 12 grandchildren and 23 great grand-children.

### 90TH BIRTHDAY

REV. ALAN ARKEMA will celebrate his 90th birthday on September 15. We are thankful to God for an amazing father, grandfather, and great-grandfather who was a pastor and is a friend to so many more! With much love, from your family. Greetings may be sent to 3515 Dianna Queen Drive, Apt. 514, Muscatine, IA 52761.



JOHN S. HELDER of 2500 Breton Woods Dr. SE, #1000 Kentwood, MI, 49512 will celebrate his 90th birthday on October 4, 2019. His children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren praise

God for his love for his family, his Christian commitment, and his on-going service to others. God continue to bless us through his presence in our lives!

## 80TH BIRTHDAY

DARLENE (JONGETJES) SAWYER of 321 Rock River Dr, Edgerton, MN 56128 just celebrated her 80th birthday. Her children Jack & Michelle Brouwer & Greg Sawyer along with 4 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren praise God for her and wish her a happy birthday. Our family has been blessed by her loving influence.

## Anniversary

### 70TH ANNIVERSARY

BRUXVOORT Brant & Martha (Rooseboom) will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on Sept 1, 2019. Married when 20 years by Rev. Fred Van Houten in the Oskaloosa Iowa CRC. God has spared them to be life long members there. Four living children; Ervin, Barbara, Carolyn and Byron along with spouses. 15 grandchildren and 21 great- grandchildren rejoice with them.

HOLWERDA Rev. Robert & Joyce (Bouma) 3427 Brookview Ct., Hudsonville, MI. 49426, September 16, 2019. God blessed this marriage of 70 years. Children: Bob & Gayle, Dan, Marilyn & George Lanting, Sheryl, Steve & Sheri. Grandchildren: 15 plus 13 spouses. Great Grandchildren: 30 (1 more blessing awaited). God has been so good, giving blessings without number; Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

### 65TH ANNIVERSARY

BRUURSEMA Marvin & Shirley celebrated 65 yrs of marriage on Aug 5th. Their children, grandchildren & great-grandchildren join them in thanking God for their long and loving marriage!

### 60TH ANNIVERSARY

ARMSTRONG Dave and Janet are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary on August 29. Thanking God for their faithful example are their children Doug and Beth Bardolph (Justin & Cori, Aaron, Chelsea & Corey Van Dyk, Ethan, and Anna) and two great-granddaughters. Although retired from Elmhurst CRC, they both continue to minister and worship in that congregation.

DEBLAEY Dr. Gordon and Marcella (Koning), of 2105 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49546, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on August 21, 2019. Benefiting from the example of their Christian marriage have been their daughter, Mary (Robert) Jackson and son, Michael (deceased 2018); grandchildren, Philip (Anna Dowell) Jackson, Ellen Jackson, Drew (Caitlin) Jackson and Griffin (Colleen) Jackson; two great-grandchildren, Simona and Geneva; and one great-grandchild expected in December, 2019. Your faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 119:90a

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LANINGA Vernon and Anna Marie (Schmidt) of 2105 Raybrook, SE #2021, G.R., MI 49546, celebrated 60 years of marriage on Sept. 5. Children: Karla, Myra and Gary Warners, Keith and Kerry Laninga, Paul Laninga(deceased). 8 grandchildren and soon 1 great-grandson. Josh.24:15



SCHREIBER, Bertus and Alice will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary on Oct. 2, 2019. Children Sylvia & Tymen Van Stryland, Martha Schreiber & Shiao Chong, John Schreiber, and Derek & Jane Schreiber, together with 7 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren thank them for the blessing they have been to the family. Address:17 Quinpool Cres., Ottawa, ON K2H 6H9

VERSLUYS John and Judi (Huisman) celebrate 60 years of marriage on September 1st. Gratefully celebrating their faithfulness to each other and God's faithfulness to them are their children: June (Tim) DeGraaf, Jill (Jeff) Damec, Joel Versluys (deceased), Julie Versluys (Fred Knapp), Jim (Natasha) and Jennifer (Robert) Bruining. They have been blessed to be part of the lives of their 12 grandchildren: Aaron and Matt DeGraaf, Sarah Rose, Joel and Jake Damec, Jaden Knapp, Max, Zoe, and Hilde Versluys, Luke, Kate and Lily (deceased) Bruining and 6 great grandchildren.

### 50TH ANNIVERSARY

ESSEBAGGERS Bruce and Donna (DeHorn) were married August 1, 1969 in Evergreen Park, IL. They have lived in Fremont, MI their whole married life attending Second Christian Reformed Church and raising three children. Jodi Blanton, Robin (Matt) Hollebeek, and Chad (Julie) Essebaggars. They have also been blessed with 7 grandchildren: Jack Hollebeek, Sam Blanton, Addison Essebaggars, Avery Hollebeek, Luke Essebaggars, Kacie Hollebeek, and Charlie Hollebeek. We are all so thankful for your faithfulness to God and each other, Mom and Dad!

### Obituaries

ADGATE, Evelyn (Weber) VanderLind, age 89, of Grand Rapids, MI, was welcomed into glory on Friday, July 26, 2019. She was preceded in death by her husbands, Richard M. VanderLind, and J. Bernard Adgate; son, Rick VanderLind; and brother, David Weber. Evelyn will be missed by her children, Lauriejo (Robert) Smickley, Suzanne (Will) Wilkinson, Karen (Troy) Sprague, Mike (Tami) VanderLind; stepchildren, Cheryl (Paul) VanTol, John Adgate; 16 grandchildren; 20 great grandchildren; and sister, Marcia Bouwens.

