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SEPTEMBER 2020

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Divisive
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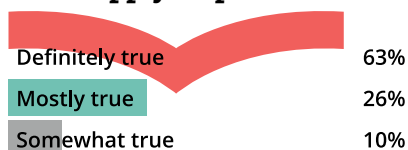
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BY THE NUMBERS

As part of the denominational ministry plan, Our Journey 2020, the CRCNA has contracted with Calvin College's Social Research Center to administer a denominational survey every year. The results from the 2019 survey have now been compiled. A positive highlight was the response to the statement, "Our church strongly urges us to apply the Bible to every area of our lives."

Read. Apply. Repeat.



Every member of every CRC is welcome to participate in the survey every year, but each church will only be sought out and encouraged to respond once every five years. In 2019, 208 churches were invited to recruit responses to the survey. A total of 1,161 people from 90 churches responded.



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.)

- » COVID-19: Churches Offer Worship With Extra Space, Continue Streaming
- » Movie: *The Way Back*
- » Middle-Grade Book: *Lotus Flower*
- » Podcast: *God Hears Her*

Hope for the Politically Homeless

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 articles online at TheBanner.org/tags/political-home.

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The Church Life Chose Me

Emily Stroble // A letter to the young people who leave the church—and to those who stay.



Christian Love in Divisive Times

See the top two articles submitted for this year's Young Adults Writing Contest.



Model Kingdom Disciples

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Writing Contest: Young people from all over the CRC submitted articles showing how much they care about showing the love of Christ in this world. // Photo by Odonata/Pexels

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Clarification

The mention of the sale of the Atlantic Stewardship Bank (Jul/Aug., Noteworthy, p. 27) noted the involvement of members of one Christian Reformed church. Initial charter applicants for the bank also came from Bethel CRC (Patterson, N.J.); Second CRC (Prospect Park, N.J.); and Irving Park CRC (Midland Park, N.J.).

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



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BANNER

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When you
change
a story...

NO CHILD should fear for her future. But when basic needs like food, safety, and shelter are threatened, the future becomes a luxury. This Fall, let's change the story of hunger for refugees, farmers battling climate change, and other vulnerable families impacted by COVID-19. Ending world hunger starts with food for every table. And food for every table, starts with you.

...she
gets to
change
the
world.

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Love and Justice

It was heartwarming to read how young people are thinking seriously about the divisiveness within and outside the church.



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.

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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

WE ARE PROUD to highlight and congratulate the winners of our Young Adults Writing Contest in this issue (pp. 32-34). We received 25 entries from writers between 16-25 years of age on the topic of “Christian Love in Divisive Times.” It was heartwarming to read how young people are thinking seriously about the divisiveness within and outside the church.

Ideological tribalism seems to have taken over our world. Tribes in and of themselves are necessary and good. But it becomes an “-ism” when we give our tribes greater loyalty and importance in our lives than we should. In our North American cultural landscape, our tribalism is mostly marked by rage, resentment, and revenge (borrowing a phrase from author Karen Armstrong). So-called progressive and conservative tribes alike are quick to be outraged at wrongs. They just get angry at different things. Both harbor simmering resentment at perceived slights and mistreatments. And both, it seems, would love to punish the other by various means.

Lately, the “cancel culture” trend seems to be one such means of revenge or punishment. Cancel culture refers to the practice of withdrawing support for public figures and/or companies who have done wrong. It often extends to totally boycotting any product or work from such figures or companies, as well as public shaming on social media.

To be clear, cancel culture is not only the domain of left-wing progressives, although the term is currently associated with them. A form of cancel culture has been around for ages, even before the term existed. Some Christians, for instance, have canceled or boycotted public Christian figures

for not having the right theology or doing or saying the right things. Remember the Christian outcry against Amy Grant back when the popular Christian artist got a divorce? Or, more recently, the Southern Baptist pastors who threatened to boycott their own conference because the organizers included a woman pastor as a speaker? In other words, the posture of rage, resentment, and revenge cuts across various tribes and has been around for a long time.

In this cultural climate, Jesus’ command to love your neighbor as yourself remains as radically challenging and difficult to follow as ever. By answering the question “Who is my neighbor?” with the parable of the good (but hated) Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Jesus essentially taught that our tribal enemies are also our neighbors. Hence, we are called to love not only those who think or act like us but also those with whom we disagree and with whom we might even feel animosity.

It is challenging for me. Am I called to love a racist as myself? Am I called to show love to those who may attack, even viciously, my ideas, beliefs, or even my character? This is very hard. But loving our enemies does not mean we accept everything they say or do.

The late Lewis Smedes wisely drew this distinction: “Love is the power to suffer evil for a long time, but it does not drive us to accept the evil we suffer” (*Love Within Limits*, p. 7). Love calls us to accept unjust persons in love, but not to accept the injustice inflicted by unjust persons. This is why the prophet Micah calls us not only to “love kindness” but, in the same breath, also to “do justice” (Micah 6:8). In our Christian discipleship, we will struggle with this tension. **B**



REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at thebanner.org/letters.

Walking with LGBTQ+ People

As I began reading Laurie Krieg's reflection in the June *Banner* ("How to Walk Well Among LGBTQ+ People"), I hoped that it would contribute to healing in the church. Many CRCNA members are taking steps to seek forgiveness for past exclusion, to understand more clearly what it means to live a life of holy obedience, and to celebrate the diversity of all who bear God's image, including all the nuances of sexual and gender identity. The preliminary report to Synod 2019 from a "Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality," in my reading, helps the church move forward by rejecting simplistic proof-texting in order to understand more fully the order and the variety we find in the world that God created. Ms. Krieg's call to extend a warm welcome and a listening ear is commendable, but in the end she endorses hospitality as a gentler mode of condemnation. Christians should welcome and love their gay and transgender neighbors, she urges—and then inform them that the Bible teaches that men and women cannot flourish in same-sex relationships. If out of sympathy we give our approval to such relationships, she adds, we "encourage sin." The pain endured by so many LGBTQ+ Christians, to which Ms. Krieg returns again and again, is

real indeed. But where she attributes it to inner turmoil and self-doubt, I see far more pain inflicted by the hostility of fellow Christians. Rather than moving us forward in the difficult task of discerning how Scripture can guide us in patient and thoughtful dialogue about sexuality and gender, in publishing Ms. Krieg's reflection, *The Banner* has taken a step backward.

» David Hoekema // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Laurie Krieg indicates that she can usually pinpoint the reason people change their theology to one of affirming same-sex relationships: because they "met a real LGBTQ+ person experiencing real suffering." Not mentioned are the many more whose perspective has changed because they have family members or friends who quietly live singly or in grateful and committed same-sex relationships, healthy and happy. The pain they and their loved ones experience comes primarily from rejection by a church that defines acceptable committed relationships narrowly, not recognizing the complex way we are fearfully and wonderfully made, also in sexual orientation. As a result, the only "safe" way for our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters in Christ to remain in their congregations or the Christian Reformed Church is to hide their orientation (as so many have) or to leave the CRC (as so many others have). But this kind of safety prevents the more honest work of challenging our theology with open study and discussion among those on both sides of the issue. The CRC has changed perspectives on many things over the years, imperfectly to be sure,

on issues of slavery, divorce, women in leadership, gender diversity, and most currently, racial issues of white supremacy. Change in each of these areas has resulted from long, slow, and difficult struggle and continuing effort as we see more of God's amazing reach of grace and hospitality that continues to widen the circle of those who "belong."

» Emily R. Brink // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Technology Friend

In response to Mr. Heetderks' article in "Big Questions" (April 2020), I will share my story regarding "new technology" in my life. The unwanted gift was given to me on Nov. 7, 2019. Little did my family or I know what a valuable gift this would be in the year 2020 when a pandemic arrived! I thank God now for my new friend—my computer—and for the valuable tool it is in connecting and sharing his Word with those I know are being traumatically affected at this time. I offer this in Christ's name.

» Bette Kamerman // Scarborough, Ont.

Calvinists Are We

Self-isolating because of the COVID-19 virus, I have been catching up on some reading, including old *Banners*. Reading the article "Youth Unlimited: '100 Years of Belonging to God'" (Sept. 2019), I was wondering why it was not mentioned that before 1993, it was called Young Calvinists and had its own song: "Calvinists Are We!"

» Ann Bezemer // Orillia, Ont.

Easter Saturday

I read "Saturday of the Harrowed Hearts" by Debra Rienstra (April 2020). I am disturbed that we should believe in the Harrowed Works of our Lord Jesus on Saturday after his crucifixion. On the cross, Jesus told the criminal who wanted to remember him in his reign: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in

Interaction Opens Minds

Editor's Note: In fulfilling our role as a public forum of diverse viewpoints, The Banner offers this unsolicited article as part of our denomination's collective conversation on a pressing issue. Read the CRC's official position on the topic at tinyurl.com/y7oyw8go.

paradise." I trust Luke 23:43 that Jesus was in Paradise. Also Jesus said "It is finished" as he breathed his last. Why add to Scriptures? All we need is the Bible.
» Eveline Franje // Oskaloosa, Iowa

Suicidal Thoughts

In his response to a Big Question (May 2020), Adam Barkman describes the reasoning behind suicide as "purely self-ish." It is high time we remove this word from the vernacular surrounding suicide. The reasoning behind suicide is often severe and lasting depression, hopelessness, and desperation. If one would not call these things selfish, then one should not use that word to describe suicide. As someone who has been touched by suicide and has also struggled with thoughts of it, I deeply resent the word "selfish" residing in the realm of my struggles. Compassion is the answer.
» Holly J. Wielsma // Spencer, Mass.

READ MORE ONLINE



As I Was Saying

Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at TheBanner.org.

- » The COVID-19 Coaster
- » Too ____ to be an Alcoholic
- » I Am a Pastor, and I Am a Racist
- » Is There a Heaven? Convinced of What We Cannot See

THE REPORT ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

expected at Synod 2021 and the resulting denomination-wide discussion will directly and profoundly affect a small number of our members: those with same-sex attractions.

Who are they? They are our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, grandchildren. They are children of the covenant, born into our fellowship, raised and nurtured among us, heirs of the promise. How our discussion labels them and their relationships will affect their relationships to God and the community of the saints.

I have lived with people who are same-sex attracted my entire 76 years. My late brother was in a long-term, committed same-sex relationship. Similarly, my sister, now 82, has been together with her lesbian friend longer than most straight people are married. They truly love each other.

Among my first memories is my mother saying, "That boy should have been a girl!" about my younger brother, Jack. For my siblings, sexual identity was fixed as much as their blue eyes and blond hair.

My siblings were labeled sodomites and as such found no place in the Christian Reformed congregation of our youth. The pain inflicted on them is indescribable. As a denomination, we can continue such hurtful mislabeling or we can foster a more nuanced understanding.

Some changes in the church, such as women voting at church meetings, family planning, marriage after divorce, and children at the Lord's Supper result from applying the Bible afresh to the unfolding of history. The church must always be open to the Spirit's leading and reforming.

Change can happen when Christians observe and read general revelation

The church must always be open to the Spirit's leading and reforming.

in tandem with special revelation. It is useful to observe how people actually live rather than to assume. Many Christians who have walked closely with people who are same-sex attracted recognize a purity of love in many long-term, committed same-sex relationships in today's society. We find it problematic to identify such committed relationships as sodomy with its connotation of violence, equal to the vile and godless of Romans 1.

It is my fervent plea that our denomination spend meaningful time engaging with people with same-sex attraction, including those who are celibate, even as we study the Bible. If we don't seriously consider the lived experiences of Christians with same-sex attraction, I fear we will continue to mislabel and misunderstand the issue at hand because we will not be speaking about the long-term, committed same-sex relationships that Christians with same-sex attraction are talking about today. To be meaningful, we must apply the Bible to the lived experience of our members, not to a theoretical abstraction. **B**



Nick Loenen and his wife, Jayne, are members of the Ladner (B.C.) CRC. Nick held elected public office at the local and provincial levels.



