

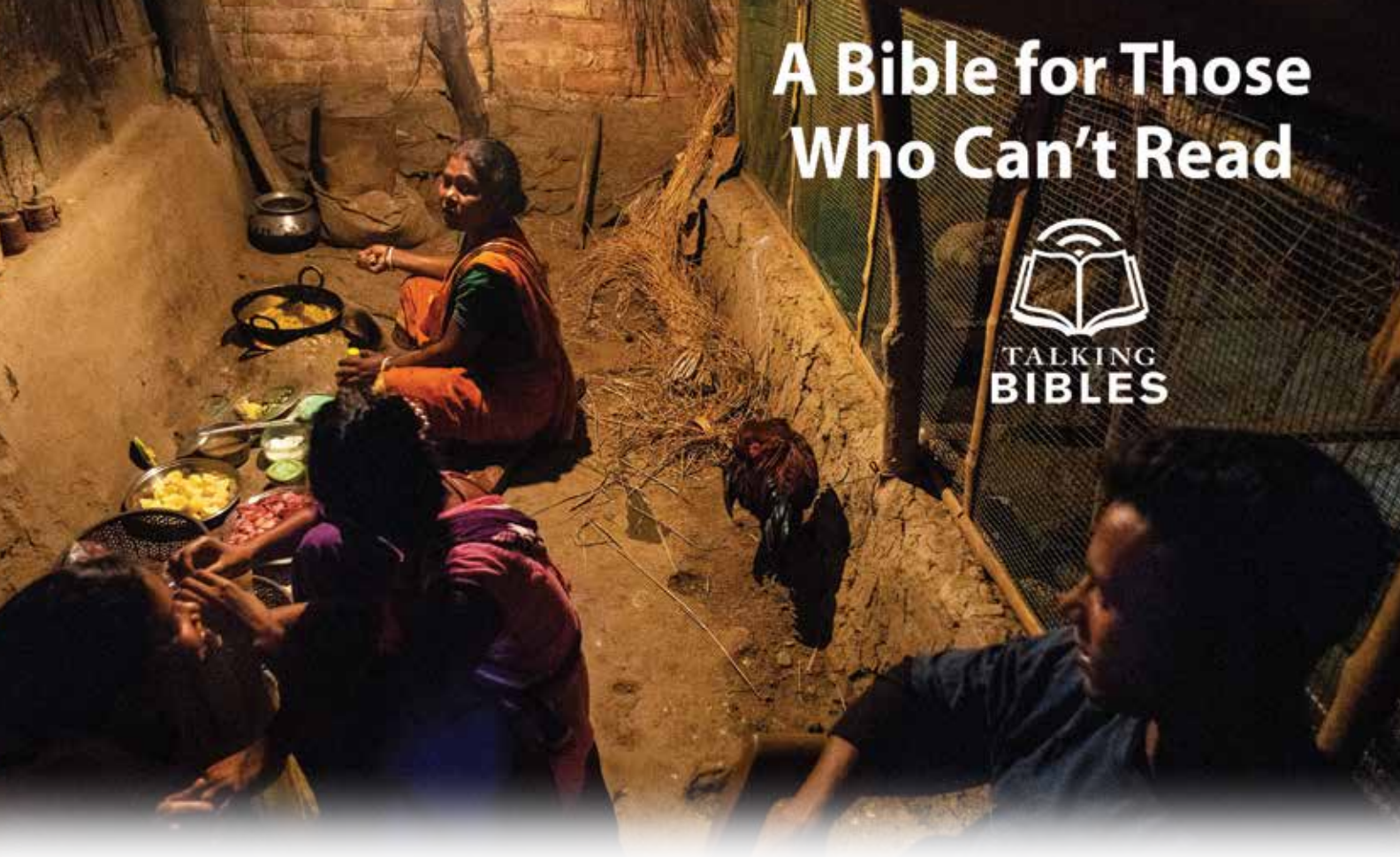
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- » Americans to Religious Organizations: Stay Out of Politics (Pew Research Study)
- » Book: *Get on Your Knee Replacements and Pray! If You're Not Dead, You're Not Done* by Kris Kandel Schwambach, Karen Kandel Kizlin, Kathie Kandel Poe, and Linda Kandal Mason
- » Television: *God Friendled Me*
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The December 2019 article "Study Needed on How the Church Should Speak on Justice Issues" and the January 2020 correction should have said delegate Susan Hoekema is a member of Classis Muskegon.

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BANNER

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'How' Matters

Even in war, when the stakes are life and death, Christians have had a long tradition of insisting that “how” matters as much as “why.”



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

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

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ONE OF THE THINGS I LEARNED from 15 years of campus ministry is that “how” matters. How we carry out good intentions to reach good ends makes a difference. Why and what we do matters, yes, but how we do it also matters to God.

I have heard from many young Christians that they wish their churches would be more open to exploring their tough questions rather than shutting them down. A former Christian once told me, “If my youth pastor was as patient as you are (with my questions), maybe I wouldn’t be so quick to leave the church.” “How” matters in discipleship and faith formation.

I have also heard from unbelievers who complain about the evangelism methods of Christians on campus. Some Christians were too aggressive. Many unbelievers felt like objects or targets of Christian evangelism. Some Christians came across as “know-it-all jerks” because they lacked intellectual humility, refusing to ever admit ignorance or mistakes. These young unbelievers were turned off less by Christianity’s message than by its messengers. “How” matters in evangelism.

I believe “how” matters to God in all areas of our lives, even in conflict and war. In the Old Testament, God included rules to guide the Israelites in conducting warfare (Deut. 20). Although they seem barbaric to our modern moral sentiments, these rules attempted to mitigate the worst excesses of typical ancient warfare and inject some compassion into how the Israelites waged war in contrast to their pagan neighbors. There was compassion in conscription of soldiers by giving exemptions (Deut. 20:5-9). There was compassion in mandating diplomacy as a first step (Deut. 20:10-12).

There was compassion in the treatment of captured women (Deut. 21:10-14). There was even compassion shown to the environment by restricting which types of trees could be felled for building siege works (Deut. 20:19-20). Even in waging war, “how” matters to God.

The old Christian just war tradition advocated by most Reformed Christians echoes this point. Just war theory is not limited to only finding just causes (why) for war but also requires just means (how) in conducting war. These rules require that the response be proportional to the offense and that innocent bystanders must not be intentionally harmed (“Just-War Theory,” *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, p. 521). If the rules are violated, it is no longer a just war. Even in war, when the stakes are life and death, Christians have had a long tradition of insisting that “how” matters as much as “why.”

If how people engage in brutal physical conflicts matters to God, do we think it matters less to God how we engage in our theological conflicts? Or in America’s so-called “culture wars”?

I have observed Christians wrongly stereotyping their opponents’ viewpoints in order to disparage them. I have read Christians citing false or misleading information in defense of their positions. Some even resort to name-calling and mockery when they run out of good, solid arguments. These are not God-honoring, neighbor-loving, or truth-seeking ways of engaging conflict. Even if we believe our cause is noble and godly, we cannot justify that any method will do as long as it brings “success.” The end does not justify the means. “How” still matters to God. We can do better, trusting in God to honor our faithfulness in the how. **B**



REPLY ALL

A Question of Priorities

"We all have a responsibility to take a stand on the defining moral issue of our time: the climate crisis." This quote from the November 2019 *Banner* ("Hundreds Attend Vigil Organized by Edmonton's Climate Justice Group") is so disheartening to me personally. I have been involved in pro-life efforts for many years. The CRC is largely silent on this issue. What is more immoral and unjust than murdering babies? In stark contrast, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops declared that abortion is the "preeminent" political and moral issue over all others. According to the National Catholic Reporter, the bishops approved a letter saying that the "threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives it destroys."

» Carmen Reitsma // New Sharon, Iowa

Extra Cost, Extra Blessing

Thank you for "Extra Costs Bring Extra Blessing" by Tony Kamphuis (Sept. 2019). At All Belong Center for Inclusive Education (formerly CLC Network), we have been partnering with Christian schools for decades to help them support individuals with disabilities in their classrooms and churches. We are grateful for the theology that sees every child, with all abilities, as an imagebearer of God who brings gifts to community. Our Christian schools honor that covenant by putting into place the structures and systems to support students and families along their church and school journeys. We rejoice in the blessing of belonging with a wonderful community of believers!

» Elizabeth Lucas Dombrowski,
executive director // Wyoming, Mich.

Cult of Normalcy

Thanks to Sara Pot for writing "The Cult of Normalcy" (Nov. 2019). The cult of normalcy cuts a wide gash across our society and church and leads not only to ableism, but also to racism, ageism, classism, sexism, and other biases that slice our common humanity into "us" and "them." Those of us who are part of the dominant culture (white, abled, middle and upper class, etc.) can't see the privileges that this status affords us. We need prophetic articles and books like this one to be called to humble recognition of the commonness of all humanity made in God's image. We all suffer from a common brokenness of sin that separates us from our God, and grace alone gives each one of us an entrée into the fully accessible throne room of our Lord. Because our Lord eschews all these sinful biases, we Christians need to follow his lead to ensure that our facilities, communications, and attitudes fully welcome and engage all whom he welcomes into his kingdom.

» Mark Stephenson, director of
Disability Concerns for the CRCNA //
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Keep the Organ

A sincere thank you to Doug Tjapkes for his article "Don't Throw Out the Organ" (Nov. 2019). Mr. Tjapkes described the musical rendering of "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent" in such a beautiful way that I could almost hear it. May this article encourage churches not to abandon their organs.

» Didy Prinzen // Whitby, Ont.

Pulling TULIPs

In a recent *Banner* article, Prof. Suzanne McDonald urges us to pull up the TULIPs in our theological garden ("Pulling Up TULIPs," Nov. 2019). TULIP is the acronym for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. Others have been struggling with this acronym, indicating its weakness, though acknowledging the need for holding onto the core doctrinal truth of the Canons [of Dort]. After more than a half century of preaching on the Canons using this acronym, I have difficulty now abandoning it. It is a good device for teaching basic biblical truth and a good memory crutch for the five main points of teaching about salvation found in the Canons of Dort, also known as the five points of Calvinism.

» James M. Evenhouse // Jenison, Mich.

Prison Reform

The growth of ministry in prisons is noteworthy ("Building Community, Unlocking Hope," Nov. 2019), but I expected to find equal attention to efforts to reform the prison system, which is widely acknowledged as very unjust and a contributing factor to other social problems. Especially in a Reformed magazine. Please give the same space in a future issue to explore our complicity as citizens in a system that runs counter to what the CRC teaches and what we can do to support important work being done to change it.

» Kathy Vandergrift // Ottawa, Ont.

READ MORE ONLINE

Remember the Sabbath

I DON'T RECALL MY PARENTS sitting me down to explain just what we kids could and could not do on Sunday. We learned by example and fell in step with the prevailing home and church standards. Sometimes we learned the hard way: a reprimand, a scolding, a shaming.

On Sunday mornings we marched to and from church for our weekly dose of three points and an application. After eating the roast and roasting the sermon, we lapsed into languor until it was time for the evening service. For kids, there was little about Sunday to look forward to. It was a day of refraining, of avoiding, of not doing.

As we grew older, we chafed at the restrictions and argued with our parents, wanting to know why our friends' folks sometimes drove their car into the countryside on a Sunday afternoon while we had to stay home to read the Sunday school paper or play Chinese checkers. Buying groceries on Sunday was out of the question, as were throwing a softball or riding a bicycle.


The fabric of my piety became progressively tattered as I grew into adulthood. I became a doctor-in-training and discovered that illness and calamities are not acquainted with the fourth commandment. Once established in practice, though, my life became more orderly and predictable. There was time again to go to church and keep the rest of the day "apart"—just like in the days of my supervised youth. But I wondered, is doing nothing the best way to keep a day holy?

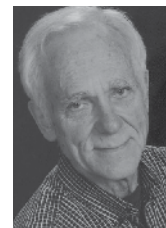
While walking in our garden one Sunday afternoon, marveling at God's way with tulips and daffodils, a cluster of dandelions challenged my piety. As I tugged at the stubborn roots, the rectitude of my youth tugged at my conscience. Guilt-induced disquiet

The fabric of my
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tattered as I grew
into adulthood.

waged war with a longing to be free from legalism. I wondered how to square Yahweh's explicit carvings on Sinai's stone tablets with the lessons his son taught on the subject centuries later: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

I have gone from pulling weeds on Sunday to pruning back unruly shrubs and even, on occasion, to mowing the grass. After church we sometimes join friends for Sunday brunch at a restaurant. I do not wear a WWJD bracelet, but I do wonder how Jesus would react. Pulling weeds and eating out are not matters of necessity like healing leprosy or staving off starvation. Would Jesus condone my "work"—though it feels like play—in the garden? What about playing a round of golf?

At what point do we Christians lose our distinctiveness from unchurched neighbors, from the self-serving, consumer society we live in? *Help me, Lord, to determine your will for my life.* 



Henk Ottens is a retired orthopedic surgeon and an active gardener, photographer, and singer. He attends Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich.



As I Was Saying

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- » **Babel in the Soul** — We are called to remember our common humanity.



Making a Difference Through Mentoring

By LeMarr Jackson and Meghan Donohue

In his poem “Bored of Education,” Christian spoken-word artist Propaganda asserts that real learning happens as we walk through life together. He writes, “You can’t measure a kid inviting their teacher to a quinceañera or a soccer game, or waiting rooms at free clinics.” Just as Jesus entered the everyday, ordinary, and at times desperate situations of the people in the Bible, we have an opportunity to step into the real lives of others and make a difference.

The Great Commission gives us the command to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). A major role in discipleship is mentoring, and it should play a major role in our faith lives. This way of living is invaluable.

‘Multiply Yourself’

If you’ve ever been in leadership, you might have heard the phrase “multiply yourself.” Multiplication can be understood as replicating aspects of yourself in those you lead in hopes of seeing them do the same, continuing the cycle of handing down knowledge and practices to future generations. Passing down knowledge is not solely a Christian or even human tradition, but is actually the very nature of evolving and progressing. This is a great concept in theory, but as imperfect humans, we often distort good ideas.

