

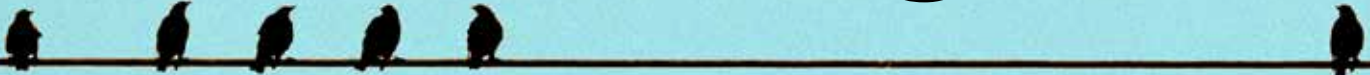
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Rewriting

Belonging



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Every three years or so, *The Banner* distributes a survey to its readers. Almost 800 of you responded this year. We were curious: How often do you read the *The Banner* online? More than 90% of respondents read it—or parts of it—at least once a month. Guess we should continue.

Reading *The Banner* Online?

Almost every week	40%
About twice a month	30%
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The survey was conducted in January and February 2020 by the Calvin University Center for Social Research. A total of 769 participants completed the survey.

WHAT'S ONLINE

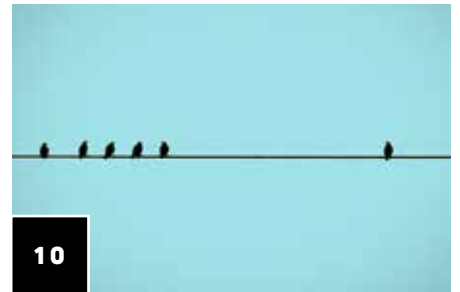
Looking for more? Here are just a few of the stories you'll find online at *TheBanner.org*. (Try typing the headlines into the search box.)

- » Michigan Church's Podcast Project Tells 'God's Story Through Our Stories'
- » Ontario Churches Share Tech, Creativity for Online Worship
- » Podcast: *Stuff You Missed in History Class*
- » Movie: *Emma*
- » Streaming: *Unorthodox*

Hope for the Politically Hopeless

The Banner has teamed up with the Center for Public Justice to release a series of articles online exploring the divisiveness of our times. Look for the first article June 29 at *TheBanner.org/Political-Hope*. See p. 30 for more information.

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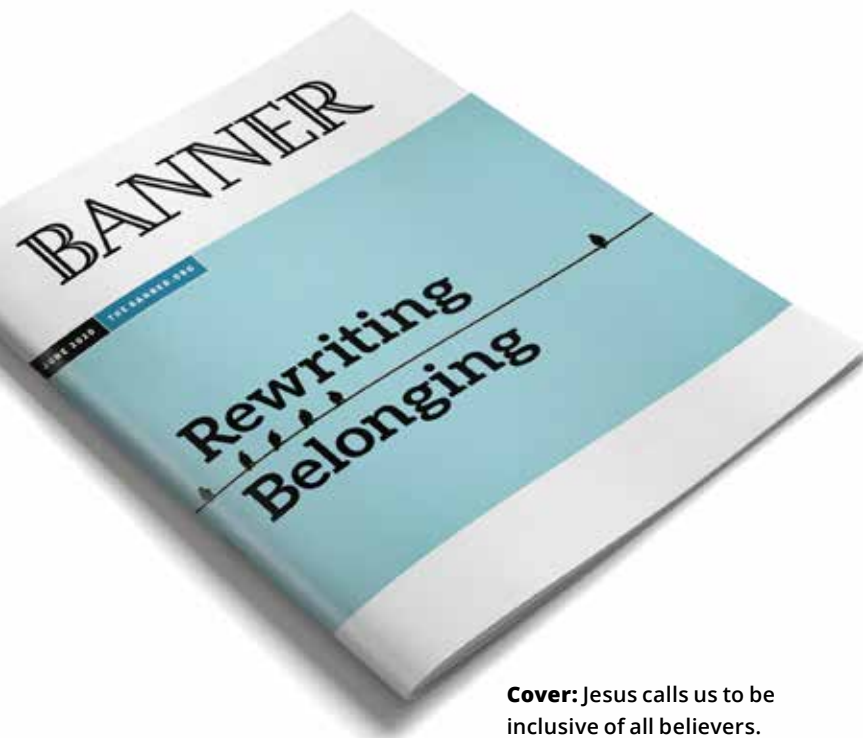
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BANNER

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Through the Darkest Valley

Doing the right thing
does not mean we won't
suffer in the process.
But God will help us get
through the valley.



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.

MY LATE BROTHER, Thomas, was a Reformed Presbyterian pastor in Singapore. He died many years ago in his early 50s from nasal cancer, leaving a wife and four children. When Thomas was still alive and suffering from cancer, some insensitive person asked if he still believed that God could heal him. I will never forget Thomas' reply: "I believe God can heal, but God doesn't have to."

My brother taught me that our faith and trust in God is not dependent on God's bounty or "blessings" (as popularly understood). We do not trust God only when things are going well. The flip side of that is that trusting God does not necessarily bring us material blessings, either.

Psalm 23 is a beloved psalm for many. We love the promise of how we will lack nothing if the Lord is our shepherd. We want God to lead us to those green pastures and quiet waters. We long to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, enjoying God's goodness and love all the days of our lives.

Yet sandwiched right in the middle of this psalm is walking through the valley of the shadow of death (v. 4). The God who guides us along the right paths (v. 3) also guides us through the darkest valleys. Following God's paths does not ensure we avoid trials, suffering, or pain. But it does ensure that God is with us, even in the dark valleys. Therefore, we always have hope that the darkness will end when we eventually climb out of the valley.

In these difficult times with the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us may feel like we are in the darkest valley. Due to restrictions, many have lost jobs and financial security. Thousands have lost loved ones to the virus.

Front-line health workers are overwhelmed and exhausted, risking their lives daily. Most of us are grieving. Doing the right thing does not mean we won't suffer in the process. But God will help us get through the valley.

My father died about 10 days after my brother's death. I think the heartbreak of burying one of his sons was too much for Dad. Those were dark days of grief for my family, especially for Mom. And, unfortunately, at the time I was half a world apart in Canada while my family was grieving in Singapore. It didn't work out for me to travel then, and I would have been too late for the funerals anyway. I visited all of my family and the gravesites months later. But it was difficult to process grief alone. My wife discovered me in my study one evening sobbing uncontrollably.

God knows many have suffered far worse than I have. I know I am privileged and blessed, and I thank God for those blessings. But when I do suffer and walk through the dark valleys, I will still trust Jesus, the man of sorrows acquainted with grief. In Jesus Christ, God knows our suffering intimately. But Jesus also triumphed over death, ensuring that life—God's resurrection life—has the last word.

Hence, I will confess that God is good, all the time. As one of my favorite worship songs reminds me, "on the road marked with suffering; / though there's pain in the offering, / blessed be your name. ... When the darkness closes in, Lord, / still I will say, / 'Blessed be the name of the Lord'" (Matt Redman, "Blessed Be Your Name"). **B**



REPLY ALL

'Descended into Hell'

I very much appreciated Debra Rienstra's article on the harrowing of hell ("Saturday of the Harrowed Hearts," April 2020). She rightly points out that it is a doctrine steeped in ancient and rich tradition. She also hit on an important discrepancy between the (Apostles') Creed's testimony to a historical, salvific Christ-event and the Heidelberg Catechism's "psychologizing" of the phrase "he descended into hell."

Unfortunately, that phrase from the Creed is misleading. The teaching of the (church) fathers was not that Jesus spent the time between his crucifixion and resurrection in hell, the place/state of eternal damnation and punishment. He descended to Hades ("Sheol" in the Old Testament), which was the realm of the dead. The moment he did, he broke down its gates, shattered its chains, and trampled death by death.

» Bruce Anderson // Muskegon, Mich.

Traditions

In response to the article "Outdated Tradition or Biblical Truth" (April 2020), I think my reason for giving away my three daughters (at their weddings) was for a different reason than just because it's a tradition. When I "gave" each to her new husband I was "entrusting" each one into his care. I was passing along the responsibility I had had of raising and caring for her into his care. It was a symbol of entrusting. It meant a lot for me to be able to walk her down the aisle and "give" her to my new son-in-law. ... As for April (Otto)'s future wedding ceremony, regardless of what she believes for herself, she should be considerate of her father's feelings.

» Mark Stevens // Twin Lake, Mich.

As a husband and a father who has been blessed with four daughters, now married, your article made my heart ache a little. I too have often questioned the proper place of traditional practices, and heaven knows the Christian church is full of them. I have also learned that some traditions have great value, being born of wisdom and testing over the ages. ... I hope she finds someone to make the rest of her life full and rich and can celebrate her marriage in a way that is meaningful and true to her. Perhaps she can even start some new traditions. And for what it's worth, I have come to believe that discarding old traditions is sometimes in order but, like throwing out old relics, should be done only with the utmost care and caution, as some of them may be worth more than you think.

» Bob Van Aertselaer // online comment

Political Idolatry

Reminders about idolatry are always useful ("Visions and Illusions in Political Life," March 2020), but I wonder if we are also at risk of idolizing Abraham Kuyper's ideas. I am thankful that God used others to recognize the full agency and gifts of women rather than limiting them to Kuyper's family sphere. Critics who name the racism and colonialism embedded in his analysis are also God's servants. More importantly, our tendency to venerate past heroes freezes our thinking in 19th-century categories instead of being God's agents of justice and reconciliation in our own times. If Kuyper were alive today, I am sure he would suggest more than a personalistic, least-bad choice as a public witness strategy in a historical context that calls for the kind of leadership he showed in his times.

» Kathy Vandergrift // Ottawa, Ont.

A Holy Pathway

Thank you, Frank DeVries, for your helpful article, "A Holy Pathway" (April 2020). For those of us who cannot recall a time when we accepted Jesus as our Savior, the article offers an intriguing answer to the question: How is it that we came to love the Lord? Perhaps we owe more to our parents' singing than we surmise. As for me, I can still hear their voices singing the old Dutch psalms in our church in Holland many years ago. Were they unwittingly creating holy pathways? Who is to say? As the old hymn tells us: God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

» John Van Dyk // Marion, Ill.

A Shirt Story

I completely agree with the premise of this story ("A Shirt Story," April 2020). ... Here's where the shoe drops. This article paints a picture of cotton production that holds kernels of truth but doesn't back it with any real data or what production looks like. In other words, it's pretty prose designed to have you, the reader, feel guilty and change your behavior. ... The U.S. is the second-largest producer of cotton in the world. Want to really know about sustainability in U.S. cotton production? Please visit *cottoncultivated.cottoninc.com*. I found very few solutions in the article other than to look for organic or fair trade. How about buying from an American company that sources its cotton exclusively from America, where sustainability measures are part of most farms' business plans? ... As the author of the article suggests, please be mindful of your purchases and giveaways either as churches, youth groups, or even as businesses.

» Jodi DeHate // online comment

READ MORE ONLINE

Speaking the Gospel in a Changing World

THE PASTOR ASKED his evangelism team, “How well do we share our faith with unbelievers?” The team’s response was that our missionaries do it well. The pastor then clarified his question, asking, “What about us? How do you and I do in sharing the gospel?” General silence followed, without any specific responses, making it clear that personal, local evangelism has not been a high priority even though the church is strong and provides exemplary missionary support. Perhaps this is an issue in your church as well.

In our church and community, we are seeing a shift. In our traditional Dutch community, nearly everyone was always believed to be a Christian, or at least a church attender. Now surveys show that only about half of the community members attend church regularly. Particularly in communities that were once mostly Christian, church members are beginning to see the pressing need to live and speak the gospel to those nearby, not just via our missionaries overseas. We live in a mission field.


How do we adjust to this shift? One of our first steps is mobilizing our church members to share their faith with those around us. Our church has hosted one class on this topic, and another is planned. We don’t need a big program or budget for our church to do evangelism. Often the best way to reach local unchurched people is to help them, befriend them, and speak to them as we encounter them in our everyday lives.

“Organic outreach is all about sharing our faith in a way that is authentic, real, and feels natural to the people around us,” Kevin Harney writes in his book *Organic Outreach for Ordinary People* (Zondervan, 2009). We can

How do we adjust to this shift? One of our first steps is mobilizing our church members.

initiate spiritual conversations even with skeptical people, asking them to tell us about themselves. This can sometimes lead to us being asked “to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet. 3:15).

One suggestion for staunch Calvinists: No matter how strongly you believe in predestination and election, never ask yourself if the person you are considering reaching out to is one of the elect. I have heard this question raised, and it is irrelevant in terms of who we evangelize because only God knows the answer. It’s pointless to consider it further.

Those in the church are starting to ask how to share their faith. Let’s challenge each other to learn how and make it a priority to speak our faith while we continue to do good for those around us. The pressure for results is off. Only God through the Holy Spirit can bring people to God; we just have to be God’s willing tools. 



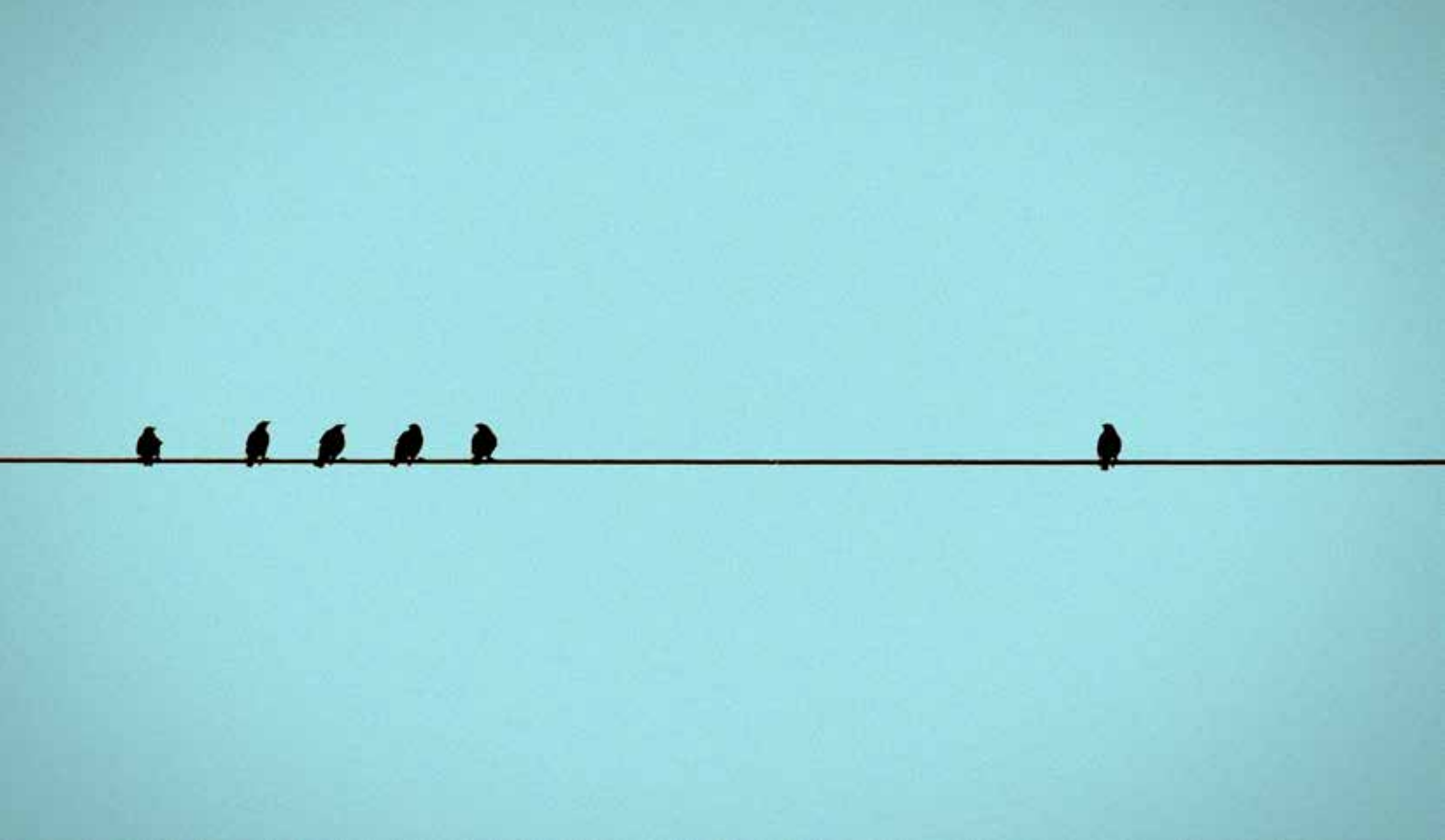
Robert King is a retired corporate manager and a member of First Reformed Church in Zeeland, Mich.