Photo by Jon Tyson/Unsplash

The Church Life Chose Me

By Emily Joy Stroble

It's a well-known and often-quoted statistic that young people are leaving the church in droves during college. LifeWay Research published an article in January 2019 stating that 66% of Protestant American teenagers who attended church regularly as children (at least twice a month) stopped when they reached those critical young adult years (18-22).

In some ways, this is my letter to that 66% (I was almost among them) and the parents, grandparents, pastors, and friends who pray for them.

But this is also to the 34% to prompt us to consider why we stayed in the church (or came back). I think it unlikely that it was some strength in us that allowed us to resist the seductions of "worldliness," as if our journeys in the real world bore a distinct resemblance to that of *Pilgrim's Progress* and mere moral fortifications would make us better travelers in it.

The first Saturday night after my own college orientation, I dumped a wrinkled fistful of church flyers out of my backpack and sorted through them, meticulously looking up their websites

and eliminating denominations I knew I didn't agree with and, perhaps more importantly, any whose services began before 10 a.m.

I was choosing a church on my own for the first time, and it would be perfect.

Church shopping became church hopping, then church stopping.

This is telling about what I thought church should be. I saw church primarily as another classroom, an institute of holiness that would make me holy too, as if "good Christians" can be processed through the machinery of doctrine like so many cartons of eggs. I searched for that kind of church with the same cost-benefit analysis that had brought me to Calvin College. The church search exhausted me. But I encouraged myself with the thought that somewhere out there was the perfect church, and once I did the hard work of finding it, I could retire to pew sitting and simply absorb all the right answers.

But is that what church is?

The more people I spoke to and read (good Christian voices spanning centuries) Monday through Saturday, the less I felt satisfied with what I heard on Sunday. My experience stepping into

adulthood from the warm embrace of a loving, Christian family was certainly a privilege, but did anyone else feel like questions and ideas were hitting them like a sonic boom?

I had been prepared with arguments to defeat the world's lies and, it pains me to say, proudly rebuff theology different from the tradition I had been raised in. I took meticulous notes on the services I attended, determined not to be "corrupted" by some new, strange doctrine.

Maybe more than half of young adults leave the church because we're taught that most of the people outside of our particular practice are entranced by heresies.

Yes, the church should ground and govern us. Yes, we must develop some sharp reasoning to slice away those things that leech onto the gospel, to parse out what is finite, human understanding from eternal truth.

But I do not know that the "perfect church" is the right desire at all.

The easy moral to extract from this story is that there is no one "right" church, that everyone has to find the place they are called to.

However, I am wary of fracturing faith to tailor it to approximately 7 billion desires. Many of my post-church peers call themselves “spiritual,” and I see the allure of meeting God on mountaintops, in quiet books, and mostly on my own terms. But I resist the idea of Christianity as *merely* a personal relationship with Jesus.

I recently spoke with a man who saw his great-granddaughter baptized in the church his family had attended for eight generations. He kept referring to “the life of the church.” In my head, I pictured this thriving vine, a dynamic, frolicking, ambitious, clematis-like plant with all sorts of branches grafted on and tangled together. How often we forget the church is a living thing, that we *are* it as well as *in* it!

My apologetics courses had perhaps prepared me to *define* church, but not to *be* church.

What does this “church life” look like? And is it something we choose?

I don’t think so. I thought I could sign up for church like I did for college. If I didn’t fit in a church, I could leave.

I stopped going to church, but I never felt like I left the faith—just as a duck cannot cease to be a duck by walking far enough away from a pond. I am part of the church, and I’d have more success abandoning my shadow—no, my classification as *Homo sapiens*, or the nuclei of my cells.

You too, in Christ, are the church.

The church by its nature is big enough for you, for your pain, your doubt, your sin.

And for your passion, your sudden, sacred revelations, your courage.

Church is neither merely balm nor blame nor law nor love. Church is the experience of Christian life as we commit to doing it together under the name and blood of Jesus Christ.

We, the rising generation of the church, are drawn to energy like moths to flame. We want things to happen. This

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is our gift to the church, but it is a gift so easily twisted and corrupted into self-righteous dogmas and hurt, which turns to apathy or isolating spiritual silos.

We can be the nervous system of the church, sounding the alarm when we are broken, but also never forgetting that we are a living, growing thing too and must change in our own turn. Neither we nor the church are healthiest when stagnant.

Psalm 122 speaks to me, to this cry in my heart. The first two Psalms of Ascent are songs of lament, confusion, and demands for God to do something about the state of the world. Psalm 122:1, 6, and 8-9 read:

I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the
Lord.” ...
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. ...
For the sake of my family
and friends,
I will say, “Peace be within you.”
For the sake of the house of the
Lord our God,
I will seek your prosperity.

For every young person I know who has left the church, who didn’t make their faith their own or didn’t feel their full self was welcome in the church, I know two for whom the process of finding where they fit in the body of believers was a critically formative experience of self-discovery. I belong to my church not because the sermons are particularly rigorous or the doctrine perfectly agreeable, but because I committed to live in confession and community with these people. I could not tell you *why* these people. But I’m here now. And I am home.

This letter may have begun addressed to the percentage of my brothers and sisters leaving the church, but I challenge us to resist yet another division in our body. My prayer is for 100% of the Christians I bitterly disagree with, have wronged in my prideful self-righteousness, have mentally crossed off the communion guest list to prosper: “For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity.” Because I love the church, and you are the church, I love you. I need no other syllogism. 



Emily Joy Stroble is a graduate of Calvin University, art maker, mocha drinker, and reader of many books (but never as many as she wants to). A regular contributor to *The Banner*, Emily lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

1. What do you think are some of the reasons some young people stop being part of a local church community?

2. The author used to see church as primarily “another classroom.” What image would you use to describe how you have primarily regarded church?

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

BIG QUESTIONS

Faith Formation

Lent and Advent celebrations were totally absent in the first 30 years of my 75-year Christian Reformed experience. Now they abound. Why now and not then?

Your experience matches ours. Growing up, we never heard of church seasons like Lent and Advent either, and they certainly were not mentioned in worship! We first became aware of them when in 1989 we joined our current congregation, where the Children's Worship program had recently been introduced. In Children's Worship, children learn about the church seasons and the colors that go with them. The church calendar and its rhythms were gradually incorporated into congregational worship as well. Lent, Advent, and other church seasons that have long been part of many other denominations are now deeply embedded in many Christian Reformed churches.

We asked Scott Hoezee, director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, about this question, and he described a similar experience. He noted that Children's Worship influenced many Christian Reformed churches, as did the establishment of the seasonally organized magazine *Reformed Worship* (1986) and the gray *Psalter Hymnal* (1987). These coincided with a larger ecumenical movement in the 1980s in which Christian Reformed churches joined with other congregations from across the theological spectrum in recognizing the church calendar.



Illustration for The Banner by Laurie Sienkowski

One reason church seasons had not been historically recognized in the CRC was that it was considered too Roman Catholic for the iconoclastic Reformers, who resisted stoles, colors, banners, and other pageantry. The Reformers viewed every Sunday as a little celebration of Easter, and these other things were seen as distractions.

There is more to this history, of course. But using the same liturgical cues in Children's Worship and congregational worship builds a continuum of comfort, understanding, and wonder in children. Recognizing the church seasons has helped our children—and us—to have a deeper appreciation for the rhythm of the church year, and it has shaped our understanding of how God worked in the biblical story and continues to work today.

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

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

Ethics

Jesus tells a Syrophenician woman, 'It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' Isn't Jesus being racist here?

This is for many a very difficult passage (Matt. 15:21-28), offending

first our emotions and then our intellects. For non-Christians, this is the kind of passage that confirms for them that Jesus was just a fallible man. For Christians, it is a passage easier ignored than engaged because we want to "keep Jesus," but it's hard when he sounds like this.

I'm sure many of us have people in our lives whom we love and admire and yet who at times can seem harsh or insensitive. I have many times spoken in tones that were taken by my children as harsh or by my wife as insensitive. Perhaps they were. But it's also true that in some of those cases I was simply interpreted as being unkind when I was not actually being unkind. This causes all sorts of emotions on all sides, but particularly on the side of those who feel harmed. I find in these cases the best solution is to talk it out to find out what we meant by things.

So too with the story of Jesus and the Syrophenician. What's fascinating about this story is that this is the only time in the Bible where Jesus appears to lose an argument. In fact, he loses the argument in the same way that a parent loses an argument with a child the parent wants to challenge to think for oneself. The association of non-Jews with "dogs" and Jews with "children" plays on a common Jewish error—the error of Jonah—that the Jews were somehow spiritually superior to non-Jews. When the Syrophenician woman accepts Jesus'

statement and even extends the analogy, saying, “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table” (v. 27), Jesus’ teaching point is made: non-Jews as much as Jews are able to access “bread” or salvation—hence Jesus’ response, “Woman, you have great faith!” (v. 28). So while Jesus is certainly not speaking in a safe tone, especially for a modern audience, he’s not being a racist. In fact, just the opposite: he’s affirming that all “races” are one race that has access to him.

Adam Barkman is a professor of philosophy at Redeemer University in Hamilton, Ont.

Relationships

How can I stop being judgmental of my teenagers? I grew up with constant criticism from my parents. I don’t want to hurt my children like I was hurt, but I can’t seem to stop being critical. Help!

The first thing to realize is that we are *all* guilty of being judgmental. We admire or dislike someone’s looks or clothes or manners. We (mostly subconsciously) decide to befriend or avoid a person. Or we *feel* something positive or negative about someone—envy, disgust, admiration—but say nothing. Generally we are quite unaware we are evaluating and judging people against some standard we learned and internalized in childhood.

In your case, however, because of your parents’ hypercriticism, and also because you remember what it felt like to be attacked, you are struggling against your own thoughts. Good for you. You know there is a better way to help your children navigate their roads to adulthood, and you are determined to support rather than hurt them. Notice that you made the decision to continue trying to stop being judgmental by exercising good judgment!

Forgiveness is the key to your own healing. Start by forgiving yourself, and give yourself some slack when you criticize your kids unnecessarily. Also, spend time in prayer forgiving your parents. When a hurtful incident of the past comes to your mind, choose to pray blessings and forgiveness for them rather than rehearsing anger and hurt even though you have a right to those feelings.

Also, you are in good company. Read again Romans 7:14-20. Notice Paul’s struggle and feel his frustration with himself. Sound familiar? Let that be a comfort to you.

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

Missional Living

In the midst of a pandemic and the greater call for social justice and equity, what does “missional” look like?

Our first response to this question might be characterized by a sense of needing to do more *to* or *for*. We think we need to get more people linked into our services, give more money, provide more social services, organize more food pantries, participate in more demonstrations and letter writing campaigns, and so on.

While some of these activities might be worthwhile endeavors, I’m wondering if the Spirit might be inviting us to take up a different posture while we’re sheltered in place. I wonder what we might be learning about living missionally in these unprecedented times.

One thing many are learning is that God really is at work in our neighborhoods and we did not know it (Gen. 28:16). As we are paying more attention to our neighbors, we are noticing that the kingdom of God is near—maybe even right next door!

So what if being missional begins with being where God has sent us to remain (our neighborhoods), paying attention to what God is already up to right where we live and joining in? What if joining the Spirit on God’s mission is about learning again how to listen and discern the kingdom of God come near and pointing to it rather than trying to build, develop, grow, advance, or expand it? This latter language is not used in Scripture in conjunction with our participation in the kingdom; rather, we are told the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, yeast, and a wedding banquet, and we’re invited to receive it, inherit it, and enter it as little children.

Luke 10:1-12 is a paradigmatic text in the missional movement because it articulates some counterintuitive practices for God’s people as Jesus’ sent ones. The 70 apostles, a number symbolizing all of us, are sent to Samaritan villages—not to do to or for, but as humble, vulnerable laborers and gracious guests who take nothing and depend on the hospitality of the other. They are reminded that it is God’s harvest, and they are to trust the Spirit to remain with them as they go. They are told that their witness begins with sharing peace or shalom.

