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Political Tribalism

Are we identifying ourselves more by our politics than by our faith?



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

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

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

ARE WE IDENTIFYING OURSELVES more by our politics than by our faith?

A 2018 LifeWay Research survey showed over 57% of Protestant churchgoers under 50 prefer to attend a church where people share their political views, and 57% of evangelicals are in politically like-minded churches. Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research, concludes that, “like many places in America, churches are divided by politics.”

At the same time, according to Pew Research, while cross-religious marriages in the United States are increasing, cross-political marriages are very rare. In other words, political differences are greater relationship barriers than religious differences.

This growing polarization in the U.S. and Canada is not simply an ideological difference. Surveys show that people from different political tribes actually dislike and distrust each other.

North American Christians are in danger of political tribalism. Political tribalism is where loyalty to the political tribe is more important than loyalty to anything else. Tribalism means the tribe never concedes an inch to other tribes. It is an “us versus them” mentality, where “them” are seen as morally suspect and morally dangerous while “us” are saints.

Political tribalism is about identities and thus is rooted deeply in emotions.

As a Canadian citizen, I am not invested in any side of U.S. politics. I am not a member of any political party and have voted on a case-by-case basis.

As Christians, we must step back from political tribalism. Our identity is not rooted in our politics. It is rooted in

Christ. Our ultimate loyalty is to our Lord Jesus Christ. Our struggle is not against “flesh and blood” but against the spiritual forces of evil that cut across every human heart and every tribe (Eph. 6:12).

Tribalism is characterized by dissension and factions—part of the “acts of the flesh” the apostle Paul warns against, saying “those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19-21). Tribalism is an enemy of our faith.

Aligning the church with a political party always compromises its mission and witness. I agree with James Davison Hunter’s assessment in his book *To Change the World* that progressive and conservative American Christians have aligned themselves too closely with the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively. Both are being used by the political parties to further their own agendas.

As David Koyzis points out in his article (p. 32), every current political vision is rooted in idolatry. We cannot align our faith with any one political party even though we may lean toward certain political visions. If following Jesus never brings you into conflict with your political tribe, then you might have inadvertently made Jesus subservient to your politics.

As a first step toward detoxifying ourselves from political tribalism, can we love our political enemies and pray for them (Matt. 5:43-48)? Can we regularly, at least weekly, pray for the well-being of the other? And can we see politically different Christians not as “them” but as “us,” fellow Christ-followers and citizens of God’s kingdom? And then can we work together? **B**



REPLY ALL

Courage and Racism

John Medendorp's article "The True Courage of Johanna Veenstra" (Dec. 2019) gives our pioneer Nigerian missionary well-deserved praise. But the charge that Synod 1920 was racist in choosing China over Sudan (Nigeria) for its first international mission is overstated. Synod listed six reasons for China and six against Nigeria. Besides the cultural factors Medendorp cited are strategic, theological, and practical issues—China's rich language and literature, healthy climate, better infrastructure, and schools for children of missionaries, compared to Nigeria's poor infrastructure, unhealthy climate (think malaria), political instability, lack of schools—and Sudan United Mission (Veenstra's agency) was theologically Arminian. A follow-up motion to support Nigeria later was rejected on the same grounds. SUM was already in Nigeria. In 1939 Synod adopted the SUM work as its second foreign ministry. Meanwhile, God blessed the China ministry of Revs. John De Korne and Dr. Lee Huizenga.

» Robert P. Swierenga // Holland, Mich.

In Rev. Medendorp's article, he stated that, because of the denomination's official position that they would not initially support the missionary work of Johanna Veenstra, they "left Johanna Veenstra without support." He seems to accuse all of us of having a stain of racism and prejudice. Veenstra was a member of the Second Christian Reformed Church in Paterson, N.J., where our family were members for several generations. That church supported Veenstra financially and prayerfully with much enthusiasm. Other churches in the area did the same. In later years, the CRC opened its first church for African Americans in Harlem,

N.Y. Our church supported Rev. Eugene Callender in a very substantial way. He became a close friend of our family and had many dinners in our homes. As one can see, Rev. Medendorp's accusation does not apply to everyone in the denomination.

» John Steen // Franklin Lakes, N.J.

Shunned

Four points in response to the article "Shunned: A Call to Restorative Grace" (Dec. 2019):

The author states he was an upstanding member of his local church, and three months later he was facing prison. He may have pretended to be upstanding, but he was using, abusing, deceiving, and betraying.

The author complains that he has not received grace from his local church. Grace is a gift. Grace is not a right. It is unreasonable, wrong, and foolish to think one might be able to demand forgiveness and/or grace from those one has harmed.

In this situation, the local church community is a victim. Having entrusted their youth to the care of this admittedly guilty individual, the church community has been deceived, betrayed, and seriously injured. That community needs healing, not blame.

The author claims that the church has not offered grace, but grace has been offered. When the prison fellowship reached out, that was the church offering grace.

» Linda Lensink // St. Catharines, Ont.

I appreciated very much your editorial and your willingness to print "Shunned: A Call to Restorative Grace," the article for which you provided explanation.

We have a longtime friend whose story bears remarkable resemblance to the story of "Anonymous," the writer of the article. ... A couple of years beyond parole, our friend has come to see that, among both acquaintances and fellow Christians, the spectrum of acceptance (or not) is wide, often fixed, and sometimes moveable. "Anonymous" was right that "a church ought to respond to an offending member with the same divine grace—restorative grace—that Jesus showed us when we were in our own sin." For some, this is much more easily said than done. We need to pray for the Holy Spirit's urging for people who have a hard time with thoughts of restoration. It's especially difficult to consider in circumstances of willful crimes against another.

» Dave Learned // Ann Arbor, Mich.

I appreciate and am thankful that *Banner* editor Shiao Chong went outside of his comfort zone to publish an unsolicited article by someone convicted of a criminal sexual offense. ... (The denomination's) Safe Church Ministry has gathered resources to help churches navigate the difficult tension between being a welcoming community for those who have a past sexual offense and maintaining a safe environment for all people. This is not easy! Congregations include children and youth, those who are vulnerable for one reason or another, and those who have experienced sexual abuse who may be triggered by having someone with a criminal sexual history at church. Is it possible to create a community that feels safe for everyone? Resources and ideas are posted on *The Network* (bit.ly/2swbuDO). They include a webinar, a bulletin insert, articles, and policy examples. Please also feel free to contact your Safe Church Coordinator or the Safe Church office for consultation and/or additional information.

» Bonnie Nicholas // Director,
Safe Church Ministry

'God Does Not Make Mistakes'

We are confused at the editor's treatment of the article "Shunned: A Call to Restorative Grace." Most of the editorial and the introduction to the article read more like a secular magazine. The editor notes that he is "publishing viewpoints that may be unpopular to some." Mr. Chong also uses the phrase "morally equivalent" (a political term). These phrases and others suggest ideas to be debated. We are wondering what part of "Shunned," where a believer asks for mercy and grace, needs debating? God commands us to forgive others (even enemies)! The Lord's Prayer instructs us to forgive, as do countless other New and Old Testament verses. In addition, Mr. Chong writes, "I stand in solidarity with the survivors." Should not all believers stand in solidarity with the survivors AND the believing offender who is desperately looking for forgiveness?

» John and Heidi Slinkman // Beulah, Mich.

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- » What Am I Doing Here? Reflections of a Choir Rookie
- » The Strength of Our Vulnerability

"GOD DOESN'T MAKE MISTAKES."

That's what I told my youngest son after he sat me down and told me that he wants to become a woman. My son, who was baptized in the Christian Reformed Church, who attended Sunday school and youth groups and went on mission trips, told me that God led him to the knowledge that he is transgender.

For months I dove into the Bible looking for Scripture passages to show him that God could never approve of this. I signed up my husband and myself for therapy, hoping to find out how to talk sense into my son. I didn't want to lose him. The therapist couldn't offer any comfort in sorting out all of our questions and feelings. Instead she referred us to a support group for parents of LGBTQ children.

This group allowed us to open up and reveal the pain, confusion, and sadness we were feeling without being judged. The leaders suggested reading material, and as I began reading these books I slowly realized I had been so focused on finding the perfect Scripture passage to enlighten my son that I missed what he really needed: love, a listening ear, and acknowledgment of his struggle and pain.


I started focusing on Scripture with an eye to how Jesus would treat my son. What would Jesus say to him? Jesus was compassionate, loving, forgiving, and patient. He wouldn't be judging my son or withholding his loving touch. He might seek him out, as he did the tax collector Zacchaeus. My son needed to be embraced. But my church could not give him what he needed. Nor could I, because of my own ignorance and pride.

Jesus himself gave us the greatest commandment of all: love God and love one another. Can we do that and

I can't fix this. I can only trust God.

trust God to figure out the hard stuff? Can we see through the outward shell of a person and see the potential? Our mission is to share God's life-saving gift of grace with everyone. Only God can see into our hearts to see his Spirit working. We don't know *how* God will work through us in his kingdom, but we know God *is* working through us.

I still believe God does not make mistakes. God brought this eye-opening, heart-exploding, joyful struggle into my life to lead me to a place I have never gone before. I can't fix this. I can only trust God. I pray for my son every day to listen to the Spirit in him to guide him on this journey. I see God working in him, leading him to a church that has welcomed him with open arms.

So I pray for our churches to join me by loving people like my son just as if they were your own son or daughter. Share with them God's gift of grace by welcoming them into your community. Then stand back and watch what God can do! 



Lisa Schulz has led Coffee Break studies and Vacation Bible School and has been a GEMS counselor. She lives in Schererville, Ind.



10 Things to Give Up for Lent That Aren't Diet Coke

By Darrell Delaney

Historically, Lent is a wonderful season before Easter where we try our best to identify with the sufferings of Christ in a variety of ways. I remember asking my college friends what they would “give up” for Lent, understanding in our simplistic way that depriving ourselves of things was the pious way to go. In all sincerity, we were doing our best. But I noticed a trend then that continues in many places now: Many have lost sight of the importance of this season and have reduced it to giving up external

things like Diet Coke. They believe that by doing so they somehow fulfill their spiritual penance, and that the temporary denial of their favorite soft drink gives them a taste (no pun intended) of the sufferings of our Lord. But the Lenten season isn't about giving up external things unless they are a vice, which we shouldn't be dabbling in in the first place.

Instead, I believe God is interested more in what comes out of a person and less about what goes in (Mark 7:14-23). God has always been interested in getting to the heart of the matter (pun

intended), so why don't we move away from the externals as well?

Here, in no particular order, is my top-10 list of things we should consider giving up. (A caveat: some of these we should not be doing anyway, but they must be mentioned because of the habitual patterns of our nation, our culture, and our religious circles.)

10 GIVE UP COMPLAINING. Not to be confused with venting frustrations and lamentations, complaining happens out of a spirit of not trusting God. Some believe this is their only recourse in difficult situations

even though the Bible is clear that we should not do it (Phil. 2:14). You would be surprised how innate complaining is in our culture. Think it's easy to stop? Try it.

9 GIVE UP COMPARISONS. Why are we not content until we look at another person's life? The "grass is greener" mentality lives until you realize you still have to maintain the other lawn! When we compare our salary, body type, possessions, or families to others', we deplete our own "contentment tank" and have a hard time thanking God for what he has done for us. We must learn the secret of being "content whatever the circumstances" like the apostle Paul (Phil. 4:11-13). In my opinion, it comes from eliminating comparisons from one's life.

8 GIVE UP STRIVING AMBITION. Striving ambition is that thing inside that makes you think that if you aren't continually gaining, you're losing ground in failure. In the song "In Christ Alone," one line says, "What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease." What if we didn't push, pull, or spend our lives climbing corporate ladders, making our names great, and trying to bring all glory to ourselves? I don't believe Jesus strove this way, nor would he endorse us sacrificing ourselves on the altar of the "American dream."

7 GIVE UP PEOPLE-PLEASING. If you want to breed a healthy dose of passive-aggressiveness and resentment, keep this in your life. If it festers, "what about me" will be an undercurrent in your life, a frustration at the people who never seem to return the favor to please you. People-pleasing by sacrificing your thoughts, feelings, and opinions will slowly suffocate you, especially if you do it out of an unhealthy sense of obligation or aversion to conflict that is inevitable anyway.

6 GIVE UP NOT ACCEPTING OTHER PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AS TRUE. We must stop failing to acknowledge another's experiences as valid.

I believe God is interested more in what comes out of a person and less about what goes in.

When we do not agree or don't understand the full context of someone's experiences, "redacting" so it is more comfortable for us traumatizes the sharer. Make it a point to acknowledge others' experiences as valid. Let's show more empathy for our neighbor.

5 GIVE UP SELF-CENTEREDNESS. Do you really think the world will cease to exist if you do not add your contributions? Do you really think your job or family will dry up if you are not there to "catalyze" everything? We should be careful not to make ourselves the most important person in anyone's lives lest we delude ourselves into thinking we are higher than we ought to be (Rom. 12:4-8).


4 GIVE UP NEGLECTING SELF-CARE. You know the saying about all work and no play, right? Well, Jack, it's true! Jurgen Moltmann once came up with a "theology of play." Sabbath should be a delight. Take a stroll or take a spa day. Enjoy that cup of ice cream with a friend. Play your favorite song loudly. Pick up that video game controller. You fill in the blank. There are things that God has given us to enjoy. Regularly schedule some good old-fashioned fun. You will be glad you did!

3 GIVE UP ANXIETY AND WORRYING. I am not referring to a clinical diagnosis that requires medication or therapists. I'm talking about the panic that comes from not trusting

God's past, present, and future provision. God is not scarce of resources, so why do we freak out as if God is? Has God not come through in the past? Why do we fret when God has been faithful? Do you ever have the feeling that you are going to drown? Well, God is with you, friend. Trust God.

2 GIVE UP NOT SAVORING THE MOMENT. What is it in culture that always wants us to rush to the next thing? Why do we have such a hard time enjoying what is going on right now? When is the last time you savored the flavor of a meal instead of quickly stuffing it down to leave the table? Have you taken in the sunset lately? Do you have time to "chew on" and process how you feel? Stop. Breathe. Hold a moment. Before you know it, it will be gone. Ask seniors if they wish they could have those moments back. They'll tell you.