In Christian mentorship, the actual goal of “multiply yourself” is not to make as many copies of yourself as you can (that would double our faults,

which are as many as the San Andreas is long). It’s to make as many copies of Jesus as possible. We teach what Jesus commanded, not what we command. The secret sauce to the best mentoring relationships is not cloning the mentor, but giving the mentee knowledge and the tools to apply it in their own work.

The ‘Who’ of Mentoring

We are not called to mentor everyone. Mentoring is a special relationship—a calling, perhaps—that God can make clear to us. Sometimes it’s a teen at church who has leadership potential. Other times it’s a student from school with very little faith experience. Every time, it involves a special connection between the mentor and mentee that can be fostered and sustained

over a period of time. It would be selfish, perhaps even egotistical, to think we are the best-fit mentor for every person we encounter.

You can bring exactly who you are to mentorship because there is no correct or cookie-cutter mentor to fit all needs. God uniquely designs and equips us to connect deeply with the stories of specific people. There are all types of mentors for all types of mentees.

Mentoring Is Mutual

The most rewarding mentoring relationships we've experienced are mutual. They are characterized by a give-and-take that is life-giving for both parties. Instead of being hierarchical, they're grace-filled and leveling. Young people in particular do not look for mentors to tell them what to do, but watch closely for mentors to show them how to be. Mentoring is not a one-way street, nor does knowledge flow in one direction. In fact, we've learned more about humility and trust by being vulnerable with mentees and genuinely sharing our stories than we have in some of our peer friendships. Teens are especially eager to hear the stories of our mistakes, lessons learned, and current revelations. Let your mentee see you for who you are, and honor their story in return.

The Best Teacher

One of the most important details to keep in mind when mentoring is that it is actually okay for your mentee to fail. Overprotection can actually force a mentee into stagnation. Never let them fail so badly that they will be completely devastated, but in many circumstances, failure is a better mentor than you could ever be. In the wake of failure, a mentor can do the crucial work of caring for and guiding the mentee to a place of greater maturity as a result of life experience. Teach your mentee how to handle failure and use it as a stepping stone to greatness.

**Mentoring
is a special
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Mentoring Exists in Real Life


Some of our most meaningful conversations with teens have occurred as we've dragged them with us to the grocery store. Weaving these relationships into your existing schedule eliminates two common barriers to rich mentorship: structure and time. Instead of an endless series of rigid, scripted coffee dates, we opt for a more organic approach: join me in what I'm already doing. Jesus models this style with three simple words: "Come, follow me." He travels with his disciples, mentoring them between the lines of Scripture (Matt. 4:18-25).

One significant benefit of mentoring "as you go" is that it allows the mentee to view their mentor as a real human being. This reveals the mentor's integrity to the mentee in real time. "Life on life" mentoring transforms platitudes into actions and models positive habits for the mentee. It's also disarming. Doing an activity, task, or service project side by side can foster a level of comfortability that sustained eye contact at Starbucks simply can't achieve. We're talking about real life, beyond programming and events. Relationships can start there, but they should not stay there.

I (Meghan) have brought my mentee Lemaria along with me to more events and errands than I can name. She's been my buddy on retreats (and always packs the best snacks). We've

served together at fundraisers from early in the morning until late at night. One time we spent two hours wandering the aisles of Home Depot. Another time she snuck out of our hotel in Washington, D.C., with her friends and proceeded to explore the city—without shoes on (but that's a story for another time; mentoring is not always pristine).

Lemaria and I have become so accustomed to doing life together that when something exciting is happening in my world, I want her to know right away. When she was applying to a prestigious summer program at Duke Divinity School, I was quick to write her a letter of recommendation. Likewise, when I'm struggling, I want Lemaria lifting me up in prayer. And when she needs inspiration or relationship advice, I want to be there to send an encouraging text. Mentoring is naturally mutual when situated in the context of real life.

We are faithfully planting and watering seeds, expecting that God will make them grow (1 Cor. 3:6-8). Further, we believe everyone is called to mentor someone at some point in their life. This is how Jesus chose to spread his Word and how his disciples also spread the gospel. Relationships enrich our lives and are the best vehicles for evangelism. Join us in this kingdom pursuit. It's fulfilling! 



LeMarr Jackson is director of youth ministry at Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. He enjoys poetry and preaching.



Meghan Donohue is a high school English teacher and youth leader at Madison Square Church. She seeks to empower young people to transform the fabric of their communities.

BIG QUESTIONS

Stewardship

Our pastor recently preached on Psalm 104 about the divine wisdom in God's manifold works of creation. He said animals and plants are examples of God's wisdom, so if we don't treat them well, we are disrespecting God's wisdom. He tried to say creation, like salvation, is all about grace, but it seems to me that environmental sermons are a bit fluffy and sermons instead should be about the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus.

You are certainly correct that the heart of the gospel is, as Colossians 1 puts it, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to himself through the cross. Further, this reconciling work is central to the message of the church. One would be concerned if, over time, that message was absent from the preaching of the church and sermons seemed to be just talks about contemporary issues.

There are several things to consider, however, regarding your pastor's sermon on Psalm 104. First, in accepting the charge to be a minister of the Word, your pastor vowed to preach the whole counsel of God. Psalm 104 is a part of the counsel of God. It is, in fact, one of the most beautiful and profound of the creation psalms of the Old Testament.



Illustration for The Banner by Laurie Stenkowski

Second, by mentioning the damage that humans cause to the earth and the dangers of extinction, the sermon identifies a brokenness that affects the world and requires the reconciling work of Christ. There is a valid connection between the divine wisdom of Psalm 104 and the reconciling Christ of Colossians 1.

Finally, keep in mind that saving grace isn't the only kind of grace there is. "Grace" simply means a gift, and creation itself is a gift. As George Bernanos says at the end of his book *Diary of a Country Priest*, "Grace is everywhere."

Rolf Bouma is interim pastor at Dearborn Christian Fellowship, Dearborn, Mich., and teaches in the University of Michigan's Program in the Environment in Ann Arbor.

Vocation/Calling

What makes us believe God is calling us?

Different kinds of experience can provoke a sense of one's calling. For some, it is the wise counsel of a coach or a parent. For others, it is a dramatic encounter with God's power and grace, one that interrupts one's plans and commands attention. Sometimes we sense God's call when we are brought

low, when we realize we are needy and humbled by the trials of life. When we are broken and humbled, acts of kindness convey God's care in ways that spark and refresh our sense of calling.

One of these times in my life was when I interviewed for my first job at Calvin University. After 11 years of college, seminary, and graduate school, my wife and I were extremely poor. We had two children under 3 with a third on the way. I drove from Chicago to Grand Rapids for my job interview in our beat-up car. I had not realized that rust holes in the trunk and perforations in the exhaust system were sucking fumes into the car. I arrived in Grand Rapids dizzy and reeking of exhaust.

My friend took me out to lunch. I told him that I needed a new exhaust system but had no money for it. He quickly said, "My wife and I have plenty of money. We'll give you some." The next day he gave me a wad of \$20 bills. I took the car to a muffler shop that squeezed me into their schedule, and in one day I had a new, safe exhaust system.

This spontaneous act of kindness caused me to thank my friend and thank God. We are not alone; we

can rely on each other for support. Through this act of kindness, my sense of call to serve God was refreshed. It reminded me of how God works through the support of the Christian community, and it made me eager to join the mission of Calvin University as one of its professors of religion.

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

Church/Bible/Doctrine

Why is church membership important? Why not just do away with membership and let people be involved as they so choose?

It's true that some people today are reluctant to make the commitment to join a church, perhaps because they are skeptical about churches and institutions in general, because they want the freedom to move easily if they become unhappy, or because membership just seems unimportant.

But membership *is* important and should be encouraged, not first of all for the church but for those who belong. For starters, membership addresses the basic human need to belong. People need connections with others and human interest in themselves. Membership is also important because promise making is important. One way to answer the question "Who am I?" is to ask, "What promises do I keep?" God made us to make and keep promises. But can't someone make commitments and keep promises to a church without being a member? On one level, yes. But isn't the church more than a collection of individuals making ad hoc commitments? There is an "us" to the church that is more than merely the sum total of "me"s.

Isn't this part of the mystery and glory of the body of Christ? In a culture that by and large wants to be commitment-free, could the interlocking commitments that go with membership in a church perhaps be one of the strongest witnesses to Christ in us?

The church to which I belong recently went through a building program that stretched our faith and our pocketbooks. The building program was necessary because of specific ministry commitments to which God has called our church. Without a strong sense of "us," I don't think our church would have made those ministry commitments and financial commitments. And now that it has made those commitments, our sense of "us," of a called community, is stronger than ever. Church membership seems to be natural and important as we seek to be the community of belonging that is the body of Christ.

Kathy Smith is senior associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and an adjunct professor at Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin University. She is a member of First CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Digital Life

What's the one best thing you can do to be less distracted by your phone?

This is an easy one: turn off all alerts.

It's been about a year since I turned off all the alerts on my phone save two: my morning alarm and texts from immediate family. No more blinking lights or ringtones or vibrations to celebrate every breath of the internet. My home screen has only my five most-used application icons, and none of them shows the number of unread or unlooked-at items.

It'd be an overstatement to say it has changed my life, but it certainly has changed the focus of my life.

No longer is that little blue light blinking its way into my attention. I'm not the guy at the end of the conference room table hoping that no one notices the strange but familiar sound of a vibrating phone. I don't regularly know how many scintillating Facebook notifications have presented themselves. My phone has its rightful place as a tool to be used when I want to use it and not when it wants to use me.

Yes, I have missed some last-minute opportunities to meet someone unexpectedly, and I'm not always the first to hear about late-breaking news. But gone is the forever feeling that if I don't pick the thing up immediately, I'm going to miss out on something big.

To work, this strategy involves making sure people know how best to reach you. My colleagues know email is best. Friends and family usually text, but they call if it's an emergency.

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. Wondering about any part of the digital side of life? Tell him about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.



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

Conversations Lead to Housing Solutions for Elderly, Homeless in St. Thomas, Ont.

NEWS

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Don Shaw, one of the founding members of the Christian Reformed church plant Destination Church in St. Thomas, Ont., doesn't just listen to the friends he meets—he wonders what might happen if friends with differing needs meet one another.

Shaw moved to St. Thomas 16 years ago with his wife, Linda. He initiated conversations on day one. Navigating St. Thomas on his electric scooter, Shaw goes out of his way to talk to business owners. He stops to speak with seniors trimming their hedges or tending their gardens. And he pauses to greet people on the streets in downtown St. Thomas: “Hi, I'm Don, and now you've got a new friend.”

With 24 years of experience as a vocational rehabilitation counselor, Shaw always has an ear to the ground to match the needs of business owners with the skills of those he knows who need work. Shaw listens for other needs, too. Many of his senior friends are reluctant to move into nursing homes but can't safely live in their homes alone. They are often lonely. His friends who live on the streets are also lonely, and they need dry and dependable homes. As Shaw listened, he began making new connections.

One day, a retired cabinetmaker stopped Shaw on the street. He was worried. He needed help, but he had no family and nursing home care was expensive—one year's worth would be twice the amount he could get from selling his house.

Shaw considered this and asked, “What if someone was living with you?” He offered to connect the retiree to a young man he had known for three years who was interested in woodworking and needed a home.

Two and a half years ago, the young man moved in. With the senior's help, he learned cabinetmaking and completed a woodworking program at Fanshawe College in nearby London, Ont.

Over the past four years, a similar scenario has played out 31 times. Shaw now calls the people who've moved in from the streets “helpers.” They assist seniors in everything from shoveling snow and mowing grass to washing the dishes. The pairs of helpers and seniors also provide company for each other. While Don knows all the helpers through Destination Church, the seniors belong to a variety of churches.

On one street in St. Thomas, there are five homes with helpers. On another, there are seven. Some helpers do weekly grocery shopping for their seniors. Others find skills from earlier work to put to use, such as a former professional painter who repainted his senior's home.

Bob*, a former ambulance driver, has shared First Aid/CPR training. Though Bob is not homeless, when he walked into Destination Church two years ago “he looked very dejected, so I sat down with him” and learned his story, Shaw said. One day, Bob was called to a severe accident involving his parents. Both his mother and father died in his ambulance. Bob quit his job and went on long-term disability with post-traumatic stress disorder. He moved away from the scene of the accident to St. Thomas. “That's when I met him,” Shaw said.

Bob heard that Destination Church was open every day, and he dropped in to talk. Shaw is in the storefront church on



Don Shaw (in the yellow vest), who serves on his city's Municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee, prepares to take St. Thomas Mayor Joe Preston on a scooter tour of the city.

Mondays. "He told me he was looking for a safe place he could live that he could afford in St. Thomas," Shaw said. On the way home from meeting Bob, Shaw came across a senior couple he had known for years: "The husband was out trimming hedges with the old-fashioned giant scissor-type clippers. And the wife was pulling weeds in the yard and she was crabbing at him," afraid he would have another heart attack. Shaw asked if the two could use help. The couple agreed to meet Bob, and the next morning Bob moved in. He offered to train each of the other 30 helpers in First Aid/CPR.

Except for Bob, who hadn't been homeless but was simply relocating, Shaw doesn't make a connection unless he's known the potential helper for a year or more. It's also important to him that they

have no history with drugs or alcohol. He sees the work of connecting seniors with helpers to be God's work for him, but once Shaw introduces a helper to a senior, the rest is up to them. "All I do is introduce people," he said. "The senior gets to decide if they want someone to live with them."

So far none of the seniors has charged rent, and it's up to the seniors and helpers to discuss what would happen in case of an accident or death. Often the adult children of the seniors are living far away. "When they find out that Mom or Dad has someone living with them, someone they can count on, with medical training even, they're usually thrilled," Shaw said. In fact, since matching the last helper, Shaw has been approached by eight adult children to find someone willing to live with their parents.