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



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

Love Spreads for Young Michigan Mothers

NEWS

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Hope Unexpected, an 8-year-old organization serving young single mothers in Byron Center, Mich., opened a second location in January at Westend Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

“Being on a waiting list when you are pregnant or just had a child and need the help just doesn’t work,” said executive director Susan Lickley. “It became very clear that we needed to open a second location to surround these women. Westend (CRC) had fully open arms.”

With a grant from Buist Electric to get started, the Grand Rapids West site offers the same services as the Byron Center location: Monday Meets with discussion groups for young mothers, classes for their older children, and a nursery. The groups are kept small to develop close relationships. The organization also offers supportive resources such as counseling services, safety courses, and money management lessons.

COVID-19 has changed the way Hope Unexpected serves these families. The Monday Meets are now aided by technology. Mentors call or text the young mothers to check in. They intentionally pray for

Hope Unexpected, seen here hosting a December 2019 Christmas party, serves young mothers and their children in Grand Rapids and Byron Center.

each family. Volunteers and staff hand out groceries and deliver diapers, wipes, and gas cards. They have also been able to provide donated handmade masks to the families.

“This pandemic has had a huge effect on the moms,” Lickley said. “We have had more mental health issues. Women have lost their jobs, and the ramifications of that is scary. It’s been very difficult to see what some women have accomplished—like getting a car or legitimate insurance—and now see them financially wiped out. The communities in Grand Rapids West and Byron Center have really stepped up to help. We’ve had a lot of churches and groups donate diapers and wipes. It’s been such a huge blessing.

“I do think that God uses hard, complicated situations to bring people to him, and I have to trust in that,” Lickley added. “I hope that happens. I pray for it—that somehow amidst this hardship, these women can understand more clearly how having God in your life can fill you with so much hope.”

—Krista Dam-VandeKuyt

Teens SERVE@Home for Summer Mission

Youth Unlimited, a Christian organization that provides week-long SERVE summer mission trips for teens, adapted the annual experience due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They announced the plans for SERVE@Home in early April. About half the usual number of churches signed up, and even some of those plans had to change.

SERVE@Home was an adapted program that encouraged youth groups to stay home and find local places to be of service so as not to risk the spread of the coronavirus with travel between cities. The social and learning aspects of a typical SERVE trip were packaged in SERVE@Home kits featuring T-shirts, booklets, and pre-recorded teaching and worship sessions.

Forty teens from Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minn., had originally registered for three different SERVE trips. With the change to SERVE@Home, 10 registered but only six ended up participating. Heidi Uilk, Bethel's youth director, appreciated having a local alternative despite the drop-off in participation. "We need to focus more on serving the community with our youth, so SERVE@Home felt like a natural transition," Uilk said.

The first two days of Bethel's SERVE@Home experience were spent worshipping and using the lessons provided by Youth Unlimited. Then three of the Bethel teens, Uilk, and another leader took the service part of the week to neighboring communities, working from Inspiration Hills Camp in Inwood, Iowa, as a home base. The group painted a shed, made and delivered over a dozen meals, removed a tree, chopped firewood, sorted donations for a nonprofit organization, and helped at an organization that packs and distributes boxes of food.

"It was commented many times both by adults and kids that eyes were opened to ways that we could serve our own church



The Bethel CRC SERVE@Home team participated in a drive-through food giveaway at Faith Temple in Sioux Falls, S.D.

community in more ways than we had been doing," Uilk said.

The group ended their SERVE@Home experience with a prayer and a time of asking how they could take the community service further.

At Stephenville (Tex.) CRC, even the adapted SERVE@Home plan had to be changed. After a SERVE trip to Colorado was canceled, the church had planned to host a three-day experience for more than a dozen local teenagers.

Stephenville member Roeland Stoker said, "I had volunteers and worksites setup. Then, toward the end of June, the numbers for COVID-19 spiked in our county." The council made a decision that it would be unwise to host teenagers at the church and canceled SERVE@Home to prevent any unnecessary risk.

"I really commend Youth Unlimited on taking the initiative in canceling SERVE when it was just starting so that people could prepare logistics. ... It was sad we had to cancel—I love having SERVE—so making the decision really hurt my heart, but it was the best decision," Stoker said.

—Kristen Parker

Noteworthy

The Canadian Foodgrains Bank named Andy Harrington as its **new executive director** in May. He starts in the position this month. The bank is a partnership of 15 church-based agencies working in hunger relief, including the Christian Reformed Church's World Renew. Harrington replaces Jim Cornelius, who has served as executive director since 1997.



Andy Harrington

Canadian Foodgrains Bank



Mike Earls, Fred Zietal, and Gerry Gysbers (from left) form the band Deservedly So.

Immanuel CRC members Mike Earls and Gerry Gysbers in Hamilton, Ont., often take their band Deservedly So into local nursing homes to perform for residents. During COVID-19, they've kept the **sing-along** going with an **online concert**. Created from recordings of previous live performances as well as songs performed specifically for this video, the concert includes lyrics printed on the screen so viewers can sing along with the various folk songs. bit.ly/DeservedlySo

The DOCK, an after-school ministry program in Wyoming, Mich., that is supported by several Christian Reformed Church congregations, recently marked its **15th anniversary** with an announcement of several new ministry initiatives, including a **new partnership with Sleep in Heavenly Peace**, a nationwide nonprofit organization that builds beds for people in need.

READ MORE ONLINE

From Vacant Lots to Affordable Housing: Church Members Participate in 'Restoration Row'



Photo by Stan Boes

Steepleview Apartments in Grand Rapids, Mich., built by Grand Rapids-based nonprofit housing developer Inner City Christian Federation, opened in 2020. "Steepleview" is an accurate name: Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church, an anchor of the Baxter neighborhood for more than 140 years, sits right across the street.

Members of the church teamed with ICCF to make the affordable housing project possible.

Four of the 65 apartment units will be market-rate rent while the rest will be rented at rates affordable for tenants with low to moderate incomes. Seventeen of those are designated as supportive housing for adults aged 18-24 who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of becoming homeless.

"Permanent supportive housing is housing that comes with dedicated casework and support," ICCF chief executive officer Ryan VerWys said, explaining that many of the young people are transitioning out of foster care into independent living. "We work with Bethany Christian Services and their Center for Community Transformation to provide those on-site services."

Those young adults would pay no more than 30% of their income as rent, VerWys said.

The development also includes six live/work units on the main floor, offering an opportunity to be a business incubator, said Lee Hardy, co-manager of the Eastern Avenue CRC member corporation that pulled together the land for the project. "Those are units where you have business space in front and an attached apartment in back so you can live and work in the same space. ... We wanted to contribute to the economic vitality of the neighborhood as well as its residential capacity."

Hardy and two other church members thought of trying to acquire the property across the street 14 years ago.

"We got tired of looking at vacant lots and abandoned buildings," Hardy said.

The church members, 14 households in all, formed their own corporation—Restoration Row LLC—to pool money to buy the five lots on which the new development now sits. It took five years to acquire all the parcels.

"The idea was to hand them off to an enlightened developer, to do something good for the neighborhood, and ICCF was our first choice," Hardy said.

Steepleview Apartments in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Financing the \$19 million project was another hurdle that took time to overcome. ICCF worked for two years to get low-income tax credits from the state of Michigan to get the ball rolling.

"We applied for tax credits every six months," VerWys said. "We submitted four applications, and the fourth one was the winner."

Other funding support came from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis, which specializes in financing for affordable housing projects.

Once ICCF had the finances to build, it bought the lots from Restoration Row, and all members of the LLC were paid back for their investments. Then, Hardy said, "the LLC was officially disbanded, having accomplished its stated purpose."

A plaque recognizing the members' role in the development was presented at the buildings' opening.

"We hope this (partnership) might be a model for other churches around the country," VerWys said.

—Greg Chandler

CRC's Indigenous Family Centre to Get New Director

For the first time in the 42 years since the Indigenous Family Centre began, an Indigenous person is stepping in as its director. The center, operating in the North End of Winnipeg, Man., is one of three Urban Indigenous Ministries run by the Christian Reformed Church. Shannon Perez, who currently works as Justice and Reconciliation Mobilizer for the CRC's Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee, has taken over about 25% of the job and will gradually transition to the full directorship over the next several years. She will succeed director Michele Visser-Wikkerink.

Perez, 41, lives in Winnipeg and is from the Dené peoples in Manitoba. She started the transition to director in May.

"Doing things this way is consistent with the values we have been trying to encourage in the Christian Reformed Church—recognize, be a part of, invest in Indigenous leadership and participation," Perez said. "Those are all messages we try to convey as CIMC in the work that we're doing."

Visser-Wikkerink, 52, has served the Indigenous Family Centre since 2009. Almost from the time she began her work at IFC, she had planted the idea in Perez's mind that the younger woman should consider becoming the center's director. The two knew one another through involvement at Good News Fellowship Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in Winnipeg.

"I always thought, if there's a Christian Indigenous person who wants this position, I would step down," Visser-Wikkerink said.

Perez said she now feels ready to step into Visser-Wikkerink's role, having learned practical governance skills serving on the board at IFC for eight years, two years as trustee for the Syisi Dené First Nation Relocation Settlement Trust, and on the board of her children's day care for eight years.



Shannon Perez (left) and Michele Visser-Wikkerink.

Starting at just a quarter capacity allows Perez to continue her part-time job with CIMC, ensuring there is no gap in that important work.

"It's a living, breathing example of what we feel we're called to do as Christians," Visser-Wikkerink said. "We talk a lot about discipleship and mentoring and helping people lead, but when it comes time for those folks to step up, we don't always like to step back. You don't usually work with someone in the position you're in in order for them to take it over, but it's an entirely biblical way of doing leadership."

Darren Roorda, who serves as Director of Canadian Ministries and as a supervisor for both Visser-Wikkerink and Perez, agreed. "There is an important principle here at play," he said. "That is the principle or philosophy of autonomy and ownership fitting to the context. When a person of a particular group, culture,

or ethnicity can be fully in ownership of a ministry effort, then it should be pursued."

So far Perez is working on helping with applying for grants, taking calls two days a week from the public to answer their questions about IFCs programs or from organizations who want to partner with the center, and building relationships with the community.

Mike Hogeterp, director of the Centre for Public Dialogue and Perez's current boss, would like to see this mentorship model of changing leadership become more commonplace in the denomination. "This staged transition will give Shannon a wonderful opportunity to build deepening relationships in the IFC community, learn about the gifts and assets of the community and benefit from Michele's experience," Hogeterp said. "This is a creative and organic approach to leadership transition that I would love to see us use when possible."

—Krista dela Rosa

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. James E. Versluys
1932-2020

Jim Versluys, who served for 33 years as pastor to several Christian Reformed congregations, died May 15.

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Mich., Versluys graduated from Calvin College, Calvin Seminary, and Denver Seminary. Ordained in 1957, he served the following CRC churches: Cascades Fellowship, Jackson, Mich.; Crossroads Fellowship, West Des Moines, Iowa; White Lane Bible Way, Bakersfield, Calif; Trinity, Denver, Colo.; University Church, Mount Pleasant, Mich.; West Olive, Mich. He excelled in one-on-one ministry such as discipling, evangelism, and demonstrating compassion.

Versluys was energized by several weeks in God's creation every summer. A serious, hard-working pastor, he was full of wit and laughter once he got in the car with his family, camping trailer behind. He and his wife spent many summers pursuing their love of travel and camping, visiting all 50 states.

After retirement in 1996, Versluys continued to serve at Harderwyk Ministries in Holland, Mich. He loved studying and discussing the Bible, playing games, and taking photographs, followed by family time viewing them.