1 GIVE UP LIVING AS IF GOD DOES NOT EXIST. Some of us are what Craig Groeschel calls "practical atheists." Even though we believe in God and love God, we operate as if God doesn't exist, as if life is all on us. What would submitting to God in all our ways (Prov. 3:5-6) actually look like? How do we consider God in our decisions? How can we become more aware of God?

This is not an extensive list, but I hope the suggestions will put our hearts in a better place. The Lenten season can be profoundly worshipful instead of trivialized by external deprivations. God cares more about the inner parts. Let's go into Lent understanding this and challenging ourselves toward lasting change for God's glory. 



Darrell L. Delaney lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and is pastor of Madison Church, Square Campus. He and his wife of 15 years, Kia, have three children.

BIG QUESTIONS

Ethics

There are people I've come in contact with at my church who are rude and generally unfriendly. Shouldn't Christians be friendly?

Paul tells the Christians in Rome to "be devoted to one another in love" (Rom. 12:10), and to those in Galatia, he says that "kindness" is something the Holy Spirit produces in us (Gal. 5:22). While friendliness and kindness—a sort of warmth toward others—is not the best-known of the virtues or moral excellences, they are still qualities that God presumably has and values and also wants us to have and value.

However, we need to pay attention to Paul's language: Moral virtue is at once something that God produces in us and at the same time something we need to work at. Moral character, in other words, is a work in progress.

Moreover, because we are all works in progress, we are also different in respect to what virtues, if any, we possess. Daryl, for example, might have spent a lifetime becoming courageous and can now boldly speak a word of truth. At the same time, he may not have made much progress along the path of kindness, and so speaks his word of truth with callousness. Morgan might have spent many years developing a warmth toward others, yet still only have a poor palate for justice and so might be unwilling to vote to excommunicate the obstinate (1 Cor. 5:11-13). Ultimately, of course, God calls us to "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). We all are called to all the virtues, and

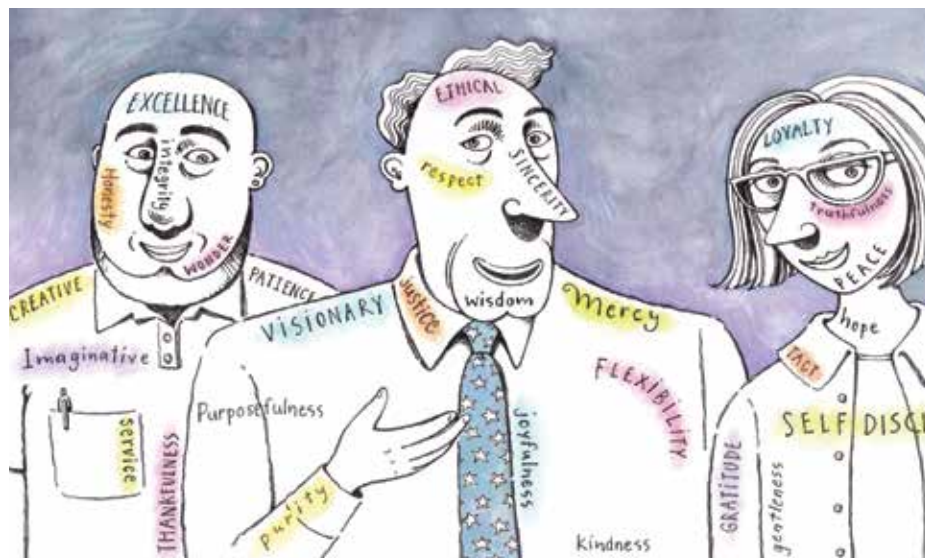


Illustration for The Banner by Laurie Sienkowski

one day—not in these shadowlands, but one day—the Daryls will be brave and kind and the Morgans kind and just. But that day has not yet come, and the Christ vaccine, though in us, works its way slowly through us.

There is also something not mentioned directly by Paul, but I think worth adding: While God and the individual are the most important persons in the development of a virtue like kindness, we can aid our brothers and sisters along this road. Remember the Phantom of the Opera? His incivility was overcome in the end partly by Christine's act of supernaturally produced kindness.

Adam Barkman is a professor of philosophy at Redeemer University.

Missional Living

What does discipleship have to do with being missional?

Discipleship is about learning to love, follow, obey, and become more and more like Jesus. Jesus was missional; in fact, God's very nature is missional. The Triune One is *Missio Dei*, the Sent and Sending One. The Triune One, John tells us, is love, and love is missional—always extending itself, always about the other.

Therefore, to be a disciple of the Triune One is to be missional. The Great

Commission (Matt. 28:18-19) and the greatest commandments (Matt. 22:36-40) are linked. Disciples are taught to do what Jesus commands: love God and love your neighbors (Matt. 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27).

When I began to understand the implications of this royal law (James 2:8) and how it is fulfilled (Rom. 13:8,15:2), it stopped me in my tracks. To love God, I have to love my neighbor? In loving my neighbor, I'm loving God? Those who first heard Jesus declare this dared not ask him anything else. It changed everything.

Jesus taught that loving God is no longer reduced to lawkeeping, religious rituals, purity, or piety. It is about loving your neighbor. As we read the gospels, we see Jesus teaching and demonstrating this over and over again. According to Judaic law, to love God one would not heal on the Sabbath, eat with a tax collector, touch a leper, or talk with a woman or a Samaritan. But Jesus broke the law to do all these things and more, demonstrating that we love God and become his disciples when we love our neighbors. Many of Jesus' parables also illustrate this game changer: the prodigal son, the lost sheep, the open banquet invitation. To love God is to love our neighbors.

Loving our neighbors is missional living. When we do life together with our neighbors, loving them just the way they are, we bear witness to the kingdom of God in our everyday ordinary lives right where we live.

After all, Jesus' priority is love ("God so loved the world ...").

I think I'll go have tea with my neighbor.

Karen Wilk is a Go Local catalyzer with Resonate Global Mission and Forge Canada. She is a pastor of Neighborhood Life, a home church movement in Edmonton, Alta., where she also enjoys being a wife, mom, and neighbor.

Relationships

What exactly is the opposite of "fake news"? Is it "authentic news"? Does that mean if people authentically believe something to be true, it is? When you are on one side or the other of an issue, who decides whether something is the truth or a lie?

In a family, when a fight breaks out between two siblings, it is usually not possible for a parent to get a clear picture of who started the fight. Each sibling will blame the other, and a wise parent will give both siblings a "time-out." Similarly, in a relationship where each of two people believes the truth is aligned with one's own particular bias and labels the other's position to be based on a lie, there will be trouble. Who decides what's true?

It is important to distinguish between personal truth and what could be termed objective truth. Objective truth requires a measurement higher than and separate from our subjective beliefs about an issue, person, or event. Personal truth cannot be objective because it is based on our individual experiences, world-views, family contexts, religious beliefs, likes and dislikes, and more.

Determining what is "fake" news versus "authentic" news is easier. Reputable news organizations will abide by rules of fair and honest reporting, and most democratic countries ensure that reporters are free to investigate the facts of a story. The news organization also has a responsibility to differentiate clearly between fact-based news and subjective comments (op-eds).

For Christians, there is an objective standard that can measure what is authentic or fake, truth or lies. Scripture reveals two measures that help us get to the truth: The first is Jesus Christ, who reveals himself to be truth (John 14:6), and the second is the "Spirit of truth" (John 16:13). Together the Holy Spirit and our King of kings provide an objective standard of truth against which our authentically held personal truths will be judged.

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

Faith Formation

My church no longer reads the Ten Commandments in worship. Isn't hearing the Commandments an important part of our faith formation?

There are good reasons to read the Ten Commandments (or Jesus' summary of them), especially because our culture tells us that we're good people who are mostly innocent. We need to be reminded of the truth of our sins, and the Ten Commandments provide a clear perspective on our sin. Some churches that include confession and assurance as part of their weekly liturgy use the Law to remind us of our sin.

Other congregations read the Law after confession and assurance to remind us that living holy lives is how we can express gratitude for the grace that God has given to us. This lines up well with the way the Heidelberg

Catechism addresses the Law. In the three-part guilt/grace/gratitude structure of the catechism, we find the Law in the third section. God's forgiveness is offered through grace, not because of what we have accomplished.

This holy living we are called to is possible only through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Seeing this image of what this new life in Christ looks like is an important part of our faith walk. However, a weekly reading of the Ten Commandments is not the only way to accomplish this in worship. There are New Testament passages that also paint a picture of what a life with Christ being formed in us (Gal. 4:19) might look like. Using a variety of passages rather than only a reading of the Law can help to cast that vision of new life.

Whether the Commandments should be read every week in worship is more a question of how and why they should be read. Just reading the Commandments every week is not sufficient. A variety of texts from the Old and New Testaments can best provide a full picture of how we can be formed by and incorporated into Christ.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children's ministries at Fourteenth Street CRC in Holland, Mich. Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin University and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.



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

Building Leaders With a Focus on Scripture, Discipleship

NEWS

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At Hillcrest Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich., the men’s discipleship program Every Man a Warrior has helped 45 men and counting to develop as followers of Christ.

Chad Schreur, who leads Hillcrest’s men’s ministry, has been using this resource since 2016. The material is based on a series of Bible studies written by Lonnie Berger, a longtime staff worker with The Navigators ministry.

Schreur said the program begins with an emphasis on meditating on and memorizing Scripture. It then goes into practical applications for applying the Word to issues such as marriage, parenting, work, and moral purity.

Schreur said the small-group, discussion-based format helps men to engage with the Word more deeply. “You slow down, not just read it, but listen to God and ask questions about the passage and apply it to your life.”

In the first phase of the program, there is a designated facilitator, but in later phases, each member of a group takes turns being a facilitator, Schreur said. He’s seen this help to develop leaders within the congregation.

Men’s Deeper Journey event at Hillcrest CRC in February 2019.

“You have more mature believers who are then engaged in other ministries,” he said. “You’ve got men who are better husbands, better fathers, better able to deal with adversity at work, because they’re walking with God in this and not trying to do it on their own.”

Joshua Jongsma started attending the study shortly after he and his wife became members at Hillcrest. He expressed some doubts at first about being able to memorize verses but now says the study has helped him grow in his faith.

“It was great connecting with a group of men I most likely would not have otherwise had a lot of interaction with,” Jongsma said. “I really appreciated the relationships I built, and the lessons and quiet times helped grow my spirituality and helped to remind me to keep God present in all areas of my life.”

—Greg Chandler

Building Neighborhood Connections in Boston

Leading up to its first official worship service Sept. 8, 2019, and in the months following, the emerging Christian Reformed congregation Resurrection Church in Boston, Mass., has been focused on its neighborhood. The congregation of about 20 core members has a Neighborhood Connections Team and is joining other organizations working toward God's kingdom in their city.

"We are outwardly focused," said Justin Ruddy, pastor at Resurrection. "We keep our internal programs pretty lean so we can be more engaged in the neighborhood. We want to live life with God for our neighborhood."

For example, in the warmer months, the church set up a table every week at the nearby subway station, where they passed out popsicles and water and had games for families to play. At Thanksgiving, Resurrection Church partnered with Crossroads Family Shelter to deliver Thanksgiving dinners, and on Christmas Eve, Resurrection held a songs and carols service in the East Boston Community Soup Kitchen. The church also works with



Phil Earley, a member of the core planting team for Resurrection Church, put out the welcome sign Sept. 8.

a local civic beautification association to work on community projects.

"We want to get people involved in what already exists," Ruddy explained.

Resurrection Church is a church plant whose parent church is The River Community Church in Douglas, Mass. Bruce Dykstra, pastor at The River, said, "We helped them build a relationship with Classis Atlantic Northeast and the

classis' churches through meetings, the commissioned pastor process, financial support, and resources like people, networks, and prayer."

Ruddy said that one of the unique things they learned from The River was hosting a time of open prayer at each service—a practice Resurrection does now too. In prayer, the congregation considers questions such as: What is God doing? Where are we rejoicing? Where do we need God to meet us? "It opens up space to pray for the neighborhood," Ruddy said.

Resurrection Church is a partner of Resonate Global Mission.

—Callie Feyen

Inmates' Artwork Displayed in Michigan Church



Photo by Anita Ensing Beem

Marianne Tanis shares stories behind inmates' art at First CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

For 20 years, Marianne Tanis has taught art classes for inmates at Earnest C. Brooks Correctional Facility in Muskegon, Mich. She recently exhibited some of her students' art at First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids. Tanis said the exhibit, which ran through January, was set up to give her own church an idea of the volunteer work she does in the prison. It also portrayed the impact art has had on the lives of the artists.

In a church newsletter, Tanis noted that art teaches many life lessons and has become a way for the inmates to redeem time, to problem-solve, and to find hope and gratitude in a hard place to live. They find that there is grace, mercy, and forgiveness in art, just as in their own lives.

"A flawed piece can be worked on to improve it instead of simply giving up and throwing it away," Tanis said.

During a viewing session for the congregation, Tanis shared the stories behind some of the art on exhibit. She noted that "four of the men represented in this show are serving life sentences, and all have experienced transformation."

Tanis' art classes came about after one experience of sharing the creative expression of drawing. She and her husband, Larry, have led worship services in prisons for 25 years. At one of those services, she suggested to an inmate struggling with depression and rejection that he begin drawing to express himself. He did and then eagerly sought her critique of his work each week. The chaplain noticed and offered Tanis the opportunity to teach weekly art classes at the prison. Initially concerned that she had a degree in art but not in teaching, she has since discovered that God had a plan, and the experience continues to be humbling and joy-filled for her and the students.

—Anita Ensing Beem

Campus Pastor Serves in the Midst of Tragedy

Rick Mast, full-time Christian Reformed campus pastor at the University of Alberta, was called into service in January to support that community after faculty members and others died in the Jan. 8 crash of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752. On Jan. 11 Iran acknowledged that the civilian plane had been unintentionally shot down. The news at first was vague, Mast said. “We did not know how many, but we knew that returning to Canada on that flight were two highly loved and esteemed engineering professors and their two young children, and two newlywed graduate students and other students who had been a part of the wedding party. We soon learned that 10 of our campus community had perished.”

Flags on the university campus were lowered to half-staff and, in an online statement, University President David Turpin acknowledged the loss and announced the availability of counseling and other services. “Ours is a closely interconnected community, and we grieve with everyone touched by this terrible loss,” Turpin said.