As I Was Saying

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- » COVID is Devastating, but Decentralized Worship is a Gift
- » Virtual Church in a Time of Vulnerability



Rewriting Belonging

By Ruth Padilla-DeBorst

The hymn “All Are Welcome in This Place” warms the hearts of parishioners on many a Sunday. Yet we must ask if it truly reflects the reality of our local church or if God is calling us to break out of old wineskins to allow the Spirit to rewrite what “belonging” means in our midst.

Biblical and extra-biblical accounts portray historical communities of Jesus-followers as ones in which people of all ethnicities, social classes, and cultures shared the table, encouraged and cared for one another, reordered their economies, and gained the favor of their neighbors (Acts 2:42-47).

These things did not come easily, of course. Some leaders demanded that newcomers submit to Jewish traditions and religious practices. Some operated within the ruling patronage

paradigm, buying favor and the best seats at the table.

Yet many Christians resisted imposing such cultural filters, and some faithful followers gave sacrificially toward a communal economy in which no one’s needs went unmet.

Those church leaders, who saw the need to open the doors wider than they might naturally do, were reading themselves into a story far larger than themselves, a story that spans from creation to re-creation.

For starters, many of them had witnessed Jesus’ outrageous embrace of outsiders—touching lepers, affirming women, healing the son of the Roman enemy, walking through despised Samaria.

Or perhaps they remembered that embarrassing day toward the end of Jesus’ ministry when he tossed the

tables of the temple merchants. The issue was not business itself, but two interconnected problems: the how and the where.

First, business was most likely not being conducted ethically. Sellers were overcharging the poor pilgrims who had come from afar and were forced to pay jacked-up prices for their temple offerings. Second, and just as importantly, by allowing trade to take place in the temple’s outer court—the area designed to welcome foreigners into God’s temple—the leaders deprived Gentiles of access to worship and belonging. Jesus’ anger was directed specifically at the pious religious leaders who should have been guaranteeing that business be fair and the temple be open to all nations. Instead, they were benefiting from the unjust arrangements.

When Jesus declared, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house

of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'" (Mark 11:17), he was citing Hebrew scripture familiar to his listeners:

Foreigners who bind themselves
to the Lord to minister to him,
to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
...these I will bring to my
holy mountain
and give them joy in my house
of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and
sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called
a house of prayer for
all nations

(Isaiah 56:6-7).

Jesus was harkening back to the law that made provision for the welcome and livelihood of foreigners, widows, and orphans as special recipients of God's favor. In so doing, he embedded himself and his followers in a story that had begun far before their time.

In his teaching and his actions, Jesus' first followers heard echoes of the ancient Hebrew law, which included ethical demands in relation to people outside the Israelites' inner circle. Jesus' way demanded guaranteeing the care of the people rendered vulnerable by the society of the day (Lev. 23:22). It demanded setting aside discrimination and offering a wholehearted welcome to diverse people (Lev. 19:33). It demanded conducting honest business and enacting just economic practices (Lev. 19:35). Following Jesus' way demanded ensuring equal rights and responsibilities in the new community to all people, regardless of one's place of birth or one's socioeconomic, ethnic, or political status (Lev. 24:22).

Jesus' first followers were writing themselves into the story of God's good creation. God had opened up space and filled it with colorful, joyous, beautiful, and diverse forms of life. Through the Law, God made provisions to guarantee the dignity and livelihood of people

Jesus' way ...
demanded
setting aside
discrimination
and offering a
wholehearted
welcome to
diverse people.

made vulnerable through loss, deprivation, and human-constructed borders.

When the people strayed, faithful prophets told the truth, denouncing false readings of reality and calling Israel back to its mission of living out God's good purposes for the entire creation. Through his life and teaching, Jesus highlighted the purpose of his time on earth in relation to God's law: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17).

When elites of Rome or of the temple valued people according to their ethnicity, social status, or taxable income, Jesus stepped in, boldly and counter-culturally, with an alternative story. Within this story, he could not help but clean out the temple! And this is part of the calling Jesus entrusted to his disciples when he was getting ready to hand his ministry over to them:

"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (John 20:21).

Same calling, same Spirit—the Spirit of wide embrace, God's Spirit, who hovered over the waters breathing creation into being. God's Spirit, who inspired and empowered the prophets of old to tear off religious facades

and call God's people back to their true calling to be a blessing to those outside their borders. God's Spirit, who anointed Jesus to tell and live the truth of God's love all the way to the cross, touching the untouchable, uplifting the marginalized, affirming the dignity of those society undervalued. That same Spirit is still in all of Jesus' followers, yearning to write us into a story of belonging in God's story of love.

Will we allow the Spirit to break down our prejudices and barriers, be they racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, or ideological? Or do we, as the pagans, worship the gods of success, security, privilege, and entitlement—the ever-hungry gods that dismember our families and communities?

As Reformed Christians, we at least pay lip service to the priesthood of all believers. But might traditions, orders, academic requirements, or prejudices related to gender or ethnicity be depriving members of the body of Christ from living out their callings?

Will we respond to the promptings of the Spirit that urge us to question structures and strictures that keep some people in and some people out, or some as first and others as second class? Will we step out to denounce economic systems that deprive people of the full life God intends? Will we instead become communities of living examples of Christ's good news through reordered economics and ecological care?

What new modes of being are required so that we, the communities and members and friends of the Christian Reformed Church, may step into this story of God's expansive and reordering embrace? Into which story are we writing ourselves? **B**



Ruth Padilla-DeBorst is a theologian, missiologist, educator, and storyteller, a wife of one and a mother of many. She serves with Resonate Global Mission, leading the Comunidad de Estudios Teológicos Interdisciplinarios.

BIG QUESTIONS

Stewardship

I've always been one to keep busy. But being stuck at home these past months, I've found myself falling into a slower pace. Will I be wasting time, one of God's gifts, if I don't return to a busier schedule when normal life resumes?

Many of us were raised to think that keeping busy with work and other productive activities was a positive sign. "Idle hands are the devil's workshop," the old adage goes. Rudyard Kipling equated maturity with "fill(ing) the unforgiving minute with 60 seconds' worth of distance run." And there is much to be said for hard work and industry. We should all learn to apply ourselves and to focus on necessary tasks at hands.

Like most good things, however, hard work and busyness can become a form of idolatry. They become the "why" rather than the "how." I had a friend in college who suddenly began to study 50 hours a week and cut off all social life. When a group of us finally confronted him and asked him what was going on, he said, "I finally figured it all out." He thought he'd found the answer to life, and the answer was incessant work.

It sounds as if these past months have given you an opportunity to reflect on why you work and why you liked to be busy. But we aren't supposed to be busy just so we can say we're busy. We work because there's work to be done. When it's done, it's done. And then it's time for something else. What else?

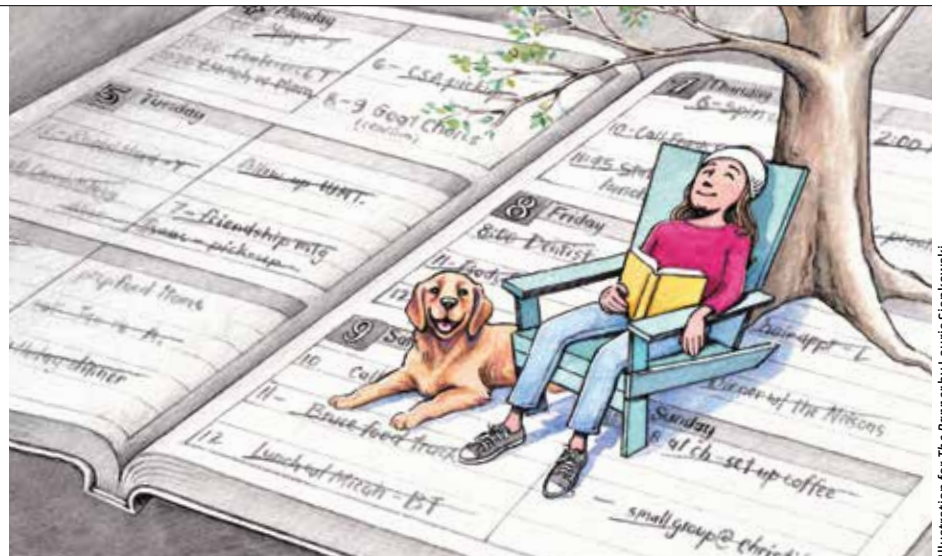


Illustration for The Banner by Laurie Sienkowski

Volunteering. Hobbies. Socializing. Leisure activities. Figure that out with the Spirit's guidance. Ecclesiastes 3 says there is a time for everything under heaven, which means all things have their appropriate time, including, perhaps, finding the right blend of busyness and leisure—and for Christians, knowing that the best time of all is the timeless gift of Sabbath.

Rolf Bouma is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church who teaches religion, ethics, and ecology in the Program in the Environment at the University of Michigan.

Church/Bible/Doctrine

Our church council is too large to function well. Is there a model structure that complies with church order yet allows a smaller group to be responsible for the day-to-day running of the church?

One way to address this issue is to delegate some matters to committees that report to the council and can make decisions within their mandates that don't require council approval. Some churches structure their councils differently as well, often dividing into shepherding or pastoral elders and deacons and administrative elders and deacons. Then, the administrative elders and deacons meet as a group to oversee the administration of the church, while the shepherding

elders and deacons focus on pastoral care and benevolence or other mercy-related matters. It's fine to divide the council in this way, and even to select elders and deacons based on what roles they will play.

A concern about these divisions of labor between administrative and pastoral is theological. These divisions have sometimes led to a false division between "business" and "spiritual," with church leadership divided between "business types" and "ministry types." All ministry is spiritual, including budgets, buildings, pastoral care, education and outreach. Churches that distinguish between administrative and pastoral functions must make sure all ministry is driven by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the mission of the church.

Assuming the unity of the church's mission is maintained, there are some specific functions that require the full council to meet at least occasionally, because all office bearers are responsible for "the common administration of the church, such as promoting its mission, calling a pastor, approving nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern." Further, "the council is responsible for preparing the annual budget of the congregation, including classical and denominational ministry shares, for presentation to the congregation for its approval"

(Church Order Art. 35 & Supplement). Another reason for the full council to meet is to consider any major items on the agenda for synod so that there is opportunity for overtures to be brought by the council to classis.

The key point is that all duly called and ordained office bearers should be included in important decisions as leaders in the church.

Rev. Kathy Smith is senior associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, adjunct professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, and adjunct professor of congregational and ministry studies at Calvin University. She is a member of First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Vocation/Calling

I am in a period of huge transition in my life right now. How do I make sure I navigate my decisions and direction-setting well?

Changes in the economy, technology, consumer demands, or even simply changes within our family dynamics often propel us into new seasons of discernment. We become forced to make choices regarding new jobs, new careers, moves across town or moves across the country. Indeed, these times are often anxiety-inducing, stressful, and full of questions. When this happens, it's easy to feel overwhelmed, especially when considering the level of impact these choices may have on the trajectory of our careers or the implications they have for our family and friends.

One common fallacy in decision making is that there is always a right or wrong choice. This isn't necessarily the case, especially if we are prone to thinking that the right decision is the one that leads us out of worry or the one that promises us better security. In fact, sometimes God leads us into situations or even seasons of life where he is seeking to grow our faith,

not our financial portfolio or even our comfort.

In Mark 4:35-41, Jesus actually leads the disciples into a storm while he takes a nap. As the story plays out, Jesus demonstrates that he is much more comfortable with our discomfort than we are. That's because in the end, his goal for their lives (and ours!) is not that life would be easy, but that they (we!) would be his.

The right decision for you in any given moment shouldn't be dictated by what looks easier or more comfortable, but by what will form your faith the most. And if you're looking to provide for others around you through your choices, the greatest thing you could ever give your family or anyone else is you, fully alive in Christ.

Aaron Baart lives in Sioux Center, Iowa, with his family of seven. He serves as the dean of chapel at Dordt University and is the co-founder and president of One Body One Hope, a church-planting and community development ministry in Liberia. He and his family attend First Reformed Church in Sioux Center. He co-authored *Vivid: Deepening Your Colors* with Syd Hielema.

Digital Life

What's an algorithm?

I've been thinking I might need to replace my current lawnmower, so yesterday I took a picture of an orange-colored model on display in a big-box store. Today, what showed up in my email inbox? An eBay listing not for lawn mowers, but chainsaws in the same orange color used by the manufacturer of the mower I took a picture of yesterday.

A coincidence? I'm thinking not. Nothing in my online wanderings would suggest I need a chainsaw. I'm going to guess an algorithm got yesterday's story almost right, but not quite.

Algorithms (of the computer variety, anyway) are mathematical rules that programmers write to help computers do things like recognize patterns and

trends and make connections much, much faster than any human could. And they're getting quite good, helped in no small part by algorithms that can be written to help computers teach themselves even better algorithms.

An algorithm has learned your shopping habits and is behind the suggestions that appear at the top of lists. An algorithm is also guessing what you might be looking for as you type in a search field, saving you keystrokes. If you spend any time on Facebook, an algorithm is learning—and remembering, mind you—what kinds of news stories or personalities you're attracted to, and it's more than happy to keep serving you these same kinds of stories so you keep coming back for more. It's how search engines and social media make their money—not only by selling the carefully selected ads displayed just for you, but also by delivering a very specific audience of users to potential influencers willing to pay.

I don't mind algorithms making suggestions for things I choose to be interested in, but I get a little uneasy when they continue to serve up only what I've already eaten. It appears it's as hard to find a balanced diet online as it is in real life.

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



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

Denise Posie, Director of Leadership Diversity, to Retire

NEWS

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Photo by Aaron Cantrell

Denise Posie, who has served the Christian Reformed Church as a congregational pastor and denominational leader for 21 years, is retiring at the end of June. She was named director of leadership development in 2017, a position that's come to focus on leadership diversity. The 66-year-old is still curious about the work that might come next.

“There is an openness to surrender to wherever God wants me to go,” Posie said. “God will build upon what he’s already placed in my heart.”

Before becoming a pastor, Posie worked in Detroit, Mich., for IBM and General Motors. “I loved corporate,” she explained. “But I knew I was being called out of (it). I did not know what I was being called into.” While she was unsure what direction the Spirit was taking her, Posie said she wasn’t afraid. “I was curious.”

Posie’s curiosity served her well throughout her career. She went to Columbia International University in South Carolina and earned her M.Div. At the time, Posie, who grew up in the Baptist tradition, had taken an interest in Reformed theology. “I was studying Reformed theology without knowing why,” she said. That year, she met a chaplain who told her about Immanuel CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich. “They were a small congregation with an interest in ethnicity and women leadership,” Posie said. She served that church (now closed) from 1999 to 2012.

In 2013, she joined Pastor Church Relations (now known as Pastor Church Resources) as a pastor congregation consultant in Grand Rapids, Mich. It was work of “supporting pastors and congregations in times of transition. I also assisted in resolving conflict,” Posie said.

In 2015 she was appointed co-director of the Reformed Leadership Initiative, a collaboration of the Reformed Church in America and the CRC. In this position, Posie helped groups facilitate discussions so people felt that they were in a safe place. “That was pivotal for me.”

Colin Watson, acting executive director for the CRCNA, noted how sincerely missed Posie will be.

“Denise is a calming presence, a prayerful presence, and a team member who always reminds us that we are people of God and are called by him to continue to pray, meditate, and find ways to remain connected to him,” he said.

Watson said that following Posie’s retirement, Reggie Smith, who recently left his role as director of the Office of Social Justice and the Office of Race Relations, will assume many of the responsibilities she carried.