Predeceased in 2015 by Mathilda (Mae), his wife and "partner in ministry" for 60 years, Versluys is survived by three children, eight grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Improving the 'Kid Chair' Meant Designing to Constraints

Two groups of Dordt University engineering students 24 years apart worked on designing a pediatric wheelchair for the development support agency Hope Haven.

Professor Ben Saarloos led this year's group of students at the school in Sioux Center, Iowa. The project's goals were noted in the students' project summary: "Hope Haven provides low-cost and low-weight wheelchairs for children in developing countries. Five percent of these children require tilt adjustment not possible with the current design. Our task was to modify Hope Haven's original design to enable the chair to tilt. Our design needed to use as few new parts as possible; be safe, durable, and operable with one hand; and have modifications cost less than \$70 additional."

The restrictive specifications were not new to Dordt. In the fall of 1996, Hope Haven's first request to create a chair required that it "not contain any welded parts, could grow with the recipients, offer several layers of built-in support for the heads, legs, backs, etc., and only need one wrench size to adjust or fix in the field," said Mark Siemonsa, Hope Haven's director of development.

That year professor Nolan Van Gaalen, then head of the engineering department, led a group of four seniors in creating the "Kid Chair." Since then, Hope Haven has distributed about 130,000 of the original chairs around the world. When they were



Photo by Sarah Moss

Dordt University engineering students Mykaela Ptacek (left, foreground), Eber White, and Levi Smith (background) worked on the tilt mechanism for the improved "Kid Chair."

looking for improvements—including a removable footrest and a tilting mechanism—Hope Haven came back to Dordt.

Mykaela Ptacek, a senior at Dordt, worked on the tilting mechanism. "I really liked the missional and service aspects of this project because it gave our project more meaning and impact in that we would be helping others gain mobility," she said. "I also liked that we would get to design something mechanical from scratch and would get to build it and see it through to the final product. I was also inspired to choose this project because my grandpa had a stroke at the age of 57 and used a wheelchair for the rest of his life, so wheelchairs carry a personal significance, and I hoped that through this project, I could help many other(s) regain some mobility."

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

Ann Arbor CRC a 'Shelter in Place' Site for Men Without Housing

For two weeks every winter, Ann Arbor (Mich.) Christian Reformed Church hosts additional shelter space for the Shelter Association of Washtenaw's Delonis Center. This year, their second week of hosting turned into 12 weeks.

The church is one of several congregations to host a rotating additional shelter space. Local churches "volunteer to host a group of 20-25 for a week at a time. They usually spend from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. in the churches, and are brought to downtown Ann Arbor during the day," said Rachel Bush, a deacon at Ann Arbor CRC.

"This year, our second week happened to fall right during the time that (Michigan) Gov. Gretchen Whitmer first gave the 'stay-at-home' order, and we were asked to consider allowing the men we were hosting to stay longer so they could also shelter in place," said Rachel Redder, Ann Arbor CRC's director of communication and community engagement.

Due to space restrictions and confirmed cases of COVID-19 (the disease caused by a novel coronavirus spreading throughout the world) the Delonis shelter had to relocate participants, Redder said.

The men stayed throughout the church in classrooms. The congregation provided meals and support as needed. Knox Presbyterian church, Ann Arbor Christian School, and supporters from across the U.S. played a major role in providing financial support. Funds raised were used for food, socks, clothing, and toiletries. As a result, "the men staying at our church have responded with a desire to show their gratitude through service

to our church—preparing our church garden for spring planting, cleaning up the grounds, fixing and refinishing a picnic table," Redder said. They took pride in cleaning and established a group cleaning schedule.

The long extension of welcome had other benefits. "The stability of remaining in one location all day for so many weeks means that the Delonis staff and case workers have been able to work more closely with these men on progressing through goals set up for each person," Bush wrote in a May 15 update on Ann Arbor CRC's website.



Men sheltering in place at Ann Arbor CRC left their thanks on two canvases to hang in the church.

The men moved out of the church on June 15.

Bush said, "Our church is currently talking with the Washtenaw Shelter Association about this upcoming winter and how we, along with other churches in the area, can improve on the winter rotating shelter program. ... Our church is hoping to step up into a larger role since we discovered that having the men for 12 weeks was not a huge burden."

—Kimberly Simpson

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Bernard J. Niemeyer
1926-2020

Berny Niemeyer lived with Alzheimer's disease for more than a decade. Even when he no longer recognized anybody, Jesus remained. After dinner he usually played his harmonica and sang, most often "Jesus Loves Me." Niemeyer died May 20.

Three years after high school, Niemeyer left his job as a dairy milker to study for the ministry. After graduation from Calvin Seminary and ordination in 1953, he served Greene Road Christian Reformed Church in Goshen, Ind., and Lamont CRC in Coopersville, Mich. After experiencing a call to home missions, he helped plant two churches: Sunnyslope CRC in Salem, Ore., and Life Church West Iglesias Vida in Yakima, Wash. He subsequently pastored First CRC, Los Angeles, Calif.; Parkland CRC, Portland, Ore.; and The River Church in Allegan, Mich.

After retirement in 1991, the Niemeyers lived for two decades—years filled with much joy—in Chula Vista, Calif. He served as an elder at Otay Mesa Community Church and seven terms as an interim pastor. Volleyball, his favorite sport, became a regular part of Niemeyer family reunions.

Predeceased by Jean, his wife of 68 years, Niemeyer is survived by his brother, Chuck, six children, 10 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Wilbur L.
"Bill" DeJong*
1929-2020

A gentle, wise servant of God, Bill DeJong was devoted to preaching Christ in churches and to sharing God's love with his neighbors and friends. A lifelong learner, he never tired of reading, studying, and growing in his faith. DeJong died May 30 at age 90.

Born in Pella, Iowa, DeJong entered the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in 1957 and pastored the following churches: Houston (B.C.) CRC; Oak Harbor (Wash.) CRC; Prairie Lane CRC, Omaha, Neb.; Sherman Street CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; and Ann Arbor (Mich.) CRC.

Upon retirement in 1994, DeJong served several churches, including two of his former congregations, as interim pastor. He loved being outdoors and especially enjoyed gardening, fishing, and hiking. He and his wife, Marilyn, also enjoyed traveling together.

Predeceased by his daughter Judy, DeJong will be deeply missed by Marilyn, his wife of 66 years; five children and their spouses; a son-in-law; 12 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Recent Canada Corporation Meeting Discusses Governance Restructure

The Christian Reformed Church in North America Canada Corporation met for half a day in July to further discuss governance restructure. CRCNA Canada Corporation is made up of the Canadian members of the Council of Delegates, which acts on behalf of synod between synod's annual meetings.

The restructuring of CRCNA Canada Corporation and U.S. (Michigan) Corporation was announced in February. It will bring the CRC in Canada into compliance with tax law for charitable organizations in Canada. (See "Restructuring Gives CRC in Canada More Ministry Control," April 2020, p. 18)

Much of the discussion at this meeting was about proposed bylaws and how to ensure that Canada Corporation has direction and control of resources in Canada, as required by tax law.

Delegate Bob Loerts, Classis Niagara, wondered if full direction and control is jeopardized by the fact that synod appoints the members of the Canada Corporation, since synod has far more American delegates than Canadian. Aaltje van Grootheest, the member-at-large who is drafting the new bylaws, replied that synod is not mentioned in the new bylaws.

As part of reshaping governance, the way reports are received in committees of both the Council and at synod might need to be adjusted. Delegate William Koopmans, Classis Hamilton, said dual reporting may be necessary. "We could theoretically have a synod that

meets partly joined and partly separate (for U.S. and Canada). We can't give the appearance of simply rubber-stamping synod recommendations."

The Canada Corporation voted to ask the entire Council to further embrace a dual-nation reporting practice at its committees in cases when an agenda item has significance on both sides of the border. That would be accomplished by having both a U.S. and a Canadian staff person reporting to the committee.

A request for synod to do the same will go to the Council executive committee.

The Canada Corporation members also approved in principle a job description for its chief administrator, a position that will replace the current Canadian ministries director role. The U.S. Corporation will have a parallel role for an executive director in the U.S.

A new PowerPoint presentation that will explain more about the restructure is being assembled by Council delegate Greta Luimes and will soon be available for churches and classes.

—Gayla R. Postma, news editor

Classis Watch: Summer 2020

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional group of churches. Many of the actions taken by classes are governed by the CRC's Church Order, the rules that govern denominational life. Here are some of the actions by classes in the past few months.

Ministers released from a congregation: Rev. Joel De Boer, from Bridge of Hope CRC (Sioux Center, Iowa) (Church Order Art. 17a, p. 34)

Ministers granted emeritus status (retired): Revs. Len Riemersma, Nick Overduin (Church Order Art. 18)

—Gayla R. Postma, news editor

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Living Out Our Faith in a Technological World

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

By Brian Clark and Matt Kucinski

As Reformed Christians, we believe God's Spirit extends over all creation. This includes technology, but does that mean that:

- » God is at work even through the smartphone a teenager frequently uses to access pornography?
- » the Holy Spirit is working through the computers that university students use every day—the same computers that cause constant distractions with social media and the never-ending flood of bad news happening around the world?
- » there is hope for people who didn't grow up learning technology and feel left behind or even forgotten?

Yes! The next three stories illustrate ways that God is at work in all three of these scenarios thanks to ministries of the Christian Reformed Church.

Djibril

As a teenager living in Burkina Faso, West Africa, Djibril was regularly accessing pornography on his smartphone. The sense of guilt he felt for doing so was becoming overwhelming.

Even though Djibril felt guilty about watching pornography, he never stopped using his phone.

One day, Djibril came across a website that offered advice for people like him who were struggling with lust and pornography addiction. The program was part of a youth-centered audio series from Back to God Ministries International's French ministry team.

"We gathered 15 youth volunteers who wanted to share messages with their peers," said Marc Nabie, BTGMI's French ministry coordinator in Burkina Faso. "Many of the volunteers have struggled with the same issues that they were now discussing."

Djibril comes from a Muslim background. When he heard the honest words from someone his age who had struggled with the same issue he was now facing, he felt compelled to call the Christian ministry center that produced this message, even though it was from outside his religion.

Young Christians in Burkina Faso shared messages that helped Djibril see the harm in watching pornography.

"I realized through listening that other young people are facing the same problem as me, but also that there is a solution in Christ," Djibril told Nabie.

After that initial call, Nabie connected Djibril with a volunteer who lived in Djibril's region. The volunteer was willing to answer Djibril's questions about overcoming temptation and about the Christian faith. In Djibril's case, his parents accepted the offer of having Djibril meet with a volunteer and allowed him to do so.

Several months later, Nabie was scrolling through his own Facebook feed when he saw something that made him smile. It was a message posted by Djibril to all his friends professing his faith in Christ. Djibril had realized that his phone could be a tool for God's kingdom.

Irene

As a mental health expert and practitioner, Irene Kraegel has an interest in studying the effects of technology overuse on the mental well-being of individuals and groups.

"Is this a technology that is supporting real human connection or one that's taking the place of real human connection?" she'll often ask.

She recently had the opportunity to test this. Irene is the director of the Center for Counseling and Wellness at Calvin University, and this summer she taught three sections of the course "Practicing Mindfulness in a Time of Pandemic." It was one of more than 20 three-week courses offered this summer in the university and Calvin Seminary's *A Christian Witness in a COVID-Shaped World* series of courses.

Most of Irene's work is done in one-on-one, face-to-face clinical settings, so the classroom setting and the medium of delivery were less familiar. But it didn't take long for Irene to see how technology had opened doors to learners from all walks of life and from all over the world.

"Having older and younger folks in my class, it's exciting to see those connections happening, to hear stories across the lifespan—people still learning how to individuate from their families, retired people looking back, others who are



watching their own kids go to college, mid-career folks who are struggling to keep up with multiple commitments," Irene said. "I just love that intergenerational mix."

"The denominational diversity has been a blessing, too," she added. "It's been an opportunity to bring the best of the Reformed worldview and also share with one another in broader Christian community to inform each other's

The [smart] speaker helps

her with nearly every part

of her daily routine,

including her

devotional time.

response to what's happening in the world."