On Wednesday, all available supports, including chaplaincy services, were called to the engineering department, where Mast was asked to set up in a conference room to serve faculty in particular.

“Those who came to meet me there spoke of disbelief, shock, and sorrow,” Mast said. “I sometimes asked questions, but mostly listened to stories of almost unbearable lament, rich connections, and deep caring. Throughout, I offered



Rick Mast, campus pastor, at an earlier student information fair.

God the same simple prayer: Lord God, don't let me make this worse! That day I met with almost a dozen faculty and staff. The next day was even busier as students and their friends came to share their grief.” Mast said people came individually and in groups; the department provided refreshments for all. “Some (people) came specifically to support me.”

Thursday afternoon, as disturbing rumors about the cause of the crash began to emerge, Mast attended an impromptu memorial gathering in the computing science department. Mast said almost 200 people from the Iranian campus community attended, and “grief there was palpable.” On Friday—again in the computing science department, the academic home of one of the newlyweds—he met with a graduate student who was close to the couple.

It was a profoundly sad week, said Mast. Noting that most of what he did was to listen, Mast said he was amazed and humbled by the feedback given from the chair of engineering. “I want to sincerely thank you,” wrote the chairperson, “on

behalf of our entire department for everything you did for us during our time of need. I have heard only praise for how caring and supportive you were with everyone who sat with you over the last couple days. Thank you.”

Referring to the support offered him during this time by the denomination, friends, and other individuals, Mast responded, “For such a time as this, in what have become very public forums, our efforts as chaplains at campuses across North America are enriched and made bearable and possible by the large community of support from behind the front lines. We covet, cherish, and need that assistance.”

Mast and 38 campus ministry teams across North America are supported by Resonate Global Mission, the CRC's mission agency. The University of Alberta campus ministry is also supported by Classis Alberta North.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Campus Ministries at University of Toronto Turns 50

Photo by Aileen Verdun, 2018



The University of Toronto's Christian Reformed Campus Ministries offers Tuesday morning worship throughout the academic year.

For the past 50 years, Christian Reformed Campus Ministries at the University of Toronto, Ont., has had the mission, as articulated on its website, to “challenge, mentor, and enable students to think, work, and live as Christian disciples in the academy and in their professions. Rooted in the confession that all truth is in Christ, (they) seek a radical Christian discipleship in all of life.”

In 1968, Morris Greidanus accepted a call to found a ministry on the University of Toronto's campus. He served it until 1974. John Veenstra served for six years, and then Derk Pierik served from 1980 to 1994. Current campus chaplain Brian Walsh serves with a team of leaders, including some from Mennonite and Anglican traditions. From 2016 to 2017 Lisa Vander Leek, now at West End CRC in Edmonton, Alta., joined the team.

The ministry is supported by Classis Toronto (a regional group of Christian Reformed congregations) and Resonate Global Mission as well as by donations from a wide ecumenical campus ministry community.

Walsh, who has served the ministry for 24 years, plans to retire this summer. Anticipating the transition, campus ministry staff, supported by Mark Wallace, Resonate's director of missional leadership and campus ministry, have hosted a series of strategic planning meetings to discern God's direction for the ministry.

“We can look at these years and praise God for this season of life for the campus ministry and look forward to what the next season will bring,” Walsh said.

Having selected five key priorities through the planning process, the ministry hopes to strengthen connections with partners and neighbors, build a healthy and visionary staff team, pursue a sustainable funding model, develop robust policies and procedures, and cultivate a welcome and safe Christian community.

“I look forward to a continued Reformed presence on the University of Toronto campus that is ever more ecumenical in its outlook and practice,” said Peter Noteboom, a member of the University of Toronto Campus ministry committee.

The ministry is planning to have a service of celebration followed by a party March 28 at Wycliffe College, a graduate theological school affiliated with the University of Toronto.

—Kristen Parker

Noteworthy

Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont., has officially adopted that name, dropping “College” from the end and clarifying its status as a degree-granting school. The name change required approval from Ontario's Minister of Colleges and Universities, which granted the change Jan. 20. Three other schools associated with the Christian Reformed Church have previously dropped “College” from their names: Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. (July 2019); Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa (May 2019); and The King's University in Edmonton, Alta. (July 2014).



Photo by AP Photo/Patrick Semansky

U.S. President Donald Trump attended and addressed the Jan. 24 March for Life on the National Mall in Washington. He is the first president ever to offer an in-person address at the annual demonstration against abortion.

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Rodger
James Buining*

1931-2019

A compassionate, loving, and humble man, Rodg Buining loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind. He died Nov. 26 at age 88.

A graduate of Calvin College and Seminary, Buining was ordained in 1955. Over the years, he was called to organized churches, church planting ministries, and Native American ministries. In later years he felt called to healing ministries, striving to bring reconciliation to churches and believers challenged with conflict.

Buining served the following: Prairie Edge Christian Reformed Church in Portage, Mich.; Rehoboth (N.M.) CRC; Caledonia (Mich.) CRC; Bozeman (Mont.) CRC; Friendship House in San Francisco, Calif.; Faith CRC in New Brighton, Minn.; Orangewood CRC in Phoenix, Ariz.; and Bethel CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. In Minnesota and San Francisco, he also served as police chaplain.

After retirement in 1993, he continued to be a church visitor, wrote and delivered Sunday school lessons, and, at the time of his death, was minister of pastoral care at West Valley Christian Fellowship Church in Sun City, Ariz.

Buining leaves behind his three children and their spouses, five grandchildren and their spouses, and 14 great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by Mary Jane, his wife of 66 years.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Small Seeds Multiplied in Saginaw Church



Community Christian Reformed Church in Saginaw, Mich., is a church of about 25 families serving over 2,000 people with clothing, food, and a place o play. It's been possible through community partnerships.

Six years ago members considered what outreach program they might next participate in. Seeing the possibility of filling a gap in community services, church member Anita Collins suggested they begin a clothing ministry.

Members of the small church wondered where the supplies would come from, but Collins, who owns a day care and preschool was one step ahead of them. "Let me approach my (students') parents," she said, thinking there would be plenty of toys and clothes to donate. She was right. "The parents stepped up," and the Community Caring Closet was born.

Shortly after, the congregation thought a garden could be a great way to teach families with young children how to make healthy meals.

"We want to share the love of Christ while helping them with their needs," Collins

Planting in Community CRC's garden, spring 2019.

explained. So when it was time to plant the seeds, Collins told the children who would help her, "God's giving us the seeds we need to grow food, just like he gives us seeds of faith. And we are taking what we've grown and giving it back to the community."

Church members have also built a pavilion and a playground using natural materials. This, too, is a way to praise God. "It's a fun way to play with the natural elements he gave us," Collins said.

"Everything starts with a seed," Collins said of how Community CRC has been able to cultivate so much. "Don't worry about it being far out of what your reach is. If God is in it, it's going to happen."

Funding for some of these projects came through grants from Harvey Randall Wickes Foundation, the Wickson Link Foundation, and the Saginaw Community Foundation. They were also given money from the Van Mastrigt Memorial Fund.

—Callie Feyen

Stated Clerks Meet in California



The role of stated clerk is probably the most unsung task in the Christian Reformed Church. Stated clerks are the ones who keep classes (the CRC's 49 regional groups of churches) running—receiving mountains of information and distributing it to the appropriate people and organizing classis meetings to help them run smoothly.

Thirty-three of these hardworking souls gathered together Jan. 8-10 in Bellflower, Calif., to meet with and learn from each other and to meet some of the denominational leaders with whom they often correspond.

Clerks in the Canadian classes have met previously, and U.S. clerks had a gathering two years ago, but this was the first time they were all together.

Albert Postma, a minister and consultant for classis renewal with Pastor Church Resources, and Dee Recker, director of Synodical Services, organized the conference. Besides Postma and Recker, the clerks met John Bolt, the CRC's director of finance and administration; Kathy Smith of Calvin Theological Seminary; David Koll, director of the Candidacy Office; and others.

Recker said the main purpose was to give clerks an opportunity to learn from each other. Postma concurred. "We think that when people serving in different places but in similar roles come together, they can learn a lot simply from hearing how things are being done in other places."

Thirty-three stated clerks gathered in Bellflower, Calif., in January.

Bernie Bakker has been a stated clerk for almost 10 years, serving in three different classes in Canada. He said clerks had some of their questions answered, like changes to rules regarding commissioned pastors. "Pastors and church councils often consider (clerks) to be experts in Church Order. We were made aware of resources available on the CRCNA website," he said.

He noted that they learned from each other about best practices, like using technology for committee meetings. They heard how classes that have several ethnic and language groups do classis.

Glenda Tebben has been the clerk for a classis in Michigan for three years. She learned that another clerk sends a recap of each meeting to the churches. "I thought this was a great idea and wondered why I didn't ever think about this," she said.

Tebben hopes there are more gatherings like this one. "Gatherings like this are great ways for me to continue learning," she said. "I'm not a pastor and don't have any formal seminary training, so connecting with pastors and church leaders expands my learning."

—Gayla R. Postma

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Peter Sluys

1927-2019

Peter Sluys lived a joyful life serving his Lord and Savior. He died Nov. 8 after a few years of living with dementia. He was 92.

Sluys was born in the Netherlands. His education ended in ninth grade after his school was bombed during World War II. He joined a Christian youth movement called *Jeugd en Evangelie* (Youth and Evangelism), where he made many friends and discussed his faith. He served as an airplane mechanic in the Dutch Air Force from 1948 to 1950. A few years later, he immigrated to Smiths Falls, Ont., where he worked as a car mechanic. After marriage in 1956, he passed the equivalent of high school and completed Calvin College, and in 1962 he graduated from Calvin Seminary. He then served the following churches: Bigelow (Minn.) CRC; First Christian Reformed Church, Rocky Mountain House, Alta.; Strathroy East (Ont.) CRC; Bethel CRC, Lacombe, Alta.; Cornerstone CRC, Salmon Arm, B.C.; and Terrace (B.C.) CRC. He retired in Nanaimo, B.C., and later returned to Lacombe.

A great storyteller, Sluys enjoyed reading, sketching, and talking with people.

Predeceased by his wife, Ruth, in 2009, Sluys is survived by six children and their spouses, nine grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Scripture-Based Art Challenge Inspires Creativity



A sword created by Geneva Boersema is part of Shoreline CRC's Revelation art project.

When Pastor Daniel Claus preached from the book of Revelation last fall, he challenged his congregation at Shoreline (Wash.) Christian Reformed Church to engage deeply, asking as many as would participate to create artwork inspired by the book. Members had three months to ponder and produce pieces. Artists shared their work Sunday, Dec. 1, in a temporary gallery erected in the church hallways and main gathering space.

"People expect Revelation to be all charts, and that can be daunting," explained Claus. He hoped that art would allow members to experience the book through an imaginative lens.

Claus invited a high school art teacher, Diane VanOrnam, to bring her students into the project. Just over half of the 71 participants were students.

One of the most exciting projects was a metal sword forged by a student with the help of her father. Inspired by the letter to the church in Pergamum in Revelation 2, Geneva Boersema crafted the blade from an aluminum bar that she shaped with a jigsaw and bench grinder. "I cut three hilt pieces of wood and epoxied them to the tang to create a reasonably realistic-looking hilt assembly," Boersema explained. She also drew from the "importance of words in the entire book—from the blessing at the beginning to the warning at the end."

Harriet Tibbits crafted a quilt inspired by Revelation 4, 8, and 20. Though an experienced quilter, Tibbits said she felt challenged "to do an original project while applying it to Scripture." Ken Oordt, an elder at Shoreline CRC, created a music video set to a recording of the church choir singing *Revelation 19*, by Jeffrey LaValley. Oordt's video featured astronomical imagery and photography of the Washington landscape. "I keyed into verse 16 of chapter 1, about the 'One... holding seven stars in his right hand.'"

The variety of finished products represented the church members' varied gifts, fulfilling the pastor's hope of having members "do what [they're] good at."

—Elizabeth Drummond

Michigan Church Connects with Nigerian Christians



Children in the Rim community in Nigeria received Bibles from Forest Grove CRC on Nov. 20.

In November, on a visit to the Rim community in Nigeria, David Tyokighir brought with him a collection of children's Bibles from members of Forest Grove Christian Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Mich. Tyokighir is a country consultant with World Renew, the relief and development agency of the CRC, and his personal connection is helping the Forest Grove congregation make meaningful relationships with the Nigerian Christians whose community has been ravaged by attacks from the insurgent group Boko Haram.

Church members began supporting Tyokighir's work more than two years ago when the church's mission committee was looking for a new long-term opportunity. Tyokighir shared the story of what was taking place in Nigeria, and a relationship was established. Support includes provision for 20 orphaned children, giving access to education as well as gifts such as backpacks and water bottles at Christmas. Forest Grove families write to each child twice a year to share their love and concern.

The support of the Forest Grove congregation, including the gift of Bibles, has been well received in the Rim community, Tyokighir said. Children have written notes of gratitude to Forest Grove members, telling of what they're studying in school and thanking the members for their care.

"They see this partnership as a demonstration of God's unfailing love," Tyokighir said. "Expressions of gratitude continue to flow from beneficiaries, caregivers, and other church and community leaders in the Rim community."

—Greg Chandler



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Prayer as Relationship

By Brian Clark and Cassie Westrate

Hey God, it's me. I have an offer for you. If you heal my friend in the next two days, I'll volunteer for one week ... but wait, there's more! If you heal her in the next hour, I will double the amount I put in the offering plate next Sunday."

It can be tempting to treat prayer like a sales pitch—even if it's not as obvious as the prayer above. But Emily Vanden Heuvel recognizes the importance of seeing it as a relationship.

"The challenge lies in asking God for requests," says Vanden Heuvel, the prayer team coordinator for ReFrame Media, the English ministry of Back to God Ministries International. "When we instead approach prayer as a relationship, it becomes less about how he's responding and more about how he just *is*."

Around the world, partners from the Christian Reformed Church in North America's global mission agencies—BTGMI and Resonate Global Mission—have seen how God moves in response to prayers.

Answered Prayer in Japan

Seeing prayer as a relationship can feel especially freeing in challenging ministry contexts. Walking the streets of Japan's busiest cities, for example, you'll come across very few Christians and even fewer young Christians. This is alarming for the present and future of the Japanese church.