While Destination Church is not officially involved in Shaw's work to match seniors and helpers, Pastor Beth Fellingner enjoys seeing his gifts and creativity at work. "Seeing the need and talking with people,

He sees the work of connecting seniors with helpers to be God's work for him, but once Shaw introduces a helper to a senior, the rest is up to them.

he created an alternative way of helping people with housing," Fellingner said. "By Don engaging with this expression ... he, too, lives into the DNA of Destination—adding value to people for the sake of Jesus Christ."

Shaw hopes people will be inspired by what is happening in St. Thomas, seeing that big change can come with just an introduction.

"It's a reciprocal relationship that meets many people's needs," he said. "I am blessed by the people I meet, and the blessing flows through to others."

—Maia VanderMeer

*We are using only Bob's first name and have not identified other helpers or seniors in this story because of the vulnerabilities they may experience if named.

Sharing Harvest Bounty: 'A Conduit of Mercy'

In September in Fort Saskatchewan, Alta., a group of farmers continued their 17-year tradition of donating time, resources, and labor to food relief. About a dozen combines harvested 295 acres of barley on land set aside for Share the Harvest, a project run by Keith Goutbeck, a member of Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton.

"I started the Share the Harvest project along with my dad and the neighboring farmers in our area," Goutbeck said. "It's a group effort that is so amazing."

Goutbeck's effort doesn't stand alone. Share the Harvest, Growing Hope Globally, and Niagara Christian Gleaners are just three of many organizations that exist across Canada and the U.S. as a Christian response to world hunger.

The work is often interconnected. Share the Harvest's \$100,000 contribution from the barley, which was sold to Asian markets, was multiplied by a 4:1 matching grant from the Canadian government to the Canadian Food Grains Bank. With 15 partners, including World Renew, the



Supplied by Keith Goutbeck of Share the Harvest

In Edgerton, Minn., a similar farmer-supported project contributes to the development efforts of Growing Hope Globally (formerly Foods Resource Bank). Currently, all of the farmers in the Edgerton project are members of either First CRC or Bethel CRC. Each farmer donates land, and others donate seed and fertilizer.

Ron De Weerd, a member of Trinity CRC in Rock Valley, Iowa, is the regional director of Midwest and Southwest growing projects for Growing Hope Globally. By July 2019, he said, "we had engaged more than 2 million people in our development

Fort Saskatchewan, Alta., barley harvest for Share the Harvest, Sept. 14, 2019.

(niagaragleaners.org). With its Smithville, Ont., produce-salvaging plant in operation for just over a year, the organization recoups the gleanings that might otherwise be lost.

Pete Wierenga, a member of Bethany CRC in Fenwick, Ont., is the plant's general manager. "Stores don't want fruit and vegetables with imperfections," he explained. "There's nothing wrong with it. It just needs some trimming." So produce that can't go to retailers comes to the Gleaners. Volunteers trim, chop, and dehydrate the food to preserve it. Wierenga estimates in one year they have received 1.2 million pounds of fruits and vegetables equal to 3 million servings. He sees Niagara Christian Gleaners as a mission, a "conduit of mercy to others."

About 60 individual congregations and 500 registered volunteers support the Gleaners. "It gives me a good feeling to be able to help others this way," said Arie Versteeg, a member of Smithville CRC who volunteers twice a week running two different machines.

—Janet A. Greidanus



Volunteers at Niagara Christian Gleaners process nonmarketable produce to redistribute as dehydrated fruits and vegetables.

Food Grains Bank helps to provide training and financing for farming projects in Africa, Asia, and South America. Others contribute to the work too; members of the public are able to sponsor an acre of land, and the energy company Suncor donated the field in Fort Saskatchewan.

programs. This could not have happened without our community projects like the one in Edgerton." He says he's humbled by the sacrificial commitments of more than 170 communities partnering with Growing Hope.

In the Niagara region of Ontario, Niagara Christian Gleaners seek to "demonstrate Christ's love and grace by sharing the abundance of produce we enjoy with those around the world who are in need"

Art Exchange Promotes Peace

Spreading peace for students at Rehoboth (N.M.) Christian School can look like a unicorn, a waterfall, or a forest. This fall, 128 of the school's elementary students participated in a program developed by The Memory Project to create artwork to mail to and share with Syrian children, who will send artwork back in an exchange to promote peace and friendship.

Art teacher Autumn Newell initiated the participation with support from the school's leadership and community.

"They really like that kids are doing something for others and that they don't have to wait until they're grown up to do mission work," said Newell, who also serves as a local mission leader with Resonate Global Mission in the Classis Red Mesa area. Previously, she involved high school students in creating portraits with The Memory Project. This year, The Memory Project introduced a simpler art exchange, one that could include younger students from kindergarten to sixth grade.

Each student is matched with a Syrian child in a refugee camp and is asked to create art that represents happiness or reminds them of peace, friendship, and kindness. Each piece of art has the child's hand traced on the back, representing a touching of hands.

Sixth-grader AJ drew a mountain, trees, and a sunset, saying the person receiving his art might enjoy the beautiful things God created. Sixth-grader Jade also drew creation: "God's done a lot to make this world beautiful," she said.

Newell's students watched a video from The Memory Project and talked briefly about the war in Syria before students began creating. "Their artwork is beautiful and wonderful because of their creativity and the time each took to make something to send to someone who has experienced so much loss," Newell said.

—Maia VanderMeer



Art Exchange contribution by Deiyanera, fourth grade.



Art Exchange contribution by James, sixth grade.



Art Exchange contribution by Trajen, sixth grade.

Noteworthy



Photo by Brin Schat

The Smithville Christian senior boys' volleyball team.

The **senior boys' volleyball** team at **Smithville (Ont.) Christian High School** earned **gold at the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations' Boys' A championships** in Chatham, Ont., Nov. 23. It was Smithville's second time as boys' volleyball champs at OFSAA. The first was in 2013. Adam VandenDool, a member of Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont., and player on the team in 2013, was one of the coaches this year along with head coach Tim deVries, Rob Greenham, and manager Patrick Ghaly.



Photo by YMCA of Southwestern Ontario

Henny Drope

In a ceremony Nov. 20, the **Sarnia-Lambton (Ont.) YMCA presented its Peace Medallion to Christian Reformed Church member Henny Drope** in recognition of her 25 years of volunteer service in welcoming refugees. In 1994, as a new deacon at First CRC in Sarnia, Drope volunteered to be the congregation's representative on a refugee sponsorship committee shared by four area Christian Reformed congregations. The committee has helped to welcome and settle more than a dozen families.

—Banner correspondents

California Congregation Honors Veterans With Quilts



Photo by Diane Vos

Military veterans at First CRC in Bellflower, Calif., received quilts made in their honor Nov. 10.

Wrapping them in colorful quilts created just for them, the congregation of First Christian Reformed Church in Bellflower, Calif., honored nine of its military veterans during the morning service Nov. 10. Those honored had served in World War II, the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and in Kosovo. The group also included a Purple Heart recipient.

Each of the donated quilts was handmade by a volunteer organization called Quilts of Valor. This charity has volunteer chapters across North America, and to date it has donated more than 250,000 quilts to veterans.

Karla Evans, a member of the social committee at First CRC, coordinated the event with the help of the local Quilts of Valor chapter. "A lot of work goes into each quilt," Evans noted. Each quilt takes 50 to 80 hours to complete, depending on the pattern, and each is made for a specific veteran with that person's interests, hobbies, and service history in mind.

"Sometimes this is the first time they have ever received a thank-you," Evans said of the practice. "The quilt is always wrapped around their shoulders to give a feeling of caring and love."

Many veterans at the service had their immediate family and some extended family present. Jerry Westra, one of the honored veterans, said he was proud to be honored in front of his children and grandchildren.

"Receiving the quilt was wonderful," veteran Jim DenOuden said, "but being honored as a veteran by the congregation was even a greater blessing." DenOuden, who served in the Army from 1969 to 1971, said he would "treasure the quilt," and he's "thankful for such a special gift."

—Dan Veeneman

Hamilton Church Issues 'Kingdom Assignment'



Photo by Graham Baker

Volunteers for the Kingdom Assignment share their stories Nov. 24 at Meadowlands Fellowship CRC.

Pastor Everett Vander Horst of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Hamilton, Ont., surprised his congregation Sept. 8. After preaching a sermon on the generosity of God, he followed the song of response with a request: "We have a very special project in mind, and we are looking for 25 volunteers to be involved."

With only five people in the church knowing what was about to happen, it took a few minutes before 25 people had gathered at the front. Vander Horst then handed each volunteer a \$100 bill, explaining that this was God's money to be used to bless the community. They were being given a "Kingdom Assignment."

An anonymous donor in the congregation provided the \$2,500 for the project. Ken Tigchelaar, chair of the congregation's stewardship committee, promoted the challenge with his pastor after writing about a similar project in a newsletter for Christian Stewardship Services (bit.ly/KingdomAssign). "I thought this project would be a fun way to stimulate conversation on what stewardship really is," Tigchelaar said.

Eleven weeks after accepting their assignment, the volunteers shared their experiences at the Nov. 24 worship service. One couple planned a knitting class with a nearby Indigenous community. A woman helped two recently arrived refugee women repaint their apartment. A father-daughter duo fed a local football team after its practice.

Peter Frielink, a first-year student at Redeemer University, was attending Meadowlands for the first time when the Kingdom Assignment was launched. Frielink volunteered and used the money to start a club at Redeemer to connect with seniors. "This experience pushed me outside of my comfort zone and made me try something new," he said.

Vander Horst emphasized the results of the Kingdom Assignment do not rest with the congregation members. "It is important to recognize that the money is not our money; it is God's money, and he is going to multiply it or use it how he sees fit."

—Kristen Parker

B.C. Youth Convention Reactivated

Re:Activate 2019 took place in September at Willoughby Christian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C., bringing close to 200 young people from 15 CRC congregations together for worship, community, and team-building activities.

The weekend for youth groups and their leaders to be reactivated together in their faith required its own literal reactivation last year. In part because of a change in the convention's original leadership, the gathering went on hiatus last year after a four-year run. A cohort of youth pastors from classes B.C. South-East and B.C. North-West organized the 2019 event and moved it from Abbotsford to a recently renovated gathering space at Willoughby CRC.

What did not change was the event's purpose: to "unite and inspire Reformed youth to live out the call that God has placed on each of them."

—Jenny deGroot



Photo by Kevin VanderLeek

Youth participate in outdoor fun at Re:Activate 2019.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. William J. Renkema

1952-2019

Bill Renkema, who served for 17 years as a missionary and church planter with Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission) and for 24 years in parish ministry, died Oct. 28. He was 67. Renkema had glioblastoma, a type of brain cancer he was diagnosed with just six weeks before he was scheduled to retire in 2018.

After graduation from Calvin Seminary and ordination in 1978, the Renkemas went to Honduras. For the first five years Bill planted churches in Olancho, where the nearest English-speaking neighbor was six hours away. He had amazing language skills and wrote Bible school and seminary curriculum in Spanish. In 1989 the couple went to serve in Puerto Rico. In parish ministry, Renkema pastored these Michigan churches: Calvary CRC in Lowell, Borculo CRC in Zeeland, and Cutlerville East CRC in Cutlerville.

Known for his wide smile and his optimism, Renkema sang or whistled all day long. His grandchildren will remember him for teaching them to fish and for requesting ice cream for every dessert.

He will be missed by Teresa, his wife of 45 years; four children; their spouses; and 11 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Dr. Paul C.H. Szto

1924-2019

Pastor, theologian, and professor Paul Szto died Oct. 22 in New York City. He was 95.

Born in China, Szto graduated from Zhejiang University in 1946. In 1947 he began studies at Westminster Seminary under Cornelius Van Til and then at Union Seminary under Richard Kroner and Paul Tillich. While at Union, Szto pioneered a Chinese student ministry on New York City's Upper West Side before he was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 1957. He later earned his Doctor of Ministry from Westminster.

In the 1950's Szto founded, with Christain Reformed Home Missions, what would become Queens Christian Reformed Church, the first Chinese congregation in Queens, N.Y. With his wife, he tirelessly drove, housed, fed, and taught over 2,000 students, refugees, and immigrants.

Among his many pursuits, Szto wrote articles; lectured at New York's Queens and Nyack colleges, the China Institute, various seminaries, and Chinese universities; and helped establish Chinese Christian Reformed churches in Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

Szto will be missed by his two sons, a daughter, and their spouses; seven grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his wife, Clarice, in 2007 and his daughter Irene in 2012.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Jacob Kuntz

1926-2019

Jacob Kuntz loved to preach God's grace from the pulpit or on the Dutch radio program *Zingend Geloven*. An encourager, he ended every visit, even during his final week, with a hands-raised "Lift up your heart!" Kuntz, 93, died Nov. 3.

After several years of ministry in the Netherlands, Kuntz immigrated to Canada in 1958 to pastor First Christian Reformed Church in Orillia, Ont. He then served First CRC, Owen Sound, Ont.; New Westminster CRC, Burnaby, B.C.; Maranatha CRC and Covenant CRC, both in St. Catharines, Ont.; and Community CRC, Kitchener, Ont. He was then chaplain for several years at Holland Christian Homes in Brampton, Ont.

Kuntz did everything with gusto. He is remembered for running up to the pulpit two steps at a time and for his meaningful 15-minute pastoral visits. He practiced a "freedom in Christ" that others found liberating. He enjoyed cottage vacations with family, kept a daily journal for 60 years, and with his wife swam 30 minutes 5 days a week for 50 years.

Kuntz is survived by daughter Evelyn Hielema, son-in-law Syd, three grandchildren, and a great-grandson. He was predeceased by his wife, Maria, and two children.

—Janet A. Greidanus

B.C. Churches Broach Uncomfortable Subjects

The statistics are disturbing. One in three women and one in six men have been sexually abused or assaulted. Pornography use among men (60%) and women (30%) is no lower within the churchgoing population than outside of it. Yet only 5% of people engage in open conversation about these facts with church leaders, says author Jay Stringer, who spoke at a recent B.C. Safe Church conference.