Through the *COVID-Shaped World* series, Irene and hundreds of students ages 17-90 from 23 U.S. states, four Canadian provinces, and 13 other countries in Asia, Africa, and South America seemed to find real human connection.

"Ultimately, when so much is taken away through the radical upending of a global pandemic, we come down to the basics of what life is: us as creatures, made by our creator, existing for our time here on earth with God," Irene said. "It's not an existential place most of us have been trained to be at peace with. These courses have provided an opportunity for people to find meaning in this new landscape, to discover deeper values, to explore guidelines for how to live when so many things have been stripped away, ... to learn how to tap into the goodness that God gives us in every moment."

Lois

Lois is 90 years old, but when she looks at changing technology, she concentrates on the way it has helped her connect to the world right from her rural home in the midwestern United States.

"I remember when we limited everyone to five minutes on the phone," said Lois, who asked that her name be changed to protect her privacy. "Technology has surpassed what I understand, but I'm grateful I can talk long distance all the time."

Lois estimates that the *Today* devotional messages have encouraged her in her faith for the past 50 years. Yet as her vision began to fail her, the way she accessed *Today* changed.

"My husband and I always used to read *Today* together. He passed away 15 years ago," Lois said. "Then, when I no longer could read the regular print, I used the large print."

Recently, Lois's daughter-in-law helped her set up a Alexa-enabled smart speaker in her home. The speaker helps her with nearly every part of her daily routine, including her devotional time.

"Living alone (as a person who is legally blind) wouldn't be possible 25 years ago," Lois said, adding that the same smart smart speaker that reads her *Today* devotional, "tells me what time it is, calls my son for me, and turns on my lights."

About 8,000 people have joined Lois in adding *Today's* feature to their Amazon or Google speakers.

"I think I concentrate on the message more now that it's read to me," Lois said.

The hope that technology offers Lois goes far beyond her own home. During COVID-19-related church closures, she enjoyed listening to her pastor online. She knows that others around the world are finding hope online, too, because she's been a long-time supporter of BTGMI's ministries to unreached people groups.

"God says in the Bible that the world won't end until the whole world knows," said Lois, referencing Matthew 24. "I never thought that would happen, but now, through media, God's Word is spreading so quickly in places I've never even heard of!" **B**

Using Technology to Support Worship Leaders

ON MARCH 12, many of the Christian Reformed Church's Worship Ministries endorsed coaches gathered for their first-ever meeting. The agenda was full, and the coaches were eagerly anticipating all they would learn from each other. But that morning as they gathered, they were confronted with the reality that COVID-19 was spreading and churches were starting to shut down.

Knowing that worship leaders and churches would be scrambling to meet the needs of their congregants, especially during Holy Week and Easter, the group tabled its agenda and began to create resources. These resources were posted on The Network (crcna.org/network), where most were accessed hundreds of times, some over 1,000 times.

Katie Roelofs, minister of music and worship at Washington D.C. CRC, reflected, "I marvel at God's timing for bringing us together and sending us home just in time to shepherd our churches through a transition to online worship. Our time together praying, discerning, and planning fed my soul and gave me a deeper well to draw from in the coming weeks of chaos and uncertainty. This was one of the last in-person interactions many of us had with a group of people, and what better way to end than in worship of the God who drew us together, equipped us, and continues to work amongst us through God's Spirit as we strive to foster worshipping communities in this new context?"

Creating these resources wasn't all the endorsed coaches did during this time of pandemic. Several also served as panelists for a number of webinars focused on questions related to planning online worship. Other webinars



During a meeting in March, endorsed coaches Chris Walker, Joy Engelsman, Katie Roelofs, and Ruth Ann Schuringa planned Holy Week and Easter resources to support churches during COVID-19.

were also offered on topics such as "Self-Care for Worship Leaders" and "Worshiping with the Psalms in This Time of Pandemic and Isolation." Those webinars (and 25 other video resources) are accessible on Worship Ministries' YouTube channel: bit.ly/2ww7eSZ.

Online technology also allowed CRC worship leaders to support each other on the CRC Worship Ministries' Facebook group, through twice-a-week prayer times, and with an online book group formed to study *Stilling the Storm: Worship and Leadership in Difficult Times*, by Kathleen Smith.

Even as travel continues to be restricted, endorsed coaches and staff are working with individuals and churches via online technology.

Rev. Joan DeVries, assistant professor of worship arts at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., wrote, "As someone who is passionate about the health of the church, I love the

opportunities to connect with leaders far and near who have specific questions or issues concerning worship. Restrictions on travel don't need to hinder connecting via phone or internet. We're here to help!"

Rev. Chris Walker, pastor of worship and arts at Covenant Life Church in Grand Haven, Mich., said, "Of course, nothing can totally replace being together in a shared space for a shared experience. But technology can help us overcome various boundaries, so we can continue to find new ways of sharing the good ways the Spirit is at work within our churches."

—Joyce Borger
CRC Worship Ministries

The View from Here

Technology: A Reality and a Gift

EARLY IN 2020, the Council of Delegates was considering a suggestion to meet at least once per year by video conference. This would reduce meeting costs and make it less of a time commitment for delegates than having to travel for meetings three times per year.

After a small team considered the matter, the COD decided not to pursue this course of action. They felt that a significant aspect of the meeting would be lost if they could not physically interact with each other.

That was in February. Little did we know that within a few weeks, the rise of COVID-19 would force us to revisit this question. Instead of asking “Should we consider video meetings?”, we found ourselves asking, “Since we must use digital technology to conduct our meeting, how should we go about doing that?”

Context is everything. Our environment, our circumstances, the issues we are dealt, and things beyond our control must be considered before we embark on a course of action. This is also true of ministry. We must acknowledge our context and realities before asking, “How can we honor God and do his will in ministry as we recognize this specific environment?”

Though we often bemoan the problems we have with technology—poor

We thank God that
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these means.

WiFi resulting in poor-quality calls, files that mysteriously disappear on our computers, the inability to see the faces of everyone participating in a video room—we know technology is a gift. We thank God that he has created the world in such a way that we are able to engage each other across the globe by these means. Technology allowed us to have our first-ever virtual meeting of the Council of Delegates, and though we had to cancel Synod 2020, we were able to host a meeting in lieu of synod via technology.

We are also grateful that we can use technology and media for the sake of the gospel. Beginning in March 2020, Christian Reformed churches around North America closed their building doors and gathered for worship using technology instead. In many cases, this was viewed as a necessary inconvenience. It was a temporary setback until we could “return to normal.”

Lately, however, we’ve recognized that although this is not an ideal situation, there are some advantages to gathering online. There are individuals we are able to reach in worship,

in small groups, in prayer, that ordinarily would not be present in our churches on Sunday morning. We thank God for this. Hopefully, as we continue to discover new ways to reach our communities and our world, we will continue to use what we’ve learned during this time of pandemic to improve and increase our future ministry.

In this issue, you will read about how technology is being used in worship, global discipleship, and in various aspects of our ministry together. My prayer is that as we engage with this medium, we continue to remember our first love and call—to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and all our strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Technology is one tool that helps us to do that.

May God bless us all as we continue to embark on this journey.



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

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

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

Church, COVID-19, and Disability: A Personal Story

MY NAME IS AMIE SPRIENSMa, and I have cerebral palsy. I currently work from my home in Allendale, Mich., as an online chaplain for *Family Fire* (part of Back to God Ministries International).

As a person with a physical disability, I am happy I can work from home right now during the COVID-19 pandemic. I miss the face-to-face interactions that chaplaincy usually provides, but I do not miss struggling with transportation or wearing personal protective equipment, which would otherwise be necessary components of my ministry life.

Working from home via my computer is safe, convenient, and often global. Using Facebook as a social media platform, I am able to connect with people in other cities, states, and countries. I can empathetically respond to prayer requests, minister to hurting people, and suggest helpful resources without leaving my home.

My experiences remind me that the intersection of faith and technology is a mixed bag for people with disabilities. No two disabilities are exactly alike, and no two people with disabilities are exactly alike.

My friend who lives in a group home and has been quarantined there is desperately missing social interaction with his friends from church. Going to church and participating in church activities is a major part of his social life. When activities are not allowed



Amie Spriensma encourages churches to embrace face-to-face and online worship as a way to help people of all abilities participate.

to take place and indoor visits to his group home are banned, he struggles to remain encouraged and hopeful.

Another friend lives with spina bifida and anxiety. She is glad that she can worship from home on any given weekend, and she urges churches not to give up their virtual platforms anytime soon. She appreciates worshiping in her living room without the threat of crowded spaces, loud music, and multi-sensory overload. She can breathe freely and not worry about becoming overwhelmed.

As for me, I like to connect with clients and friends online, but I also miss the power and presence of physical touch. Online relationships do not allow me to fully experience a friend's hug or their supportive hand on my shoulder while we chat. I confess to missing

church fellowship meals when I worship online. It's hard to virtually enjoy a taco salad or an extra piece of blueberry dessert. Hearing someone laugh with you on Zoom is nice, but it can't really compare to a moment of shared laughter when two people are standing nose-to-nose. Singing with others in a virtual meeting is nice, but it doesn't really compare to raising hands together in the same assembly.

As we continue to move through stages of recovery from COVID-19, I would like to encourage churches and ministries to keep their virtual platforms for individuals who need them even as they also encourage people to maintain face-to-face and elbow-to-elbow relationships in ways that are safe, accessible, and possible. Disability Concerns maintains a library of resources for ministering with people experiencing physical and mental health challenges in the face of COVID-19 that might be of use to you.

The Christian church has ministered to people from many different walks of life for centuries. We must not allow fear or discouragement to keep us from doing what we can in days yet to come.

—Amie Spriensma is a chaplain with Family Fire and also serves as a regional disability advocate for Classis Zeeland.

Joining God at Work Right Outside Your Front Door

“WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE to live in the neighborhood God has placed us in?”

Resonate Global Mission recently brought together 54 individuals living throughout the world to explore that question through Joining God in the Neighborhood cohorts.

Joining God in the Neighborhood addressed the new context of stay-at-home orders due to COVID-19. Meeting together regularly online over video call to read Scripture, learn, and reflect together, participants were then sent out to join God on mission right outside their doors.

“God is at work in God’s world, including in our neighbors and neighborhoods,” said Karen Wilk, one of the facilitators for the cohorts. “As we pay attention to those next door, listen to their stories and learn from them, we will discover more about who God is ... and how we can participate in what God is already doing right where we live.”

Ahee Kim learned about the cohort through Resonate missionary Mary Buteyn. Kim had been working at a school in Berlin, but the school closed due to COVID-19. She felt purposeless at first, but as she spent time praying, she felt God teaching her that the Holy Spirit was still actively working—and she, just like everyone, was invited to join in that work.

“The cohort seemed like such a fitting opportunity for me to learn more about how I may respond to God,” Kim said.



John and Carol Vanderstoep are planting The Bridge, a Christian Reformed church plant in Ontario. Carol participated in Joining God in the Neighborhood to discover where God is at work in the church’s neighborhood.

Through the cohort, Kim felt challenged to be more intentional about getting to know people in the dormitory where she was living. As Resonate ministry leaders challenged cohort participants to go for walks in their neighborhoods, check in with neighbors, and experiment with different ways to connect with people, Kim joined yoga classes and led a chapel service in her dormitory.

Carol Vanderstoep also joined the cohort. Vanderstoep and her husband are planting The Bridge, a CRC church in the small town of Fergus, Ont.

“Although we thought we understood what that would mean,” Vanderstoep said, “God took us on a different journey than the attractional model that we imagined.”

Vanderstoep said the church has been learning what it means to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading.

“We are all on a learning curve of seeing where God is already at work in our neighborhoods and community and joining him there rather than coming in and creating our own programs and inviting others into it,” she said.