"The existing Japanese churches are rapidly aging and fragile due to a lack of young people," said Resonate Global Mission missionary Ken Lee, who serves in Japan with his wife, Jeannie.

But God is raising up more young adults to be leaders in Japan's churches—and God's doing it in response to persistent prayer.

The Lees reach and disciple young adults to continue growing and strengthening the church in Japan. They do this through small group Bible studies, one-on-one discipleship training, and opening their home so young adults can invite friends who are not yet Christians to spend time in a Christian community.

Resonate Global Mission missionary Ken Lee disciples young adults like Tomoki Mikawa for Japan's churches.

But first, they pray.

"I work for God," said Ken Lee. "If I work for him, then I need to hear what his plans are and what he wants me to do. ... That's why prayer, talking to God, is very important to me—to find out where he is working and how he wants me to participate in his work."

Following the Holy Spirit's leading is decisive in Resonate's work joining God on mission. Wherever God sends church planters, campus ministers, volunteers, and missionaries throughout the world, God is already at work. That's why prayer must be the foundation.

In prayer, God highlights young adults for Ken Lee to disciple for church leadership. "There are certain people God gives me a heart for," Lee said.

Tomoki Mikawa is one such person. An elementary school student when Lee first met him, Mikawa and Lee reconnected while Mikawa was studying at university. He told Lee that he felt called to seminary, and Lee started studying the Bible with him and encouraging him to live a life of prayer. Lee also helped coordinate an internship for Mikawa at a church where Mikawa is now a leader.

But Lee has been praying not only for more young adults to go into ministry; he's been praying for more people to reach young adults.

Again, Mikawa was an answer to prayer. "He, too, has a vision for sending young people to seminary," said Lee.

Following the Lees' example, Mikawa and his wife often invite young adults over to share a meal. "That gives them a chance to talk and share about faith," Lee said. "He guides them in decision making."

Mikawa is just one person in Japan through whom God is working, but with prayer, he'll make more disciples. By equipping leaders such as Mikawa, the Lees are helping the gospel to spread in a country where very few people know Jesus.

"We just praise God that he answered our prayers," the Lees said.

Many Forms of Healing

In her work as ReFrame's prayer coordinator, Emily Vanden Heuvel receives about 130 prayer requests every week and then sends them to about 6,500 volunteers around the world.

"It's a privilege to read messages from people who are pouring out their heart," Vanden Heuvel said. "I pray for them right then and there, then respond to let them know that it won't always be easy. But no matter what, God is with us in that space."

The bottom line, Vanden Heuvel said, is that God always heals the broken through prayer. But the healing takes different forms.

Answered Prayer Through Physical Healing

In India, BTGMI's Hindi ministry team often encounters God's physical healing.

The Hindi ministry team regularly meets with seekers and Christians who listen to BTGMI radio and internet programs but don't have a regular form of fellowship with one another.



BTGMI's ministry teams in India regularly meet with seekers and Christians who follow their programs but don't have a regular form of fellowship.

At one such event, Pawan (his first name is omitted for his safety) shared his powerful story with the ministry team and about 35 listeners from his area.

"Pawan grew up worshiping spirits and would eventually start telling the fate of the people using black magic," a member of BTGMI's Hindi ministry team shared. "People would come to him with their issues and learn their fate."

Gradually, Pawan said, he himself became a victim of black magic.

"Evil spirits possessed him and

tormented him," BTGMI's Hindi ministry leader said (name withheld for safety). "Slowly his body became very weak and stiff. He had multiple diseases, and doctors told him that he would never heal."

Confused and hopeless, Pawan came across a flash drive a friend had given him. On it he found programs produced by BTGMI's Hindi ministry team. His curiosity piqued, Pawan visited a Christian who lived nearby to learn more.

Pawan prayed for physical and spiritual healing. Not long after, he was healed.

Prayer Resources

- » Sign up to pray for CRC efforts around the world at crcna.org/pray.
- » Become one of more than 6,500 pray-ers supporting ReFrame listeners and readers by receiving weekly requests at prayer.reframemedia.com.
- » Sign up for Resonate's weekly Prayer Points email at resonateglobalmission.org/pray.

"Pawan believed that Jesus is Lord," the Hindi Ministry leader reported. "And God in his matchless grace delivered Pawan from all his bondages."

Since then, God has used Pawan to be a living testimony to others in his community.

"He is continuously witnessing his faith and testimony to many other people," the ministry leader said. "He lives in a small village from where it is difficult for him to go for Sunday fellowship. During our seeker meeting, we introduced flash drives like the one he first encountered, and he was excited to share them with others."

Answered Prayer Through Spiritual Healing

Of course, not everyone experiences what Pawan experienced. Ken and Jeannie Lee had to wait many years for God to reveal his work in Tomoki's life.

This is why Vanden Heuvel regularly reminds people who come to her with prayer requests from BTGMI's programs that this time of waiting is a part of the healing process.

"Part of the challenge is being okay with the mystery," Vanden Heuvel said. "Prayer helps our idea of wanting to grasp something tangible."

Vanden Heuvel came to this realization with help from her mother.

"My mother was one of the most godly women I knew, but she was never healthy," Vanden Huevel said. "She had prayed for years that the Lord would heal her. But he didn't."

Still, her mother recognized the power of prayer in her own life—sharing with her daughter and many others about the sense of spiritual renewal she felt at the end of her life.

"Her heart gave out, but her spiritual heart was vibrant and fresh when she passed away," Vanden Heuvel said. "No matter what, God will always provide and make all things new." B

Praying for a New Beginning

AS THE DIRECTOR of the Christian Reformed Church's Office of Race Relations, I am a product of many answered prayers. Prayer helped mold me for leadership in my early days at Lawndale CRC in Chicago. Prayer supported me as I furthered my preparation for ministry at Calvin Theological Seminary. Prayer sustained me in ministry at Northside Community Church in Paterson, N.J., and in Grand Rapids, Mich., and it continues to sustain me today. Prayer has kept me going because I believe in new beginnings.

I'd like to share with you a recent experience of how God answered prayers for Roosevelt Park CRC in Grand Rapids. As the head pastor, I welcomed the church's birth in 1994 and presided over its closing in 2015. Originally built for Grandville Avenue CRC in the 1950s, the church building had seen worship services, baptisms, weddings, and funerals. What would God do with it now that the congregation was disbanding? The members of Roosevelt Park prayed that the Lord would find a suitable occupant with a Spirit-led purpose.

When the final, festive service of Roosevelt Park CRC took place July 26, 2015, I feared the building would sit vacant for a long time. Who wants to buy a 60-year-old church building on the southwest side of Grand Rapids? Apparently, the Lord had other things




Students from The Potter's House Christian School were part of a grand opening of The Potter's House Chapel in the former Roosevelt Park CRC building.

in mind. There were other people whose hearts and minds had already been dreaming and praying about expansion and growth. The Potter's House Christian School, next door to the church, had caught a vision. Hearing the church was up for sale, the school supporters believed their prayers for additional space were being answered. And the very next day, the school asked to buy the property.

Fast-forward four years to Oct. 20, 2019: The old church building of Roosevelt Park CRC was officially renamed The Potter's House Chapel. With a joyful open house event, we welcomed old members, school families, and supporters to see the church's new look. I greeted members who thanked the Lord that their prayers were continuing to be answered as the church was still an anchor in the

neighborhood, where 78% of the residents are Latino.

I saw the joy on the faces of people who remembered their baptisms many years earlier. I recalled many children's and youth ministries, from hip-hop services to holiday plays to professions of faith. I heard the stories of God's grace and faithfulness through a combined 150-plus years of ministry.

Yes, I am a product of many answered prayers, and I continue to reap the fruits of it five years, 10 years, and even many more years after the initial requests. 

—Reginald Smith

The View from Here

A Prayerful Identity

EVERY FIVE YEARS, synod adopts a new ministry plan to help guide congregations and ministries in a unified direction that we believe is Spirit-led. This plan is developed in part by listening to members and congregations across North America and learning of the needs they express.

Based on recent listening sessions, the following statement is emerging as one of four priorities for a ministry plan that will be presented to Synod 2020 in June:

Our church is praying, reading Scripture, and practicing other spiritual disciplines, historical and new, transforming our lives and communities for Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

What is it about our current climate and demographic makeup that causes us to express a desire to be a church that evidences this posture even more?

To answer this, let's recall that an emphasis on spiritual disciplines has always been part of our identity. The Christian Reformed Church in North America is a denomination of immigrants, and its earliest members were influenced by events in the Netherlands back in 1834. At that time, some Reformed believers broke away from the Dutch state church, believing the church needed to focus more on congregants' personal relationships with God. This breakaway was called the *Afscheiding*, a word that simply means separation or split. Yet we often refer to those who separated as part of the *pietist* dimension of our history.

About 50 years later, Abraham Kuyper—a pastor, writer, and Dutch prime minister—led a second movement that shapes us today. It was

called the *Doleantie* (to feel sorrow) movement due to its followers' perception of the Dutch state church becoming too liberal. Moreover, with Kuyper as a key leader in this movement, the importance of worldview and a *transformationalist* understanding of Christ and culture became a significant dimension of this chapter of church history in the Netherlands.

These two movements came together in 1892 to become the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerk), which in turn shaped the CRCNA with an emphasis on a personal relationship with God and the need to be transformed by this relationship in a way that influences everything we do.

As part of a wave of immigration from the Netherlands after the Civil War in the U.S., I suspect my ancestors were formed more by the *Afscheiding*, having immigrated here before the start of the *Doleantie*. In contrast, the part of the CRC formed by post-World War II immigration (much in Canada and some in the U.S.) certainly benefited from the *Doleantie* as well.

But our CRCNA identity doesn't stop with these Dutch influences. We continue to be a denomination of immigrants, and our Korean members are a great example. Historical events in Korea have shaped and continue to shape Korean CRC members in Canada and the United States in a way that demonstrates a robust dependence on prayer. This, too, has an influence on our entire denomination.

The recent influx of Korean immigrants into the CRC has shown us the value of depending on prayer. Prayer summits hosted by some of our Korean CRC brothers and sisters, for example,

have awakened all of us to greater engagement in prayer and the spiritual disciplines, reclaiming the earlier part of our identity.

This is especially true in 2020 as we face challenging and confusing times. As we consider new moral and ethical dilemmas, struggle to build civil relationships in a polarizing political environment, and strive to sift through the deluge of information coming at us 24 hours a day, we recall the important posture of being on our knees—being reliant upon God and our prayer life with God.

I suspect that in an increasingly secularized society, we are sensing the need to be the Christian family together, linking arms with those from the past and other traditions. So we rekindle our long-held practices and learn from other Christian brothers and sisters whose traditions are rich in the spiritual disciplines. In so doing, we are increasingly living into Jesus' prayer for all believers: "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me (John 17:21).



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

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

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‘How Can You Say No to This?’

TWO AND A HALF YEARS AGO, Linda DeBoer was busy finishing another year as a Christian school secretary in Georgetown, Ont., and planning a trip to Ireland.

When she received an email from her cousin in the Netherlands about helping to sponsor an Eritrean refugee to Canada, she read it quickly, thought it sounded like a lot of work, and didn't give it much more thought.

But after the school year ended, her cousin emailed again. DeBoer reread the request. Her cousins' four sons had been backpacking in Israel when they met an Eritrean man who had been living there for 10 years on a temporary visa, revocable at any time. The young men were moved by this man's plight and wondered if Canada—and DeBoer in particular—might be willing to help. They'd heard that Canada allows for private sponsorship of refugees in addition to those already resettled by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

Was she willing? DeBoer wasn't sure, but her youngest son said, "How can you say no to this? Is this not what the church is all about—helping those in need?" So DeBoer forwarded the email to Tom VanMilligen, her pastor at Georgetown Christian Reformed Church, and to her good friend Rebecca Walker, who DeBoer knew "had something to do with refugees in her work at World Renew."

Walker is, in fact, the coordinator of World Renew's Refugee Program. And DeBoer's cousin's sons were right: Canada does allow private citizens to sponsor refugees. World Renew, as an official Sponsorship Agreement Holder with IRCC, has sponsored more than 10,500 refugees to Canada over the last 40 years in partnership with churches



Kidane is greeted warmly with the chance to enjoy his very first Timbit doughnut hole.

and their members. And DeBoer was right when she said upon learning this, "God had a plan in place."

So at her first council meeting as a newly elected deacon, she stood up and delivered a proposal "with lots of reasons" that the church sponsor a refugee—and they said yes.

When DeBoer learned that the refugee's brother—also living in Israel on a temporary visa—was put in a detention center, she went back to her council, this time with her son, who asked them to consider sponsoring two men. They said yes again.

Now DeBoer and her sponsorship team faced a big challenge. Sponsors are responsible for providing financial support for a refugee's first year in Canada. They would need to help the men—with both time and money—to find housing, medical care, language classes, and employment. DeBoer admits she "fretted over the money," but she kept reminding herself that "God has a plan in place. I just had to trust him."

And God did. The principal of her school invited DeBoer to share her

plan with the staff, and soon the fifth- and sixth-graders asked how they could help. What about a talent show? Janie Visser, a support team member and grandmother to student Ethan, remembered wondering if "these 'big dreamers' could successfully plan this event," but delightedly reported that "God took these big plans, and the talent show was a huge success!" The class raised over \$10,000 in one night.

This August, DeBoer and Georgetown CRC's refugee sponsorship team welcomed their first refugee at Toronto Pearson Airport. Sporting Canadian colors and waving Canadian flags, they were joined by school families holding high a student-designed banner reading "Welcome to Canada!" As Kidane, walked through customs, tears flowed and hugs were shared.

In addition, Kidane's brother has arrived in Canada. He is awaiting the arrival of his wife and two sons who are in asylum in Ethiopia, once their paperwork is processed. and his wife and two sons, previously unable to leave Eritrea, have found their way to a refugee camp in Ethiopia.

This will all mean more investment of time, money, and emotions for DeBoer and the Georgetown team. But they're not alone. Georgetown CRC, the Halton Hills Christian School community, and World Renew are invested too. "Rebecca and her colleagues have been a great help to us every step of the way," said DeBoer. "[They're] always willing to answer our many questions and [are] very supportive."