The Safe Church Ministry partnership for the British Columbia Christian Reformed churches sponsored the conference Safe Spaces Nov. 16 in Abbotsford, B.C. Because shame and guilt are powerful silencers, B.C. Safe Church wanted to provide an opportunity for dialogue that might lead to breaking silences and to healing from shame.

Faye Martin, coordinator of abuse prevention and response for the ministry, organized the conference. "We hoped attendees would include parents, grandparents, church leaders, and pastors," she said.

About 90 people attended, representing all those and more.

Stringer, the author of *Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing*, offered the keynote address. A pastor and therapist, Stringer speaks boldly and openly about a topic that many are hesitant to confront. He is pastor of Awake Church, an emerging Christian Reformed congregation in Seattle, Wash.

Hearing from Stringer was freeing, Martin said. "There is a freedom that comes with being able to talk about pornography and abuse in the church. Breaking the silence becomes preventative because these things thrive in silence."



Photo by Liz Tolcamp

Author Jay Stringer with Safe Spaces conference organizer Faye Martin.

Other workshops at Safe Spaces included those to equip parents of young children growing up in a highly digitized context and to support teens who experience pressure and loneliness in a hypersexualized yet isolating environment.

Safe Church training for the B.C. Christian Reformed churches usually is offered within each local congregation. Martin said this conference, the first such offered, was able to reach a broader group with important, in-depth conversations.

—Jenny deGroot



Planning worship?

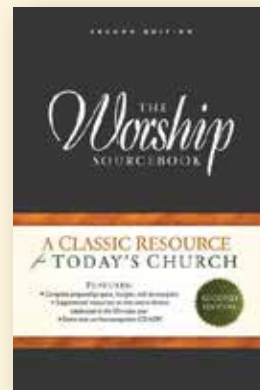
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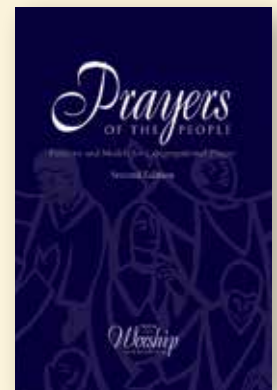
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Sharing the Call

Grace, Uganda

By Katy Johnson, World Renew

For many, the word “calling” prods thoughts of personality and strength: What am I good at? What do I enjoy? What spiritual gifts has God given to me?

Rarely do we think of our calling as a single defining moment. Yet sometimes that is how it happens. Ida Kaastra Mutoigo was 13 years old, sitting on a porch swing, when she heard God call her in the wind. Carol Bremer-Bennett, at the time a recent graduate from Calvin University, was driving a gray Toyota Corolla when God called her to the sands of New Mexico.

For Kaastra Mutoigo, God’s call came not as an audible voice, but as a deep, profound peace.

“I told my parents that night at the supper table, ‘I think God wants me to be a missionary.’ It was a life-defining moment for me, and my parents were utterly unfazed,” she said. “I think they discounted it as a fleeting, childish thought. ... But I felt in my heart a strong certainty—‘You will see.’”

For Bremer-Bennett, God’s call came amid fear and loss. “A number of things happened at that point in my life that made me want to run away. That’s what I thought I was doing: climbing into that car and running away from God,” she said. “Like Jonah, I thought I was in control, but really, God let that little car swallow me up like a whale and carry me right to where I needed to be.

“New Mexico was the place where my life as a Navajo-born woman who was raised in a Dutch family all fell into place. It was out in the sands of New Mexico that I came to believe I was made uniquely and placed precisely where God intended. There, I discovered my core identity: beloved daughter of God.”

Today, Kaastra Mutoigo and Bremer-Bennett serve as co-directors for World Renew, the global development arm of the Christian Reformed Church. Both directors agree that sharing the hope of Jesus in more than 30 countries while changing the story of poverty requires creative collaboration.

In Bremer-Bennett’s estimation, this shared leadership is biblical. “God never calls us to his work alone. Within God’s own self we see the relationality of the Trinity. In his time on earth, Jesus models relational ministry—sending his disciples out in pairs and groups. And quite frankly, the work of World Renew is not possible alone; it requires too much of us. In Ecclesiastes 4, we read of the cord of three strands that is not easily broken. That’s not because one strand is stronger or more fit than another. All are equal; all are needed,” she explained.



World Renew Co-Director Carol Bremer-Bennett witnesses the hope communities have found in Tanzania thanks to World Renew.

Kaastra Mutoigo agreed. “When Carol and I come into contact with other organizations like World Renew, I see a lot of solitary [executives] and leaders,” she said. “I cannot imagine what that is like. The greatest benefit of shared leadership is the way we can bring complementary gifts to the table. That means multiple perspectives can be utilized in all decision-making, particularly for complex situations.”

When it comes to the work of ending global poverty, nothing is simple. Kaastra Mutoigo is grateful to be able to walk into those spaces with another leader. “It keeps you both humble and encouraged in the work,” she said.

In reflecting on her calling as a whole, Bremer-Bennett said she finds gratitude to be her guide in discerning God’s will. “The path I have taken is mostly about faithfulness to step forward and say ‘thank you.’ Every action I take is a response of joy to places where God has loved me. That means my work keeps leading me to step toward those who are marginalized and oppressed.”

Bremer-Bennett carries stories of colonization and dispossession deep within her being. Barbed and heavy narratives press upon her heart. Perhaps it is the burden of her people’s history that attunes her to the voices of those who are often silenced. Perhaps it is her own story as a bridge-builder between Western and Indigenous cultures that stokes her fire for revitalized communities.

Either way, from the acres of Rehoboth School in New Mexico to World Renew’s multinational efforts in North and Latin America as well as Asia and Africa, Bremer-Bennett



World Renew Co-Director Ida Kaastra Mutoigo examines the work of World Renew's community development partner, SISA, in Tanzania.

lives out her call to gratitude by supporting and bearing witness to God's faithful provision of flourishing for all people.

Indeed, human flourishing plays a central role in all of World Renew's work, and it represents a key value for Kaastra Mutoigo as well, particularly in the context of gender.

Kaastra Mutoigo has worked for World Renew since she graduated with agriculture degrees from Dordt University and the University of Guelph. Starting in the Grand Rapids office, she soon had an assignment to

Uganda and took it with joy. Through her years at World Renew and in various countries, Kaastra Mutoigo's understanding of the transformation that men and women find in partnership has only grown. "Looking at gender around the world, there are different perspectives and values that together lead to flourishing," she explained.

Yet in examining different patriarchal and matriarchal cultures, Kaastra Mutoigo noticed a lack of balance and a broken flow of power that hinders flourishing in those contexts. "If you look at poverty and injustice," she explained, "the cause of those challenges is usually a misuse of power or a poor distribution of power. When someone wields their power over another human being or set of human beings, it leads to poor distribution of resources and poor decision-making."

"Every culture has a certain set of expectations for the use of power by men and women," she continued. "Sometimes a culture's expectations fail to reflect the truth of the gospel. This is particularly true in cultures of hierarchy and animism. But as soon as men and women come to the table together with reciprocated respect, worth, and value; ... as soon as they recognize we all reflect the image of God, that's when you have the best chance of overcoming unfair power distributions that perpetuate injustice and poverty."

This work might be slow-moving, Bremer-Bennett said, but it is also transformative. "North Americans often assume they have the best way to point to Jesus. Asset-based community

development shows a different path. It means being invited into a global community to assess what is already there that can be used to further those people's journey and better enrich their lives. It means empowering people to help themselves thrive and meeting Jesus in the work already happening in that place."

But what does such work look like on the ground?

In Uganda, there's a mother named Grace. For many years, Grace lived a life not so different from other women in her culture, shouldering primary responsibility for fetching water, household chores, tilling crops, and feeding and caring for her family while her husband worked in the garden and then headed to town to gamble and drink with other men.

In many ways Grace's life felt like a prison keeping her and her entire family trapped in a cycle where money disappeared too quickly, crops never yielded bounty, and needs were never met fully.

Then, in 2012, World Renew started working in Grace's village. That work included sustainable farming techniques to yield better crops and a Village Savings Group to build up financial stability. It also included trainings for husbands and wives. Not only did this work encourage members of the village to start talking about how they spend their time each day and how they could shoulder their work as a team, it also examined the issue of gender through a biblical lens.

For the first time, Grace and her husband started imagining a different way of relating, working together, and leading their family. Change didn't happen immediately. In fact, Grace's husband felt a lot of pressure; he did not want the other men in the community to look at him differently. Yet God was faithful. Over time, family after family in Grace's village began practicing a shared approach to labor and saving. Soon, Grace and her husband joined.

Today, Grace and her husband share the work equally for their land and home. Their crops are thriving, their children are in school, and their lives have been transformed.

Grace felt the call of World Renew, the same call carried by Kaastra Mutoigo and Bremer-Bennett—not grandiose, but measurable, enduring, and shared. It's a call for women and men, Indigenous peoples and refugees, North Americans and entire communities around the world.

It's a call to abundant life.

"Anything that gives life is God's intention," said Kaastra Mutoigo. "If you are trying to figure out where God is in a space, look for the life that is trying to grow, and do what you can to help it." **B**

An Open Door for Shared Leadership

JILL ELLENS AND I both arrived in the parking lot of Brookside Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., at 7:50 a.m. Ellens is the member and community life coordinator at Brookside. As director of the denomination's new leadership diversity initiative, I was there to talk with her and others about how their congregation shares leadership.

We walked through the front entrance together, and Ellens introduced me to the administrative assistant, Nick Remelts. I also noticed Phyllis Moes, the pastoral care and worship ministry coordinator, working at her desk. We invited them to join us for the conversation.

Brookside has a team of 12 staff members (both full and part time) plus council members and other volunteers who serve the congregation and a neighborhood with racial, gender, age, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity. The staff meet together each weekday morning for a time of devotions, check-in, and prayer. It's just one way they've created structure and space for various leaders to thrive.

Shared leadership is a value that Brookside holds tightly. Even before Rev. Paul DeVries accepted a call to be senior pastor at the church, the former pastor, Rev. Norm Meyer, emphasized the value of sharing leadership in order to maximize everyone's gifts and truly serve all of the people and groups of their congregation.

DeVries said it takes qualities like self-awareness, self-confidence, and inviting others into decision-making for shared leadership to work. While some leaders might be concerned about giving up the reins for certain decisions, DeVries said, "You do not lose anything. Shared leadership is not a zero-sum game."



Staff at Brookside CRC (Paul DeVries, left; Phyllis Moes, center; and Jill Ellens, right) place a value on sharing leadership.

As the Brookside staff pointed out, shared leadership is not always easy. It takes intentionality from everyone. Ellens explained that each leader takes responsibility for developing characteristics such as humility, good communication, respect, and trust. These variables are foundational in "wrestling through issues and supporting different opinions," she said.

She also added that it is important "to know what we need to help each other be successful." Working together has to do with people feeling secure and not threatened.

Moes agreed. She said sharing leadership is crucial in her role of providing pastoral care. While she considers it a gift to come alongside people in a pastoral care role, she acknowledged that she must discern when it might be necessary to ask DeVries to join her for a visit and at what point to involve him. They rely on each other.

DeVries said senior leaders have a special role to play in fostering an environment that allows for shared

leadership. While the pastor can be the visionary of a congregation, DeVries said, he or she must also allow space for creativity and empower others to share their gifts and leadership as well.

"Good leaders influence and make good leaders," he said, adding that getting to know people well is key to helping to understand people's strengths and weaknesses. After that, it involves inviting people into leadership roles and encouraging them to take risks.

The lessons I learned from Brookside will be valuable to me as I work to support, encourage, and develop the leadership gifts in people who are underrepresented in the CRCNA. What the Brookside staff are demonstrating is that your ethnic background, age, and gender do not matter. Everyone has the potential to shine as God opens a door to shared leadership—not doing it alone, but serving together for God's glory! **B**

—Denise Posie,
Leadership Diversity

The View from Here

Leadership of Many Voices

“A HUMAN BEING is a vessel that God has built for Himself and filled with His inspiration so that His works are perfected in it.” —Hildegard of Bingen, 12th century Benedictine nun

When I served as senior pastor in a local church, one of my favorite Sundays each year was “Friendship Sunday.” It was an opportunity for me and the entire church to let our hair down. Each Friendship Sunday worship service contained delightful surprises as dozens of people with a variety of physical and cognitive abilities took the lead.

One such Sunday, Susan, whose verbalizations consisted mainly of shouting out days of the week in random order, piped up just as I reached the height of the sermon in affirming Jesus’ death and resurrection.

“Friday, Monday, Friday, Monday!” she yelled.

I joined her in that chorus as she led me to the sermon’s conclusion: “Yes, Susan! Jesus died on Friday and had arisen by Monday. Amen!” One imperfect saint leading another. It was beautiful. And we all cheered.

Susan’s story reminds us that a person’s value in the church should not be gauged by the world’s idea of value. Scripture gives us a better picture. Allow me to unpack this anthropologically.

First, all persons, as created beings, have within them the Spirit of God. Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof

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explained this by saying, “God is called the God (or, Father) of the spirits of all flesh (Num. 16:22; 27:16; Heb. 12:9). In some of these cases it is quite evident that the Spirit of God is not a mere power but a person.” This means the Holy Spirit is within all people.

Consequently, all people share a godly commonality. So even before we consider if an individual is Christian, she deserves respect and care. With respect and care we can build a relationship that will invite the Holy Spirit to dwell in a person in a special way that brings understanding of Christ’s saving grace.

Second, respecting all persons demands we allow for their autonomy. Each individual—male or female, child or adult—is unique, and each person is called to work toward unity.

But unity is not uniformity. To demand that a person or cultural group minimize their uniqueness to achieve unified gospel purpose is sin. Unity is not about common culture, behavior, or character. Instead, unity is about sharing common purpose, as Jesus describes in John 17.

Putting these two concepts together—the respect of all persons no matter the measure of their faith and

appreciating their God-given uniquenesses in the pursuit of shared purpose—is fundamental to a healthy church community.