—Callie Feyen

Celebrating Commencement 2020

Universities and colleges navigating how to celebrate their students while abiding by their governments' regulations to curb the spread of COVID-19 made different choices this commencement season.

The 2020 commencement ceremony at **Trinity Christian College** in Palos Heights, Ill., had been scheduled for May 2 but has been postponed to December. The school did host a virtual degree conferral ceremony, streamed on the morning of the original date. "(O)ur graduates have earned their degrees, and they deserve our plaudits. ... (P)ostponing a ceremony does not equal postponing the conferral of a degree!" wrote college president Kurt D. Dykstra in an online letter to students and faculty.

Dordt University in Sioux Center, Iowa, hosted a virtual, livestreamed commencement May 8. In an April 23 announcement, the school said the goal was "to provide students and families with a meaningful experience that honors students' achievements as graduates, even if Dordt cannot hold an in-person event this spring."

This year, 2020, was to be **Calvin University's** 100th commencement. The ceremony, originally scheduled for May 23, has been postponed to Oct. 3. Communication about the plan said the decision was made "after consulting with eight student representatives, surveying the entire graduating class, and having conversations with members of Calvin's parent council." At the time of writing, plans had not been communicated for Calvin Theological Seminary's recognition of graduates. Candidates for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church, who are usually presented at synod (the annual leadership gathering of the CRC), will be approved in the special June meeting of the Council of Delegates. (See "Most of Synod 2020 Agenda Deferred to 2021," p. 17.)

The King's University in Edmonton, Alta., and **Redeemer University** in Ancaster, Ont., also have postponed their commencements until the fall. David Zietsma, Redeemer's provost, said postponing an in-person event recognized the school's value of authentic community. "We want the graduation ceremony to continue to reflect that as much as possible," he said.

The **Institute for Christian Studies**, a Christian graduate school in Toronto, Ont., opted to cancel its 2020 convocation, explaining in an April 1 update that the "current intention is to honour our 2020 graduates together with our 2021 graduates at our Convocation next May."

—Kristen Parker

Spring Planting Goes Ahead in Denver Urban Farming Ministry



Photo by Jeanine Broek

Pea planting took place at The Table community garden March 17.

The Table, an emerging Christian Reformed church in Denver, Colo., adapted two spring planting traditions to keep physical distancing protocols amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Peas still went into the ground on St. Patrick's Day, but instead of a large gathering and potluck to kick off the growing season, six family groups came at staggered times to sow the seeds.

Co-director Jeanine Broek, who ministers alongside her pastor husband Craig Broek, coordinated the adapted event. She did the same for potato planting a few weeks later on Good Friday.

Jeanine learned the Good Friday potato tradition from her grandmother. Underground, the seed

potato dies before it sprouts into life again, many times multiplied. "I guess this is the mystery, echoed in our faith, that invigorates my work because this is the mystery I get to share with friends who volunteer," she said.

The Table describes its ministry as "a unique movement of mission communities in multiple Denver neighborhoods," where urban farming and community meals are some of the ways they "experience life-giving and authentic community" together.

—Maia VanderMeer

COVID-19 Ministry Moments

A digest of stories by Maia VanderMeer, Krista dela Rosa, Alissa Vernon, Eliza Anderson, and Kyle Hoogendoorn. For more, please see thebanner.org/column/covid-19.

Care Among Seniors

In April, Ontario Premier Doug Ford called on the Canadian Armed Forces to alleviate staffing demands in “five priority long-term care homes” with COVID-19 outbreaks. Grace Manor, a long-term care home within the Holland Christian Homes complex of senior residences in Brampton, Ont., was one of those facilities.

Home to 1,100 people, HCH includes six independent-living apartment towers and two long-term care homes, Grace and Faith manors. Pastor Richard Bodini is one of three pastors who serves the community’s Heritage Fellowship Christian Reformed Church. He shared a “holy moment” of ministering during this time.



Family members greet their mom and grandmother through an April 17 window visit, coordinated by Pastor Richard Bodini, outside of Grace Manor at Holland Christian Homes.

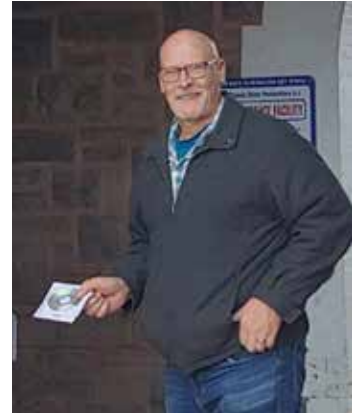
On April 17, Bodini arranged a family window visit for a resident in Grace Manor. The family gathered with signs outside her window, encouraging her over Zoom (a video meeting app) on Bodini’s phone. With help from staff inside, she came to the window in a wheelchair to see her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She ate her lunch at the window as they continued cheering and waving.

“Pastoral privileges are so often about meeting people in the crossroads of life,” said Bodini. “Sure, these aren’t always easy places, but they are holy moments where we are invited to bring the love and grace and mercy of Jesus Christ, to pray, and to pronounce the blessing of the triune God.” As of May 4, nine residents who had tested positive for COVID-19 had died, in home or in hospital, and the manors had gone 24 hours without any new COVID-19 cases among residents or staff.

Prison Congregations

Pastor Doug DeGroot from **Cornerstone Prison Church** in Sioux Falls, S.D., has seen opportunities come from the facility being closed to visitors. DeGroot said that instead of meeting in person in the prison each Friday night, Cornerstone is providing DVDs

for the inmates to watch on the prison television channel. Rather than being limited to reaching whoever signs up to attend chapel, services can now be watched by every inmate whose cell has a television in it. And several families of Cornerstone members have asked DeGroot and his team to post the services on YouTube so they can, in effect, worship with their loved ones.



The three prison sites of **Celebration Fellowship** in Ionia, Mich., also are closed to in-person visits. Pastor Bob Arbogast said regular contact with the institutional chaplains helps him keep track of what is going on inside. “Each week, I email to the chaplains a single-sheet liturgy of prayers, Scripture, and reflection. The chaplains distribute these to our ‘inside’ members. I also email the same document to our ‘outside’ members,” allowing the possibility of prayer together in the midst of dislocation, Arbogast said.

Pastor Doug DeGroot delivers his weekly message on DVD to be shared at the designated chapel time.

Collaboration in Zeeland, Mich.

Pastors of Christian Reformed congregations in Classis Zeeland, a regional group of churches in Michigan, collaborated to create joint services of “prayer, scripture, and proclamation” to share with their congregations, first on March 29 and again on April 26.

“It was much appreciated and a sign of our solidarity as a church and in prayer during these unsettling times,” said Stephen Terpstra, a pastor at Borculo CRC in Zeeland.

Members of Borculo CRC contributed other gifts of ministry during this time. One member sewed masks to share with other church members and with rehabilitation and palliative care



facilities. Several families participated in the creation of a collaborative music video, singing with their children at home.

Several of the children featured were from military families stationed outside of Michigan.



A cloth mask sewn by a member of Borculo CRC.

"I love the ability to connect with our church family virtually, and it was a nice surprise for my parents to have their grandkids participate in the service from so far away," said Kimberly Bloem, who is stationed in South Carolina.

Church Networks in South Dakota

Shalom CRC in Sioux Falls, S.D., is encouraging the formation of church networks to help communities facing difficulties in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shalom CRC and First Christian Reformed Church, also of Sioux Falls, S.D., joined Corona Help Sioux Falls, an online resource connecting help from the city's churches with people in need.

Shalom CRC's outreach director Brendon De Boer said, "We helped a number of other distribution sites all across the state get started so they could more directly impact their communities as well."

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Most of Synod 2020 Agenda Deferred to 2021

The Council of Delegates will host a special meeting in early June to process a small portion of the *Agenda for Synod 2020*. For the first time in the history of the Christian Reformed Church, synod (the annual leadership meeting of the CRC) was canceled, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The bulk of the agenda will wait for Synod 2021.

The Council is mandated by the CRC's Church Order to be the interim committee of synod, dealing with matters that cannot wait until the following synod.

Pastor William Koopmans chaired a meeting of the program committee to decide on the shortened agenda. (The program committee is made up of the officers of the previous year's synod.) Koopmans said they started with the default position of "deferring as much of the agenda to Synod 2021 as reasonable, while also realizing that some matters are time-sensitive and ought not to be delayed."

He said the committee was careful not to expect the special meeting of the Council to replicate or replace a synod meeting, but rather to manage those matters that cannot wait until the following year without adversely affecting the ministry of the church.

Urgent matters for the Council's special meeting include the following:

- » Approval of new appointments to the Council and various committees and boards
- » A proposal to recognize the 25th anniversary of the ordination of women in 2021 and an overture (request) pertaining to that proposal
- » The recommendation to adopt the Reimagining Ministry Shares proposal, including necessary changes to the Church Order Supplement
- » Approval of new candidates for the ministry
- » Budgetary matters
- » Two personal appeals

Matters deferred to Synod 2021 include the following:

- » Church Order changes proposed by Synod 2019
- » Several matters pertaining to abuse of power, including a code of conduct for ministry leaders
- » All overtures except one (related to the 25th anniversary of women's ordination)
- » A review of The New City Catechism
- » A report on the definition of heresy
- » A proposed name change for Back to God Ministries International

Just as it does for synods and regular meetings of the Council, *The Banner* will observe the meeting and report on it. That coverage will be in the July/August issue of *The Banner*, traditionally known as the synod issue.

CRC director of synodical services Dee Recker estimated the denomination will save \$225,000 to \$250,000 due to cancellation of Synod 2020. She said that takes into account the savings on contracted help, meeting facilities, lodging, travel, and food for delegates, staff, and guests. There won't be an Acts of Synod 2020 or an updated Church Order published and mailed.

A second meeting of the program committee was scheduled for the end of May to finalize the plans.

—Gayla R. Postma, news editor

IN MEMORIAM

*Rev. Yong Kyu (Peter) Shin*

1942-2020

Rev. Yong Kyu Shin, pastor and mentor, devoted his life to preaching, teaching, and being mission-focused in expanding God's kingdom. He died March 12 at age 78.

Shin graduated from Seoul University in the late 1960s and from Koryo Seminary in 1977. He then moved to North America, where he continued studies while ministering in immigrant churches in the U.S. and Canada.

Over 21 years, he served as a Christian Reformed pastor at the Korean Church of Orange County in Westminster, Calif. He retired in 2007 due to a stroke.

Shin also served as a mentor for many Korean-American pastors in the CRCNA, even after retirement and a long illness.

A longtime friend, Rev. SeungWon Yoon, retired pastor from Orange Han Min CRC in Anaheim, Calif., said, "I am so proud that I have a very faithful pastor friend like Shin. He was a faithful person to the Lord as well as (to) others ... even (in) hard times of ministry."

Shin served as a board member for many different organizations, including the missions agency Global Partners and Evangelia University in Anaheim, Calif.

Shin is survived by his dedicated wife Unsil Shin; four children and their spouses; and 10 grandchildren.

—Jonathan Kim

Council of Delegates Meets by Video Conference

The Christian Reformed Church's Council of Delegates met by teleconference May 6-7. The Council acts on behalf of synod, the CRC's annual general assembly, when synod is not in session.

The meeting lacked much of the usual camaraderie and sense of community evident when delegates meet in person. Throughout the meeting, delegates were conscious of the difficult circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stanley Jim, delegate from Classis Red Mesa, gave an emotional report on the devastation happening in the Navajo Nation due to the virus. World Renew's Disaster Relief Services is helping to respond (see p. 21).

The COD's May meeting often includes a number of items that get sent on to synod the following month. Because Synod 2020 was canceled, a special meeting of the Council of Delegates will address only the matters that cannot wait until synod convenes in June 2021. (See "Most of Synod 2020 Agenda Deferred to 2021," p. 17.) All decisions made by the Council in the special June session must be ratified by the next synod.

Leadership

The Council recommended that Colin Watson be appointed as interim executive director until July 2021. Currently the acting executive director, Watson has agreed to stay on despite his planned retirement in January 2021.

Governance

The Council spent a great deal of time discussing the governance structure and the changes made to comply with Canadian tax law governing charitable organizations. Several changes were made in February, and now the Council has a skeleton plan of how to move forward in light of the changes (see p. 20).

Finances

The Council recommended a ministry share rate of \$346.48 per adult member.

Ministry shares are the money remitted by congregations to support shared ministries. That rate has remained unchanged for three years.

This will probably be the last year the CRC will use the ministry share system. Under the Ministry Shares Reimagined proposal, congregations and classes (regional groups of churches) will pledge an amount to pay toward shared denominational ministries, and the budget will be based on that amount. For the new system to go into effect, Synod 2020 (or the Council acting on behalf of that synod) must approve the plan that was proposed by Synod 2019 unless the program committee decides to defer it to Synod 2021.

Due to the economic downturn and COVID-19 ramifications, plans for a renovation of the U.S. headquarters in Grand Rapids, Mich., (announced in October 2019) have been put on hold.

Assignments by Synod 2019

The Council noted completion of Synod 2019's instruction that Faith Formation Ministries review The New City Catechism for potential use by the churches. The review also provides guidelines for reviewing other potential curriculum materials. The report will be in the Council's supplemental report to Synod 2020.

The Council noted the completion of Synod 2019's instruction that a committee "address the proper and ongoing definition of the word heresy." The report is in the *Agenda for Synod 2020* (Appendix E, p. 68).

The Council received an update on many activities being undertaken to strengthen the CRC's response to abuse of power issues. It adopted a training program, approved by denominational ministry leaders, that includes four hours of training to prevent abuse of power, which will be required of all people going into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.

—Gayla R. Postma, news editor

Cecil Van Niejenhuis to Retire From Pastor Church Resources



Cecil Van Niejenhuis, co-director of the office of Pastor Church Resources since 2017, is retiring in June, the same month he turns 65. He's served that ministry, which seeks to help churches and pastors develop and maintain healthy ministry relationships, since 2009.

Lis Van Harten, PCR's other co-director, will continue leading the ministry as sole director following Van Niejenhuis' retirement. Sean Baker,

a new ministry consultant on the PCR team, will fill the part of Van Niejenhuis's role that involves providing assistance to pastors and churches in times of transition, crisis, and discernment. Baker started in January.

Van Niejenhuis commented on the broadening he's seen in PCR's emphasis over the past 10 years, from crisis responder to proactive coach. "We've tried to pay more attention to (the question) 'How can we help churches and pastors and their relationships be healthy?' ... (to) let churches and pastors know that we are really interested in their well-being and health."

Before starting with the denominational ministry, which he served from Edmonton, Alta., Van Niejenhuis pastored churches in that province and in Ontario. He sees the 17 years he served as a church visitor, a role appointed by classis to meet with and observe officebearers in neighboring CRCs, as contributing to preparation for PCR. "The work that we do in Pastor Church Resources is like church visiting on steroids. It's like speed reading. You go into these rooms and you have to read the room and get as many pieces of the puzzle together as you can so you have a sense for what it all looks like."

Van Niejenhuis had been planning to attend Synod 2020 as his last week of official work for the denomination. Instead, since the cancellation of synod due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he hopes to visit the Grand Rapids office sometime this summer, if and when travel and other restrictions are lifted, to say farewell to colleagues.

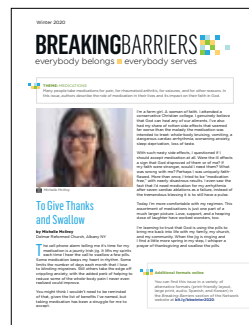
"The loss of his experience and significant knowledge will be deeply felt by our staff and, in some ways, the broader church," said Van Harten. "Cec is able to bring wise words when they're needed." She said she'll need to lean on the help of PCR staff who are "a gifted team who will be able to step in as needed." One upcoming project Van Harten noted is the launch of an online toolkit, created through a partnership with Resonate Global Mission, called "At a Crossroads: A Discernment Process for Churches Uncertain About their Future."