To learn more about refugee sponsorship in Canada, go to worldrenew.ca/refugee-sponsorship.

—Sara de Boer,
World Renew

A Praying Church

AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT, there are members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America who are praying. They pray on their own during private, personal devotions. They pray as families around the dinner table. They pray in their church, with their Bible study group, in the Christian school classroom, and in many other places.

And the content of their prayers is vast. The CRCNA's praying people not only bring to the Lord the needs and desires in their lives and communities, but they also pray for their nations, their political leaders, people in need around the world, and much more.

To equip you in your prayer life, the CRCNA provides several prayer resources. The Network (crcna.org/network) is a website where Christian Reformed people can connect to discuss all kinds of ministry topics. The "Prayer" section of the site allows you to connect with prayer coordinators from across the denomination. There are also numerous resources and suggestions for improving your prayer life.

Another tool for your prayers is the CRCNA prayer guide. The monthly prayer guide gathers prayer requests from across the many ministries of the denomination. It is available online at crcna.org/pray, where you can also



To equip you in your prayer life, the CRCNA provides several prayer resources.

Photo by Deb Hoag, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship

sign up to have the guide sent right to your email daily or weekly.

Churches in Canada who are using the Bridge App (thebridgeapp.org) can receive prayer requests from both their local congregations and the denomination on their mobile phones.

"The technology keeps changing, but the needs of the church remain," said Paul Faber, a CRCNA staff member who served as part of a team that recorded prayer requests to a toll-free prayer phone number (now defunct). "While

we no longer record prayer requests or print and distribute a paper prayer guide, we continue to want to spread joys and concerns of our shared ministries to all who are willing to pray." Today, email, websites, and mobile apps continue to make that possible.

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

Preaching Baptism Over Many Miles

REV. JOYCE BORGER looked into the webcam in her office in Grand Rapids, Mich., and began to preach a sermon on 1 Peter for members of Sonlight Christian Reformed Church, hundreds of miles away in Regina, Sask.

Wearing a pastoral stole over her shoulders, she began preaching on the subject of “Who You Are.”

In her opening prayer, she said, “This is a new experience dealing with all of the technology. But even in the midst of this newness, preaching to a screen, listening to the Word proclaimed via video, Lord, we know that the Holy Spirit is transcending it all, that it transcends time and space. We are grateful for the assurance you are here with us.”

Borger, who is director of Worship Ministries for the CRC, recorded five sermons dealing with the subject of baptismal remembrance for members of the remote church in Canada that is currently without a pastor.

The church in Regina called her, she said, because they were interested in using the five-part worship series she had written on baptism for the June 2019 issue of *Reformed Worship*, a quarterly journal filled with practical resources for planning and leading worship in the Reformed tradition.

Sonlight asked if, besides the order of worship and its prayers and responses, she would be willing to share her sermons, assuming that the sermon notes included with the series were based on completed sermons.

“I didn’t have full sermons written out that I could send to them,” said Borger. “I thought it might be easier for me to do more preparation and preach them myself rather than create a manuscript that someone else could read.”

When the people in Regina seemed to like this idea, Borger decided to do an experiment. “I wondered if I could preach and record them and then they could show them on Sunday.”

Finding the right technology to do this was a bit tricky, she said. “There was a learning curve, but it got better.”

Once she worked out the bugs, she started the series, sending each sermon to the church to download and use on a Sunday.

For her sermons, Borger did a little research on Regina and the church itself and incorporated things she learned in her sermons.

As she worked on the sermon series, she thought of all those churches, especially ones located in isolated areas, that are without pastors. And she wondered if her experiment could have a wider application. What if some way could be found to help a pastor record a sermon for a far-flung church?

Her own series came out of her desire to help make people aware of the significance of their own baptisms and the importance of remembering that.

“Every single pastoral care issue we face has something to do with baptism,” she said.

Our identity is tied up in our baptism; it reminds us that we belong not only to God, but to each other. There



Rev. Joyce Borger used online technology to preach a sermon series from Grand Rapids, Mich., to Sonlight CRC in Regina, Sask.

is forgiveness in baptism. Through baptism we receive a calling and purpose to live as God’s child in the world, to be missional, to bring the light of Christ wherever life’s journey brings us. And baptism reminds us that we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection so we too can have hope in the resurrection and need not fear death.

In her sermons, Borger was engaging, personal, self-effacing, and passionate about the significance of baptism.

Melanie Schipper, a member of Sonlight, said they appreciated the sermon series.

“Joyce worked very hard to make the sermons applicable to our members and everyone felt included,” she said. “Joyce is an excellent preacher. ... We would definitely do this again.”

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

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Wild Tails

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED why most animals have tails? What are they for? Just what do tails do anyway?

Tales of Tails

Monkeys, opossums, anteaters, and seahorses use their tails to grab and hold on to objects.

Squirrels and lemurs use their long tails to help them balance as they run along branches and leap through the trees.

Kangaroos use their strong, muscular tails to help support and push them forward as they hop—like a fifth leg!

Animals such as elephants, zebras, giraffes, horses, and cows can use their tails to swish and swat flies away.

White-tailed deer have bright-white tails that they raise like flags if there is danger. This can confuse predators and warn other deer.

Salamanders can distract and escape from predators by letting their tails fall right off—and if this happens, they can grow another one!

Beavers store fat in their big, flat tails.

Arctic foxes use their fluffy tails to stay warm by curling up and covering their face with it while they sleep.

Alligators, whales, and fish use their tails to swim.

Fashion and Function

Birds' tails are made of feathers. A peacock's tail feathers can be six feet long! But peacocks aren't the only birds with impressively long tail feathers. Check out these other amazing birds:

» Ribbon-tailed astrapia
(tinyurl.com/astrapia)

» Superb lyrebird
(tinyurl.com/lyre-bird)

These long, fancy tails all belong to male birds. The longer and fancier the feathers, the stronger and healthier he is.

But tail feathers don't have to be long to be beautiful. Wilson's bird-of-paradise has short, curling tail feathers (tinyurl.com/bird-of-paradise).

A woodpecker's tail feathers might not be as fancy as a peacock's, but they are very useful. Stiff and pointed, their tail feathers help to prop the birds up as they cling to a tree trunk.

Birds also use their tails to help steer when they fly.

Isn't it amazing that tails are used in so many different ways? Creation can remind us every day of how awesome our God is!

*How many are your works, LORD!
In wisdom you made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.*

—Psalm 104:24



Rachel Lancashire is a freelance writer with an educational background in wildlife. She grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and currently attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont.



Visions and Illusions in Political Life: Guidance for Voters

By David T. Koyzis

It's not easy to know who to vote for at election time. We can be thankful we live in a democracy where we enjoy the right to vote, even if joy might not be what we are feeling as we cast our ballots. So what exactly are we doing when we vote? Are we voting for a candidate or group of candidates to govern us? Yes, but there's more to it than that. We are, in fact, voting for people's visions for our community. We are voting for candidates' beliefs about the good life, the public interest, and justice.

As it turns out, however, the parties often downplay these visions, instead focusing narrowly on issues, image, and personalities. Yet as Christians we need to dig deeper to find out what motivates our political groupings. If our leaders disagree on the right policies to pursue, it is often because they are effectively worshiping different and conflicting gods. Some form of idolatry is operating within our dominant visions of liberalism, conservatism, and socialism.

Political Idols

Let's take a look at these idols, the jealous gods that demand our loyalty and

work to influence our political communities. We are familiar with idols in the Bible. Israel's neighbors worshiped tribal deities represented by wood and stone statues, and God's people often followed after the same idols the Canaanites, the Philistines, and others served. So God raised up prophets to call God's people back to faithful worship of the one true God.

Today our idols are subtler and come disguised as mere life goals such as career success, self-esteem, personal fulfillment, and material wealth. None of these is inherently bad, of course. Wealth might be a sign of God's blessing, but it comes with the responsibility to use it to serve God and neighbor. A successful career may or may not indicate a life well lived, but when we make it the overarching focus of our lives, it becomes an idol.

What does this mean for politics? In North America, we generally see our politicians divided between liberals and conservatives, with socialism increasingly popular among some voters. But what if it turns out that all three represent a form of idolatry distorting our political life?

In Canada, two parties carry the conservative and liberal labels. In the United

States, conservatives are generally associated with the Republican Party and liberals with the Democratic Party, though it hasn't always been that way. Despite the current polarization, both conservatives and liberals follow a larger liberal tradition that influenced the American founding documents. The Declaration of Independence, for example, was penned largely by Thomas Jefferson, who borrowed heavily from the 17th-century English liberal philosopher John Locke.

The Idol of Liberalism

According to early liberal doctrine, individuals are the building blocks of political community. In the liberal worldview, individuals come together to form a political community to serve their needs. Here they give up some of their liberty as individuals but retain the right to "appeal to heaven," in Locke's words, by taking up arms against the chief magistrate if he fails to protect their lives, liberty, and property. Jefferson wrote his Declaration to defend the American colonists' struggle to sever their ties with the British Crown, with Locke's language supporting their claims to independence.

The irony is that in the U.S. and increasingly in Canada, both liberals and conservatives are liberal in the larger sense. Individualism is so persistent a feature of North American political culture that it influences debates over gun control, social welfare, abortion, and marriage. Everyone wants to defend their rights as individuals, but this sometimes gets in the way of other considerations that might limit people's claims. Because liberalism narrowly focuses on individual interests, liberalism in effect makes the individual into an idol.

In ordinary political life, God calls governments to do public justice—that is, to fairly decide among a variety of legitimate interests, both individual and communal. What justice requires is sometimes obvious to everyone, but more often we must carefully weigh the claims of all parties and discern a just judgment not at all obvious to everyone concerned. If individuals come into conflict with their communities, sometimes justice leans toward the individual, while other times it must lean toward the community. Although liberalism is by no means opposed to community, liberals believe that in most cases the claims of individuals should outweigh those of their communities. Canada's Michael Ignatieff, one-time leader of the federal Liberal Party, goes so far as to argue that rights belong only to individuals, to be asserted "against the *oppression* of religion, state, family, and group" (emphasis mine).

The Conservative Idol

North American conservatives, while embracing much of the liberal agenda, risk serving an idol in a different way. While conservatives differ with each other on many issues, what unites them is respect for tradition. They are not wrong in this. Our very lives and loves are shaped by tradition—virtually everything passed down to us from previous generations. We are more like our parents than unlike them, even if we try to distance ourselves from them. Furthermore,

Given the
obvious flaws
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those who rebel against one tradition do so by appealing to another tradition—revolting against tradition! Since the 19th century, the stereotypical revolutionary is immediately identifiable as such, perhaps sporting a black beret and a leather jacket and smoking unfiltered cigarettes. Why? Because this is what the revolutionary *traditionally* looks like.

Of course, we need to consider the possibility that at least some traditions should be discarded. One example is the tradition of legally enforced racial segregation in the southern United States. Others include the casual anti-Semitism vividly portrayed in Elia Kazan's 1947 film *Gentleman's Agreement* and the exclusion of women from a variety of occupations and educational opportunities. To follow tradition thoughtlessly is something the discerning Christian must avoid. Tradition does not speak with one voice, and we would do well to follow the 16th-century Reformers in weighing the value of traditions in light of God's Word.

Jesus himself had something to say about tradition in his conflict with the Pharisees and scribes described in Matthew 15 and Mark 7. Asked why his disciples had failed to wash their hands before eating, Jesus responded: "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matt. 15:3). Indeed, traditions may acquire respectability over many generations but contradict the will of God expressed in the Bible. Many Christians readily embrace the conservative label when describing their political convictions, but if they immerse themselves in Scripture, they will recognize that traditions cannot ultimately be binding. Deferring to tradition for the sake of tradition makes us passive and limits how we think through and react to current events. As Christians, we can do better.

The Idol of Socialism

Finally, there's socialism, the third ideological vision influencing our political landscape. Canadians have been familiar with socialism for many decades, first in the former Co-operative Commonwealth Federation and after 1961 in the New Democratic Party. Espousing a unique tradition of democratic socialism, the NDP has never governed Canada as a whole but has governed several provinces. In the United States, socialism was until recently considered un-American, often identified with either German immigrants in Milwaukee or Cold War communists. Once the Cold War ended, with a new generation knowing little of this era, socialism unexpectedly became more respectable. During the 2016 presidential election, Sen. Bernie Sanders (D-Vt.) successfully mobilized a youthful following for his professed democratic socialism—something that surprised many observers. Recently elected Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) claims the democratic socialist label as well.

While socialists commendably want to protect the underprivileged, at their most ambitious they seek to

consolidate ownership of some kinds of property, which in practice generally means ownership by the public through the state. Socialists are not wrong to value communal ownership of property. In our society, we have no difficulty recognizing that a variety of communities ranging from families, schools, businesses, and churches to local, state/provincial, and federal governments own property. Private ownership is not simply individual ownership, as many libertarians assume. Ownership is dispersed throughout an entire society and takes many forms.

Socialists mistakenly—and unjustly—want to concentrate this ownership in the hands of a single community. A single-minded pursuit of economic equality can become idolatrous and can result in a dangerous concentration of political power in too few hands and a central government that assumes too much responsibility for achieving the economic goal. Socialists are generally impatient with the reality of multiple decision-makers in multiple communities pursuing different goals—something they consider insufficiently egalitarian. Nevertheless, Canadian and American societies are characterized by a huge diversity of agents, both individual and communal.

A Balanced Society

Abraham Kuyper, a 19th-century Christian theologian and politician, recognized this movement toward socialism at the start of his political career in Holland more than a century ago. He and his followers fought the efforts of Dutch liberals to homogenize especially education and to squeeze Christianity out of the public realm. Rather than invoking tradition, though, Kuyper articulated a positive vision for governance based on the principles of power-sharing across confessional lines and of something called “sphere sovereignty.”

Sphere sovereignty means God grants authority to human beings in

a variety of communities, each with a distinctive place in society. Schools are subject to educational standards and should not be treated as business enterprises. Similarly, the institutional church has its own divine calling that cannot be usurped by another institution. Marriage uniquely unites a man and a woman in a lifelong covenantal relationship supporting the bearing and raising of children. Each sphere in society plays its part not in isolation from the other, but ideally in a web of cooperative relationships contributing to human flourishing.