When we live into these two things well, we will discover all manner of good ideas offered through a variety of people—exactly what God intended. As the apostle Paul writes, “If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:26-27).

This year in the Christian Reformed Church of North America we celebrate the leadership of women in ordained ministry. As we recognize this, I am thankful that we are beginning to take significant and needed next steps to work toward creating a safe place for all to use their gifts in the church (see the many recommendations that Synod 2019 made about preventing the abuse of power).

I am also delighted by the imaginative ways churches are exercising leadership through the increased volume of younger and more culturally diverse voices. We need more Susans.



Rev. Darren C. Roorda is the Canadian Ministries director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Sharing the Gospel in One of the World's Coldest Places

CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS have been over for a few weeks now in Siberia, Russia, and it is the coldest time of the year in one of the world's coldest regions. Making matters worse, jobs continue to be hard to come by in the city of Tomsk.

Artur (not his real name) wasn't just tired of living in these conditions in Tomsk; he was tired of living his life. The community and family that most people in Tomsk rely on to get through the harsh winter just wasn't in place for Artur. So he made plans to commit suicide.

But God had different plans.

A Unique Invitation

A few months before Artur decided to end his life, Rev. Sergei Sosedkin received a unique invitation. Sosedkin serves as the Russian ministry leader for Back to God Ministries International (BTGMI).

In times when much of BTGMI's work is shifting from radio to online programming, a Russian Orthodox church in Tomsk asked Sosedkin if he would like to partner with them to develop a new radio program.

"This is a popular FM station in a city of about half a million people," Sosedkin said. "So we were happy to be invited into this partnership."

The new program is discussion-based, focusing on cultural issues from a Christian perspective. Although Sosedkin does make guest appearances on the show, the main BTGMI host is a volunteer who lives in the Tomsk area.



"God led Artur to our radio program," said Sergei Sosedkin, BTGMI Russian ministry leader.

Message of Hope

As Artur prepared to end his life, he decided he would listen to music. While he was searching for something peaceful, something caught his ear—a message of hope from BTGMI's new program.

"God had led Artur to our radio program playing for the first time in his area," Sosedkin said.

As Artur listened, he felt the darkness and pain in his life begin to lift. He realized there is a God who loves him.

Right then and there, Artur abandoned his plans for suicide. He later called the station to thank the church for broadcasting the program and told them his story.

"That's the kind of impact the gospel has. It's both immediate and eternal," said Kurt Selles, BTGMI's director.

"And that's why it's such a privilege to have the opportunity to share it with people all around the world."

The Russian ministry team has talked to Artur a few times since he first called to tell his story, and they have connected him with a local church to offer him the community he so needed.

To further encourage people like Artur, BTGMI sends Christmas cards signed by supporters in Canada and the United States to areas where their programs are broadcast. This Christmas, with support from ministry shares of the Christian Reformed Church, about 500 Russian listeners received these cards, including believers in the city of Tomsk where Artur lives.

—Brian Clark,
Back to God Ministries International

Calvin Professors Talk Books

FIVE CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

professors gathered in November to speak about their recently published books, which range from a book about Eve and the role of women in the church to a philosophical view of living everyday life.

Amanda Benckhuysen, professor of Old Testament and author of *The Gospel According to Eve*, began writing her book because the traditional interpretation of the Genesis account of Eve as being subordinate to Adam—that, as one church father said, Jesus came to save the world because of the sin of Eve—troubled her.

“The early church taught the view that Eve did not bear the full image of God,” said Benckhuysen in the hour-long panel discussion. “It bothered me because this view bolstered a social system of patriarchy that has had a huge effect on women even up to today.”

In her research, she discovered a range of commentators who believed that Eve was a “full imagebearer of God” and “a companion in life with Adam.”

Benckhuysen calls on the church to discuss the dominant view of Eve and how it has hurt women over the years. “I’ve tried to make accessible a range of women in history who had written about Eve positively.”

Gary Burge, dean of the faculty and author of *The New Testament in Seven Sentences*, boils the message of the New Testament down to seven fundamental themes: fulfillment, kingdom, cross, grace, covenant, spirit, and completion.

To flesh out these themes, he uses key sentences from Scripture, such as “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16); “By grace you have



Mariano Avila, Amanda Benckhuysen, Gary Burge, Young Ahn Kang, and Bob Keeley discussed their recent publications in a panel discussion.

been saved, through faith ... not by works” (Eph. 2:8-9); “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession” (1 Pet. 2:9); and “I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1).

“The vision,” Burge said, “is to help educate men and women in the church who have heard the same sermon too many times and want to go to the next level” in understanding key elements of the New Testament.

Young Ahn Kang said his book, *Philosophy of Everyday Life*, reflects the thought contained in Christian philosophy as well as beliefs of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. “These all share the concern for everyday life,” said Kang, a visiting professor of philosophical theology. “There are rules of life: be mindful in all we do, in our study, in our work, in our relaxation. Also, be grateful, because our being is based on others.”

Robert Keeley, visiting professor of discipleship and faith formation,

cowrote *Dear Parents: a Guide for Family Faith Formation* with his wife, Laura. They wrote the book for parents both in and out of church to help their children grow in faith. It introduces readers to four building blocks of faith to help children to find their place in God’s family, learn God’s story, live in hope, and discover their calling.

Professor of New Testament Mariano Avila talked about *Efesios*, his two-volume Spanish-language commentary on Ephesians. It explores how Paul’s letter to the Ephesians challenged the Roman Empire but also is valuable especially for readers in Mexico and Latin America, where a “machismo” culture often oppresses women.

“The central idea of Ephesians is power,” Avila said. “Ephesians helps organize new ways of family life.”

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

Women in Japan Are Causing Ripples in Christian Leadership Training

LESS THAN 2% OF JAPAN'S population openly follow Christ, and there's a need for strong Christian leaders. That's why a dedicated group of women at Naka Church are working with Resonate Global Mission missionaries Jeong and MiSook Gho.

The Living Water Group is a small group of women at Naka Church who began meeting nearly 20 years ago. "Newly married or raising small children at the time, it was difficult for us to have a quiet fellowship with small children, but because of the common situation for all participants, the group became very active," said Shoko Kurita, a member of the group.

Young children in tow, the group met every week to sing, read the Bible, and discuss Scripture-based parenting books together while their children played. But as the women grew older, so did their children, and soon the meetings were quieter—maybe too quiet. Shoko said the women felt a need for something more.

That's where Resonate missionaries and leadership trainers Jeong and MiSook Gho stepped in. After attending a vision trip with the missionary couple, leaders of Naka Church caught onto Resonate's vision to equip leaders within churches—leaders who could then disciple and train other believers. Naka Church invited the Ghos to train people at their church, including the women of the Living Water Group.

The Living Water Group has participated in leadership training with the Ghos for more than a decade. They describe Jeong and MiSook as being supportive and encouraging, and said God has used the training to bring group members into deeper relationships with God.



The Living Water Group is working with Resonate Global Mission missionaries Jeong and MiSook Gho to train more leaders for Japan's churches.

"I am so thankful to God for sending us Jeong and MiSook," group member Akiko said. "I was able to read the Bible in a deep and careful way."

Tomoko, another member, added: "We realized that these ancient (Bible) stories are still alive, and (we) are still receiving messages from God through reading."

As members of the Living Water Group grew deeper in their relationships with God through the training, they wanted believers in other churches to participate in the training too.

"Gradually, they began to introduce what they learned to the churches (in their denomination) to help others to become joyful Christians and to be

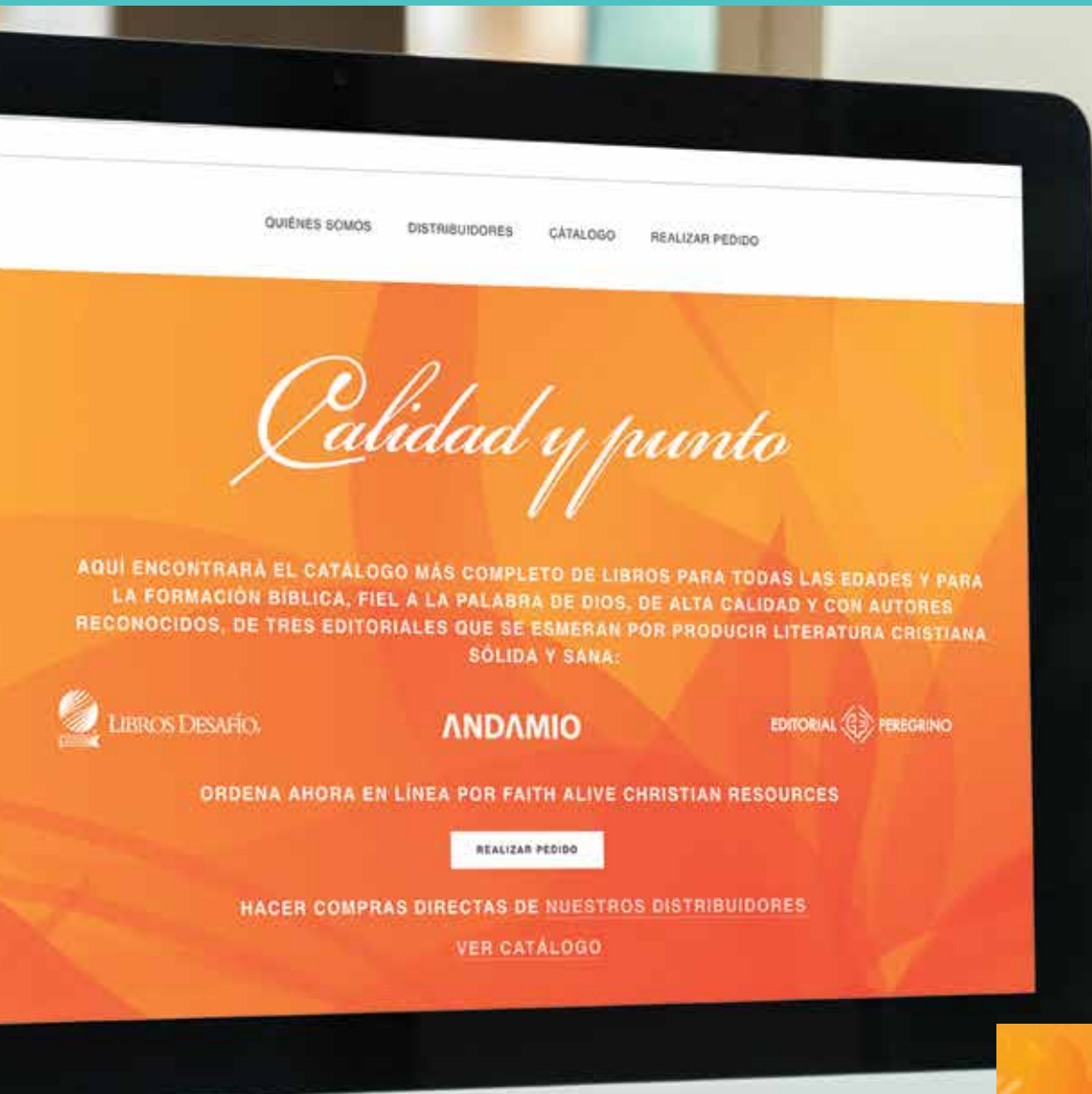
more effective witnesses of the gospel in Christ," said Jeong.

The Living Water Group challenged one church to participate in leadership training, and church leaders told the Ghos that they're discussing how they can continue equipping leaders in their congregation.

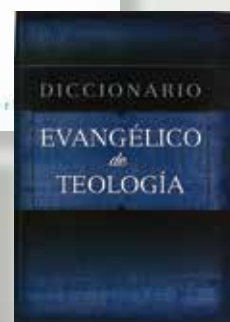
"We are now beginning to see the ripple effect started by the Living Water Group," said Jeong. "The ripples are reaching neighboring churches. ... We are so happy to be a part of this great journey with them. May God use these ladies and churches for his glory greatly!"

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

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Super Deer? Super You!

WE ARE ALL MADE for a purpose. God designed every creature and every person with a specific purpose in mind. Take the addax, for example. Mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:5 (NLT), the addax is a deer designed for life in the desert. It has light-colored fur to reflect sunlight and wide hooves for walking on sand. Because it digests food very slowly, the addax doesn't need much to drink; it gets enough water from the plants it manages to find. Scientists think the addax has special pouches in its stomach that hold and store water for when it is needed. If the addax was a superhero it would be Desert Deer, surviving where no deer should be able to!

Just as the addax was designed with special features for life in the harsh desert, we as God's children are designed with a purpose in mind. In Jeremiah 1:5, God says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." Each of us is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) with special gifts and talents that make us unique. Being unique means you are one of a kind, with specific things that make you *you*. God calls us to use these talents to serve: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others ... so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 4:10-11). You might be really good at writing stories, at taking care of people, at making people smile, or any number of other things. You can think of these gifts and talents as your individual superpowers.



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

Be a Hero: Try This!


Make a list of all the things you're good at. These are your superpowers!

Now think about how you could use these gifts to serve others in your community.

Then think of your very own super-name and design a super symbol to represent you!

Action Hero

Superpowers are only good if you use them well. Superheroes are heroes because of their actions. It's hard to be a hero just sitting on the couch. Can you imagine if all the comic book heroes just stayed home? Boring!

How has God designed you to serve in your community? How can you be the best Super You? 



Why Christians Should Observe Black History Month

Black History Month is a time when people across the U.S. and Canada reflect on all the ways in which people of African descent have affected our culture and our world in big and small ways. We at The Banner wanted to explore the value of this month for Christians with different backgrounds by asking three questions of Michelle Loyd-Paige, an African-American woman who lives in Michigan; Kim Radersma, a white woman who lives in Ontario; and James Lee, a Korean-American man who lives in New York.

Why is Black History Month important to you?

Loyd-Paige: Black History Month is important to me for several reasons.