Vanderstoep enjoyed learning alongside other members of the CRC who are trying to do the same. She appreciated hearing their ideas and stories about connecting with their neighbors.

“What I’ve learned over time is that God is asking us to love our neighbors and become friends and share in each other’s lives,” said Vanderstoep. “Relationships develop naturally, and conversations flow. We just need to meet people where they are on their journey. Listening to the Spirit for guidance is so important.”

Resonate ministry leaders adapted Joining God in the Neighborhood from Go Local, a Resonate initiative in which churches learn how to discern how the Holy Spirit is at work in their neighborhoods and respond faithfully.

Resonate ministry leaders will continue to lead Go Local and Joining God in the Neighborhood cohorts for anyone who wants to discover how God is working in their neighborhoods. You can learn more about joining a cohort online at resonatglobalmission.org/go-local.

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

Church Finds Disaster Response Opportunity Close to Home

ON THE EVENING OF MAY 20, Midland (Mich.) Reformed Church opened its doors to some of the 10,000 people who were forced to evacuate their homes and the surrounding communities due to flooding caused by the breaking of two dams. Of those affected by this disaster, close to 20 families were members of the congregation.

Midland Reformed Church had been scheduled to send a group of volunteers to serve with World Renew Disaster Response Services in North Carolina this summer. That trip was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Little did those volunteers know that May 2020 would bring an entirely different opportunity to serve those who had survived a natural disaster, this time much closer to home.

Senior pastor Mike De Ruyter explained that in the past it had seemed to the congregation that “disaster recovery work was always something that happened a long distance away and participating in that work meant doing a short mission trip. When the disaster happened right in our community, I knew that World Renew DRS would be one of my first calls.”

While COVID-19 has restricted the ability of World Renew to send volunteers to disasters, Midland Reformed provided World Renew the chance to creatively respond to a crisis with a grant that equipped Midland and other nearby churches to serve their local communities, physically and emotionally.

Since the night of the evacuation and through the aid of their World Renew grant, Midland Reformed Church has installed hot water heaters, focused on immediate needs to get families back in their homes, and tended to the emotional needs of the vulnerable.



Pastor Mike DeRuyter speaking to volunteers in Midland, Mich.

“Our prayer is that congregations across the mid-Michigan region will be unified in our response to those needs in a way that the hope of the gospel becomes a profoundly and personally lived experience and that the presence of Jesus is known,” De Ruyter shared. “Specifically, we are praying that we will be able to develop long-term relationships with those we serve.”

Chris Gibson, groups program manager for World Renew DRS, was able to spend some time in Midland after the flooding to assess the disaster and meet with De Ruyter.

“Before we ever got involved, neighbors were helping neighbors, pastors were talking with pastors, and churches were working together to help their own community,” Gibson said. “This type of collaborative work is foundational for the type of ministry we hope World Renew comes alongside in times of disaster. Collaborative partnerships are at the center of this ministry, and having pastors and churches already moving forward together to help their neighbors is exactly the situation we hope for when a disaster strikes a community.”

—Annie Mas-Smith,
World Renew

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Back to School During the Pandemic



WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT SCHOOL, you probably think about how differently school ended last year. We went to sleep one night expecting to pack our lunches and go back to class the next day, but instead we were told that school would be done at home for the rest of the year.


We all had to change our thinking, plan differently, and look to the adults in our home for our learning. We talked to our teachers through screens and waved to our friends from a distance. We didn't get to sit in our usual spot in the classroom. We didn't get to ride the bus to school with our friends. We didn't get our morning hugs or high fives from our teachers, and we didn't get to sit by our friends at lunchtime. We called this type of learning "distance learning," and it was much different from what most of us were used to.

During this time, we might have struggled a bit. As a parent, it was hard to know if I was doing all the right things for my daughter's learning. I wasn't sure if I had taught her the information the same way her teacher would. And I could tell she was missing her usual routine, her friends, and being in the school environment. Maybe you felt the same way.

Maybe during this time you were sad or frustrated. Maybe you prayed and asked God, "Why is this happening?" or "Why can't I go back to school with all of my friends?" This time was very scary. There were so many unknowns. But one thing we did know was that God was still with us through all of it. God loves us, and God knew everything that was going to happen each day. God wasn't surprised by the changes, and God knew each detail of what was going to come.

As we start this school year, we know that things will be different. We may sit a little further apart than we used to. We might have less group work than we used to. Maybe there will be fewer kids on the playground during recess. No matter what the changes are, we know God has a plan for our school year. God has purposefully placed each of us exactly where we are. God is sovereign. God isn't going to leave us. God isn't going to harm us. God loves us!

So when you go back to school, try not to be scared or nervous about the changes. Get excited, and remember that God already has a special plan for you!

For a list of some great back-to-school books for elementary students, check out this link: [goodreads.com/shelf/show/back-to-school](https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/back-to-school) 



Liz Brown is the assistant principal at Living Stones Academy in Grand Rapids, Mich. She has bachelor's and master's degrees from Grand Valley State University in elementary education/instruction and curriculum. She is a native of Grand Rapids, where she lives with her husband, two daughters, and son.





Christian Love in Divisive Times

First place

By Adam Vanderleest

This year *The Banner* sponsored an essay contest for young adults aged 16-25 on the topic of “Christian Love in Divisive Times.” We wanted to hear what young people had to say about the difficult conversations being had in North America right now. We received 25 entries from young people in the Christian Reformed Church. Our three judges read each one without seeing any names attached, and they agreed on three winners. The top two are printed here, but all three are published online.

I imagine two Roman centurions fighting about the best way for Rome to deal with the Jewish people around the time of Jesus. One argues for strict control to extinguish uprisings, as he worries about protecting his young family. The other has made friends with a few Jewish men in his precinct and believes Rome should be more tolerant.

Skip ahead 1,500 years and travel to Germany. Agnes and Else are arguing about the growing Reformation movement. Agnes prefers to trust in the authority of the church, as her ancestors always have, while Else is interested in the movement and wants to be able to read her own Bible.

It's another 500 years later, and society feels more divided than ever. Gun rights, immigration laws, abortion, climate change, and the place of socialism within a capitalist system are issues that divide us today. The past few months of COVID-19, race relations, and vivid examples of police brutality further highlight the divisions that exist between us.

From the outside, society might see the church as a group of people who share a similar worldview. As we know, the opposite is true, with many historic schisms dividing the body of believers. Today we worry about divisions over political allegiances and changing cultural responses to sexuality and gender issues. There will always be disagreements, but we must not let disagreements become divisions.

Unfortunately, our disagreements often do devolve into divisions. Families, churches, and nations are all divided. These divisions hurt. Sometimes we avoid the pain by hiding in echo chambers. These places, either online or in person, make us feel like we've got it all right; our beliefs are affirmed. Echo chambers can create and reinforce the labeling of people as “us” and “them.” These labels artificially simplify the nuances of others' opinions and enable us to blame “them” for division. As a result, we hear statements like “Those liberal-minded folks care nothing about the financial security of our

I fear the church
has more of a
reputation of
acting like the
Pharisees than
like Jesus.

country,” or “Those older folks, they’re so out of touch with current reality.” These statements alienate us from our neighbors, making divisions feel more insurmountable than the Rocky Mountains. How can we heal these divisions?

My pastor recently taught a series about orthopraxy (right practice), which he often contrasted with orthodoxy (right beliefs). As a denomination, we have a history of worrying more about orthodoxy than orthopraxy. Shifting our perspective toward orthopraxy can help us show love in the midst of division. Even when we’re unsure of what to believe, we can practice love.

Of course, orthodoxy is important. We must still stand up for our beliefs. Is there a good way to share our beliefs *and* spread God’s love?

Jesus provides an example. Throughout his ministry, he would teach *and* heal. During his encounter with the adulterous women, he acts in a way that protects her dignity and shows her love, turning the tables on the Pharisees by reminding them of their own sin. Jesus only teaches the woman how to live *at the very end*. His priorities were to love and protect first, and to teach second.

I fear the church has more of a reputation of acting like the Pharisees than like Jesus. Tellingly, I recently read an article from HuffPost titled “Has Evangelical Christianity Become Sociopathic?” The article outlined examples from recent decades of Christians creating division. The author argued that Christians define themselves more by what they oppose than what they believe. He suggested that these stances have caused

Christians to be known for spreading hate and contributing to sharp divisions in America. I am Canadian, and a recent conversation I had with an Indigenous person resonated with the article’s sentiment. The visceral way they spoke of Christian missionaries’ abusive impact on their family highlighted their pain. I was left wondering if the divide the church created between it and our Indigenous neighbors will ever heal. Is this the way God wants the world to see his church?

We can strive to stop creating divisions but must also repair divisions that already exist in order to show the love of Jesus. I believe loving starts with listening. As a medical student, I can read information in a patient’s chart before seeing them. While reading, it’s easy to conjure up an image of a patient before I ever meet them. My brain quickly translates “HIV, hepatitis C, alcohol abuse, injection drug use” into “addict, uncooperative, unemployed, drain of health care dollars.” These prejudicial thoughts and assumptions can cause me to hear what I want to hear instead of truly listening to a patient. As a result, I can miss important parts of their story that could benefit the healing process. Being a good care provider means pushing preconceptions aside and listening instead.

Just as truly listening to a patient can contribute to healing in medicine, truly listening to those around

us can bring healing to our divisions. Listening helps us see our role in another’s pain and ways we can participate in healing. In the historical examples above, and in our world today, common ground can be gained by listening and understanding. Adopting a posture of love and grace through listening might help our divisions seem more like the rolling Appalachians than the wall of the Rockies.

A historical lens shows us that societies will always have disagreements and, sadly, divisions. However, God calls us to be agents of healing to a broken world. I hope to grow into this posture of listening to make me a better physician and a more Christ-like child of God. I pray that we, the church, would use the tool of genuine listening to show the world the unifying love of Christ in divisive times.



Adam Vanderleest is in his final year of medical school at Western University. He loves reading about mountains and hiking in them. He and his wife, Katherine, worship at Talbot Street Church in London, Ont.

Second Place

By Rheanna Rosenthal

“Can I pray for you, too?”
The man I met that day on a downtown street corner spoke these words, not knowing they would change my life.

Throughout university, I was part of a group of students that went downtown on Friday nights to hand out hot chocolate to people we met. One evening, this white-haired man without a home told me his story, and I asked if I could pray for him. “Yes!” he replied with a smile, then added gently, “Can I pray for you, too?”

I froze, my face wide-eyed and hanging. My mind reeled: *No! You’re homeless! You need my help; I can’t take yours.* Everything I had learned about doing *unto* and *for* and *to* the least of these was deconstructed in this moment; my categories were flipped upside down. I was there to serve, not be served; to give, not receive. And this kind of response is precisely what causes division in the first place.

I think we can all agree we find ourselves inhabiting divisive times. The year 2020’s inventory is stocked full with a global pandemic, mass shootings, racially driven hate, and other personal and systemic oppressions and injustices. Gossip simmers in break rooms, in living rooms, about family members, bosses, neighbors, politicians, church leaders—the list goes on. We gulp this brew down like poison. Someone needs to be blamed if we’re to make sense of this brokenness. Right?

Yet we only know our world is divided because somehow we know things aren’t as they were meant to be. In *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*, David Naugle calls this a “residual memory of paradise” etched upon human hearts. Though this juxtaposition of what things *are* and what things *should be* foreshadows the redemption of a broken world, the fractured things we see can make us despair and forget who we are or who we belong to or who

could allow such suffering anyway. It hurts. It sears and it scars. It steals our gaze away from our God, if we let it.

Yet what if the division we saw was a mere projection of 7 billion broken hearts and divided souls? What if I was the reason for disunity? What if you were, too? The Fall means discord is a natural human tendency. The apostle Paul exhorted his audiences to be careful; his letters are teeming with calls to unity. But perhaps the biggest reason for these divisive times is that we divide this world and its people into categories, explicitly through language, covertly in our hearts. Things and people become good *or* bad, religious *or* secular, right *or* wrong. Complacently, we love from our “goodness” with visions to fix all that’s awry.