Sphere sovereignty does not mean a watertight separation of spheres, as some might see it, but it does imply that God has given a unique commission to each. The result is a balanced society in which no sphere attempts to grasp more than it can rightly claim. This rules out all forms of totalitarianism and a libertarianism that expects too much of the free market.


While Kuyper on the one hand fought against the liberal “Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life” (the title of an address he delivered in 1869), on the other hand he supported confessional orthodoxy against “a false conservatism that adorns itself with the name of Christianity but is devoid of its power” (“Conservatism and Orthodoxy: False and True Preservation,” 1870). (Both addresses can be found in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 1998.) Kuyper largely succeeded in finding a place for his Christian followers in the policy process.

How to Vote

Sadly, no political party represents Kuyper’s vision in its entirety in North America, even if that vision does correspond more closely to the way actual societies function. Nevertheless, one may find hints of this vision in existing parties, possibly in some more than others. But given the obvious flaws of the dominant ideological visions, many Christians are genuinely puzzled about who deserves their vote. There is no ready answer,

and often we are forced to vote for the party or candidate we hope will do the least harm.

When we vote, let’s remember three things. First, not everyone will come to the same conclusion as to which positive things in a party’s program are worthy of support, so Christians will inevitably disagree on which party is the “least worst” of the alternatives. Second, we need to be aware of the distorting ideological visions operating within the party we end up supporting. As we vote for the good things in a particular candidate or party, we will inevitably be stuck with their defects as well. Thus we should go into the polling station with our eyes open. Finally, as Christians we must vote prayerfully, asking God to permit the good to outweigh the bad in any government or administration coming to office.

In the meantime, however we vote, we do well to heed the apostle Paul and pray “for kings and all those in authority, that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Tim. 2:2). 



David T. Koyzis is author of *Political Visions and Illusions* (InterVarsity Press, 2019) and *We Answer to Another Authority, Office, and the Image of God* (Pickwick, 2014). He holds a Ph.D. in government and international studies from

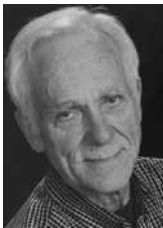
the University of Notre Dame. He lives with his family in Hamilton, Ont.

1. How would you define idols and idolatry?
2. “The irony is that in the U.S. and increasingly in Canada, both liberals and conservatives are liberal in the larger sense.” Were you surprised by this statement? How pervasive do you think the focus on individualism is in North American culture?

READ MORE ONLINE

A Chance Encounter

I first met him
one morning on
a sunny day at a
busy intersection
south of town—
he behind the
wheel of his semi,
I on the seat of
my bicycle.



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

IT WAS ANYTHING BUT a casual meeting. The hug was from the heart—a lingering embrace communicating profound gratitude and relief. It came from a woman I had never met, in the hallway of a hospital at the door of a room where her husband lay. Days earlier, he had been clinically dead, but was now very much alive.

I first met him one morning on a sunny day at a busy intersection south of town—he behind the wheel of his semi, I on the seat of my bicycle. As I waited for the light to turn green, the stuttering racket of a passing truck caught my attention. I looked up to see smoke coming from its rear tires as the driver braked hard to avoid hitting the trailer of a semi drifting across his path from the other direction. I watched in disbelief as the errant vehicle crossed the opposite shoulder and nosed its way into a shrubby thicket.

I set my bike on the ground and trotted over to the truck. Inside, a man was sitting upright behind the wheel, his head on his chest, his hands hanging limp in his lap. Something needed doing, but where to begin? The driver's door was wedged against unyielding shrubbery. The cab was cramped; the man was large. Two young men helped me wrestle him out of the passenger door and onto the ground.

The man had suffered a cardiac arrest. I placed the palm of my right hand on his breastbone, other hand on top, elbows locked, and pressed down with steady rhythm and brutal force. Keep blood moving to the brain, the kidneys, the lungs. Keep up the harsh squeezing of the impotent organ until the medics arrived with their tools: endotracheal tube, IV needles, and, most importantly, a defibrillator.

Not a moment too soon a 911 call brought the sound of wailing sirens and the flashing lights of ambulance and police. Within moments fluid was dripping into a vein and oxygen flowing through a tube into the man's lungs. I made my way home on my bike; the trucker was rushed to the hospital.

Pedaling steadily homeward, I was struck by the coincidences that morning. How I had decided, for no good reason, to take an alternate route home. How the red light at the intersection had halted my forward progress just as the truck made its unconventional turn off the highway into the shrubbery. How only last year I had taken a refresher course on CPR. In fact, it wasn't really a coincidence at all. I am convinced that chance and luck have nothing to do with the course of our lives. I had been destined to play a life-giving role. But my elation at the thought was attenuated by apprehension. Before I'd left the hectic scene, the defibrillator had been used three times; the medic had shaken his head after each application. What, I wondered, had I accomplished? Had it all been in vain? Did getting the man out of the truck take too much time? I pedaled and wondered. And I prayed that all would turn out well.

Still glowing from the warmth of my reception outside the hospital room door, I followed the grateful woman into her husband's room. There lay the driver of the wayward semi, looking a good deal better than when I'd last seen him. We shook hands. Our bright smiles spoke of gratitude. His for my service, mine for the divine providence that had brought us together that memorable morning. **B**

Mindfulness and Christian Faith

Are you fully present, here where God is? As a human, it's likely you are partly here and partly elsewhere.



Irene Kraegel, Psy.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist who teaches mindfulness meditation to students at Calvin University, where she serves as director of the Center for Counseling and Wellness. Irene writes about mindful Christianity at themindfulchristian.com and @mindfulxian on social media. Her new book, *The Mindful Christian: Cultivating a Life of Intentionality, Openness, and Faith*, will be released in February 2020 through Fortress Press.

WHEREVER YOU ARE as you read these words, you can be sure that God is present, here with you as Emmanuel, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

But are you fully present, here where God is? As a human, it's likely you are partly here and partly elsewhere. Just this morning I woke up thinking about all the things I need to do at the office rather than noticing the warmth and coziness of my bed in that moment. Our minds naturally and regularly wander, disconnecting us from the reality of where we are. Often this wandering has a negative tone to it. We think about the past—the mistakes we made, the things done to us, the regrets we carry. And we think about the future, playing out scenarios about how things might go wrong and how we might respond.

Because of this mental wandering, it is not uncommon that we find ourselves missing chunks of information from our own experience. Have you ever driven yourself to your destination with no memory of the drive? Or perhaps you've discovered yourself lost in a daydream when you intended to be in prayer? My son this afternoon found himself sitting alone in a cold car after everyone else had gotten out while he remained absorbed in a library book in the back seat. He had a good laugh about it when he woke up to the present moment and finally made his way into the house.

The reality is that we live much of our life in a mental fog, operating in a swirling cloud of thoughts that keep us disconnected from ourselves, from one another, and from God. For some of us, this is an emotionally neutral experience. For others, it fuels chronic feelings of depression or anxiety. But for all of us, it blinds us from seeing all that God has for us, keeping us detached from



the richness of God's creation and provision in each given moment. Because of this, the practice of mindfulness is a deeply valuable tool for those who desire a deeper relationship with God.

Mindfulness is a simple concept. It means intentionally paying attention to the present moment with an attitude of nonjudgmental curiosity. This can be practiced formally, using times of silent meditation to hone our awareness of what is present around us moment to moment. It can also be practiced informally by regularly bringing our attention back to the present throughout each day. Mindfulness can be learned through a series of guided practices that teach us the attitudes of acceptance, openness, and compassion that accompany mindful awareness.

Like most practices of mental and physical wellness, mindfulness can be practiced in a purely secular fashion. But attention to the present moment is a component of all major world religions, including Christianity. We see this present-moment focus in a variety of Christian practices such as listening prayer and centering prayer. More broadly, Christian spiritual formation has deep roots in meditation and contemplation. Jesus himself modeled the importance of regularly withdrawing into solitude.

My own journey with mindfulness started reluctantly. I had heard mindfulness presented primarily from a



Photo by Mitchell Griest, Unsplash

Buddhist perspective, and I wasn't sure whether it was compatible with my deeply held Christian beliefs. But at a point of deep emotional suffering in my life, I was desperate for relief, and I suspected the practice of mindfulness might be an opportunity for healing. It quickly became clear to me that this was indeed the case.

As I learned to move out of painful mental rumination into the

TRY IT

If you are interested in practicing mindfulness within a Christian framework, you might start with this simple practice. Set a timer for three minutes. Close your eyes (or relax your eyelids halfway) and become curious about physical sensations in your body, aware that you are in God's presence and that your body is God's creation. If you choose, pay particular attention to the sensations of breathing—the breath, given by God, coming into the body and exiting the body without any direction from you. When your timer goes off, take a moment to write down (or verbalize) the specific physical sensations that were present during that short breathing space, as well as any thoughts or feelings that you noticed. Thank God for this “temple of the Holy Spirit”—the body that God has given you—as you proceed into the rest of your day.

present moment, I found that God was there, ready and willing to connect. Mindfulness quickly moved me out of a cognitive struggle with religion into a holy communion with God. God was right there with me, offering me a much lighter load than the one I was carrying on my own. I felt happy for the first time in my life, and I began enjoying the people around me more. It became easier to bounce back from disappointments or failures. Mindfulness was not always pleasant, just like other healthy habits such as exercise can be quite uncomfortable. But the result was an opening to God's good gifts in each moment and a life more infused with God's contentment and joy. Mindfulness turned out to be the gift that unlocked others God used in my life for deep healing.

So how do we practice mindfulness? It's a bit like moving up onto a balcony to create observational distance from what's happening in our own experience of the moment. As we do so, we cultivate an attitude of curiosity that does not judge, resist, or analyze our experience. We experiment with a direct awareness of experience in the moment, unfiltered by thoughts and language. Christians who practice mindfulness engage in this process with an awareness that God's presence is part of what is present in the moment, acknowledging that all we observe in each moment is given by God.

You might wonder what types of things to observe in a moment. Mindful awareness often begins with physical sensations, supporting our experience as embodied creatures, connected to the bodies that God created for us and pronounced “good” at creation's birth (Gen. 1:31). We notice what is coming through our senses (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste) and tune into the sensations of our breath. This grounds us in something that is always in the present moment: our body.

Mindful awareness also incorporates observation of thoughts. Scripture reminds us with some regularity that human thought is not fully reliable. “My thoughts are not your thoughts,”

God tells us in Isaiah 55:8, and Paul encourages us to engage in an ongoing “renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Mindfulness practice increases conscious awareness of thoughts, giving us the opportunity to observe our thoughts without believing all of them or obeying them heedlessly. It opens up room for us to hear God's voice rearranging and gently correcting our thought life.

Mindful awareness also incorporates observation of emotions. We notice our emotions, both pleasant and unpleasant, with gentle attention, knowing that God holds us with divine care and faithfully sees us through the emotional fluctuations of each day. We practice following Jesus' instruction “Do not worry” (Matt. 6:31), observing our emotional triggers with curiosity in order to open ourselves up to God's joy and peace from moment to moment.

Such mindfulness is a tool God uses for our healing and growth. It gives us the focus and openness needed to lay down resistance to the good gifts God has in store for us. Mindfulness keeps us awake and aware as we move through each moment, receiving each God-given breath that is granted this side of heaven. For the Christian, mindfulness is a gift that brings us into the only moment we can ever meet God: the present moment. **B**

1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word “mindfulness”? Have you ever tried this practice?
2. Do you think mindfulness is compatible with Christianity? Why or why not? How would Christian mindfulness differ from other forms of mindfulness?
3. Might some Christians' uneasiness with mindfulness stem partly from a discomfort with their bodies and emotions as the practice brings more awareness to them? Is such discomfort with our bodies or emotions biblical?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

5 Books to Read for Women's History Month

MARCH IS HERE, and with it a yearly opportunity to reflect on some of the people and stories that paved the path for future generations of girls and women. Below are five books about women written by women. From our ancient sister deacon Phoebe to mathematicians and pioneers, these women changed the world for the better.

***Phoebe*, by Paula Gooder**

As our daughter, Phoebe, is named partly after the biblical Phoebe, I was thrilled to find an entire book about this somewhat mysterious woman. After all, Paul entrusted Phoebe to deliver and most likely explain the book of Romans to the church in Rome. Biblical scholar Paula Gooder imagines Phoebe's story—who she was, the life she lived, and her first-century faith—and in doing so opens up the world of the early church and the role of women in it. After each chapter there are in-depth notes by which one can learn about everything from slavery (Phoebe was likely a freed slave who inherited wealth from her former owner) to adoption to street food around A.D. 56.

***Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott**

With the luminous new movie just out, people are reading and rereading Louisa May Alcott's classic 1868 novel. This story of a family of women who bonded while their father and husband was serving in the Civil War has charmed generations because of its timeless messages of love, sisterhood, and ambition. Far ahead of its time in egalitarian thinking, *Little Women* continues to inspire readers to use their gifts, whatever they might be.

***Hidden Figures*, by Margot Lee Shetterly**


This book knits together the true stories of four African American women who played a major role in

achieving some of NASA's greatest successes in space. Known as "human computers," these women used their mathematical gifts to help propel the first man into space, all while being segregated from their white, male counterparts. If you saw the movie, you'll love gaining more inspiring details about a story that was once lost to time and whitewashed history.

***Caroline*, by Sarah Miller**

This meticulously researched historical novel reconsiders childhood favorite *Little House on the Prairie* through the lens of Laura Ingalls Wilder's mother, known as "Ma" to generations of readers. Caroline Ingalls's journey will leave you with a new appreciation for the fierce challenges female pioneers faced as well as for their weighty contributions.

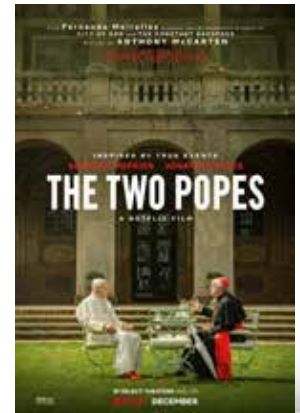
***I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, by Malala Yousafzai**

Read this if you want to be empowered no matter your age, gender, or obstacles. Malala Yousafzai is the youngest-ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and a global symbol of courage. The memoir recounts her recovery journey, from getting shot by the Pakistani Taliban to her schooling in the United Kingdom, and explains how the hope of education and family helped her to overcome overwhelming odds. 