First, Black History Month began as an effort to recognize the many contributions of Africans and black Americans to the economic and social development of the U.S.A.—a place where many Africans were brought as slaves, kept in bondage, and denied basic civil rights. It's a place where, still today, experiences of racism are pervasive. Nevertheless, the contributions of Africans/black Americans to this country have been numerous.

These accomplishments should be celebrated and given proper credit—as should be the case for all people groups who have contributed to the building of this nation.

Second, it is a matter of truth-telling. The U.S. history that is often taught in our schools is very white. The history of black people in America rarely goes beyond slavery, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks. Black History Month is an invitation and an opportunity to dig deeper into U.S. history and the accomplishments of African Americans.

Third, it is about representation. Almost 13% of the U.S. population

is African American, and 70 metropolitan areas have black populations over 30%.

Fourth, I identify as a black woman. Black history is my history.

Radersma: Black History Month offers me, a teacher, an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the amazing achievements and unfathomable resilience of past and present members of the black community. So many writers, business leaders, filmmakers, politicians, athletes, scholars, doctors, and more have contributed crucial meaning and depth to the fabric of our lives in North America.

However, this month also prompts me to acknowledge a past that has yet to be reconciled. Recently, a black male student said, “If you’re not addressing the racism I’m experiencing here, then celebrating diversity is for white people.” I keep this statement printed above my desk. It provokes me daily to grapple with the uncomfortable truth that celebrating diversity while ignoring ongoing racism in the U.S. and Canada is a sham. Mere celebrations are not solving deep, ongoing, systemic problems.

This young black man, my students, and my children are watching me. They are wondering if I will confront the truth of the terror of the past and if I will honestly examine the ways the devastation of white supremacy continues to reverberate in our current realities.

Lee: I believe Black History Month is a crucial part of the fabric of American history. Although some may consider this “another person’s story,” I consider it “our story.” Our country was founded by diverse people from various backgrounds. Some might argue about the validity of how our nation was founded, but we cannot argue about the Italian and Chinese laborers who built the railroads that connected the East to the West. From the cornfields of Iowa to the streets of New York City, every individual had an impact on the nation we live in today. Therefore,

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the African-American story is also my story. America is my country. America is their country. America is our country.

How does your Christian faith connect with Black History Month?

Loyd-Paige: The telling of black history is a narrative involving white Christians as oppressors. As a black American, I think my Christian faith is a testament to the power of the gospel. It is not intuitive that I would be a Christian or, more specifically, Christian Reformed. Christians, some who were Reformed, have been complicit in slavery, Jim Crow, and school segregation, and they were slow to integrate their churches. Some white Christians during the time of slavery argued against baptizing African slaves because that would complicate keeping Africans enslaved. Africans were viewed as property, not imagebearers of God. I am a Christian despite what white Christians did to my ancestors. I am from a people who were told we could not, we should not, and we dare not, but with the help

of the Lord, we survived and thrived. With faith in a God that is bigger than oppressive systems and racist Christians, I found hope in the Word of God—not from what was preached by those who could not see me as a sister in Christ nor an imagebearer of God. As the hymn goes, other African Americans and I have “come this far by faith.”

Radersma: In a 2017 post on the On Being blog, black scholar and activist Christena Cleveland said, “Turning our attention toward systemic pain is not something we typically associate with spiritual nourishment and liberation, but what if it is? What if we can’t truly experience the hope of the Divine until we are able to experience the Divine in the most hopeless situations?”

I believe doing the difficult work of turning our attention toward systemic pain, particularly systemic racism, can be transformative. For white people, doing this work ourselves is a way to explore how being white has shaped us without burdening people of color with our ignorance. This is why I’ve been a part of Kenosis Learning Communities in southern Ontario, created by the Office of Race Relations of the Christian Reformed Church. Based on Jesus’ own self-emptying (as described in Phil. 2:7), communities of white Christians seek to hold each other accountable for the ways white supremacy has harmed people. In community, we ask difficult questions and help each other notice and take responsibility for the persistent, invisible privileges of which we are so often unaware, so that we may embody more of what it means to imitate Christ.

This isn’t easy work. But I feel convicted that God invites me to it and to participation in his work of redemption.

Lee: When I think about the history of the black church, I think about oppression. Throughout history, the black church has been oppressed in so many different ways. But through

Going Deeper

Here are a few book suggestions from Kim Radersma for further reading:

- » *So You Want to Talk About Race*, by Ijeoma Oluo
- » *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*, by Austin Channing Brown
- » *How To Be an Antiracist*, by Ibram X. Kendi
- » *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right*, by Lisa Sharon Harper

that oppression, members of the black church have learned to cry out to the Lord. They have learned to testify to the Lord's faithfulness in the dark valleys of the shadow of death. The joy that comes from sorrow is incredibly powerful. It's something that is biblical, but something that also is relevant to my heritage.

I am a Korean American. For many years, the Korean people were brutalized by the Japanese. The Japanese colonization that occurred on the Korean peninsula between 1910 and 1945 affected my grandparents' generation. Through the oppression, the Korean church was greatly impacted: the people learned to cry out to the Lord like the black church. The Korean church has learned to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, through the Holy Spirit, those in the Korean church have learned to lean on each other and ultimately learned to persevere.

Today the Korean peninsula is home to the largest Protestant church in the world. I am where I am today because of that heritage. Therefore, my Christian faith connects with the history of the black church.

How do you respond to people who don't think there should be a Black History Month?

Loyd-Paige: I rarely run into people who don't think there should be a

Black History Month, but I am sure they exist. If I did meet someone who did not think there should be a Black History Month and was trying to convince me of such, I would first want to discern if the person wanted to have a conversation or just wanted to make their views known. If they just want to make their views known, I'd "shake the sand from my sandals" and keep walking. People are entitled to their own opinions. But if someone wants to have a conversation, I would welcome the opportunity to share why black history is worth celebrating. Committed to having a conversation, I'd want to establish that the conversation was a dialogue and not a debate. I'd want to know if the person thought there should not be months designated for the celebration of any ethnic/racial groups or just African Americans. Their answer would dictate the next step in the conversation. Ultimately, I would share much of what was in my answer to the first question and point out that almost every racial group in the U.S. has a month.

Radersma: This depends entirely on who's asking the question and what kind of relationship I have with them. If they're white, I might ask questions to spark curiosity, such as:

Why do you think there shouldn't be? What would it mean if there weren't?

Are you aware of statistics that reveal vast disparities between black and white people in wealth, education, incarceration, access to health care, and many more areas?

Are you familiar with the history of policies and legislation that created and maintain these gaps?

Do you have personal relationships with many black people? Black mentors? Black leaders?


Do you read or listen to black voices regularly?

Do you listen carefully to the voices of those most impacted by systemic racism in our countries (not offering

help or trying to save, but listening and learning)?

Are you learning about how your white skin positions you in this world? Are you seeking to unpack the privilege and power this allows you?

This February, as we celebrate the amazing accomplishments of black people, white Christians also have an opportunity to grapple with the ways we are complicit in a system that privileges us, and in the process, to build a new kind of community.

Lee: Everyone has a unique story. Our nation has a unique story. If we don't take the opportunity to listen to that story, we're going to miss out on the full picture of who we are today. That story isn't necessarily just filled with good. It's also filled with the bad and ugly. Our nation was built on each person's story to build a bigger picture, and that picture is not finished yet. 



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



Kim Radersma is an educator committed to anti-racism and equity. She lives in southern Ontario with her partner, her two children, and her dog.



James Lee is pastor of Christ Community Church in East Islip, N.Y.

1. What does Black History Month mean to you? . . .

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

Lopsided Prophets, Priests, and Kings

Instead of viewing one another as liberals, moderates, or conservatives, let's think of ourselves as prophets, priests, and kings. Face it—we are all lopsided. We need each other to balance out.



Doug Aldrink is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.

She is a loony liberal! He is a closed-minded conservative! Such labeling of fellow Christians creates division in the church.

Far better would be evaluations like these: *He loves to share the gospel and centers his life on a personal walk with the Lord. She stresses doctrine and the importance of knowing what you believe and why you believe it. They work on social justice issues and how best to advance God's kingdom.*

These labels draw Christians together rather than driving them apart. After all, we share a precious name: Christian. Christ means "Anointed One." He is our anointed chief prophet, high priest, and eternal king. We believers, according to 1 Peter 4:16, are to praise God that we bear Christ's name. Christians share in Christ's anointing. We, too, are prophets, priests, and kings.

As prophets we cherish God's Word. We meditate on it and lovingly proclaim its truths to others. As priests we receive by faith Christ's sacrifice for our sins; out of gratitude, we give of ourselves to others, including the teaching of doctrine. As kings we receive from our eternal king spiritual gifts, exercising leadership with those gifts in the various arenas of his vast kingdom.

The trouble is, not a single one of us perfectly carries out the roles of prophet, priest, and king. Jesus held his threefold office in perfect balance. We do not. In fact, we are prone to emphasize one of the offices at the expense of the other two. Each of us is lopsided. What's worse, our lopsidedness does more than hinder our personal growth. It also causes us to discount other believers who do not

share the same lopsidedness. We tend to view ourselves as having the whole truth, and we suspect those who do not see things from our emphasis.

As these differences get played out over time, things go from bad to worse. Before you know it, people are leaving the church in the hope of finding the "true church." In this "true church," of course, most share the same lopsidedness. The cycle repeats itself when the majority dies out or loses control.

Becoming more Christlike means growing in all three roles we are anointed to. Given that our denomination is not gaining many new members through evangelism, maybe we should listen to and learn from brothers and sisters who eagerly share the gospel and excel in the spiritual disciplines. Given that chaplains report that many of our college students have mixed-up ideas about who God is and the way of salvation, maybe we should listen to and learn from brothers and sisters who stress doctrine. Given that enrollment is down at many of our Christian schools and that our society is torn in so many ways, maybe we should listen to and learn from brothers and sisters who strive to promote a Christian perspective in all areas of life.

Instead of viewing one another as liberals, moderates, or conservatives, let's think of ourselves as prophets, priests, and kings. Face it—we are all lopsided. We need each other to balance out. **B**

1. As you read the article, which of the three roles (prophet, priest, or king) do you feel you currently lean into most? . . .

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

'I'm Still Here'

Through all the tragedy, she would remember her father, an itinerant evangelist, counseling, "If you don't know how to pray, you just need to know one word: 'Help!' Pray 'Lord, help me.'"



Lorilee Craker lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. The author of 15 books, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her at lorileecraker.com or on Instagram (@thebooksellersdaughter).

AFTER ALMOST A CENTURY of survival, "I'm still here," Theodora Kleisma often tells people. And no one is more surprised than she is.

Her story dates back more than 350 years to the Spice Islands of the Indonesian archipelago and the wars that erupted over their control. In 1602, the Dutch established the Dutch East India Company, which led to the government of the Netherlands establishing the Dutch East Indies—present day Indonesia—as a nationalized colony.

Kleisma is descended from Indos, a mixture of native Indonesians and Dutch colonist settlers. Her life has had "plenty of spice and too much war."

Theodora Franscisca Johanzoon was born March 27, 1926, on the island of Sumatra, famous for its coffee and tigers. Known in ancient times as the "Island of Gold" for its gold deposits, her homeland has always been an exotic place of adventure and wildness.

Four years before her birth, Theodora's older brother, Gustaaf, died of pneumonia at 10 months old. Her father, Emile, always believed in the power of prayer and prayed fervently for another child, because it seemed as if her mother could not get pregnant again after Gustaaf died.

"If you answer my prayer and give us a child, I will honor you in his or her name," her father prayed. He had already chosen names: Theodore for a boy and Theodora for a girl, because both names mean "gift of God."

During World War II, Theodora's clashing bloodlines meant the teenager would see far more tragedy, violence, and injustice than anyone should

ever see. She would lose her father, who meant everything to her. This loss would stay with her for the rest of her life.

"But God was working," she says in her memoir, *Theodora: How I Survived a WW2 Japanese Prison Camp, Fled Indonesian Extremists, and Escaped the Great Dutch Flood*. "He was bringing good out of bad and planting seeds of hope in my darkest hours."

Through all the tragedy, she would remember her father, an itinerant evangelist, counseling, "If you don't know how to pray, you just need to know one word: 'Help!' Pray 'Lord, help me.'" Theodora would need tremendous help in the next phase of her life.

World War II

On March 9, 1942, Japanese forces took control of Indonesia. Indo-Europeans with more than 50% Dutch blood would be sent to concentration camps, including 16-year-old Theodora and her family. Her beloved dad was one of the first to be taken to a prison labor camp.

The just-captured prisoners of war were marched out in front of Theodora and her mother.

"Pappi, Pappi!" she cried out. A Japanese soldier took pity and allowed her father to break from the troops to say goodbye. Emile kissed her mother and told her, "Take good care of my two diamonds," meaning Theodora and her sister, Toot. "Did he know then he would never see us again?" Theodora wondered. He was about to suffer terrible cruelty and deprivations, and he died soon after his capture.

Theodora, her mother, her sister, and her 10-year-old brother, Ed, were sent to Halmaheira, a detention camp



God planted “seeds of hope” in Theodora Kleisma’s darkest hours.

that housed almost 4,000 women and young boys. Here they battled disease, infestations, and near-starvation. They subsisted on rice, mush, bats, slugs, and laundry starch. The inmates were always on the lookout for animals to kill and eat. At one point, Theodora spotted an older woman, a server at the camp, crying.

“Why are you crying?” someone asked.

“I have to kill my dog,” the woman replied, weeping.

The Japanese soldiers told her she had to kill her pet and then serve it to the others to eat. “It was one of the worst things I have ever seen,” Theodora said. “I’ll never forget when this devastated old lady scooped up a bit of ragout, made from her dog, and slopped it on my plate.”

After Japan surrendered more than three years later, in August of 1945, Theodora and her family were released. But as Indos, she

remembered, “our celebration was short lived.” Her people group suffered racism and violence from Indonesian extremists.

It was also difficult to move on without Emile. The Allies were working hard to reunite prisoners from men’s camps with those from the women’s camps. One of the hardest things for Theodora was witnessing the joyous and tender reunions of other girls and their fathers. “My heart was broken to know I would never see my father again on this earth,” she said.