In *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis wrote, “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken.” Consequently, we detach ourselves from real love because it’s too painful, too costly. We ponder compassion—suffering *with*—and toss the idea aside when we see the risk of having our own brokenness exposed. Instead, we love from a distance, from the far side of God’s grace, a calculated reaching down with a stony hand to pull people into the facade of “I’ve got my life together.”

Christian love in divisive times means not doing *unto* or *for* or *to* the least of these; Christian love is seeing that I, myself, am the lost sheep *and* the 99, the prodigal son *and* the elder brother, the sinner *and* the Pharisee, the leper *and* the healed, the least of these *and* the justified. All these things are within me—within all of us—because I am a good creation that has been crushed by the Fall. Seeing this—that good and bad sit snugly in my heart together—means loving broken people not as “other,” but as “brother.” We can acknowledge difference, but must not let difference convince us there’s not enough room at Christ’s big table.

Finally, we come to see that love is not pretending we’re immune to suffering;

rather, it’s incarnationally dwelling amidst the suffering—as Jesus did—because I myself am a co-sufferer, a co-sinner. Recognizing our own sin and suffering is a liturgy that habitually forms and reorients us as we acknowledge our wretchedness and look up to the one who paid for it all. We can pore over verse after verse about how to “love thy neighbor,” but until we learn that love is an embodied posture of being in this world, love will remain an agenda, a platform, a duty of charity or pity—not a way of caring for the souls of those around us. When we find the courage to gaze into the brokenness of our own hearts, we finally understand “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19), and that changes everything.

The man on the streets prayed for me that day. He showed me how high, how wide, how perfect is the abundant love of Jesus. It was big enough for both of us, flooding the cracks in our hearts as we sat on the cracks in the sidewalk. The echo of a broken Savior hovered like the Spirit over blooming waters; we were equally broken, and it was OK for us to be broken together.

Often I look to the world and become cynical. I look within my heart and find shame and despair. But when I look up and see Jesus hanging with hands and feet pierced assuredly to a cross, I find hope for shattered governments, shattered culture, shattered hearts to be put back together in a divine reassembly. At this, I hear shackles breaking, angels singing, Jesus saying, “This is why I came.”

May the words of this hymn be our unbroken and eternal prayer: “Brother, let me be your servant. Let me be as Christ to you. Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant too” (*The Servant Song*, 2012).



Rheanna Rosenthal recently graduated from Redeemer University with a degree in clinical psychology and English literature. She attends Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Belleville, Ont., with her family.

Rescue Boldly!

Ebed-Melech not only acted boldly when he saw Jeremiah treated unjustly; he also displayed deep compassion by thinking of Jeremiah's comfort.



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario.

ABRAHAM, DAVID, RUTH, and Esther.

But what about Ebed-Melech? I didn't encounter him as a child, and can't recall hearing a sermon about him. It wasn't until I read the book of Jeremiah that I was pleasantly surprised to meet him.

Why the surprise and encouragement? Because Ebed-Melech was a godly role model for Jeremiah's time and still is for us today.

Ebed-Melech obeyed God's commands—the same ones we're called to observe: "Defend the weak and the fatherless; uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed. Rescue the weak and the needy" (Ps. 82:3-4).

Ebed-Melech lived in a time of immense turmoil for God's people. The prophet Jeremiah was in prison because he had relentlessly spoken God's word of judgment against God's people, Israel, for deserting God and following idols. Even in prison, Jeremiah continued to proclaim God's Word: those who stayed in the city would die, but whoever went over to the Babylonians would live.

The officials wanted to silence Jeremiah. With the approval of weak-kneed King Zedekiah, Jeremiah was lowered by ropes into a deep cistern. Though it had no water in it, it was muddy, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

Enter Ebed-Melech, a Cushite—an Ethiopian—who was an official in the royal palace and a foreigner. We've been calling him Ebed-Melech, but that wasn't his name. It was his title, and it meant "servant of the king." Being nameless and a foreigner didn't stop Ebed-Melech from acting. Boldly, he went to King Zedekiah and told him about Jeremiah's plight.

At King Zedekiah's command, Ebed-Melech took 30 men with him to free Jeremiah. But it's striking what he did next on his own initiative. He found some old rags and worn-out clothes, which he took to the cistern. He told Jeremiah to put them under his arms to pad the ropes. Then the men pulled Jeremiah out of the cistern.

Ebed-Melech not only acted boldly when he saw Jeremiah treated unjustly; he also displayed deep compassion by thinking of Jeremiah's comfort.

Jeremiah faced injustice, abandonment, mistreatment, and hunger, just like many people do today—refugees, trafficking victims, modern-day slaves, casualties of domestic abuse, and people with insufficient food and clean water. I wonder what I would have done in Ebed-Melech's place. Would I have acted courageously? Or would I have remained silent? Would I have thought the problem was too big for one person to handle? Or would I have been willing to speak up?

Our king is not weak-kneed like King Zedekiah was. He is God of heaven and earth. He sent his son to rescue humanity and creation. Jesus—the one of whom the prophet Isaiah wrote: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isa. 42:3)—still today meets people in their needs and mends broken lives. He does that by sending us, his ambassadors, to speak up for justice, to boldly rescue, and to live as Ebed-Melechs. We are, after all, servants of the King! **B**

1. Which biblical character do you look up to as a role model? Why?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Staying Afloat in a Sinking Boat

I wanted to fix the problem, but all I could do was pray their boat would stay afloat, that it wouldn't sink with the weight of the burden it was now carrying.



Linda L. Hanstra is a speech-language pathologist in Edwardsburg, Mich. She and her husband attend Church of the Savior Christian Reformed Church in South Bend, Ind. She writes about faith, empty-nesting, and other topics at lindahanstra.com.

I REMEMBER ONE SUMMER before the diagnosis.

Tom and I pulled into the peaceful bay and waved when we spotted my parents' boat. While dropping our lines, I noticed Dad scrambling around and realized something was wrong.

From his knees in the front of the boat, he shouted, "We're taking on water!" Mom gestured to show that several inches of water had already filled the bottom. After a few tense minutes, Dad yelled, "I lost my boat plug!"

We've faced many unexpected events during our vacations at the lake, but this was a first.

Fast-forward 15 months. At the psychologist's office, my parents, my sisters, and I all filed into the conference room. The doctor took a seat at the head of the table and, looking over his glasses, shared the results of Mom's testing.

"The MRI shows areas of shrinkage of the brain, and testing indicates cognitive decline consistent with a degenerative disease. Her short-term memory loss ..." The doctor kept talking, but he didn't need to. I knew exactly what he would say.

Mom had Alzheimer's.

As Mom loses her memory, I search mine. I want to preserve the images of her I've always held there.

I can picture Mom cooking dinner for a family of seven and cleaning up the kitchen late into the night without complaint. I see her jotting a note on the wall calendar in her meticulous habit of making sure we are all

where we need to be when we need to be there. Practices, swim meets, basketball games, band concerts, and plays—she gets us there and cheers us on. And when I'm sick, she feeds me chicken noodle soup, takes me to the doctor, and makes me finish every drop of pink penicillin.

I recall standing next to Mom in church as she belted out the opening hymn: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation! O my soul, praise him, for he is my help and salvation!" Her strong alto voice comes through as she leans toward me so I can learn to sing harmony too. I squirm through the sermon and the long prayer, looking forward to the doxology when I can sing with her again: "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!"

The memories bring me solace for a time. But Mom's skills are descending, much as their boat did on the lake that summer day.

The wind picked up and the water climbed higher up the sides of the boat. Dad started up his engine and moved toward the dock at a nearby resort. We followed closely behind, me gripping my seat cushion.

After docking the boat, Dad raced to the boathouse and came hustling back with an old plug the boathands had scrounged up. We held our breath as he tried it. It didn't fit.

"Now what are we going to do?" Mom's eyes darted from Dad to me. I wondered the same thing.

Dad thought for a minute, watching the water rise again on the floor of the boat.

"When we went forward, the water drained out the back." Dad took his seat behind the wheel. "But now that we've stopped, it's refilling. If we keep moving, I think we can make it to the marina. They should have a plug." He started up his engine.

"We're following them," I directed Tom. I couldn't let my parents cross the lake with a hole in their vessel. I hadn't a clue what I'd do if their boat sank, but I knew I couldn't let them go down with it.

Tom hollered over to Dad, "We've got your back!"

I gazed upward. "Please, Lord, just get them safely to the other side."

It's been nearly four years since that meeting with the doctor. Four years of gradual decline in Mom's cognitive abilities. Four years of slowly losing the mom I remember.

I try to visit at least once a month. I bring ingredients for a pot of soup. Cooking has become difficult, so we bring meals and have hired a home helper.

Under stacks of unopened mail and church bulletins, I find their calendar. There are sparse marks for doctor, dentist, and hair salon visits. I match their scribbles to the joint electronic calendar my siblings and I share to track their appointments.

Each month I fill Mom's MedMinder. She calls me "Nurse Linda" as I call in prescription refills, consult with doctors, and file insurance claims.

Changes keep coming like waves on the shore, and I can't stop them. As Mom's disease progresses, we have no choice but to move along with it.

As we left the dock, the story of Jesus and his disciples in the boat came to mind (Matt. 8:23-27). When a storm came up, "the disciples went and woke him, saying, 'Lord, save us! We're going to drown!'" Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and calmed the storm.

I don't know what Jesus would have done if the disciples' boat had sprung a leak, but I felt his presence that day on the lake as Dad realized they needed to keep moving. Staying put and waiting for a miracle to happen would not keep them afloat.

We followed as they made their way across the lake. The boat was dragging, its stern cutting heavily into the water. I wanted to fix the problem, but all I could do was pray their boat would stay afloat, that it wouldn't sink with the weight of the burden it was now carrying. Again, Jesus' words to his disciples came to mind, reassuring me: "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

Mom and Dad moved forward, taking each wave in stride as it splashed against the boat. As they approached the marina, a gentle wind blew them into the harbor. I knew they'd get just what they needed now, and I offered up a prayer of thanks.

The Mom I grew up with continues to fade and drift away. Losing her is painful. Watching my parents struggle is hard. And yet Mom continues to exude joy and contentment at every turn. I sense my parents' trust in the one who hears our cries for help.

On a recent visit I had the chance to attend church with them. Standing next to Mom, I noticed her now-shaky

alto voice on the old familiar hymns. I listened to the sermon but sensed her fleeting attention as she fidgeted next to me. After the congregational prayer, we stood to sing another song, a more contemporary tune less familiar to Mom: "Your mercy flows upon us like a river. Your mercy stands unshakable and true. Most Holy God, of all good things the giver, we turn and lift our fervent prayer to you" (*Your Mercy Flows*, by Wes Sutton, 1988).

Mom tried to sing harmony but couldn't. She was even struggling with the melody and was considerably off key, hitting all the wrong notes.

She was joyfully oblivious, but I was painfully aware. Remembering her example, I leaned in and sang a little louder:

"Hear our cry, oh Lord; be merciful once more!" 

How Music Can Speak For You When You Are Too Discouraged to Pray

“When the sorrow’s heavy on your soul
Carry on and sing it like a soldier
Saying, “Come on! Come on!
We’re gonna make it home!”

—“*Looking for Some Light*,”
by Colony House

IT’S BEEN A TOUGH FEW YEARS.

Several friends and family experienced sickness and loss. I left a stable job to start a small business, and I expected God to bless me as I took this leap of faith. I felt God was calling me toward helping Christians learn discernment in popular music. But I experienced a lot of doubt and disappointment. I started to question whether the work I was doing really mattered. Had I even heard God correctly? I felt frustrated that God would plant this desire in me and then not support me in the ways I thought I needed. Maybe it was time to admit defeat and find a safe job with a good salary. One particular evening these feelings flooded over me, and tears began to flow.