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Manitoba, lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., in a 1924 house full of teenagers, pets, exchange students, and houseplants. The author of 15 books, including *Anne of Green Gables*, *My Daughter and Me*,

she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her at Lorileecraker.com or on Instagram @thebooksellersdaughter.

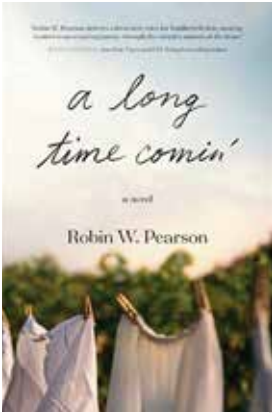


The Two Popes

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

The Two Popes explores the relationship—initially tense—between Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) and Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Pope Francis).

Pope Benedict (Anthony Hopkins) determines to step down, citing age and other concerns. Would Cardinal Bergoglio (Jonathan Pryce) consider being pope? Their friendship grows, but still Bergoglio resists. The film scrolls through time, backward and forward and then back again. This anchors Bergoglio in his backstory and explains his humility and love. There are many liberties taken here; this is a fictional account of a real relationship, after all. Hopefully, Protestants and Catholics alike can enjoy this movie for what it is: a deeply spiritual, if fictional, film declaring that being human and loving God is no easy thing. (Netflix)



A Long Time Comin'

By Robin W. Pearson

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Robin W. Pearson's debut novel is a multifaceted tale that will have readers turning it one way and another to get the best glimpses of its many lessons and messages. Granddaughter Evelyn Lester appears on Granny B's doorstep, determined to help but carrying her own burdens that threaten to derail her. The novel moves back and forth in time as it reveals the layered secrets held tight by Granny B that have threatened her family and her own peace.

A Long Time Comin' is a wonderful tale of love, family, secrets, relationships, and forgiveness that will teach us all how to live well in the midst of real life. (Tyndale)



Someplace to Call Home

By Sandra Dallas

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Ever since leaving Oklahoma, 12-year-old Hallie Turner longs for a place to call home. But it's 1933, and the Great Depression and drought-induced dust storms have converged to create a crisis for many Americans. Now that Hallie's mother has died and her father has abandoned the family, there's no reason for Hallie and her brothers to remain in their childhood home.

As the threesome travels from town to town in a dilapidated car, they confront both hostility and kindness. In this novel for juvenile readers, author Sandra Dallas paints a detailed, touching portrait of life in a challenging era when many children faced harsh economic and social realities yet overcame obstacles by banding together and experiencing the generosity and hospitality of strangers. (Sleeping Bear Press)



Linda Ronstadt: The Sound of My Voice

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

This documentary gives us a glimpse into the life and career of Linda Ronstadt, the 1970s singer who was the first artist to have songs topping the pop, country, and R&B charts at the same time. She had a string of five platinum albums, the most by any female artist. But what comes through most in this film is how Ronstadt just loved to sing. It is disheartening, then, to find her at the end of the film no longer able to sing because of Parkinson's disease. *The Sound of My Voice* is a warm and engaging look at the life and career of one of the finest singers of the 20th century. (Streaming now, Greenwich Entertainment)

The Lowdown

Chicago in Flames:

Christy Award-winner Jocelyn Green sets *Veiled in Smoke* against the backdrop of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, weaving subtle faith elements into an absorbing tale of romance and mystery. (Bethany House)

Love, Cancer, Heartbreak, and Faith:

Starring Shania Twain, Gary Sinise, and Melissa Roxburgh (*Manifest*), *I Still Believe* focuses on singer Jeremy Camp's romance with his first wife, Melissa, whom he married in October 2000 despite knowing she was dying. (Kingdom Story Company)

You Might Not Want to Watch This on an Airplane:

Now in its second season, *Manifest* delves into the mystery of Montego Air Flight 828, which landed safely after a turbulent but routine flight. But in the span of those few hours the world had aged five years, and the returned passengers soon realize they have been caught in an impossible web. (Stream the first season on NBC.com or Hulu)

Already Picked Up as a TV Series:

The author of bestseller *Station Eleven* builds more of her signature worlds in *The Glass Hotel*, racing from a crashing Ponzi scheme in New York City to the far reaches of misty Vancouver Island and the disappearance of a young woman. (Knopf)

Isn't God Different in the Old Testament and the New?

What makes us think that God is portrayed differently in the Old Testament than in the New Testament?



Mike Wagenman is the Christian Reformed campus minister and a professor of theology at Western University in London, Ont., and a part-time New Testament instructor at Redeemer University. He attends Forest City Community Church.

“How do you reconcile who God seems to be in the Old Testament—angry and vengeful—with who God seems to be in the New Testament—abounding in love?”

What makes us think that God is portrayed differently in the Old Testament than in the New Testament? Some of the most moving depictions of God as a deeply intimate and powerful lover are found in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, it is Jesus himself who is often described as having some of the most angry, almost violent confrontations with people. Throughout the entire Bible, God is described as having a wide range of human emotions.

I believe there are three things to keep in mind here. First, this question is a smokescreen. Our dominant North American culture believes we are in control. This secular mindset leads us to assume that because we can control much of the world through our science, technology, economics, and politics, there's nothing else that could possibly lie outside of our control. We are allergic to the idea that God could be angry or violent because that would mean there is someone we will never control. It's far easier to maintain our belief in our control of the world by claiming that the Bible's portrayal of God is inconsistent and therefore unreliable. We will only allow God to be God if God stays in God's place, under our control. The question allows us to carry on believing that lie about ourselves.

Second, affluent and comfortable North Americans are disconnected and insulated from the harsh realities of both the ancient and the contemporary world. We struggle with the Bible's depictions of God as angry or violent because we read them from our middle-class lives. Many in our dominant

culture are divorced from this deeply broken world, full of deadly violence and soul-crushing injustice. Most of today's world lives as nearly all of the ancient world did: under the grinding realities of a barbaric world. Anyone who has a clear vision of the state of the world as well as a heart of compassion and justice would be angry at what has happened to God's masterpiece of creation! Most of God's angry violence in the Old Testament is actually God's decisive intervention of love, a shocking interruption in the status quo to bring about liberation and justice for the oppressed. From the plagues in Egypt to Jesus causing a riot in the temple, God has a habit of bringing joy and hope to those whose lives are being squandered underneath the grimy boot of abusive power. Sometimes we object to God's righteous anger because it might spell the end of our affluence and comfort, especially if our way of life is the dehumanizing result of injustice anywhere.

Third, the American biblical scholar Greg Boyd reminds us that part of God accommodating God's self to us on this “long road of redemption” (*Our World Belongs to God*, Article 18) is by using the words of sinful human beings to write his Word. Our ancestors millennia ago were a people immersed in a world of tribal warfare. It was simply taken for granted that the gods approved of wanton human slaughter. This violent human mindset is reflected in Scripture. Despite our fallen and rebellious habits, God reliably tells the beautiful story of his worldwide love in Scripture. But if we take a casual look around the world today we see that we haven't come very far; we're still struggling to learn the transformational lesson of love displayed in Jesus. Thanks be to God that by grace God works with us where we're at! **B**

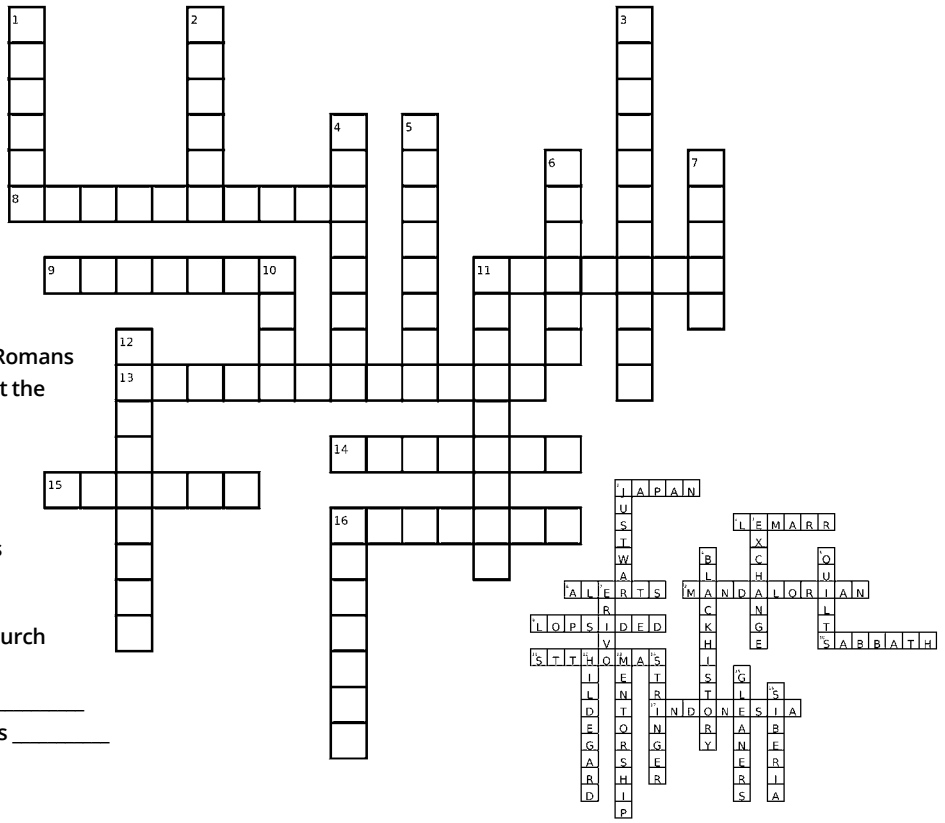
Find clues to this crossword puzzle in this issue of *The Banner*. See the answers next month!

Down:

1. He led the *Doleantie* in the 1800s
2. *I Am _____*: *The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*
3. _____ has nothing to do with the course of our lives
4. This uses its tail to help it hop
5. God doesn't make these
6. The ancient deacon who delivered the book of Romans
7. Number of years Campus Ministries has been at the University of Toronto
10. The season before Easter
11. We are in danger of this form of tribalism
12. The conservative idol
16. Redeemer University is no longer known as this

Across:

8. This book inspired members of a Washington church to create art
9. Our North American culture believes we are in _____
11. Wherever you are, you can be sure that God is _____
13. We should see prayer as this
14. Every Man a _____
15. Marianne Tanis teaches art in _____
16. The city at the center of *Veiled in Smoke*, by Jocelyn Green



Answers to the
February 2020 puzzle

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Announcement of Candidacy

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

Church Anniversary

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 125 YEARS

WITH THANKS TO GOD, the Christian Reformed Church of Pease, MN celebrates 125 years! Former pastors and members are invited to a celebratory worship service Sunday, May 3 at 9:30 a.m.

CHURCH ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO CAMPUS MINISTRY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS. So it is time to party. Alumni, friends, supporters, and current members are invited to the anniversary celebration on Saturday, March 28, 7.00pm at Wycliffe College, 5 Hoskin Ave, University of Toronto. The Wine Before Breakfast All-star Band will be playing, together with testimonies and a reception.

Church Positions Available

LEAD PASTOR - Aylmer CRC in Aylmer, Ontario, Canada is seeking an experienced Lead Pastor gifted in the areas of shepherding

and teaching. We are prayerfully searching for a self motivated and compassionate Pastor who is devoted to providing Reformed preaching, passionate about nurturing our spiritual growth and equipping us for community outreach. If this is a position you may feel God's calling to, we would love to speak with you. Please contact Lisa at 519-520-1220 or email bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com. Job description and church profile are available on the Portal.

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.

LEAD PASTOR Immanuel CRC in Langley BC eagerly calls an inspiring lead pastor, rooted in and excited to preach the Word of God in this challenging culture. We yearn for substance, dynamic deliverance and are eager to listen and be taught the full Gospel. Email Pim Schon ISCimmanuel@licrc.ca.

PASTOR OF FAITH FORMATION AND OUTREACH AT TRINITY CRC (ABBOTSFORD, BC) Trinity Christian Reformed Church in beautiful Abbotsford, BC, seeks a full-time ordained Pastor of Faith Formation and Outreach. The

successful candidate will provide leadership and vision for our intergenerational discipleship programs, including those for children, youth, and families. This person would also provide leadership to our existing local outreach initiatives, such as our ongoing Alpha program, and help us develop more opportunities for local and global outreach. Please contact us at trinitycsearch2020@gmail.com.

PASTOR River Park CRC of Calgary, Alberta is seeking a full-time Pastor of Preaching, Care and Spiritual Formation. We are a multicultural congregation situated in the foothills of the beautiful Rocky Mountains. We are looking for a Pastor to inspire us to Reach Out, Draw In and Create Community. To find out more, please contact the search committee at RPCChurch.Pastor.Search@gmail.com.

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.

SENIOR PASTOR - SHAWNEE PARK CRC, an established church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is seeking a pastor to help us joyfully worship God, equip, nurture, and extend God's family. Contact Chris Larsen at 616-318-1837 or email at chris.larsen@gfs.com.

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.

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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.

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS

ANDREW DROGE January 1. 95th Birthday. We are thanking God for you and your strong faith passed on to your family. We love you! Love Celi and your family.

DENNIS VANDEN HEUVEL celebrates his 95th birthday on March 3 along with his wife Angie, children Jack & Karen Vanden Heuvel, Doug & Dawn Terpstra, and Doug & Nancy Einfeld, 11 grandchildren and spouses and 21 great-grandchildren. Thanks be to God!

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

ELEANORE (ROETERS) DE JONG, of Homer Glen, IL, celebrates her 90th birthday on March 16. Wife of the late Theodore, and mother of the late Ralph, Jane (George) Zoeterman, and Phillip (Ruth). 6 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren. Her family thanks God for 90 years of His faithfulness.

GELENE (LENDERINK) ZOETERMAN, of Grand Rapids, MI and formerly Palos Heights, IL, celebrated her 90th birthday on February 6. Wife of the late George Zoeterman, and mother of Sandra (Dale) Van Kley, Timothy (Jennifer), Denise (Therese Reilly), Debra (Ronald) Haan, and George (Jane). 12 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

JEAN WASSENER (ZEILSTRA), 11020 Raleigh, Westchester, IL 60154, will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 12, 2020. Congratulations and much love from your family, husband Robert; children: Sharon and Jack Eriks, Sandra and Andrew Kranenborg, Ronald and Cathy, Linda and Verle Norris; 11 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. Her family praises God for her faith and Christian example for us all.