After the War

Theodora traveled to Thailand, where she met her first husband, a fellow Indo, and started a family with him back in their volatile homeland. The Indonesian struggle for independence would go on for four years, with untold lives lost on both sides. At age 24, by then a mother of three young children, Theodora received death threats. “Get out now, or else,” the letters said. “We have a tree picked out to hang all of you on it.”

Fleeing her home in a military convoy traveling through the jungle, Theodora and her family were shot at by extremists but eventually reached safety. They boarded a ship bound for the Netherlands, filled with relief but also some anxiety about the unknown.

Having repatriated to the Netherlands, Theodora’s life would be plunged into grave danger again on the morning of Feb. 1, 1953. During the Great Dutch Flood, the family’s first-floor windows in Kruiningen, Zeeland, shattered, and water poured inside. Scurrying to the attic with her four children, Theodora dropped each of them out the window into the arms of rescuers in boats. A

third time Theodora survived, but her life would hold still more hardship.

When she was in her early 30s, as a new immigrant in Grand Rapids, Mich., Theodora’s first husband would betray her and, along with his new wife, swindle her for custody of their seven children. Broken and vulnerable, a stranger in a new land, Theodora leaned on supportive friends who would teach her the beauty business in which she would thrive. She remarried and moved to California, where she worked as a beautician and massage therapist. But a mother never forgets her children. Though she was not allowed to contact them, Theodora waited, wept in secret, and prayed. It would be decades before she was able to reestablish contact with her children and grandchildren, something that still haunts them all.

Today she is reconciled with her family and attends Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids with two of her daughters.

The prayer her father taught her has stood her in good stead. “I remember how it feels to lose everything,” she said. “Always pray, even if all you can say is ‘God help me!’ He always will.”

At age 93, Theodora keeps a framed photo of handsome Emile, a twin to her grandson Theodore, on her bedside table. “It’s been 74 years since my father hugged me goodbye,” she said. “I feel close to him and know that I will join him and my mother sooner rather than later in heaven. What a joyful reunion we will experience!” B

Theodora’s memoir is available at Schuler Books in Grand Rapids, Mich., and on Amazon.com.

5 Movies to Watch for Black History Month

I'M LEMARR, and I am a movie nerd. This February, as one way to mark Black History Month, I would like to offer five underrated or lesser-known movies that can be great conversation starters about race—or just good entertainment:

Glory Road (PG-13, 2006)

The best sports movie with racial themes is, no doubt, *Remember the Titans*, but you've seen it already. *Glory Road* depicts the story of a small-college basketball team's quest to win a championship in the face of racial adversity. This movie is fun, at times raw, but still a meaningful watch.

Beasts of the Southern Wild (PG-13, 2012)

This movie is not simply about race but about “the culture.” Quvenzhané Wallis (Hushpuppy) gives an Oscar-worthy performance at the age of 6. This film observes the cycle of poverty, where the system fails its people again and again across generations. Growing up in poverty can affect how parents raise their children, and this movie provides important insight into that cycle. *Beasts of the Southern Wild* is a deeply emotional and artistic movie that challenges us to think about the circumstances that created Hushpuppy and her family's situation and our role in the solution.

Blindspotting (R, 2018)


Blindspotting dissects what it means to actually be a part of black culture in America. Are you considered a part of black culture if you are born in the ghetto or act a certain way? *Blindspotting* takes you on a journey to discover what that means by following two men (one black, one white) who grew up in Oakland together but act in different ways. Characters in this

film use explicit language, helping the viewer understand how it feels to live in their environment.

Home (PG, 2015)

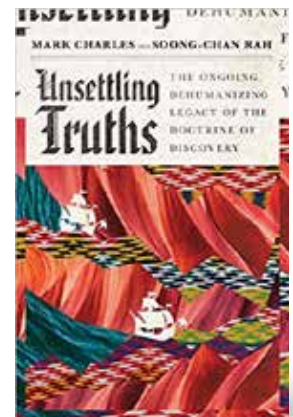
Home might not be the first movie that comes to mind when you think of black empowerment, but this is an underrated movie that deals with xenophobia. Yes, it's a children's movie about xenophobia. *Home* is a family-friendly movie that allows us to break down the concept of “the other” and makes us consider how we should treat those who are different from us.

Us (R, 2019)

Us explores fascinating, deep themes that beg to be broken down and discussed in groups. On the surface, *Us* might seem like a horror movie we need to run away from, but I believe it's a social commentary deserving of exploration and study. It deals with race, class, and privilege, reflecting both modern themes and themes as old as time. Though this movie contains violence and gore, it's meant to highlight the intensity and significance of the film's lessons. 



LeMarr Seandre Jackson's mission is to raise the bar for student and Christian leadership. He is the director of youth ministry at Madison Square Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

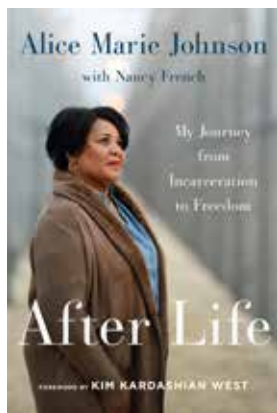


Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery

By Mark Charles and Soong-Chan-Rah

Reviewed by Andrew Zwart

As this truly unsettling book explains the Doctrine of Discovery, we feel safely distanced from the events of 1483. But readers will begin to find themselves disquieted when icons such as the Constitution, Abraham Lincoln, and current idols—whether Donald Trump or Barack Obama—are critiqued. *Unsettling Truths* hits even harder when it discusses the church's complicity in supporting or enacting certain policies. What makes this book so valuable, though, is that its critique of government and church is firmly rooted in Scripture. Those willing to run the risk of becoming “unsettled” will find in these pages a compelling argument that we have too often chosen a sense of exceptionalism over Christ's call to sacrifice. (IVP)



After Life: My Journey from Incarceration to Freedom

By Alice Marie Johnson

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Forced to marry in her teens and living in poverty as a mother of five, Johnson became a telephone mule for a cocaine trafficking organization and received a life sentence for her first-time, nonviolent offense.

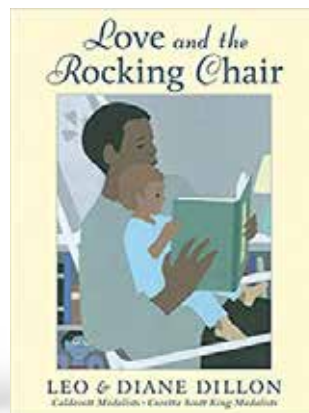
As Johnson advocated for criminal justice reform, a video with her testimony went viral, catching the attention of reality-TV star Kim Kardashian West. In 2018, Johnson's sentence was commuted by President Donald Trump. *After Life* is a deeply moving portrait of a woman who came to understand that "God has not allowed anything that I have gone through to be wasted." It is also a powerful testimony of the way God is at work in prisons, reaching people who feel broken, lost, and alone. (HarperCollins)



Harriet

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

In this stirring (if safe) biopic about the heroic slave-turned-abolitionist Harriet Tubman (Cynthia Erivo), we have the first of what I hope will be many cinematic treatments of this brave and spiritual woman's life. "Harriet" begins in 1849, when Tubman, long promised freedom by her surly owners, realizes she will never be free and escapes to the North and Canada. She eventually backtracks and rescues family members and 70-plus slaves, becoming a conductor in the Underground Railroad. The central role is perfectly cast; Erivo plays the small and fiery Tubman with blazing focus, athleticism, and complexity. Through Tony Award winner Erivo, Harriet's staunch faith shines through. Rated PG-13 for mature thematic elements throughout, violence, and coarse language, including racial epithets. (Focus Features)



Love and the Rocking Chair

By Diane Dillon and Leo Dillon

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Authors and illustrators Diane Dillon and Leo Dillon celebrate love in a picture book based on their own marriage and parenting experience. In 1965, when the interracial couple was expecting their first child, they bought the rocking chair featured in this book. When the boy grows up, the chair is relegated to the attic, where it collects dust and is forgotten until the now young man mourns his father and finds love of his own. Finally the chair is remembered and restored to the nursery in anticipation of the family's next generation. Poignant and sensitive to children living in a multicultural world, *Love and the Rocking Chair* shares the message that the love of family "would always be there." (The Blue Sky Press)

The Lowdown

Always Someone Else's Kid—Until It Isn't: In *A Prayer for Orion*, Katherine James turns her lush prose to a new purpose: to tell her family's story through the twists and turns of her son's addiction, overdose, and slow recovery. (InterVarsity)

Buck Rides Again: Harrison Ford stars in a new movie treatment of the Jack London classic *The Call of the Wild*, the story of a sled dog struggling for survival in the Alaskan wilderness. (Feb. 21, 20th Century Fox)

Come for Star Wars, Stay for Baby Yoda: *The Mandalorian*, the first live-action Star Wars television series, stars Pedro Pascal as a lone gunfighter in the outer reaches of the galaxy. (Disney Plus)

A Complicated Day in the Neighborhood: In *A Good Neighborhood*, Therese Anne Fowler delves into modern racial tensions in this story of a black mother, her biracial son, and their white neighborhood. (St. Martin's Press)

Is Peace on Earth Possible?

As the Christmas season fades away, I find myself wondering: What do we do with all the promises for peace on Earth that got stirred up during the Advent and Christmas seasons?



Chris Schoon serves as the director of Faith Formation Ministries for the Christian Reformed Church.

CHRISTMAS IS WRAPPED UP. The holiday decorations are back in their storage bins, safely tucked away in attics, basements, and closets. And we've returned to our normal worship patterns, too.

But as the Christmas season fades away, I find myself wondering: What do we do with all the promises for peace on Earth that got stirred up during the Advent and Christmas seasons? Is the peace we sang about just another fancy ornament we use to dress up our mantels, churches, and prayers for a few weeks each December? Or is peace on Earth a real possibility?

Whether through our daily consumption of global news or experiences that are much more personal, we are painfully aware of the absence of peace in our world. As Article 16 of *Our World Belongs to God* reminds us, "All spheres of life ... bear the wounds of our rebellion." Our rebellion against God has done violence to our relationships with God, our neighbors, and the rest of creation.

These violent disruptions in our relationships are toxic to any of our efforts at establishing peace on Earth. At best, we can offer a sampling of peace defined only by the absence of any visible conflict in the present moment among our circle of friends or family. But global peace? Peace with God? Peace throughout creation? That remains beyond us.

Yet the biblical narrative testifies that peace on Earth will come. From Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah will be the Prince of Peace to the opening of Colossians that teaches us how God is at work reconciling all things, including powers and principalities, through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, Scripture consistently points

toward a coming peace. In describing the arrival of God's peaceable kingdom, Revelation declares that God will remove all the consequences of violence and destruction: "[God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:4-5). A few verses later, the text extends this peace into an abundant flourishing in describing how the kings of the earth will bring their treasures into God's new kingdom and how the nations will be healed. Peace on earth is not merely possible, but assured.

The question then becomes: How do we live now in anticipation of this coming peace? The sixth article of *Our World Belongs to God* teaches that we are to wait expectantly for God to bring that day about "with tempered impatience, eager to see injustice ended." This contemporary testimony later calls us into action: "Followers of the Prince of Peace are called to be peacemakers, promoting harmony and order and restoring what is broken" (54). Such a posture reflects the Bible's prophetic voices that call us to work toward the peace of all, especially those who have been marginalized and oppressed, as well as the more personal admonition in Romans 12:18 that encourages us to "live at peace with everyone."

It is not that our efforts will establish a global peace. Rather, our peaceful posture and our daily work for the peace of others serve as witnesses, testifying that God is making all things new. One day soon, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, will usher in a kingdom of peace throughout heaven and earth in which all people and all of creation will flourish together in righteousness, justice, and peace. **B**

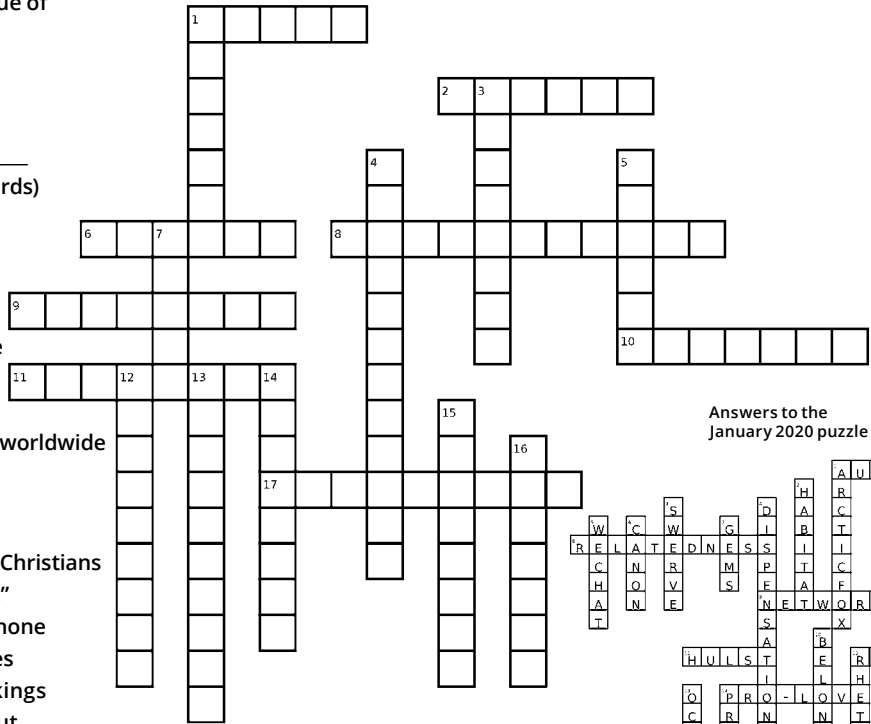
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

Down:

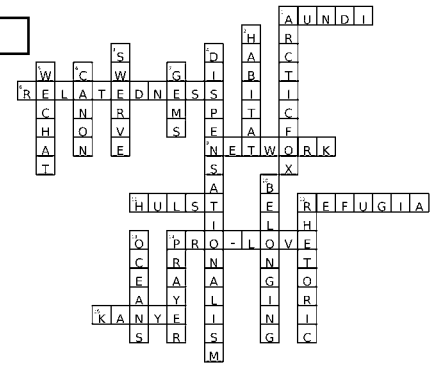
1. An old Christian tradition about war
3. New Mexico students shared art in an _____
4. Celebrated in the month of February (two words)
5. _____ of Valor
7. Last name of the Tony-winning actress who portrays Harriet Tubman
12. A 12th-century Benedictine nun
13. A teaching relationship that exists in real life
14. Author who spoke at B.C. Safe Spaces conference
15. Niagara _____ recover produce to share worldwide
16. One of the coldest places on earth

Across:

1. Less than 2% of this country's population are Christians
2. First name of the self-described "movie nerd."
6. These are nothing but distractions on your phone
8. The first live-action Star Wars television series
9. We are this type of prophets, priests, and kings
10. What the fourth commandment is all about
11. City where Don Shaw connects seniors and "helpers"
17. Where Theodora was born



Answers to the January 2020 puzzle



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Congregational Announcements

AVAILABLE FOR CALL

THE COUNCIL OF COMSTOCK CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH declares that Rev. Joshua Amaezechi is available for call. We heartily recommend him to the churches.