HOOGENDAM, Frances (Verdun), of Sarnia, ON, went to be with her Lord at the age of 81 on June 3, 2019. She is survived by her husband of 54 years, Bert, her children Bernie

(Jennifer), Karen (Dan) DeYoung, Sue Clark, and Bob (Tracy), 11 grandchildren, and siblings John(Cheryl), Marina, Peter (Betty) and sister-in-law Helen (Harry-deceased) Verdun.

LUBBEN George, of Lemont, Illinois went to be with his Lord and Savior on July 10, 2019 at the age of 90. He was preceded in death by his wife of 35 years, Dorothy Vree Lubben, his parents Cornelius and Alida Lubben, and his brother Henry. He is survived by his beloved wife of 30 years, Linda Lubben, his children Georgia Lubben (Lou Sytsma), Craig (Lois) Lubben, Tom (Sue) Lubben and Gina (Dave) Wielgus, his grandchildren Christina (Dan) Katt, Brian Lubben, Eric Lubben, Kaitlin (Justin) Kamp, India Daniels, Emma Lubben, his great grandchildren Caroline, Elizabeth and Henry Katt, his sister Barbara (Don) Brown, sister in law Donna (Chuck) Anderson, and many nieces and nephews. "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8.

SCHURMAN Lois age 91 of Rochester, MN formally of Grand Haven, MI and Des Plaines, IL passed away on June 4, 2019. She is survived by her daughter, Diane (Ronald) Schaap of Rochester, MN, and son, Robert (Paula) Schurman of New Lenox, IL. Grandchildren, Stephanie (Dr. Michael) Sawyer of Rochester, Emily (James) Hilleman of Gilbert, IA, and Kathleen (Travis) Yager of Rochester, Jacob (Shannon) Schurman of Joliet, IL, Abigail (Adam) Barr

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of Peru, IL, and Nicholas Schurman of New Lenox, IL. Great Grandchildren: Colin, Morgan, Audrey, Jenna, Elise, Ian, Maisie Lois, Everly and Mila. Nephew and niece: John Langeland and Pat Schurman. Her husband, Henry Schurman preceded her in death.

VANDENBERG Stanley J., age 83, of Midland Park, NJ passed into glory on July 4, 2019. He was predeceased in 2017 by his wife of 61 years Alberta (nee Ruit). Stan is survived by his children: Deb, Bernie (Linda), and Lora (John) Albertson; his grandchildren: Kyle (Meghan), Megan, Ben and Jack, and one precious great-granddaughter: Chloe.

VANDER LUGT, Allan, 91, of Grand Rapids, MI, died on Sunday, July 21, 2019. Al is survived by his wife, Annetta; daughter Ellen and her husband Pablo Mora, sons Ethan and Terrie Vander Lugt, Eliot Vander Lugt and Hector Rodas; 9 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren.

## Employment

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» Open mic continues through the end of the year. Submissions will close Oct. 31.

» Open to anyone with a camera and an original work of music, poetry, or spoken-word art to share. Parodies also accepted.

» Videos should be no more than five minutes in length. Use the form at [TheBanner.org/OpenMic](http://TheBanner.org/OpenMic) to submit your entry, your contact information, and a brief biographic note.

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# Sigsbee Street

Apparently God decided that delivering a nutritious meal to a neighbor was more important for me than leading a congregation in worship.



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

**THERE'S NOTHING** very remarkable about Sigsbee Street. It runs for just seven blocks through the near southeast side of Grand Rapids, Mich. Sigsbee School, an elementary school in the Grand Rapids Public School system, is its most notable feature. Aside from the school, most of the street is residential, and most of the homes are older and in generally good repair.

But Sigsbee Street is significant for me because of two interesting encounters I had with it.

The first was from 1975 to 1977 while I was a student at Calvin Theological Seminary. I lived in two different apartments on Sigsbee Street. The rents were affordable and the location was convenient.

During my time living in those apartments, I was focused almost entirely on my education and my future ministry. I had little awareness of my neighbors and their needs. I never got acquainted with anyone living there other than my landlords. After all, I had bigger and better things to be concerned about. In the near future I would be caring for the multiple needs of a whole congregation, I reckoned, so I couldn't afford to be distracted by what was happening in my temporary neighborhood.

My second encounter with Sigsbee Street was about 40 years later. During retirement, I volunteered to deliver meals to homebound seniors. For several months in 2016, I was assigned an area that included a handful of residents on Sigsbee Street.

Forty years later, things looked very different to me. Life had taught me a lot of lessons during those years. I never achieved my goal of becoming

a minister. And after many years of working at more "ordinary" jobs, I was looking for some small way to be a blessing to someone else.

So there I was, driving past my old apartments delivering meals to people who might well have been my neighbors 40 years earlier. I wasn't transforming anyone's life—just providing some essential food and trying to deliver a cheerful greeting.

Before the end of 2016, my delivery route was changed and I didn't go to Sigsbee Street anymore. But the lesson I learned there is still poignant. Apparently God decided delivering a nutritious meal to a neighbor was more important for me than leading a congregation in worship. It was humbling for me to learn that meeting a simple, immediate need might be more urgent than my more ambitious plans.

There may be times for us to dream big, but we should never do so if it means neglecting to do the little things right in front of us. A warm meal, a cup of cold water, a kind word of encouragement, a helping hand: any small deed done for Christ might be just as valuable as something seemingly much bigger. **B**



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