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

Noteworthy

The Banner received recognition from the **Evangelical Press Association** and from the **Associated Church Press** for work published in 2019. **EPA awards** included:

- » **second place** in the **feature category** for "**The Cult of Normalcy**," by Sara Pot (Nov. 2019)
 - » **fourth place** in the **fiction category** for "**A Depression Story**," by Mary Hulst (Oct. 2019)
 - » **fourth place** in the **editorial category** for "**Judge Not**," by Shiao Chong (Sept. 2019)
 - » **fifth place** in the **devotional category** for "**Faith Matters: Enough Trouble**," by Syd Hielema (June 2019)
 - » **fifth place** in the **standing column category** for "**Still**," with representative articles "Shelter," by Judith Claire Hardy (Nov. 2019), and "Getting Registered," by Rod Huguen (Oct. 2019).
- ACP awards** included **seven honorable mentions** and **three Awards of Excellence**:
- » "**Me and the Black Dog**," by Theresa Miedema (April 2019)
 - » "**Too Much Stuff**," illustration by Laurie Sienkowski (Oct. 2019)
 - » "**Annual Ministry Report 2019**," by Kristen Vanderberg (Dec. 2019 insert)



The RCA-CRC Disability Concerns **Breaking Barriers** publication was honored with four **Associated Church Press** awards including **Best in Class Awards of Merit** in the **blog category** and in the **newsletter category**. Terry A. DeYoung and Mark Stephenson are co-editors of the newsletter.

READ MORE ONLINE

Still Bumps in the Road for CRC's Restructuring

Work on realigning the administrative and governance structure of the Christian Reformed Church continued at the May meeting of the CRC's Council of Delegates, albeit with bumps in the road. (The Council acts on behalf of the CRC's synod between the annual meetings of synod.)

The restructuring along American and Canadian lines was announced in February after legal counsel advised that direction and control of Canadian resources had to be handled by Canadian delegates to the Council (known collectively as Canada Corporation) to be in compliance with Canadian tax law. (See "Restructuring Gives CRC in Canada More Ministry Control," April 2020, p. 18.) The changes were met with consternation on the part of some staff and delegates and led to the sudden resignation of former executive director Steven Timmermans. (See "Timmermans Resigns as Executive Director," April 2020, p. 14.)

A Skeleton Plan

The executive committee of the Council proposed what it called a "skeleton plan" for how the restructuring might look. It proposed that each country appoint an independent executive director who would work collaboratively with his or her counterpart on the other side of the border. Both job descriptions would include a plan for cross-border cooperation and unity.

The plan includes having synod appoint an ecclesiastical officer who can "help shepherd the denomination forward in a way that fosters unity across the border, emphasizes our shared faith, synodical positions, and ecclesiastical polity, and advances the denomination's global ecclesiastical goals."

Andy De Ruyter, president of Canada Corporation, stressed that it is not a finished project. "It's a stepping stone so we can move forward," he said.

Some Dissension

Not all delegates were in favor of moving forward with only the proposed plan. Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, said this is a good time to "have a crucial conversation about going forward as one denomination or (as) two denominations working together." He wanted to give the denomination two stark differences to choose from. "This proposal gives us one way but doesn't allow us as a denomination to be able to have the other conversation."

To that end, he made a motion to instruct the executive committee to map out a second distinct option of "what it might look like to become two distinct, nationally-defined denominations that cooperate with ministries where applicable."

Mark Vande Zande, Classis Heartland, agreed with Wagenmaker. "If we don't have the discussion, we aren't listening to the voices in our denomination," he said.

Several delegates bristled at the suggestion that they discuss possibly splitting.

De Ruyter reacted strongly. "To put (dividing) on the table now is an easy way out," he said. "I'm a bit taken aback by that suggestion. We're trying to follow what we have to do as a nonprofit. It will be tough, but we need to work through it."

Chris DeWinter, Classis Niagara, pointed out that for more than 30 years, the denomination has considered binationality to be a gift to its churches. "Synod has always spoken clearly about binationality," he said. "This is an outworking of that."

Zachary King, director of the CRC mission agency Resonate Global Mission, was on the committee that wrote the proposal. He pointed out that joint ministry agreements are options for shared programs. "We saw this as the opportunity to enhance binationality, as a way to adhere to all legal requirements. A structure like

this would allow us to do this," he told delegates.

Emmett Harrison, Classis Grand Rapids East, favored the proposal from the executive committee. "The overall intention is to work hard to fulfill specific legal requirements on both sides of the border yet maintain unity, working hard at being a binational denomination."

Several delegates felt that even considering dividing the denomination along national lines would be overstepping Council's authority. Adrian de Lange, Classis Rocky Mountain, noted that there are structures in place if people want to have that conversation, such as overtures to synod from churches or classes (regional groups of churches).

Colin Watson, acting executive director for the denomination, told *The Banner* that he is committed to working with leaders in both countries for continuing unity.

Moving Forward as One

After lengthy discussion, Council adopted the proposal. It defeated adding a second option by a large margin.

Paul De Vries, Council chair, said it is very important that the Council communicate that the actions taken show that it is doing its best to move forward.

"We've made it clear we don't want to talk of separating the denomination unless we can't help it," he said. "If we are going to continue to work together well, we have to do our best. If we absolutely can't do it, that should be something we discuss only when we come to that point."

—Gayla R. Postma, news editor

COVID-19 Impact in Navajo Land



Stanley Jim at Synod 2015, where he served as second clerk.

Speaking at the May meeting of the Christian Reformed Church's Council of Delegates from his home in Window Rock, Ariz., Classis Red Mesa delegate Stanley Jim shared difficult stories of the effect of COVID-19 there. Classis Red Mesa consists of 20 Christian Reformed churches and missions in Northwest New Mexico and Northeast Arizona, including 12 churches on reservation land.

"We are one of the hotspots, with a per capita incidence of COVID-19 third behind New York and Louisiana. The numbers are increasing almost daily," Jim said.

He pastors Window Rock CRC, which he said "is doing okay. The Lord has blessed us, and we're surviving." However, he pointed out, "(I)t's really painful for me to hear about others. I've lost good pastors and relatives to COVID-19, whole families. (The) death rate is rising. ... A lot of our people are still without running water."

When the city of Gallup, N.M., was shut down May 1 to try to prevent further spread from that hotspot, people were cut off from supplies. "Gallup, one of the border towns, is where we shop for essentials," Jim said.

World Renew Disaster Response Services is working to provide food, water, and personal protective equipment.

Jim asked delegates to pray for the Navajo Nation's president and vice president, who he said are strong Christians. "They are passing out food and being among the people, doing what they can to help. ... We pray with them every Monday morning."

—Gayla R. Postma, news editor

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Myung Jae Lee

1921-2020

Rev. Myung Jae Lee devoted his life to studying, teaching, and expanding God's kingdom. He died March 12 at the age of 99.

Before seminary he attended business school and veterinary school in Japan, returning to Korea because of WWII. In 1951 he graduated from Koryu Seminary and in 1957 from Busan Calvin College, Korea. In 1962 he came to America, earning a Ph.D. in Christian Ministry (1982) and in Christian Education (1984) at Faith Seminary.

Over 43 years, he served many churches. In 1967, he started Yebon Christian Reformed Church (formerly named Reformed Korean CRC) and served as an emeritus pastor in Chicago. He dedicated his time to tirelessly advocating for new immigrants and helping them with practical needs.

After retirement he served twice as an interim pastor, and he also published many books of his sermons.

Beginning in 2008 he tenderly cared for his wife, who lived in a nursing home for six years. He continued preaching at that care home until two weeks prior to his death. He will be remembered as a faithful servant.

Lee was predeceased by his wife, two daughters, and two sons-in-law. He is survived by five children, 19 grandchildren, and 26 great-grandchildren.

—Jonathan Kim

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Dr. Sierd Woudstra

1928-2020

Pastor, professor, writer, translator, editor, and Holy Land tour guide, Sierd Woudstra was a kind and open-minded man who loved talking to people of all faiths and learning from them. He looked for the best in everyone and always had an affirming word. He died March 22.

After immigrating to Canada from the Netherlands in 1952, Woudstra moved to the U.S. to study. He graduated from Calvin College and Calvin Theological Seminary, then obtained a Th.M from Westminster Theological Seminary. Ordained in 1961, he served Calvin CRC in Ottawa, Ont., while completing a Doctor of Theology from Westminster.

In 1965, Woudstra became assistant professor of Bible at Dordt College, then returned to Calvin Seminary to serve as theological librarian and Old Testament lecturer. In 1972, he had the opportunity to teach and pastor a church in Australia. Returning home, he taught religion and theology at Calvin College. After serving in 1984 as the final editor of *De Wachter*, he pastored Kelloggsville CRC in Kentwood, Mich., and Princeton CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. He retired in 1993.

Survived by six children, their spouses, 17 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren, Woudstra was predeceased by Allerdina, his wife of 60 years, a daughter, and a granddaughter.

—Janet A. Greidanus



This Is Our Church



Immigration Is Part of the Past, Present, and Future of the Christian Reformed Church

By Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission

The Christian Reformed Church in North America started as an immigrant congregation, but immigration isn't only part of our history—it's still part of our story today.

Historically, many members of the CRC came from the Netherlands. While many members are still from Dutch backgrounds, the denomination is becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural. Today, the Reformed expression of faith is resonating with people from a variety of cultures and countries who are finding a home in the CRC.

And these newcomers represent much of the growth in our denomination through evangelism, said Amy Schenkel, a Resonate Global Mission regional mission leader.

"That's where there are the most baptisms; that's where there are the most new people coming to faith," Schenkel said. "We are growing, and the Spirit is moving."

A Growing Congregation

Membership at Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ont., was gradually declining—but then Nasser Zand and Sylvie Charliekaram showed up. In just a few short years, Willowdale CRC has grown. The church baptized 22 new Christians on one Sunday earlier this year. A few weeks before that, they baptized 18.

"When Sylvie and Nasser arrived, they were the first Farsi-speaking folks in our congregation," said John Meiboom, a member of Willowdale CRC. "Currently, when you come on a Sunday morning, about half of the congregation is Farsi-speaking."

Zand and Charliekaram moved to Toronto from Iran in 2005. Charliekaram grew up attending church as a Christian. Zand was raised to practice Islam but started attending Charliekaram's home church as a teenager. He was inspired by Christ's love and gave his life to Jesus.

Eventually, Zand and Charliekaram married. The two were dedicated to their church's ministry, but like many

Top: Jerry Rawlings Opiyo, a student from Kenya studying at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Middle: Nasser Zand and John Meiboom.

Bottom: A Farsi family who was baptized into the Willowdale CRC family.

Christians in Iran, there came a time when they didn't feel safe in their country anymore.

"In Iran, as a converted Christian, your life is somehow always in danger and you receive a lot of threats," said Charliekaram.

It was a difficult decision, but the couple prayed about moving to another country, and God opened doors to Toronto. More than a decade after moving to the city, they found Willowdale CRC.

"We were welcomed warmly," said Charliekaram. "It reminded me of my church back home. I started crying, and I told Nasser, 'This is where I want to be. This is where I want to worship.' And so we stayed, and it became our home."

Through Zand and Charliekaram, other Farsi speakers came to call Willowdale CRC home. The couple has hundreds of connections with Farsi speakers through Spiritual Growth Ministry, a ministry they co-founded that provides biblical teaching in Farsi online, especially for new believers from a Muslim background in the greater Toronto area and around the globe.

Zand and Charliekaram have formed connections with Farsi speakers throughout the world. Some of those speakers have moved to Toronto—in some cases, specifically because they met Zand and Charliekaram through SGM. The couple invites newcomers to Willowdale CRC, and the congregation warmly welcomes them.

"They're thirsty and hungry to learn," said Charliekaram. "They want to belong to the family of God."

Today, nearly half of Willowdale CRC's congregation speaks Farsi, and the church has adapted. Zand and Charliekaram serve as elders, the church hosts a weekly Bible study for Farsi speakers, and the Sunday worship service is a mix of English and Farsi.

Through Charliekaram, Zand, and SGM, God opened a new ministry opportunity for Willowdale CRC—though it's not without challenges.

As the world changes

and people travel and

move to countries

throughout the world,

our communities,

churches, seminaries and

other ministries continue

to become more diverse.

“There’s an opportunity here for all of us as Christians to grow in our faith as we learn to disciple new Christians, as we learn to share the gospel with those who are seeking,” said Meiboom, who serves on the SGM board.

As Willowdale embraced this ministry and welcomed more Farsi-speakers into the congregation, it sought support from Resonate Global Mission, the CRC’s mission agency. Resonate exists to walk alongside CRC congregations as they join God in mission. While Resonate supports many church plants serving newcomers, Resonate also works with established congregations who are welcoming newcomers.

Willowdale CRC, Spiritual Growth Ministries, and Resonate formed a partnership that provides Willowdale and SGM access to funding, training, and guidance from Resonate ministry leaders. Last year, Zand, Charliekaram, Meiboom, and Henry Eyenraam, chair of the Willowdale council, participated in Resonate’s Journeying into Friendships consultation with other ministry leaders who work with people from a variety of faiths.

“We’re asking all the time, how can we help them minister better?” said Beth Fellingner, Resonate’s regional mission leader for Eastern Canada. “If they need something specifically, or if there’s a program that will help their ministry, can we put that in their hands?”

The partnership is one way Resonate works with CRC congregations to spread the gospel, disciple believers, and equip leaders throughout the world.

“I prayed to be used by my Lord in every shape and form,” said Charliekaram. “I feel joining Resonate as a partner is an answer to my prayers as well. ... How can we work together to better serve Farsi-speaking Christians?”

Learning and Training with the CRC

It’s not just CRC congregations that are growing and welcoming newcomers. Students from more than 20 countries around the world come to study at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich., and that diverse, multi-cultural student body is one of the reasons Jerry Rawlings Opiyo came from Kenya to study there.

Opiyo was well on his way to becoming an engineer when he began to feel that God was calling him to ministry. After graduating from university in Kenya, he explored this call by interning at a church and training in church planting. After a few years, he strongly felt God call him to continue his

work in ministry, and he knew he needed theological training. He settled on CTS, where one-third of the student body is from a country other than Canada and the United States.

“It was more than getting an M.Div.,” said Opiyo. “It was meeting with believers from different traditions, from different parts of the world, and having that as part of the learning experience. What is God doing in other places of the world, and what can we learn from that?”

Opiyo, who expects to graduate next spring, said he’s appreciated studying and working in the Reformed tradition. “It aligned with many of my own theological convictions,” he said. “We’re all called to live our faith in a way that speaks or proclaims to the world who Christ is and what Christ has done.”

After graduating, Opiyo said he’s holding his dreams “loosely” in order to go where God calls him, but he’s sensing God calling him back to Kenya to continue his work planting churches. He said the diverse community of CTS right now will be critical for his future ministry.

“The learning community that we are building here will continue to be a learning community even after we have finished our studies,” said Opiyo. “I can reach out to my friends from Europe and ask, ‘Your culture is pretty much post-Christian. What can you say to somebody like me who still lives in a pretty Christian context but can see signs of post-Christianity continue to show up? How do I respond to that?’”

Opiyo said CTS not only gives students the space for practical theological and ministry training, but the space to build lifelong friendships that will help strengthen the global church. That’s important to CTS.

“The presence of international students and scholars at Calvin Seminary greatly enhances the community as a whole,” said Sarah Chun, dean of international student and scholar services at CTS.

As the world changes and people travel and move to countries throughout the world, our communities, churches, seminaries, and other ministries continue to become more diverse. “We experience the ‘globalness’ of God’s kingdom here on earth,” Chun said.

Immigration isn’t just part of the CRC’s history. It’s part of the CRC’s story right now. **B**

Immigration Is Our Story

“GROWING UP ... the word ‘alien’ was tossed around a lot, and so when thinking about my role here in the United States, I always felt like an outsider,” Alex Vasquez said.

Vasquez is just one of several Christian Reformed people who shared their personal stories as part of the *Immigration Is Our Story* interview series hosted by the Office of Social Justice. Its format is similar to that of StoryCorps, which records and shares everyday stories. For the OSJ series, immigrants were interviewed by descendants or loved ones from churches across North America.