WORSHIP IN CENTRAL FLORIDA You are invited to worship with us at Lake Alfred Ministry, a church of Reformed persuasion in Central Florida, meeting from Nov. 17-April 12. Services: 10AM - 5:50 PM. Pastors: Rev. Ed Tamminga Feb.2-23, Rev. Ron Noorman March1-April12. Address:140 Mallard, Lake Alfred, FL. Directions: lakealfredministry.org or call 269-720-6413.

Denominational Announcements

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2020 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda:

a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15 (or Monday, March 16, 2020) and must first be processed through the local council and the classis.

b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15 (or Monday, March 16, 2020).

Materials will be included in the printed Agenda if received before the synodically established deadlines. Steven R. Timmermans, Executive Director.

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 11, 2020) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to assemble to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. Councils are reminded that if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U.S.), they have the right to change the date of service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U.S.) is Thursday, May 7, 2020. Steven R. Timmermans, Executive Director.

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS

HERITAGE CRC of Byron Center, Michigan is celebrating 50 years of God's faithfulness. Former members and friends are invited to

come worship with us. All former Lead Pastors will be preaching during the first 5 months of 2020. To learn more contact the church office via email at heritagecrc@sbcglobal.net.

MEETINGS OF CLASSIS

CLASSIS HEARTLAND will convene its next regular session March 7, 2020, 8:00 AM at Living Water Community CRC in Sheldon, IA. Agenda materials are due by January 18, 2020, to the stated clerk, Rev. Bob Drenten, 1405 Albany Ave NE, Orange City, IA 51041 classisheartlandstatedclerk@gmail.com

Church Positions Available

ASSOCIATE PASTOR First Christian Reformed Church in Lynden, WA seeks an ordained shepherd to provide general pastoral ministry to our flock, especially to youth, young adults and families. Email Brian at brian-vanderwoude@gmail.com

FULL-TIME LEAD PASTOR POSITION Grace Reformed & Corsica Christian Reformed Church, Corsica, SD. We are seeking our next Pastor to lead us into a new chapter of ministry. We are one worshipping body of believers, representing the CRC & RCA churches of Corsica. We're asking God to send us a person passionate about preaching the Bible, calling on God's people, and providing spiritual leadership to our intergenerational family and greater community. If God is prompting you to investigate this unique opportunity, please email your resume to scott.muckey@k12.sd.us

LEAD PASTOR Bellevue CRC is looking for a full-time Lead Pastor to passionately guide our church body as we seek to be the heart and hands of Jesus in the beautiful Pacific Northwest. To find out more about this unique opportunity, email pastorsearch@bellevuecrc.org

PASTOR Wolf Creek Community Church is located in beautiful Lacombe, Alberta. We are seeking a pastor who will join us in our mission to reach out and enfold people for Jesus. Visit wolfcreekchurch.ca or Email searchteamwccc@gmail.com

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

HILDA MANTING (VAN MEETEREN) of Holland, MI celebrates her 100th birthday on February 4, 2020. Her children, David and Kathy Manting and Joan and Wes Knapp, attribute her longevity to her faith, her active and independent lifestyle, and her enjoyment of family and friends. She is 100 years loved, and

a blessing to her children, five grandchildren and nine great-grandsons.

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

ADELINE LEO (CLOUSING) of 311 Sicomac Ave, Room 114, Wyckoff, NJ 07481 will celebrate her 90th birthday on February 13. She was married to Robert Leo for 44 years. Her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and a great great grandchild celebrate God's grace and faithfulness in her life.

ELEANOR (STOB) JONGSMA of Wheaton, IL celebrated her 90th birthday on December 20, 2019. Wife of the late Edward Jongsma & mother of her late son Robert Jongsma. Children: Edward Jr & Ellen, Sandy and Bruce VanDommelen, David, Beth, daughter in law Kim, Kimberly, Karen & Rod Tos, Anne & Matt VanderKooi. 22 grandchildren & 14 great grandchildren. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

BOLT, Jack and Jean celebrate 70 years of marriage on February 1. Their children, grandchildren & great-grandchildren join them in thanking God for many happy years together.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 65 YEARS

KAMP, Henry and Grace, February 25, 1955. We thank God for our 6 children and their spouses, our 23 grandchildren and their 14 spouses, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Employment

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Obituaries

DEKORNE, Betsy passed peacefully on November 29, 2019 in Grand Rapids, MI. She was preceded in death by her husband, Jack; her sisters and brothers Wilhemina Quackenbush, Dick VanHalsema, Gerard VanHalsema, Marian Ten Have, and Helen VandePolder; and her son-in-law Mike Ranney. She is survived by her sister Bernice VandenBerg and brother Franklin (Cathy) Van Halsema; her children Jack (Wilma) DeKorne, Dale (Jane) DeKorne, James (Greta) DeKorne, Joan Ranney, and David (Barbara) DeKorne; 12 grandchildren; and 27 adored great-grandchildren.

KEEN Nellene - nee Morren, Holland, MI; wife of the late Bernard Keen, went to be with her Lord and Savior on Nov 3, 2019. She is survived by Pat Hooey -late Ron- and Sandra; Bonnie and Larry Johnson - late Matthew, Dr. Derick and Lexi (Axel Keen, Ian Hendrick), Aaron and Jen (Silas Vale, Remi Inez); Jan Wheeler -late Darrell- and Katie.



NIEMEYER, Joan Evelyn (1937-2019) went to be with the Lord on November 26, 2019. She is survived by her husband Charles of 62 years, sons Ron (Linda) and Bob (Kristi), daughter Jodi (Mark), 8 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren. Joan will be remembered for her gentle, soft-spoken spirit and her deep love of family. She had a gift for crafting, most recently wool applique quilts. Her last large wall hanging has the quote, "We plant the seeds, but He provides the harvest". Thank you Mom for planting the seeds in us. We are comforted knowing you are in our eternal home and we will see you again.

POTT, Betty, age 81, of Parkersburg, IA died on Nov. 12, 2019. She is survived by her husband, Rev. Frank Pott and children: Mike, Cheri (Mike) Billingsley, Wendy (Owen) Camp, Jeff (Heather) Pott; 8 grandchildren and 3 great-grandchildren.

TERPSTRA, Martha Marie died on Thursday, December 19, 2019 in Grand Rapids, MI. She is survived by her husband, Jake Terpstra; her children: Mark Terpstra, Jack and Anita Terpstra, and Jeanne and Bob Katerberg; ten grandchildren; and five great grandchildren.

WISSE, Alice Suzanne, 92, of Orland Park, Illinois (born in Clifton, NJ) passed away on October 27, 2019. She was preceded in death by her daughter Karen Prins, and is survived by her daughters Marie Prins (Edward Hagedorn), Gail Prins (Robert Vogelzang), Gwen De Jong (David De Jong), and son Keith Prins (Mary Prins), and by 11 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren. Until her death, she remained very active in their lives, with her extended family and her friends, and in her church Faith CRC. She will be dearly missed by all.

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CARING FOR AGING PARENTS? Visiting Angels has been providing in-home assisted living for 15 years in West Michigan. Trish Borgdorff and her multitude of Angels offer meal prep, light housekeeping, run errands, provide transportation to appointments, and joyful companionship. Whether you need a few hours a day or up to 24-hour care for assisted independence in your home, call Visiting Angels at 616-243-7080.

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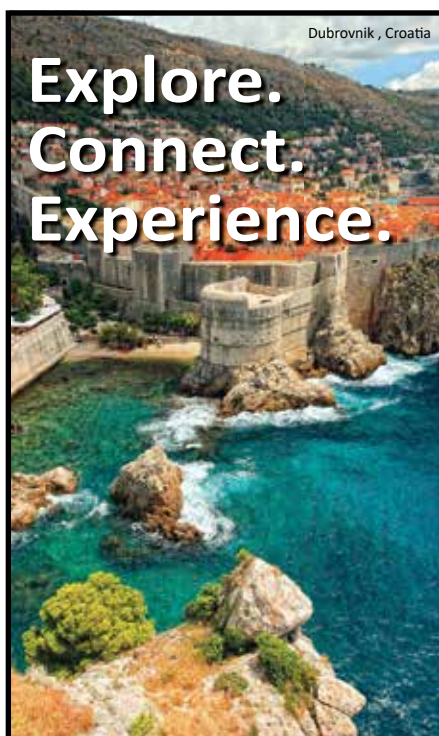
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ITALY: FLORENCE THROUGH THE EYES OF DANTE

May 15 – 28 | *Dr. Jennifer Holberg*

ALASKA & DENALI

Sep 5 – 17 | *Ken & Laurel Bratt*

COLORFUL COASTAL CROATIA: OPATIJA TO DUBROVNIK

Sep 14 – 25 | *Bruce Buursma*

2021 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

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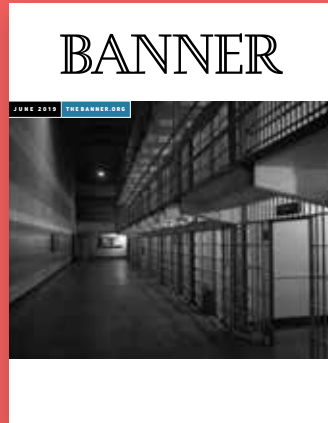
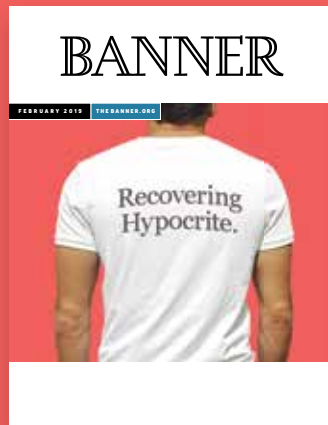
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“I’m superficial. It’s the truth. I’m so shallow. How can I change? I don’t want to be like this.”



Rod Hugen is pastor of the Village Church and leader of the Tucson Cluster, a church planting effort in Tucson, Ariz.

I INTERVIEWED A BUSINESSWOMAN for a magazine article I was supposed to write. In the course of our conversation, she told me about a mentor who had paid her way through school, and tears fell.

She apologized. “I don’t cry,” she said. “I’m normally all business. I know what I want, and I go after it. I don’t know where these tears are coming from.”

Later she talked about the recent death of her mother. She hadn’t said “I love you” to her mother when she last left the house. In the couple of hours she’d been gone, her mother had died. The woman deeply regretted not saying “I love you.” It was something they always did. But she hadn’t done it that one time. She’d been in a big hurry.

Again the tears flowed. “I’m not normally like this. I don’t cry.” She apologized, dabbing at her eyes. “I’m a businesswoman. I’m not like this.”

She talked about her goals and her hopes and her strategies to get what she wanted. She didn’t have hobbies. She didn’t know what she’d do if she wasn’t running her business. She had worked hard to get ahead, and she was proud of her accomplishments.

For some reason, near the end of the interview, I asked, “If you got everything you wanted, what would you have?”

She didn’t even pause a second: “A beach house in Hawaii. A fancy cabin in the woods. Millions in the bank.”

Suddenly, she started to cry. She sobbed for a long, long time. At last she blurted out, “That’s an awful question to ask me. Why would you ask me that?” There was fire in her eyes.

I apologized. I disciple church planters and often ask them to describe what

they would have if God gave them everything they longed for. I get a lot of interesting answers. I didn’t know why the question just came out of my mouth. But it had.

The woman was quiet for a long time. Finally she said, “God, I’m so shallow. All I want is stuff. Stuff that doesn’t matter. It’s just stuff. My life is wrapped up in stuff.” More tears flowed.

“You must think I’m awful. Please don’t put any of this in the magazine. My first thought wasn’t about my kids or my fiancé or people at all. My first thought was all about things that don’t matter. I’m superficial. It’s the truth. I’m so shallow. How can I change? I don’t want to be like this.”

Uncomfortable, I responded, “What do you think you need to do?”

She thought for a long time. Finally she said, “Maybe I need God.” More tears appeared.

A couple of phone calls interrupted us. She had to take them. She composed herself while conducting business. When she was done, we continued on a much lighter note.

The interview over, she walked me to the door. She apologized for weeping. “Ask anyone,” she said, waving her hand at a receptionist and some people standing near the front desk. “Ask them. I never cry.”

I didn’t ask. I took her word for it.

“It was good to meet you.” She shook my hand. “Thanks for writing an article about me. I’ll be thinking a long time about what I would have if I had everything I wanted. That hit me like a ton of bricks. Do you ask everyone that question?”

I don’t. But I might start. **B**



BEING CHRIST'S WITNESSES TOGETHER

Photo: Guelph Campus Ministry at the University of Guelph

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