NELLIE ANN (IZENBAARD) FEDES 6151 Shady Rest St. Manhattan, MT celebrates her 90th birthday on March 26. A church organist for over 60 years, she still plays piano at the Churchill Retirement Home. "Strength & dignity are her clothing. She opens her mouth with wisdom & the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household." Prov. 31:25-27

GRACE (DE RUITER) VANDER AA, of pantego, NC, will celebrate her 90th birthday on February 17. We thank God for his many blessings bestowed on her during her long life. She was married to the late Art for 63 years and had 4 children--Cyndie Van Dyke (Alan), the late Art, Jr. (the late Terry), Jenny Febus (Dave) and Pam Kirkman (Barry), and is "Grammy" to 9 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Obituaries



BOSS, John H., age 81, of Orland Park, IL., went home to his Lord and Savior on January 19, 2020. Beloved husband for 58 years to Sharon, nee Van Dyke. Loving father of Sandy (Bill) Errico, Jim (Joan), Bob (Diane), Tom (Francie), Karen (Ken) Eizenga, and the late Ken (late Susan) Boss. Cherished grandfather of 18 and great-grandfather of two. Dear brother of Merrie Lou (Marvin) DeBoer, Ron (Myra) Boss, and the late Rich (Dorothy) Boss. Fond brother-in-law of William (late Trina) Van Dyke and Robert (Lindy) Van Dyke. Uncle of many nieces and nephews. John worked 29 years as a roll-off driver for Hoving & Sons. He then found his true calling as a beloved school bus driver for 10 years at Southwest Chicago Christian Schools and 10 years at Peotone Public School.

BUSHOUSE, Edward, age 97, of Grand Haven, MI passed away peacefully in St. Paul, MN on Dec.31, 2019. He was preceded in death by his wife Phyllis in 2014. He is dearly missed by his children, Paul, Mary (Steve), Howard (Pat), 5 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

DEGROOT, Dirk "Dick", age 94, of Wagenborgen, Netherlands, formerly of Hinsdale, went to be with his LORD on January 8, 2020. 2N612 Land Rose Lane, Maple Park, IL 60151. Beloved husband of Aafke Bos-Ridder and the late Henrietta "Hank"; loving father of Derek (Joan) DeGroot and Mark (Lisa) DeGroot; step-father of Jan Willem (Yvon) Bos, Evelien (Francis) Bos, and Berthil (Helene) Bos; devoted grandfather of Mark (Tricia), Adam (Whitney), Amy (Ryan) Zmich, Dirk (Ali), Alex (Crystal), Mylena Bos, and Lisanne Bos; great-grandfather of 8; fond brother of Abel (the late Louise) DeGroot, Paul (Flora) DeGroot, and the late Amelien (the late Martjo) Drijver; uncle of many nieces and nephews.

HARTOG, Bonnie, (Prince) RN, age 75 of Seminole, FL went to be with the Lord on Dec.12,2019, (born in Chicago,IL.). Bonnie graduated from CCHS and then married her high school sweetheart Henry. Bonnie and Henry were married for 55 years. She was a loving wife, mother, and grandma. She is survived by her husband, Henry, her 2 sisters Marlene Oesterreich and Carolyn Aring, her 8 kids-Jacob, Jeff, Steve, Debbie, Gary, Cheryl, Randy, Mike, & 23 grandkids.



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2020 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

HIGHLIGHTS OF PERU & ECUADOR

Sep 2 – 14 | *Merlyn & Dorothy Vander Leest*

ALASKA & DENALI

Sep 5 – 17 | *Ken & Laurel Bratt*

COLORFUL COASTAL CROATIA: OPATIJA TO DUBROVNIK

Sep 14 – 25 | *Bruce Buursma*

THE NETHERLANDS: OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Sep 25 – Oct 7 | *Henk Aay & Bob Hoeksema*

JOURNEY THROUGH THE LAND

Oct 8 – 22 | *Jeff & Karen Blamer*

HAWAII: VOLCANOES IN THE SUN

Nov 10 – 22 | *Gerry Van Kooten*

2021 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

MEXICO'S CULTURAL CHARMS

Feb 7 – 19, 2021 | *John Witte*

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS: ISRAEL & JORDAN

Apr 1 – 13 | *Dr. Jeffrey Weima*

ADVENTURES IN SCANDINAVIA

Sep 8 – 21, 2021 | *John & Lynda Witte*

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KLEIN, Nellie J, age 89, passed away peacefully at her home in Palm Beach Gardens, FL on November 29th, 2019. She is survived by her children Carol (Russ Baker), Dr. Tom Klein (Dr. David Gitomer), H. Marty Klein (Karen), and Ron Klein, 3 grandchildren and their spouses, 4 great-grandchildren. She was predeceased by her husband Neil, her sister Tressa, her sister Anne, and her brother Larry.

MCCOY Linda (Halma), 71, of Gaithersburg, MD passed on to her heavenly home on Nov. 23 after a 5 month battle with cancer. Born in NJ to the late Neil and Helen Halma. Survived by her husband of 42 years, Michael, son Chris and his wife Mel of Australia, daughter

Stephanie of Gaithersburg and 2 dearly loved grandchildren, Toby and Finn. Also survived by her siblings Ruth Halma of Prospect Park, Joan (Bob) Vander Haak of Washington State, Barbara Halma of Hawthorne and Edward (Deborah) of East Hanover.



PYNAKER, Nancy A (nee Gemmell) 3/21/1930 ran into the arms of Jesus on 10/26/2019 surrounded by her family. She was preceded in death by her husband of 68 1/2 yrs, Andy, on 1/31/2017. She is survived by her 5 children: Dave & Paula, Judy Gorter,

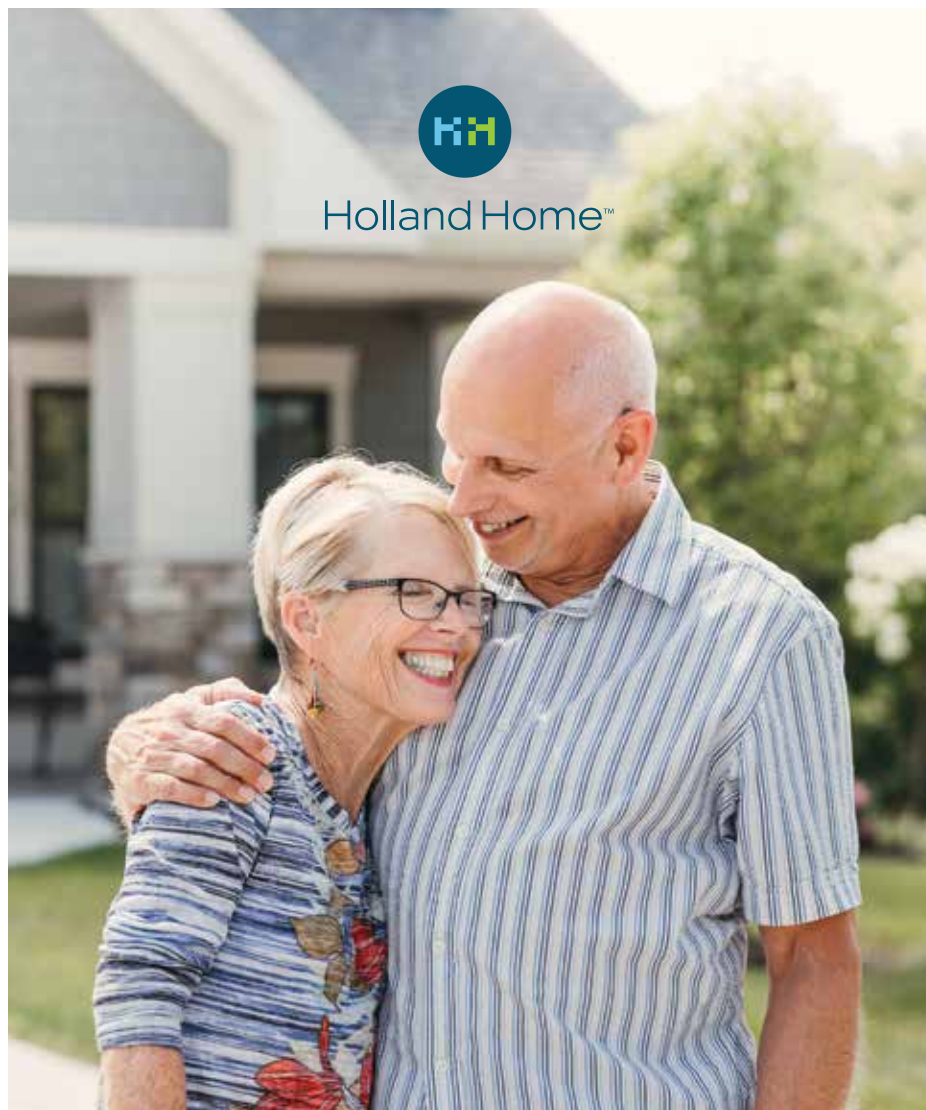
Bob & Denise, Karen & Ken Ade, Pam & Chris Maurer; 12 grandchildren; 24 great-grandchildren; 5 great-great grandchildren. Nancy will be remembered for her strong faith, love for her family & friends, & her tender roast beef. She told us many times that we were to wear bright colors to her funeral because it was a celebration, and to say Hallelujah when she was in heaven. Our mom would have loved the sound of 100+ voices saying Hallelujah at the end of her funeral. God be with you till we meet again mom & dad!

SCHIPMA, Marciana, nee Buikema, age 96, of Downers Grove, went to be with her LORD on January 9. 1041 S. Stewart Ave, Lombard, IL 60148. Beloved wife of the late Charles Andrew Schipma; loving mother of Charles R. (Mary) Schipma, Jack D. Schipma, Trudy (the late John) Voss, Doreen (Frank) Voss, and Susan (Doug) Slinkman; devoted grandmother of 19; great-grandmother of 58; fond sister of the late Peter (the late Janet and the late Minnie), the late John (Betty and the late Evelyn), Andrew (Marge), Ralph (the late Florence), and William (Clara) Buikema; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church, 1246 S. Harvey Ave, Berwyn, IL 60402.

STRODTMAN, John David, age 66, of Wheaton went to be with his Lord on January 28th, 2020. 1981 Cheshire Lane, Wheaton, IL 60189. Beloved husband of Rosemary, nee Van Reken; loving father of Rob Strodtman and Janna (Kameron) Matthis; dear son of the late Robert and the late Virginia Strodtman; fond brother of Janet E. Line, the late Robert (Debbie) Strodtman, James Strodtman, Lynne (Anthony) Waratuke, and Beth (Joe) Bernet; uncle of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Lombard Christian Reformed Church, 2020 S Meyers Rd, Lombard, IL 60148, are appreciated.

TAMMINGA, Henrietta, nee Hofmeyer, age 90 of Lombard, went home to be with her Lord on January 14th. 344 Manor Hill Court, Lombard, IL 60148. Beloved wife of 66 years of George Tamminga; loving mother of Cindy Tamminga, Kristy (Dan) Bootsma, and Scott (Denise) Tamminga; devoted grandmother of Joshua (Charis), Joseph (Alyssa) and Matthew Bootsma, Nathaniel, Kathryn, and Micah Tamminga; fond sister of Joan (the late Marlyn) Bonnema, and the late John (the late Elma) Hofmeyer; aunt of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools, 188 W. Butterfield Rd., Elmhurst, IL 60126 or Elim Christian Schools, 13020 Central Ave., Crestwood, IL 60418 are appreciated.

VOLKERS, Jay Howard, age 95, of Grand Rapids, went to be with his Lord on January 2, 2020. He was preceded in death by his wife Sarah, his first wife Mildred, and by his sister Gladys Beckman; and is survived by his children Jane and David Tiesenga, Brian Volkens, Marianne Triezenberg, Herman and Elizabeth Triezenberg, Marcia and Jack DeBaar, Ryer Triezenberg; his sister Lois Stegink; 12 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren.



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A Day on the Hospice Unit

We focus on the next med pass, the next meal we'll help someone eat, or the next prayer or shower.

IN THE HOSPICE UNIT, I stood opposite one of our nurse aides. Indicating one of the rooms, she said, "I think he'll be next."

We lost five the first week of August, but only one the second week. Three more are actively dying as I write this. One of them won't make it to the weekend. The other two will probably not see another Wednesday.

This is our normal.

"He'll go quick once he starts."

"He's a fighter. He'll probably still be here on Monday."

Sometimes we talk this way, as if we're discussing the weather. Sometimes we talk this way, and the emotional weight of our common mortality hits us. Most of the time we don't talk about it at all. We focus on the next med pass, the next meal we'll help someone eat, or the next prayer or shower.

But every time we go away, we wonder who'll be left when we get back.

In my other unit, the dementia unit, half the men are wearing helmets because they forget they need wheelchairs or walkers, so they fall. One man tries to seem normal, so you get one- or two-word responses alluding to something you both remember, just like you'd get when you sat together at the bar. Another tells me about the bugs he sees as he carefully arranges napkins on the table to keep them at bay. Then there's the one who is just angry because he's here. He doesn't know where or what "here" is, but he knows he isn't home, and that infuriates him. Mr. G will repeat whatever you say to him as if he's hypnotized. Every time I go into the unit, I have the same conversations I had the last time.

Admirals, laborers, musicians, business owners, police officers, tradesmen—whoever they were, this is who they are now.

Twenty-five years, maybe less, and that's who I'll be, too.

People talk of progress. But there isn't any. Not really. It's an illusion. I can't escape Ecclesiastes: "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well. ... However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. ... So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless" (Eccles. 11:5-6, 8, 10).

It's depressing, yet I'm not depressed. I read Ecclesiastes and the burden is lifted; vexation is truly banished. God will finish the race. I'll just take the next step until someday a different young nurse aide says to another chaplain, "I think he'll be next." And that will be OK, too. **B**



Eric Verhulst is the chaplain in the Hospice and Geriatric Dementia Unit at the Martinsburg (W.Va.) Veterans Affairs Medical Center.



You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the
ends of the earth. -Acts 1:8

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