The stories span decades and include diverse experiences. More recent stories, such as Vasquez’s, offer an interesting juxtaposition with more historic accounts. Henri and John Admiraal, for example, immigrated from the Netherlands to East Palmyra, N.Y., in 1956. The brothers arrived by ship over rough March seas and made a brief stop in Halifax, N.S., before continuing to New York. Their account shows striking similarities and differences with Vasquez’s story.

Some stories, such as Henry Kipper’s, illustrate the origins of Christian Reformed churches built by immigrants searching for better economic opportunities and religious freedom. Many Dutch immigrants arrived in Canada in the 1950s, in part because of Canadian soldiers’ role in liberating the Netherlands from Nazi occupation, and they built new churches where they settled.

But CRC immigration stories are not limited to people of Dutch heritage. Maria Cristina Aguilera, for example, tells her heartbreaking experiences as a 10-year-old leaving Cuba as it turned toward communism. She found community in a local CRC.



Brothers Henri and John Admiraal were interviewed as part of the *Immigration Is Our Story* project.

In fact, Christian Reformed congregations have a long history of sponsoring and supporting immigrants. This includes financial assistance, a worship community, and advice on how to navigate life in a new world.

“An important part to remember is how the church helped,” said Bill Lensink, another voice in the project. He explained that the church offered him sound advice that helped him find fair employment that would sustain him year-round.

“I was sponsored by International Harvester in Hamilton to work there, but Mr. N from the church said, ‘No, don’t go to Harvester because you’ll get laid off most of the winter,’” Lensink explained.

A central theme in all six of the project’s stories is how CRC congregations pulled together to help immigrants. This type of community is central to creating new relationships and thriving in a new

country. Like most immigrants today, those in the CRC’s history could not make the transition alone.

“These stories point us toward our own stories and those we grew up hearing from friends and relatives. They can also inform our perspectives towards immigration today,” project organizer Melissa Stek said.

“Immigration was, and is, our story,” she explained. “We hope that this series invites listeners into deeper reflection on their roots and the experiences of immigrants today. How can these stories change the posture of our hearts towards today’s immigrants and the challenges they face?”

To listen to these stories, to find related discussion questions, or to contribute your own interview, visit bit.ly/ImmigrationStoriesCRC.

—Victoria Veenstra,
Office of Social Justice

The View from Here

Care for Immigrants: A Demonstration of God's Love



I AM AN IMMIGRANT. I am also a descendant of slaves taken from West Africa in the 1800s. As a member of both these groups, I share a heritage common to many in North America.

I've experienced both the pain and the joy that come from understanding stories from my past and reflecting on how these realities affect my present. There is much to lament, but also much to celebrate.

In my case, my unique stories led me to the Christian Reformed Church. The stories include a myriad of individuals who left their own comfort zones to follow God's will and tell of God's good news. The stories include that of a young African American evangelist who became a missionary to my former country, Guyana. The stories also include that of a young family who were members of a local Christian Reformed Church in New Jersey and who reached out to their neighbors in love, shared a meal, shared Christ, and offered child care.

When we reflect
on our life stories,
it often becomes
clear that God
had a bigger
plan in mind.

I'm sure many of us have similar stories. Some of our stories are painful; others helped us get through the pain. When we reflect on our life stories, it often becomes clear that God had a bigger plan in mind. In fact, we recognize that in all things God is able to do God's will through us, to bring about the fullness of God's kingdom. Romans 8:28 says it best: "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

In this time of uncertainty and crisis, this time when it is easy to give way to fear, I'm reminded that it is often in such difficult times that God gives us opportunities to demonstrate the reality of God's kingdom and shows us

that God continues to be with us in the midst of our circumstances.

In this issue of Our Shared Ministry, we reflect on stories of immigrants and on how God's kingdom includes all of us. God continually reminds us to take care of and love the immigrant among us. By so doing, we demonstrate our love for Christ.

May God continue to give us opportunities to tangibly love our neighbors, including the immigrants and those who cannot help themselves, especially in this time.



Colin P. Watson Sr. is acting executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

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

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

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

Coming Together in a Time of Crisis

EVERY 18 MONTHS, Back to God Ministries International typically gathers all 10 international ministry leaders from around the world for a time of fellowship, peer learning, and visiting Christian Reformed churches.

Like many events around the world this year, the scheduled gathering was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, BTGMI's ministry leaders came together in a different way during this time of uncertainty. Each leader learned from one another how to use media ministry to respond to the coronavirus in their unique cultural context.

"Leaders prayed for each other and shared ideas about the opportunities our media ministries have to reach people with the message of the gospel in these uncertain times," shared Jeffrey Schra, BTGMI's director of advancement.

As the virus began spreading throughout China, Pastor Jerry An quickly began to rework his ministry team's schedule to help Christians who are unable to meet with fellow Christians in person because of the virus.

"Christians are looking for faith-based resources that they can use from their homes," An said. "And non-Christians are looking for answers about the virus as well as to life's biggest questions."

As the virus continued to spread, other BTGMI ministry leaders saw similar increases in response to their media-based programs.

In North America, members of BTGMI's English outreach, ReFrame Media, began hearing from people



As people have adjusted to physical distancing during the Covid-19 pandemic, Jerry An and Back to God Ministries International have increased response to media ministry around the world.

like Deborah, who shared that she was feeling "abandoned by God" and isolated from her loved ones as she read daily headlines about the increasing number of deaths.

Just as An did, ReFrame responded to Deborah and others like her, encouraging her to seek God's comfort in this time.

"Drawing near to God reminds us of a higher plan and purpose for our lives in the redemptive work of Jesus," wrote Rev. Deb Koster on a blog post at familyfire.com.

Through BTGMI, the Christian Reformed Church is bringing messages of hope in Christ to the world's computer screens, radios, and smartphones.

"I've been receiving a lot of calls from sick people asking for prayer," said Rev. Marc Nabie, BTGMI's French ministry coordinator in Burkina Faso. "This is a good time to announce the good news that despite the situation, God loves us and would like to be close to each of us."

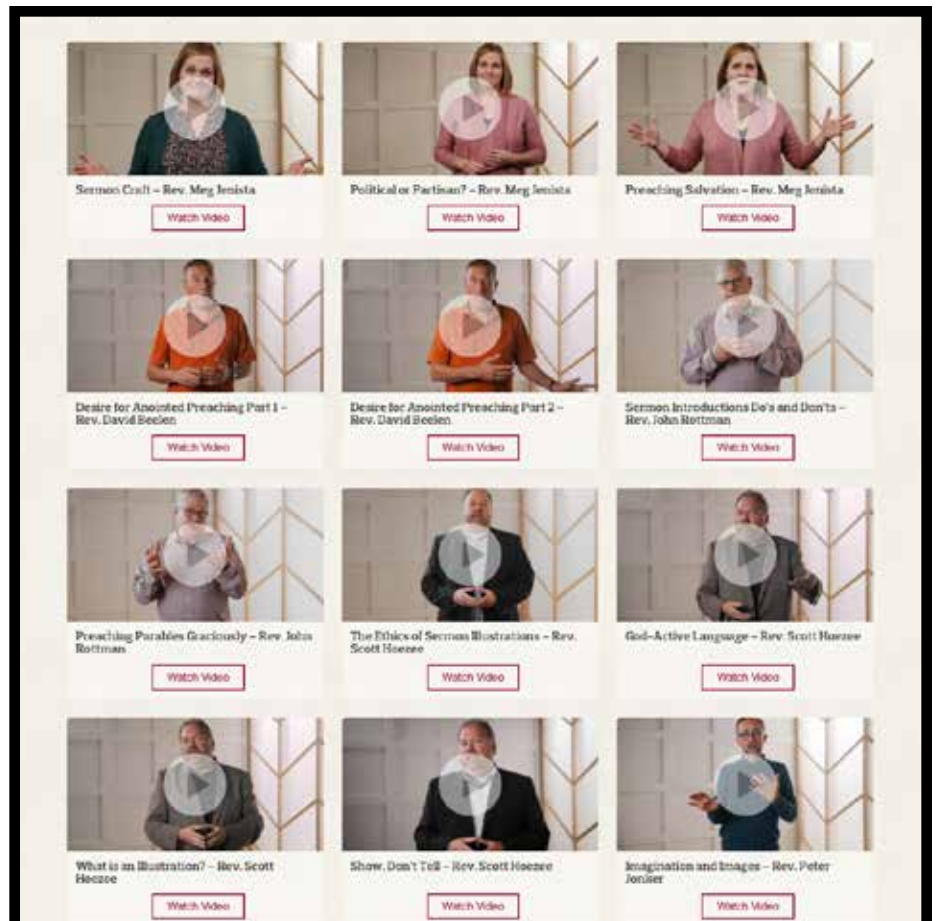
—Brian Clark, BTGMI

New Videos to Fine-Tune Preaching

THE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary has provided pastors with resources for creative preaching for the past 15 years. Every week, a set of sermon ideas—four in English and one in Spanish—are posted online. These resources are archived and searchable so pastors can find fresh sermon ideas for almost any biblical text. The Center also provides suggestions for Bible commentaries, ideas for using movies for sermon illustrations, and sample sermons in print and in downloadable audio files.

This year the Center is offering a new resource: short, four- to five-minute teaching videos to provide refresher lessons and a bit of a tune-up on various facets of the preaching craft. The first dozen videos tackle topics such as “The Nature of Sermon Illustrations,” “Preaching Without Notes,” “Anointed Preaching” (preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit), “Imagination & Images,” and more. The teachers in these short videos include pastors and professors Mary Hulst, John Rottman, David Beelen, Peter Jonker, and Scott Hoezee.

The goal is to provide easy-to-watch, concentrated reflections on how to do some of the most basic—but also some of the most important—parts of preaching better. Preachers are busy people, so the Center intentionally keeps each video to under five minutes. The Center plans to add many more videos to build an online library for preachers looking for tips on almost any aspect of preaching.



The Center for Excellence in Preaching has begun a video series to help pastors fine-tune their preaching.

We encourage all pastors to check out these new teaching videos and to spread the word to other colleagues. Visit cep.calvinseminary.edu and look for the “Fine-Tuning Your Preaching” link. The Center for Excellence in Preaching is dedicated to helping the preaching of God’s Word to be vibrant and fresh and fruitful, all to the glory of God.

—Scott E. Hoezee,
director of the Center for Excellence in
Preaching, Calvin Theological Seminary

‘A Little Bit of Heaven’

WORLD RENEW, WHOSE MINISTRY is to “relieve the suffering of the needy of the world,” has continued its tradition of offering refugee families help, hope, and a homeland in partnership with the Canadian government and Christian Reformed churches.

One congregation joining World Renew’s mission and welcoming at-risk families to Canada is Hope CRC in Port Perry, Ont.

Three years ago, church members here helped four Syrian refugee families integrate successfully into life in Canada.

As they built relationships with each other, the sponsoring families from Hope CRC were touched by the immigrating families’ longing to get their relatives out of harm’s way and resettled in Canada. One woman, Sara, had not seen her younger brother, Abdula, in more than a decade after they were separated in a refugee camp in Lebanon.

While they were apart, Abdula had grown up, married, and had a son named Hamid, who is now 3 years old. When Hope CRC members learned about Sara’s desire to reunite with her brother, they agreed with little hesitation to apply for sponsorship through World Renew for Abdula, his wife, Miriam, and Hamid.

“I wish everyone could have been at the airport to witness the joy on Sara’s face



World Renew has helped many churches sponsor refugees for resettlement in Canada and walk alongside these refugees as they adjust to life in a new context.

when she fell into her brother’s arms—the tears and laughter mingled with hugs and kisses,” one team member said. “Then our team, church members, and the reunited families shared a joyous meal together. It was a little bit of heaven.”

Over time, Abdula and his family are integrating into life in Canada, and having Sara’s family in the community already makes their adjustment easier. The Hope CRC team said World Renew walked alongside them, offering help

and support through the application process.

“This sponsorship has been and continues to be an enriching and rewarding experience for everyone involved,” one volunteer said. “It’s a blessing to bring salt and light to newcomers, especially in uncertain times.”

—Beth DeGraff, World Renew



Hope for the Politically Homeless

The world these days feels as divisive as ever—perhaps even more so.

Abortion, refugee resettlement, immigration, gun control, and freedom of religion are just a few topics that have pitted neighbor against neighbor and even Christian against Christian as many cling to their tribes no matter the cost while others find themselves without a political home.

Where does that leave us as Christians? What is our duty to each other and to God? How can we move forward connected, with respect for one another, and united in our mission for Christ?

The Banner has teamed up with the Center for Public Justice to release a series of articles online exploring topics such as “What is political homelessness,” “How to engage when you want to drop out,” “The divided Christian square,” and more.

Look for the first article June 29 at TheBanner.org/political-hope.

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[network](http://TheNetwork(crcna.org/network))

Turtle-y Awesome Stewards

“God saw all that he made, and it was very good.” —Genesis 1:31

ONE OF MY FAVORITE CREATURES

is the turtle. I love its hard-armored shell, scaly legs, determined walk, and graceful swimming. A turtle’s shell is made of layers of keratin (the same material as your fingernail) and helps to protect the turtle. In Canada, freshwater turtles range in size from that of a baseball (musk turtle) to the size of a car wheel (spiny softshell) and come in a variety of colors and shapes. Some, like the wood turtle, have orange skin. The map turtle looks as if it has been scribbled on with a bright-yellow crayon. Blanding’s turtles are shaped like a soldier’s helmet, while a spiny softshell looks more like a pancake.

One of my jobs is to study turtles in the wild because scientists are worried they are going to disappear. Sometimes we call turtles an “indicator species.” This means that when turtles are in trouble, it shows us that there’s something wrong with the wild spaces they are living in. Turtles need clean, healthy water with lots of fish, baby insects, and plants to eat, and they need to be able to live in these spaces for a very long time, which can be a big challenge. Turtles live for over 50 years, and it can take more than 10 years for them to be able to lay eggs. Often places around a turtle’s home change over time. Sometimes there are new buildings or more pollution, making it harder for a turtle to live in that space.

In Genesis 1:28, God calls us to be good stewards of his creation. To be a steward means to take care of something. Being a good steward means making sure all creation, including people, have everything they need: clean

places to live, clean water, and good food to eat. God designed the earth to naturally provide these things. Sometimes humans can change this system, making it harder for all of creation to be healthy and happy. But there are many things we can do to help make it better. That includes little things like trying to make less garbage and putting garbage in a garbage can instead of littering.

TRY THIS

Think about what you can do to be a good steward of God’s creation. It might take a little research. Maybe you can pick up garbage, plant flowers for bees and butterflies, or ride your bike instead of riding in the car. Make a list and hang it on the fridge to remind yourself that your actions can help. You can even challenge your class or school or church to be better stewards through their actions. **B**

Illustration for *The Banner* by Antia Barghigiani



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





How to Walk Well Alongside LGBTQ+ People

By Laurie Krieg

She walked into church with her girlfriend late most Sundays. I felt the nudge of the Holy Spirit. *Her. Go talk with her.* I had been speaking on stages for years, seeking to bridge the gap between LGBTQ+ people and churches, but the Holy Spirit had recently pushed me further. You don't get to wait until people reach out to you. Go to them.

For months, I simply prayed for her, and then I got an idea. "You're welcome to sit with me and my family," I said after introducing myself. Her name was Kat. "We'll always save you a seat." We did.

She thanked me and then asked about my job. "I'm trying to bridge the gap between LGBTQ+ people and the church," I said, hoping she didn't want to fight.

She didn't. Instead, she reached out: "I'm so tired of what the world says I am. I want to know what God says. Will you meet with me?"

"Of course," I said, not knowing so much about her.

I didn't know that 10 years before, she had walked away from God to live the life she desired. I didn't know that one year before, she had decided to go to

church again and broke down because of the power of the Holy Spirit. I didn't know that recently she had been talking to a therapist about transitioning from female to male. I didn't know she soon wanted to marry her girlfriend. I didn't know she had been waking up at night sometimes "gasping for God."

I didn't know that simply asking her to sit with us would lead to a discipleship relationship that would eventually lead her to surrender her whole life to Jesus and do the stumbling, imperfect, becoming-like-Jesus walk Christians do.

But God did.

"Yes. Of course," I said to her message. I was ready to walk with her.

Why was I? And how can you be ready to take the discipleship walk alongside an LGBTQ+ person? After years of walking alongside LGBTQ+ friends, I offer you the first six steps I take:

1. Take a mirror to my heart

How do I actually feel about LGBTQ+ people—*really* feel? Angry? Scared? Grossed out? Apathetic? Annoyed? Why?

Dear straight friends, we cannot dream of taking a step alongside LGBTQ+ people until we have processed how we feel about LGBTQ+

people. If our heart lacks genuine love, we should not open our mouths until we unpack and confess to Jesus why not.

2. Know what I believe

Arguments rarely win a heart, but a lack of knowing what and why we hold to a traditional view of marriage and sexuality could halt our walking alongside someone.

The focus of this article is not to convince you of the arguments, but instead help you to do the discipleship walk. I encourage you to read and understand your denomination's position (bit.ly/2L45x6I), or this other resource for a traditional view: bit.ly/2VgQHOJ. Then, when God has you engage an affirming LGBTQ+ person (someone who believes same-sex marriage is blessed by God)—and they really want to know why you believe what you do—you can graciously, humbly share a few reasons, and then ask them what they believe and why.

3. Walk differently with different groups of LGBTQ+ people

We cannot lump all LGBTQ+ people into one category—just like we cannot lump all straight people into one category.

So, yes, LGBTQ+ people need discipleship just like straight people do—but just as with straight people, we need not assume that because someone identifies as LGBTQ+ they need you to walk with them.

From my perspective as someone who has walked alongside various groups of LGBTQ+ people, here are some general ways we should walk alongside these different groups:

» *LGBTQ+ people who hold the traditional view of marriage and sexuality, are surrendering their version of broken sexuality and gender to Jesus, and are imperfectly running after him*

How do you walk alongside them?

Like you would every other person in the church who is imperfectly running after Jesus. You champion them. You learn from them. You say you are proud of them. You disciple them only if they ask you to. You ask them to disciple you! These are your peers who may be even more mature than you are in some areas of the faith because they daily, hourly, perhaps every minute experience sacrifice for the kingdom of God.

» *LGBTQ+ people who hold the traditional view of marriage and sexuality, are surrendering their version of broken sexuality and gender to Jesus, and are struggling to live it out*

How do you walk alongside this group? You champion them. You learn from them. You say you are proud of them. If and when you get a real friendship going, you ask them, “How are you really doing?” If they say, “Not great,” that’s your invitation—not to “save” them from some evil quagmire, but to ask if they would like to walk the regular old gorgeous and challenging gospel journey alongside you. Please note: Your goal while walking with them is never to make them straight. Your goal is to help connect their heart to the heart of the Father, who empowers all of us, equally, to daily

How do you walk
alongside them?
You love them as
you would want
to be loved.

surrender our version of brokenness and walk well.

» *LGBTQ+ people who hold the affirming worldview (they believe God’s design for marriage allows for same-sex marriage), declare Jesus as their Savior, and are in your circles*

How do you walk alongside them?

You love them as you would want to be loved. Don’t confront them about how they are living out their faith when you just meet them, if they are an online “friend,” or even if they are a family member with whom you are not close. “Do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matt. 7:12). Would you want a semi-stranger pointing out areas in your life as sinful—especially if you don’t even see those areas as sinful? No. Get as close to their heart as you can—become real friends—and ask the Holy Spirit to set the stage for conversations focused on both of you surrendering more of your life to Jesus.

» *LGBTQ+ people who hold the affirming worldview and don’t believe in Jesus at all*

How do you disciple unbelievers who are living like unbelievers? You can’t disciple people who aren’t disciples. Focus first on connecting their hearts to Jesus before you even dream of stepping near the sexuality or gender conversation.

As you do this, watch your motivation: Do you want them to come to Christ so they don’t do “icky sin” you don’t like? Or do you see them as critically necessary co-warriors and fellow image bearers of a holy God who daily confess and surrender sin equally icky to yours while you all usher in the kingdom of God together?

4. Surrender to God’s order of operations

Remember the order of operations for math class? PEMDAS, or (as I learned to remember it) “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally,” stood for parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, then subtraction—the order in which math expressions must be evaluated.

We have an unstated order of operations in the church: first clean up your obvious, external mess and sin, and then you can come into church to work on your inner, more hidden mess. (I’ll spare you an acronym for remembering that.)

After years of walking closely alongside LGBTQ+ people (people who have asked me to walk closely alongside them), I have learned to shut my eyes and mouth when it comes to my churchy order of operations and surrender to God’s. And what is God’s starting point? The heart.

The heart is mentioned hundreds of times in the Bible, but it never refers to the blood-pumping organ in one’s chest.

“People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

“The mouth speaks what the heart is full of” (Luke 6:45).

“A person may think their own ways are right, but the LORD weighs the heart” (Prov. 21:2).

We see crossdressing; Jesus looks deeper and might see a lack of knowing God’s love.

We see her girlfriend; Jesus looks deeper and might see her self-hatred and shame.

We see their polyamorous relationship; Jesus looks deeper and might see pastoral wounds.

How do we get to people's hearts? I start by asking people about their lives. "I'd love to hear more of your story." People are willing to share with people who are truly willing to listen. And as you do, pay attention to pain in their lives. There you will find where the Holy Spirit is already working. The Spirit wants to fill those places of pain and shame with the Spirit's self. The Spirit wants everyone to experience the Spirit's love.

Do you know what love does? Well, a billion things. But one? It empowers.

"May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God" (Eph. 3:19, NLT).

God's love empowers all of us—not toward being straight or cisgender, but toward daily surrender of all of our versions of brokenness to Jesus.

If we are going to walk alongside LGBTQ+ people, we need to surrender to God's order of operations, and that starts with the heart—and often the pain in it.

5. Help them to take their pain to Emmanuel

I am no longer shocked by people who change their theology of marriage and sexuality overnight from a traditional view to affirming of same-sex marriage. Why? Because I can usually pinpoint what made it change so quickly: they met someone.

They met a real LGBTQ+ person experiencing real suffering, and the listener thought something like, "There is no way a loving God would allow my real friend to suffer this way. Love is love. God must be affirming of same-sex relationships and identifying however you want with your gender."

Why aren't we willing to walk the road of suffering with our friends? Isn't real pain a part of the Christ-following program?

"If you suffer for doing good and endure it patiently, God is pleased with you. For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps (1 Pet. 2:20-21, NLT).

I will never negate the pain of my transgender friends who choose not to transition but instead to acknowledge how the Fall has affected their perception of biological sex. I will never negate the pain of my gay, lesbian, bisexual, and same-sex-attracted friends who desire a romantic partnership with someone of the same sex but don't pursue it because of their faith.

But I will also not "solve" their problems by giving them what they want (no-questions-asked transitioning or a same-sex partnership) when the Bible says it is not what they need to flourish.

I will also not give them churchy answers like "Well, just trust God!"

No. Instead I will get into the pit with their genuine pain. I will grieve with them, get angry with them. And I will teach them—as someone taught me—how to take their real pain to the only Empathizer who knows suffering, who knows temptation, and who has been with them every step of the road.

I will teach them lament, forgiveness, and confession, but I will not change the Word to meet temporary desires. This life is too short to encourage sin.

So this fifth step is one of the most important: when you walk with someone and they are crying real tears of real pain, take them to the real Emmanuel, God with us, who will walk with them in ways you can't.

6. Become the family Jesus promised

Don't stop there, dear church. Don't connect people to Jesus and then walk away. If we are going to hold people to a high standard of holy sexuality, we

must hold ourselves, the church, to a high standard of holy hospitality.

"I assure you that everyone who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or property [or wives or husbands or transitioning], for my sake and for the Good News, will receive now in return a hundred times as many houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and property—along with persecution. And in the world to come that person will have eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30, NLT).

If you begin walking with people, don't just do it for one hour every once in a while. Open your home to them. Invite them to become a part of your family, and in so doing, be the family Jesus promised those who are giving up houses, wives, husbands, and more for him.

These six steps are hard. They are countercultural. If you walk them, they will cost you time, money, energy, and people's respect.

We cannot gain the world and lose our souls, but heaven may gain a soul—like Kat's—by our walking well.

So let's take the first few steps together.



Laurie Krieg is a teacher, author, and podcast host who attends The Local Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. The book she wrote with her husband, *An Impossible Marriage*, comes out this November. For more, visit lauriekrieg.com.

1. How well has your church walked alongside LGBTQ+ Christians in their discipleship journeys? How about you?

2. If you are straight, how do you honestly, really feel about LGBTQ+ people? Why? And if you are LGBTQ+, how do you honestly, really feel about Christians who are non-affirming? Why?

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Miracles and Guardian Angels

In remembering and writing these events almost 23 years later, I feel an anxiousness rising in my chest. I can even conjure up that initial gripping, paralyzing fear.



Diane Vroom is a member of Orangeville Christian Reformed Church in Orangeville, Ont.

AUG. 4, 1996, was a beautiful, cloudless, summer Sunday that began perfectly. Yet by the end, it was a defining day that would be etched forever in my memory and change how I view life. In remembering and writing about these events almost 23 years later, I feel an anxiousness rising in my chest. I can even conjure up that initial gripping, paralyzing fear.

After attending the morning worship service at church, I was looking forward to a quiet afternoon of solitude in my chaise lounge with my book, Bodie Thoene's *A Thousand Shall Fall*, and the sun shining down from a peaceful summer sky.

I have read many books in my life. I have forgotten most of the authors and the stories. But this particular book, not much of a page-turner, became, in a very real way, part of my story. It changed how I view God's hand in the lives of his children.

I came to a paragraph in the book where a mother had written a letter to her son. In the letter, his mother encouraged him to read Psalm 91. I went inside to get my Bible, and settling back into my lounge chair, I began to read the psalm, which speaks of God's protection and promise of help in the midst of danger. Verse 14 reads, "I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them" (NLT). Just as I finished that verse, the phone rang.

A desperate, sobbing voice said, "Mom!"

"Oh, no," I thought. "My youngest son, Jay, is having an asthma attack while on his camping trip!"

"Jay?" I anxiously asked.

"No, no, it's Al," the voice said. My son-in-law. "There's been a terrible boating accident, and Rachel is critically injured. She's being airlifted to St. Michael's, in Toronto. Meet me there—get there as fast as you can." Click.

I immediately contacted my husband and shared the news. Our pregnant daughter was in danger. Within minutes, it seemed, he was frantically running through the front door. He stopped, looked at me and said, "You're so calm. Why are you SO CALM?!"

I said, "I'll tell you everything on the way to Toronto."

We made the trip to St. Michael's in record time. I shared, as my husband drove, that I had the utmost confidence all would go well. I, who normally would have been wringing my hands and sobbing, was calm. God had equipped me with the reading of Psalm 91 just prior to Al's call. It was for me a confirmation of the depth of my faith. My trust in my heavenly Father did not waver during these horrifying events that would continue to unfold as the day progressed. My husband and I prayed all the way to Toronto.

Arriving at St. Michael's, we hurried to the intensive care unit. Al, covered in blood, his face betraying his grief and despair, hugged us. We learned it had been a water-skiing accident. Rachel had been sitting in the back of the boat, acting as lookout as Al was pulled behind on water skis. As Al was taking a wide corner, the rope-feeding apparatus fastened to the back of the boat broke loose—first one side and then the other. The triangular piece of steel hit Rachel on the side of her head with a dreadful force.

Rachel holds baby Trista.



In the waiting room, the hours dragged on while doctors feverishly worked to save Rachel's life. One doctor came partway through surgery to give us a detailed report of the extent of Rachel's brain injuries, which mainly affected her speech and motor skills. He compared Rachel's damaged skull to a hard-boiled egg. If you were to press your thumb into the eggshell, it would crack into many pieces. Some of the pieces of Rachel's skull had pierced her brain's membrane.

The doctors were dealing with a very serious situation. He could not assure us of anything at that point.

The baby Rachel was carrying also was a major concern. At barely six months' gestation, the baby would not be able to survive if labor began. The doctor's report overwhelmed us.

Rachel, who had graduated from Calvin College (now University) with a communications degree, hoped to continue her career in radio and television after a year of maternity leave. Would this now be impossible?

The seconds and minutes seemed like hours as we waited, prayed, and pleaded silently to our Great Physician for a miracle of healing. A chaplain visited and prayed with us. There were long periods of time when we just sat numbly, shedding tears and trying to imagine what was happening in that operating room.

Rachel survived the surgery and was later transferred to the critical care unit, where we could visit. My dear, sweet girl lay in an induced coma with clicking and whirring equipment surrounding her. A nurse assigned to her sat by her side. Rachel's face was lost in a mound of cotton gauze wrapped around her head. We thanked God that Rachel had come through the surgery.

We found out later that St. Michael's, upon receiving a call from the clinic where rescuers initially brought her, immediately sent out their fully equipped medical helicopter, miraculously available on a long weekend. They assembled a team with one of the

world's best brain surgeons (who just happened to be available). Was it God taking care of things? Absolutely!

Rachel was in an induced coma for five days to allow the swelling in her brain to subside. Waiting for her to come out of the coma was beyond stressful. Al, who faithfully ate and slept in a chair at the hospital to remain close to Rachel, called us at work when she awoke.

"Mom! Rachel is awake, and she said, 'Hi.' She can talk!" Al said she had pointed at her belly and looked confused. She did not remember being pregnant.

The next day, bright and early, we headed to the hospital. I can still remember walking into Rachel's room. There she was, sitting up in bed with Al at her side. When she saw us, a big smile brightened her face. In a child-like voice, she said, "Hi! Look!"

In a second—and to my horror—she lifted her hand and pulled this swath of bound gauze straight up in the air.

It came off like a hat, and I just about fainted, afraid I would see a caved-in skull still bruised and battered. Instead, I saw stitches already healing and Rachel's perfectly shaped head shaved partially bald.

Oh, the gratitude that flooded our souls that morning! Rachel was awake, alive, still pregnant, and talking. Oh, thank you, Lord!

I learned that day how full of gratitude a heart truly can be. The coffee never tasted better, hospital cafeteria food was a delicious delight, and when people cut me off in my bike lane later that day, well, who cared? Our precious daughter was alive! We could still be grandparents.

Max Lucado once wrote, "God will heal you: instantly, gradually, or ultimately."

God healed Rachel gradually. As time unfolded, we found out Rachel did not remember a lot of things. Her road to recovery was going to take some time. Upon discharge from St. Michael's, she was transferred to a rehab facility where she underwent intense therapy until a week before the baby's due date. As she reacquainted herself to her home, she was delightfully surprised to find a sweet nursery waiting for the baby. She had no recollection of the time she spent with Al working on it.

Rachel was put on an anti-seizure medication during her convalescence, and we were concerned these medications might affect the baby. But on Nov. 6, 1996, Trista Suke was born, healthy and alert. She was, in our eyes, a miracle baby. Pain and sorrow were mixed with overwhelming joy and thanksgiving when we visited the new parents and baby Trista hours after the delivery.

As her grandpa held baby Trista in his arms for the first time, he looked intently at her small face and softly spoke these prophetic words to her: "You are going to be a very special girl."

Angels Are Watching

Psalm 91:11 reads, "For he will order his angels to protect you wherever you go" (NLT). All through this ordeal and into Rachel's recovery, I faithfully prayed, "Lord, send your guardian angels to protect Rachel."

Rachel came to our house for 10 days and slowly learned how to care for baby Trista. It was a very difficult time for us all, and especially for her, when it was time to go home. She was fragile, afraid, and still recuperating. I can still see her face through the car window as Al drove away. Her lips were trembling as she bravely fought back tears. My heart was heavy, but I knew I had to let this little family go to begin a new chapter in their own lives.

A couple of months later, we hosted a small dinner party where Rachel asked our pastor if he believed in guardian angels. He enthusiastically nodded, sharing a story about his own experience and saying, "I never questioned this truth." I shared Psalm 91:11 and how that became part of my daily prayer for Rachel. Rachel then shared something that still gives me tingles and goosebumps.

After she returned home, she was sometimes alone with Trista while Al was at work. She was still struggling with being a new mom and with her own recovery. She said she often felt a very real presence just beside her elbow as she carried Trista in her arms. Often, she would think Al had come home, and she would call out, "Al?" One time she was in the mall,

walking alone with Trista in the buggy, and she sensed a presence at her elbow that was so real that she turned to see who was just slightly beside her and behind her. But, she said, "There was no one there." Of course it was a guardian angel, for one of the functions of angels is to watch over believers.

Six months after her accident, Rachel had a scheduled appointment to visit the lead surgeon. He later said that though he could always identify a brain-injured person, with Rachel he could not. When Rachel expressed her sincere thanks to him, he waved his hand and said, "Rachel, I do not deserve the credit. It was not I who worked this miracle."

Today, Rachel is a woman who, together with her husband, works and manages two businesses. Trista graduated from Ryerson University a year ago and has her own amazing story. Her grandpa was right when he spoke those prophetic words.

For 22 years, I have wanted to tell this story. Not long ago, my granddaughter said, "Nana, it's important to share your stories. You must write them down and share them." So I am sharing this story—as must everyone who has a testimonial to God's power and grace. **B**

Reading (and Listening) for Days of Beach Towels and Porch Swings



American Dirt

By Jeanine Cummins

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Lydia lives with her husband and their 8-year-old son, Luca, in Acapulco, Mexico. In her bookstore, Lydia meets Javier, and soon the two form an intellectual bond as they discuss books. Unbeknownst to her, Javier is the violent leader of a drug cartel, and when she gets caught in his crosshairs, Lydia and Luca begin their harrowing journey to *el norte*, the United States. As Lydia and Luca wend their way north, they encounter both violence and excruciatingly beautiful kindnesses. Especially poignant are their encounters with servants of Jesus who offer food, a cup of cold water, prayer, shelter, and hope. *American Dirt* profoundly and heartbreakingly puts a personal face on the reality of the migrant experience. (Flatiron Books)

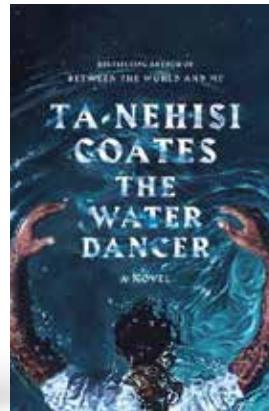


Little Mole Finds Hope

By Glenys Nellist,
illustrated by
Sally Garland

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Lying on the floor of his underground burrow, Little Mole doesn't feel good inside. When Mama asks him what's wrong, he says, "I'm sad." Mama knows just what Little Mole needs—hope! But Little Mole is confused. He doesn't know what hope is or where he can find it. So clever Mama bundles up Little Mole and walks with him through the tunnel out of the burrow, showing him along their path that "there is always hope in dark places." In this first book of an upcoming series of children's picture books, Nellist's gentle and comforting narrative is enhanced by Garland's artwork highlighting light in dark places and effectively portraying sadness, perplexity, wonder, discovery, hope, and joy. (Beaming Books)



The Water Dancer

By Ta-Nehisi Coates

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Born into slavery, Hiram witnesses the affluent, arrogant lives of the plantation owners and their families. Employing his gift of photographic memory, he watches and memorizes his people's humiliations and losses as well as his own. Hiram also possesses a mysterious power, and as word of it spreads, he is taken into the work of the Underground Railroad to transport slaves to freedom. But his own journey is fraught with confusing demands and degradations, making him unsure of who is friend and who is foe. In this riveting novel for adults, author Ta-Nehisi Coates portrays characters who experienced and survived slavery and found a way forward, embracing sacrifice so others could have freedom and life. (One World)

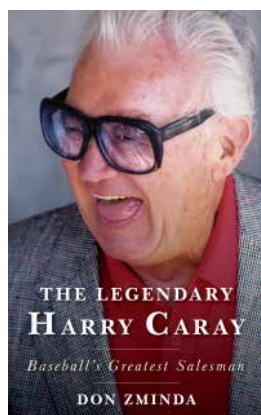


The Keeper of Wild Words

By Brooke Smith,
illustrated by
Madeline Kloepper

Reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Brook needs her grandma Mimi's help because she has nothing special to tell about her summer when she returns to school the next day. But Mimi needs Brook's help too, to find a long list of special nature words that she is afraid are disappearing. Brook and Mimi spend the day in the wild looking for each word on Mimi's list: "wren" and "willow," "lavender" and "violet," "drake" and "doe." They find every word and return home as the sun sets. The author dedicates the book to poet Mary Oliver, a fitting tribute to a writer of wild words. This book celebrates the grandparent-grandchild relationship and a day spent discovering the beauty of words and the outdoors together. (Chronicle Books)

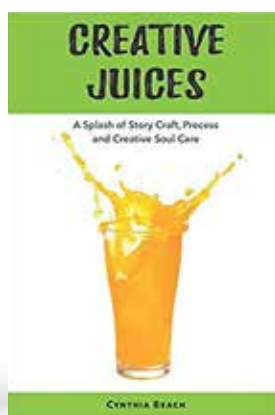


The Legendary Harry Caray: Baseball's Greatest Salesman

By Don Zminda

Review by Paul Delger

Baseball broadcaster Harry Caray's legacy and popularity remain strong. People still sing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game"—a song he made famous—at Chicago Cubs games, and a statue of the beloved Caray with his signature thick glasses stands outside Wrigley Field. Zminda's biography takes a close look at Caray's professional and personal life. Caray announced games like he was a fan, and he often became a cheerleader for the team. He also criticized owners, players, and fellow broadcasters. Caray loved the limelight and would steal a broadcasting call from a partner when something exciting happened. But overall, Caray earned his fans' delight with an unpolished, quirky, opinionated, and fun style. An enjoyable and compelling read about one of baseball's most interesting characters. (Rowman and Littlefield)

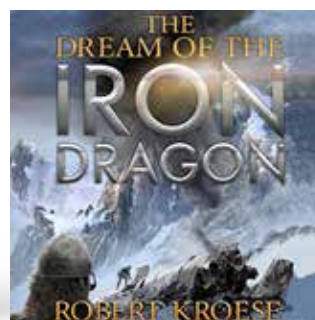


Creative Juices: A Splash of Storycraft, Process, and Creative Soul Care

By Cynthia Beach

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Creative soul care, process, and storycraft are the moving parts of a writer's life, Cynthia Beach says. She digs into obstacles that can stymie writers, such as perfectionism and procrastination, as well as the craft of writing, including plot, characterization, point of view, dialogue, and setting. Each of the book's many short, readable sections includes a small treat called "Brain Matter," usually a writing exercise that allows readers to deepen their takeaway and apply lessons to their writing life. Also included is information on writers' groups, critiques, publishing options, and hiring an editor. *Creative Juices* is for fiction and nonfiction writers, new writers, and those farther down the road, and it's filled with golden advice and nuggets that will brighten any writer's journey. (*Soul Seasons*)

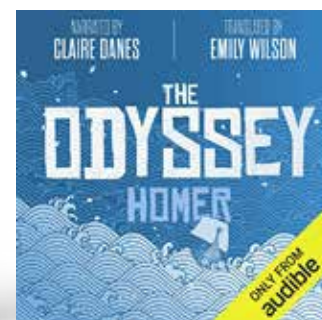


Dream of the Iron Dragon (Audiobook)

By Robert Kroese, narrated by J.D. Ledford

Reviewed by Trevor Denning

For fans of science fiction and history, *Dream of the Iron Dragon* (available in print, ebook, and through Audible) provides numerous delights. One complication leads to another, and the next thing we know our space-traveling heroes are fighting with and alongside some of history's greatest warriors, the Vikings. Given the fantastic premise, Kroese keeps everything surprisingly grounded. Scientific and historical details were thoroughly researched, yet the heart of the story is always with the characters, each of whom has hopes, ambitions, wounds, and a purpose. Narrator J.D. Ledford expertly gives each character a unique voice and conveys every ounce of emotion without ever upstaging the story. Her performance is so good, in fact, it's easy to forget she's there. (14 hours, 56 minutes, Audible)

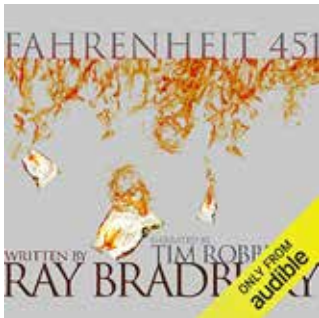


The Odyssey (Audiobook)

By Homer, translated by Emily Wilson, narrated by Claire Danes

Reviewed by Otto Selles

The classics can be intimidating, especially a work like Homer's *The Odyssey*. You know you should read the book, but unless you are obliged to study it in school, this epic poem will probably remain on your list of books to read someday. In a feat supported by a MacArthur "genius" grant, Emily Wilson has provided a first-rate English translation of *The Odyssey*. She manages to use clear and relatable language that makes a 3,000-year-old epic feel oddly close to home. In this audio version, actor Claire Danes (*Homeland*) makes Wilson's translation even more approachable, reading with great clarity and never tripping over Greek names and places. The audiobook also includes Wilson's illuminating introduction that provides many keys to understanding and appreciating the work. (Brilliance Audio, Audible)

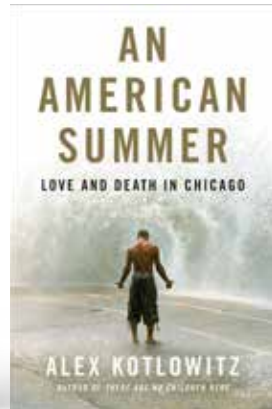


Fahrenheit 451 (Audiobook)

*By Ray Bradbury,
narrated by
Tim Robbins*

Reviewed by Otto Selles

The experience of listening to the dystopian classic *Fahrenheit 451*, about a fire-fighter who burns books for a living, during a national pandemic was at once powerful and unsettling. First of all, actor Tim Robbins (*Shawshank Redemption*) is a fantastic narrator, capturing the feverish force of Bradbury's descriptive and, at times, over-the-top prose. He uses different voices for each major character, emphasizing the novel's satirical aspects. As I listened, however, I began to identify with the fire-fighter Guy Montag's anxiety, for I was feeling increasing anxiety about the coronavirus. *Fahrenheit 451* challenges us to think. When we re-enter society, will we still take time to read well, think deeply, and consider what we might change over the long term in our lives and in society? (Audible)



An American Summer: Love and Death in Chicago

By Alex Kotlowitz

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

Journalist Alex Kotlowitz knows something about human beings and violence. In 1992, he made two Chicago brothers famous in his award-winning *There Are No Children Here*, a coming-of-age story set in a housing project. Kotlowitz's new book, *An American Summer*, tightens its focus on Chicago's summer of 2013 to show what happens to the human spirit in an American city where, on average, three violent crimes occur daily. Kotlowitz invigorates the sociological imagination. You meet victims, perhaps the police officers who found them, perhaps a parent. You meet the context, the wider definition of these fellow image-bearers of God, people who were but are no more. And in the end, you become sure of their humanity. (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday)

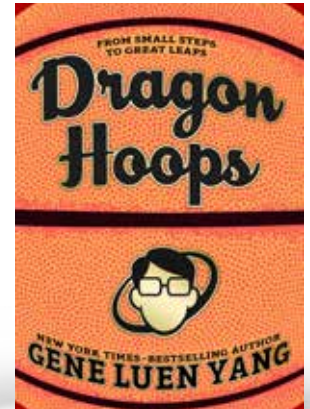


Almost Time

*By Gary D. Schmidt
and Elizabeth
Stickney, illustrated
by G. Brian Karas*

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

Ethan knows it's almost sugaring time when his dad puts applesauce instead of maple syrup on his Sunday pancakes. Soon Ethan's wait is over: the sap begins to run, and he and his dad work companionably side by side to collect the sap, boil it, and pour it into jars. In this lovely, slow-paced picture book about longing and waiting, authors Gary D. Schmidt and his late wife, Elizabeth Stickney, welcome young readers into the anticipation and satisfying rhythm of a yearly event—one that adds sweetness to both the taste buds and the relationships of a young boy. Illustrator G. Brian Karas' artwork contrasts nature's darkness and light, winter and spring. (Clarion Books)



Dragon Hoops

By Gene Luen Yang

Reviewed by Otto Selles

Gene Luen Yang begins this graphic novel by declaring, "I've hated sports ever since I was a little kid. Especially basketball." The novel goes on to explain how Yang became a basketball superfan while teaching at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, Calif., and describes the numerous challenges faced by O'Dowd's team. The book's bold and colorful images capture the excitement and movement of a hard-fought basketball game. Serious moments are balanced by Yang's quirky humor and admissions of his own nerdy awkwardness as he tries to mix with the "cool kids" of the basketball world. High school readers, sports lovers, and anyone open to reading a good story in graphic-novel form will enjoy this engaging book. (First Second)

Why Now Is the Best Time for Faith Formation Triage

Looking for those signs of hope and receiving those signs from others can be a life-giving spiritual practice.



Lesli van Milligen lives in Georgetown, Ont., and is a member of CrossPoint CRC. Following 20 years as an ordained co-pastor with her husband Tom, she is currently working as a Faith Formation Catalyzer for Eastern Canada.

As I Was Saying is a forum for a variety of perspectives to foster faith-related conversations among our readers with the goal of mutual learning, even in disagreement. Apart from articles written by editorial staff, these perspectives do not necessarily reflect the views of The Banner.

ONE OF THINGS THAT STANDS OUT to me from the past few weeks of COVID-19 response is that besides being in a constantly highly reactive and responsive mode as governmental directives change by the hour, we are also in constant triage mode, assigning degrees of urgency to our responses to the situation around us.

The shock of the past few weeks sent us all into emergency mode as we ramped up for physical distancing and reimagined social connection. Everything felt like it was in the red zone—either urgent or immediate or both. We decided whether or how to host worship services, children's ministries, and youth groups online. We scrambled to provide resources for faith nurture at home and for small groups. We promoted online giving and virtual pastoral care opportunities.

But I wonder, as we settle into a reality where there is no new normal yet, if it might be time to rest from trying to recreate programs for an online venue and perhaps do a faith formation triage instead.

What might faith formation triage look like in your congregation? Maybe it's as simple as asking where you see your people's faith being stretched in healthy or unhealthy ways. Or maybe it's encouraging families to consider what spiritual disciplines they might need to take on during this time.

Instead of trying to replicate all of our church programs to online platforms, what if triage for a pastoral response centered on the four basic spiritual needs each person has—what Faith Formation Ministries calls “the Building Blocks of Faith”? These four needs are as follows:

- » to belong to Christ and his body
- » to know God's story and one's place in that story
- » to have a sustaining hope
- » to find one's calling and be equipped in it

What if your congregation's triage entailed discerning which of these four has an urgency to it right now and which requires standard support? Personal triage might result in people admitting, for example, “I don't need another online anything as I work from home, but I urgently need a daily reminder of the hope I have in Jesus as I face potential layoff or downsizing of my job.”

Family triage might result in people saying, “We have access to all sorts of online resources to keep our kids engaged in God's story, but help us talk with them about why it matters so much.”

Congregational triage might result in a desire to explore our calling in such a time as this and to think more creatively about how to reach out to our community even while we practice physical distancing. Perhaps a regular simple tip for safely connecting with neighbors via the church Facebook page might encourage and equip members to use this time to lean into their missional callings.

If physical distancing is particularly challenging right now, people might be feeling stretched in the area of



belonging to the body. What if your congregation encouraged virtual coffee times or meals with each other? Members can sign into Zoom and then be divided into breakout rooms to interact with each other. A group icebreaker can be inserted in the chat box to help start the conversation but is often not needed.


Belonging to each other seems to be a relatively easy theme to engage. But for many, the deeper wondering is, “How am I experiencing the truth that I belong to Christ in this very trying time?” One congregation I know is

asking its members to share stories of times, past and present, when they felt Christ’s presence in times of hardship. This congregation is once a week asking two or three different people to share via Zoom and supporting them with a leader who will facilitate the conversation and then end with prayers for the gathered group. These short interludes are recorded for others to listen to.

Another way to remind each other that we are all in this together might be to create a virtual gallery of hope, inviting members of all ages to take and post photos of what gives them hope during this trying time. Looking for those signs of hope and receiving those signs from others can be a life-giving spiritual practice.

Knowing God’s story and our place in it might seem to be the easiest building block to lean into as we continue our typical devotional patterns, but what if the need here is to allow for time to really dwell in God’s story? Taking a cue from God’s Big Story Cards, what if congregations encouraged family units to take a story like the Emmaus road from Luke 24:13-35 and live into it for an entire week, one day creating a board game that traces the journey forward and back again, or another day wondering why the travelers did not recognize Jesus on the road, but later did so when Jesus broke the bread. What would it be like to pray through the story and retell the story while out on a walk? Spending a week in one rich story might help every family member find their place in that particular story.

Our faith is being formed by this pandemic in ways we have yet to fully understand. As theologian and author John Westerhoff reminded us,

“Formation takes place whether we like it or not. You are always being formed by something.” How can we shepherd this formative time by not racing to programming or busyness and still support each other even in times of physical distancing? 

Editor’s Note: A shorter version of this article was first published on The Network.

DEADLINES: 6/15/20 for July and August; 8/3/20 September. Subject to availability. Details online.

Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

Church Positions Available

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRIES CrossPoint Church in Chino (Southern California) is seeking a dynamic and experienced Director of Youth Ministries to join our leadership team. Please see the Opportunity Profile at crosspointchino.org/employment for an overview of the position and the church.

LEAD PASTOR River Rock CRC in Folsom, CA is looking for a full-time Lead Pastor to passionately lead our church in the gospel of Christ and to transform our lives through Reformed teaching. To also help us expand our connections within our Folsom community, the world, extend our hospitality and minister to those in need. The Lead Pastor will have a great level of support from our current Associate Pastor and our church Elders. If this is a position the Lord may be calling you to, please contact Mike Cox at 916-792-2832 or email sdfanmike.cox@gmail.com. Our church profile and information about our church can be found at www.riverrockchurch.org.

PASTOR First CRC in beautiful Thunder Bay, ON is seeking a full-time pastor to lead our congregation. Please email your resume or inquiries to search@fcrctbay.ca.

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.

WORSHIP DIRECTOR Sunnyside CRC in Sunnyside, WA is seeking a full-time Worship Director to lead and develop the worship ministry of the congregation. For a job description or more info email pastor@sunnysidecrc.org.

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

MARJORIE ALDERINK PROSE of 2121 Raybrook, DeVos #134, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 will celebrate her 100th birthday on 6/10/20. Married to the late Roger Prose, mom to Fred (Jill), Betsy, and Tom; 3 grandsons, & 2 great grandsons. Celebrations are on hold due to COVID, but cards would be much appreciated. We love you Mom!

BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS

REV. KENNETH SLAGER will reach his 95th birthday on June 11. Celebrating his life will be his seven children and their spouses, 21

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grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren. Ken would love to receive birthday greetings at 2121 Raybrook SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49546.

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

RON VAN KUIKEN of Jamestown, MI, celebrates his 90th birthday on June 19! His wife Myra, children Kathy & Piet, Dave & Gail, Barb, Jim & Diane, Rob & Heidi, Steve & Jill, along with 16 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren (+1 on the way) thank God for his life. We love you! Happy birthday!

EDITH S. VELDMAN, nee Weidenaar, celebrated her 90th birthday on May 25th. She is the wife of Richard C. Veldman (deceased). She celebrates with her 6 children (1 deceased) and spouses, 24 grandchildren and spouses, and 31 great-grandchildren, with two on the way. "The lines have fallen onto me in pleasant places. I have a goodly heritage." (Psalm 16:6)

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 65 YEARS



HOOGSTRA, Bob and Anita will celebrate 65 years of marriage on June 11. God has blessed them with three children: Bob & Kathy Hoogstra,

Elaine & Wendell Kappers, Ken & Lora Hoogstra. They have nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. Thank you, mom and dad, for your example of love and devotion.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS

SCHUITEMA, Dale and Norma (TerMolen) will be celebrating 50 years of marriage on June 18, 2020. 19370 Rosemary Rd Spring Lake MI 49456. They have been blessed with three children: Julie & Dan Wolthuis, Mark & Emily Schuitema, Beth & Peter Buck and 11 grandchildren. Praise be to God for his faithfulness.

SLAGER, Ray and Barb celebrated their 50th anniversary on May 27. Their children are Chris (Marissa) Slager, Rachael (Brent) Brinks and Anne (Jeff) Buttery. They have 14 grandchildren.

Obituaries

GROENEWOLD, John C., 70, went to be with his Lord on Feb 20, 2020. He is survived by his wife of 46 years, Barbara, and children Tim (Kim), Mark, and Emily (Jon Bakker). Survived

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by grandchildren: Jori, Elise, Tessa, Samuel, Kate, Lacey, Libby, Sydney, and Tyler. We are thankful for his Christian example.

HOVING, Lois, nee DeVries, age 82, beloved wife for 65 years to Arnold Hoving. Loving mother of Howard (Marla) Hoving, Jane (Ken) Meulink, and June (Doug) Evenhouse. Cherished grandmother of Kristin (Pete) Hasset, Tim (Ruthie) Hoving, Heidi (Chris) Hofstra, Bethany (Josh) Chavez; Karen (Chris) Neumair, Jana (Aaron) Eding, Susan (Nick) Vera; Marie Evenhouse (in glory), Angela Evenhouse (Amanda Joynt), Ryan (Emily) Evenhouse, and Sara Evenhouse. Dearest great-grandmother of 16. Survived by her sisters-in-law Clara DeVries, Marilyn DeVries, and Janet Huisenga.

KUIPERS, Richard Allan, 83, from Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on April 7, 2020. He is survived by his wife, Carol (Op't Hof); daughter Jennifer (Washington, D.C.), son Jason (Shelley); 3 grandchildren; and his brother Donald (Cindy) Kuipers (Myerstown, PA).

LAST, Dr. John M., age 80, of Green Pond, NJ (formerly of Wayne, NJ) passed away peacefully at home on April 18, 2020 to be with his beautiful Savior and Lord. He was a loving and beloved husband, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. He will be missed by all who survive him including his wife of 60 years, Mary E. (Holtrop) and their children, Jonathan (Mary B.) Last, Sally (Dave) Ruitenber, and Julie (Bert) Bowden along with their families; his sisters Elaine (Rev. Lester) Van Es-sen and Marion (Dave) Young, and his sister-in-law Vonnie (late James) Last.

POEL, Jeannette (Wychers), age 95, of Grand Haven, MI, passed away on Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020. Beloved wife of the late Harvey Poel; loving mother of Thom (Louise) Poel, Cheryl (Cal) Bremer, Berni (Mike) Geoghan, Marie (Daryl) Sieplinga, and Phil (Kirsten) Poel; devoted to 15 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great-grandchild. Memorial suggestions: Resonate Global Mission (Jeanne and Harvey served in Nigeria) or Second CRC, 2021 Sheldon, Grand Haven, MI 49417.



PRINS, Dena (Stout) b.11/5/31 (Calvin '55), wife of Jake Prins Groot, passed away in Grand Rapids, Michigan on 3/21/20. For details see obits.mlive.com.

SCHRODER, Ellen Jeanne (Kolk) born in Fremont, MI on 9/17/34. Ellen died peacefully on Wednesday, March 12, 2020 in Grand Rapids, MI. She was preceded in death by her husband Roland. She is survived by her sons Ron (Michele) of Sheboygan, WI and Steve(Jennifer) of Grand Rapids, MI. She has six grandchildren (Aaron, Ben and Molly, Kristen, Mitch and Janel, Megan, and Madeline and Ezra (Heethuis) Romans 8:28

VAN HAASSTERT, Anna (Hielema) went to be with her Lord and Saviour on March 21, 2020. She is survived by her husband, Chris, her children Jos (Sherilynn), Alysa (Michael), Miai, (Michael), Kylan, grandchild Oakley, her parents, Jack and Alice, her sisters, Murielle (Andrew), Jacquelynn (Richard) and brother Stanford (Monica). Communications can be sent to alysvanhasstert@gmail.com.

VANDEN BOSCH, Marlin (Mike), 85, of Sioux Center, Iowa, went to be with his Lord on April 7, 2020. He leaves behind his wife of 62 years, Nancy, his children Shelley and Jackson Hall, Mick and Judy Vanden Bosch, Dan and Sandy Vanden Bosch, and son-in-law Steve Wolffis, 10 grandchildren and 12 great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his daughter, Kim Wolffis.

VRYHOF, Frances Mae, 91, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on April 8, 2020. She is survived by her husband, Wesley; children, Susan Aupperlee (William), David Vryhof and Steven (Gayle) Vryhof; 6 grandchildren; and 8 great-grandchildren.

Employment

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR The Shalem Society for Senior Citizens Care, in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, is seeking to fill the position of Executive Director, as early as August 1, 2020. The candidate must have strong Christian values and great leadership skills with a business, human resources and gerontology background. For more information, please go to shalem.ca and/or email Tony Vandekraats at tony@cwlpark.com.

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Young Adults Writing Contest

Topic: Christian Love in Divisive Times

The Banner is pleased to sponsor a writing contest on the topic, "Christian Love in Divisive Times."

We'll publish the top two winning articles in print and the top three online, plus award cash prizes of \$1,000 USD (first prize), \$500 USD (second prize), and \$250 USD (third prize).

Deadline for submissions is midnight, June 21, 2020.

Contest open to anyone aged 16 to 25 who has not been previously published by *The Banner* and who is a member of or regularly attends a Christian Reformed church.

Articles should be no more than 1,000 words in length, submitted as a Microsoft Word file or Google doc and accompanied by a separate cover letter that includes your name, address, phone number, where you worship, and brief biographical note. Do not include this information on the essay itself. Send to info@thebanner.org with the subject heading "Writing Contest."

Decisions of judges are final. We reserve the right to withhold one or more prizes if none are deemed worthy. Winners will be notified by July 6.

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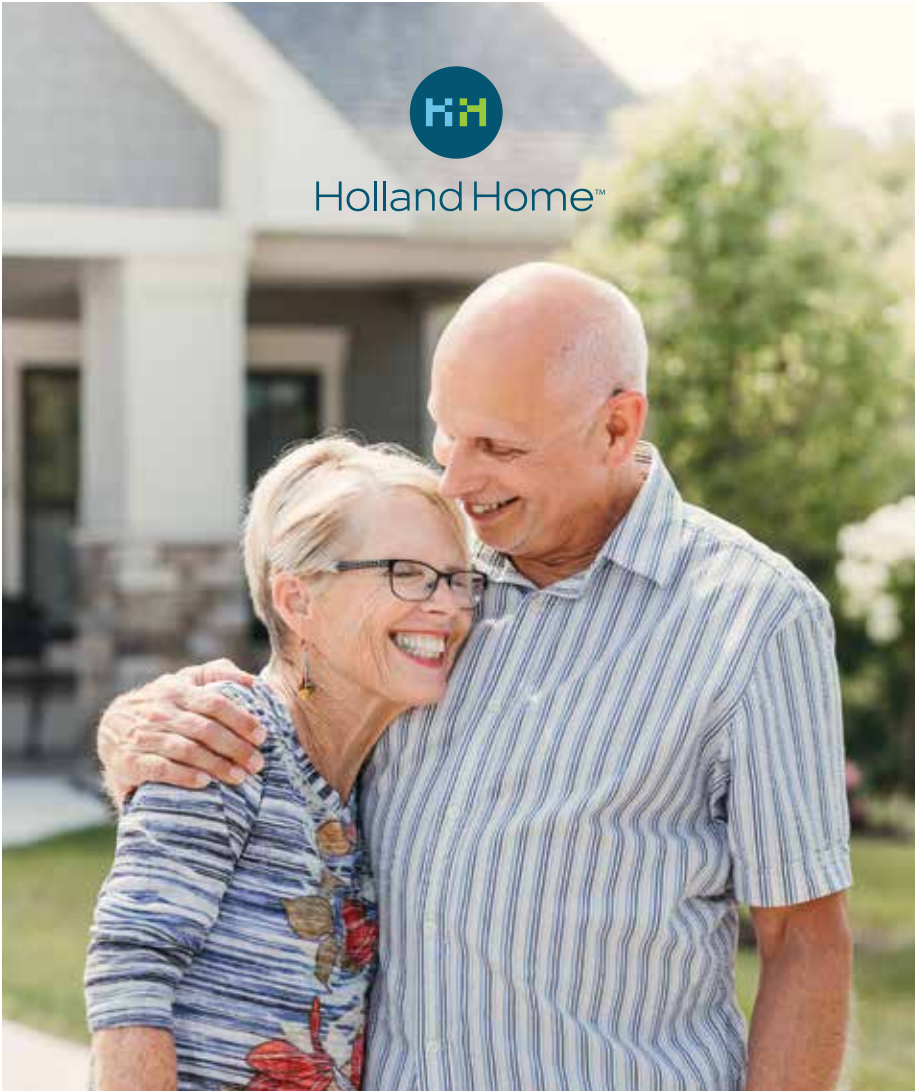
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The Unearned Tip

Sometimes you
have to wonder
about the sanity of
a younger brother.



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

I VISITED MY BROTHER in California, and we stopped at a cafe for a piece of pie and coffee. Our server seemed disconnected and quite uninterested in doing her job. It took quite a while before she finally wandered over to our table. “What can I get you?”

Two coffees. Black. And pie. I ordered the cherry, and Mark ordered peach. She moseyed away and took an even longer time returning with the coffee. No apology. No smile. No explanation. Just mugs of what turned out to be rather cold coffee. We waited for the pie. Waited some more. Mark caught her eye across the room, where she was chatting with another server. She rolled her eyes and came over with a surly, “What do you need?”

“Our pie. And maybe some hot coffee. This is pretty cold.”

She shrugged and walked away without a word. The pie never came. She also didn’t bother to do anything about the cold coffee. Eventually she dropped off the check. When she did, I asked for more coffee and the pie. There was no response other than a nod. She left the check. Mark and I chatted and reminisced and laughed a bit about our server’s total lack of competency. Another server finally refilled our coffee cups while our server leaned against the counter. She was too busy talking to other servers to even notice.

When we were down to the dregs again, Mark got up and grabbed the pot himself. If our server noticed, she didn’t let on. Eventually we were ready to leave and I grabbed the check. It was for just the two coffees. That was okay. We hadn’t really needed the pie anyway. I said, “I’ll be the big spender and you can leave the tip.”

Mark grinned, “I’m on it.” I laughed hard. So did he.

I pulled a five-dollar bill from my wallet and put it in the folder. It more than covered the bill. Mark stood, stretched, reached into his pocket and threw \$20 on the table. I looked at him as if he’d lost his mind. “Are you crazy? A \$20 bill for two coffees and the worst service ever? That’s just stupid!”

“It is,” he agreed. But the \$20 remained on the table.

To my raised eyebrow he eventually responded, “She definitely doesn’t deserve it. But that’s what grace is, isn’t it? Getting what you don’t deserve? Imagine what she’s going to feel like when she sees the \$20 tip, knowing she did nothing to deserve it.”

I shook my head. Sometimes you have to wonder about the sanity of a younger brother. We left the restaurant, and he waved to the server as we walked to the door. We had gotten into the car and were preparing to drive away when she came running out of the restaurant waving the \$20 bill in her hand. She called out, “You left your money on the table!”

Mark put down the window and said, “No, it’s yours. Thanks.”

We drove away. Such is the way of grace. **B**

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