God’s response that night was an unexpected gift: an album that allowed me to pray when prayer felt like the last thing I had energy to do. In an effort to distract myself from how I was feeling, I put on my headphones and opened up Spotify. I’m not exactly sure why or how, but I chose to listen to the new album *Leave What’s Lost Behind* from a band called Colony House. I had only recently discovered the band through the Spotify algorithm and was not at first a fan. That night, though, every song I heard became a prayer from me to God. Rather than the music speaking to me, the music began speaking for me. Line after line felt as if it was written for how I was feeling in that moment. When the band asked, “Are you

listening?” in a song, I questioned God: “Are you listening?”

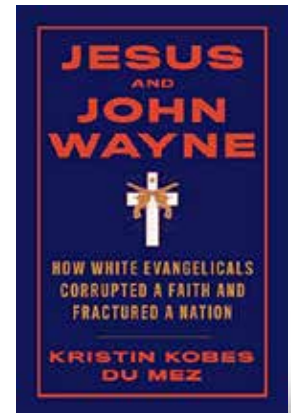
I became the main character of the songs, calling out to God to recognize me.

Song after song helped me ask God to be with me, to comfort me, and to give me hope. Other times I felt the band rallying around me in my discouragement even though we had never met.

My situation has not changed much since that night, but I feel different. God heard me, and I feel less alone. When I listen to Colony House’s album today, it doesn’t speak to or for me in the same way it did that night. Yet in a particularly challenging moment of life, God gave me a gift that I could use to call out to God. So “when the sorrow’s heavy on your soul, carry on.” Keep asking questions and searching for God. God will provide unexpected gifts that help us pray. Maybe it will be a song or album; maybe not. God wants to connect with you, and God can use anything. **B**



Micah van Dijk is a popular music expert who speaks and writes to help audiences understand the impact popular music has on their faith and identity. Visit his website at micahvandijk.com.



Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation

By Kristin
Kobes DuMez

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

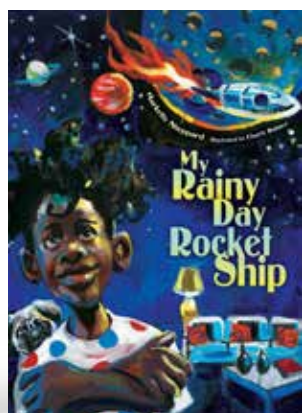
John Wayne was married three times and divorced twice, a hard drinker and a chain smoker. Yet Wayne somehow became the kind of “manly man” that personified what evangelical Christians and political conservatives hold up as aspirational manhood. Calvin University history professor Kristin Kobes DuMez tells the story of how a group of fundamentalist Christians formed the National Association of Evangelicals in the 1940s and how, over the past 75 years, that group became more politically powerful as they preached a message of rugged masculinity and Christian nationalism. As politics and faith take center stage again in the United States over the next few months, *Jesus and John Wayne* is a book that will help many of us put current events in historical context. (Liveright)



Just Mercy (Film)

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

It is 1987, and Walter McMillian (Jamie Foxx) is arrested and put on death row for a murder he did not commit even though many people know he did not do it. Fortunately, Walter has a keen legal mind on his side: lawyer Bryan Stevenson (Michael B. Jordan). Fresh out of Harvard Law School, Stevenson chooses to take on seemingly hopeless death row cases for little to no pay because of his belief in justice. There are crushing setbacks along the way and reprehensible foes and systems to battle, but also moments of hope and victory. Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, *Just Mercy* shakes up viewers' assumptions about the justice system. Based on a true story. (Warner Bros.)



My Rainy Day Rocket Ship

By Markette Sheppard, Illustrated by Charly Palmer

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Told in spirited, playful rhymes and illustrated with bold splashes of color, this exuberant children's picture book shares the vivid imagination and problem-solving abilities of a young boy who is stuck in the house on a rainy day. As he looks around his home, he finds everything he needs for a rocket ship—a rocking chair for a rocket, a launching pad that Dad helps to build, a cardboard box for a spaceship, swimming trunks and goggles for a space suit, Mom's old dish rag for a flag, and more. With the help of his loving parents and his rich imagination, he's launched into outer space. Young children are sure to delight in this imaginative romp through a rainy day. (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)



As Bright as Heaven (Audiobook)

By Susan Meissner, narrated by Cassandra Morris, Tavia Gilbert, Abigail Revasch, and Jorjeana Marie

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

I listened to this historical novel about the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918 during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, and I was transfixed by the similarities. Told through the eyes of four women, a mother and her three daughters, *As Bright as Heaven* was released in 2018 to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the 1918 pandemic. Meissner expertly weaves hope and resilience into the storyline so that it becomes ultimately uplifting instead of depressing. With four distinct voices narrating the four main characters, the audiobook immersed me in a world unlike my own, yet strangely similar. It reminded me that just as God was with the people who lived through that pandemic, God was and is with me living through this one. (Audible)

The Lowdown

Open Your Children's Hearts and Minds: If you long for a holistic approach to parenting and education with a spiritual foundation, Sally Clarkson's *Awakening Wonder: Opening Your Child's Heart to the Beauty of Learning* will open your children's hearts and minds to the grand design, beauty, and goodness permeating the universe. (Bethany House)

Live Action *Mulan*: When the emperor of China issues a decree that one man per family must serve in the Imperial Army to defend the country from northern invaders, Hua Mulan, the oldest daughter of an honored warrior, steps in to take the place of her ailing father in this live action *Mulan*. (Walt Disney Studios)

***The One and Only Ivan*:** While trapped in a cage at the Exit 8 Big Top Mall and Video Arcade, a gorilla named Ivan teams up with a caring elephant named Stella to piece together his mysterious past and hatch a cunning escape from their shared captivity. (Disney+)

Gamache Goes to France: *All the Devils Are Here* is the 16th novel by bestselling author Louise Penny of Quebec. It finds Chief Inspector Armand Gamache of the Sûreté du Québec investigating a sinister plot in Paris, the City of Light. (Macmillan)

Do Miracles Like Those Jesus Performed Still Happen Today?

A miracle never exists only for itself; it always serves a greater purpose.

DO MIRACLES STILL HAPPEN TODAY?

The answer to this question must begin with acknowledging that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If, as Matthew tells us, the earthly ministry of Jesus consisted of preaching, teaching, and healing (Matt. 4:23) and yet relegate Jesus' healing ministry to the New Testament alone, then how can we say that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever? Jesus is the same today because he continues to preach, teach, and heal us. The real challenge is being able to recognize the miracles of Jesus today.

But what exactly counts as a miracle? A better way to recognize a miracle is to make a distinction between the natural and the supernatural. The natural ways Jesus uses to heal us can be found in places like a hospital and a medicine cabinet. But when Jesus heals someone supernaturally, it means he does something medicine and science are unable to do and are unable to explain. Keep in mind that God still gets the credit whether healing is through medicine or miracle—that's why we should never stop praying!

In Scripture, miracles are often associated with the words "signs and wonders." A sign is a physical manifestation that points to something greater than itself. In other words, the healing ministry of Jesus recounted in Scripture confirms that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the Savior of the world (Acts 2:22). A miracle never exists only for itself; it always serves a greater purpose. You know it's a miracle when a supernatural work of God increases your faith in Jesus Christ.

The word "wonder" can also help us recognize a miracle. Miracles cause us to be amazed, in awe of the power of God. When we witness a supernatural

work of God, we are left speechless as we marvel at the glory of God. You know it's a miracle when a supernatural work of God increases our worship of Jesus Christ.

Consider the following four positions regarding miracles today:

Cessationists believe the kinds of miracles we see in the New Testament do not continue to happen today because they were a special manifestation of God's power that ceased to exist after the generation of the apostles passed away.

Continuationists believe all the kinds of miracles we see in the New Testament continue to happen in the world today with the same frequency and intensity.

Semi-cessationists believe only some New Testament-type miracles continue to happen today, and not to the same degree as in the New Testament. God works supernaturally today, but the frequency and intensity has diminished.

Semi-continuationists believe all kinds of miracles seen in the New Testament continue to happen today. Like the semi-cessationists, they believe the frequency and intensity of God's supernatural work has diminished, but semi-continuationists are much more open to describing events as miraculous works of God.

As I reflect on the "Big Three" aspects of Jesus' ministry (preaching, teaching, and healing) and the events taking place around the world, now more than ever we need a great outpouring of Christ's healing ministry. We desperately need Jesus to heal our world by both natural and supernatural means. As he does so, may he increase our faith and our worship of him. **B**



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

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Announcement of Candidacy

We are pleased to announce that **CARY GEPHART** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **NATHAN VOSS** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **STEVEN M. VANDYK** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **HANNAH SAXTON** has now completed her academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director

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We are pleased to announce that **RICHARD A. BRITTON III** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director

We are pleased to announce that **JEREMY OOSTERHOUSE** has now completed his academic requirements and is eligible for call as a candidate for the ministry of the Word. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director

Church Positions Available

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

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 Inglewood Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta is actively seeking a full-time pastor who is passionate in preaching God's word, in pastoral care and in leading and equipping us in community outreach. For more information go to our website www.inglewoodcrc.org or email pastorsearch@inglewoodcrc.org

PASTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL CARE Bauer CRC in Hudsonville, MI (bauercrc.org) is seeking a part-time (10 hrs per week) pastor to assist our senior pastor with pastoral care and adult education. Please email Dave Ten Clay at pastordavetc@gmail.com with any questions or to submit a resume.

Birthday

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

GENEVIEVE (KOOIMAN) SAS celebrated her 100th birthday on August 12. Happy Birthday with love from your children Charlotte (Rich), Leravene, Lugene (Karen), Delton (Kathy), Reneta (Terry), and Ruby (Dave), your 12 grandchildren and families, and your 18 great-grandchildren. Psalm 103:1-2.

MAE TIDDENS VANHEKKEn of Grand Rapids, wife of Neal (deceased) and mother of David (deceased) celebrated her 100th birthday on July 15 with her children John(Elsa), Marilyn(Ken) Corstange, Jean(David) Brower & Carol(John) Huizer, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. We give thanks for her long life, loving care and faithfulness to God.



MEINDERT BOSCH of 2480 S. Clermont, #165, Denver, CO 80222 will celebrate his 100th birthday on September 2 in the shadows of his beloved Colorado mountains. He was married to the late Evelyn Dengerink Bosch for 69 years and is dad to Bob (Linda) Bosch, Ron (Carol) Bosch, Luci (Tom) Draayer, and Bonnie DeNooy. 15 grandchildren and 31 great-grandchildren. Such an example of faith, love, and service to us all!

and love from your family: Mark & Giny, Kent, Tim & Carla, Joel & Debra, Tom, and Rebecca & Andrew Chiesa. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS

EVELYN ZEILSTRA (Wichers) celebrates her 95th birthday on September 17, 2020. She is the wife of the late John H. Zeilstra and resides at Park Place of Elmhurst, 1150 S. Euclid #112, Elmhurst, IL 60126. We are grateful and praise God for her Christian faithfulness and

sweet spirit. Her children celebrate with her! Barb (deceased) & Jim Brouwer, Janice & Dale Holtrop, John & Janice, Rev. Bill & Karla, Mary & John Cook, and Evelyn & Brad Wieringa. We also celebrate with her son and daughter in Christ, Rev. Jeong & Misook Gho. Plus, lots of grandchildren, great grandchildren, and a great great grandchild.

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

SARAMAE (7/31) AND GORDON (11/3) VANDER ARK celebrate their 90th birthdays this year. They thank God for many opportunities for service in Christian schools, churches, and in music and for blessings during retirement years. Their 5 children, 18 grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren celebrate with them. 2500 Breton Woods Dr SE #2050, GR 49512.

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS



BAYLOR, Nathan and Janet will celebrate their 70th anniversary on August 26. Their children Nate and Brenda, Ron and Mary Jane, Dave and Liz, Tim and Joan and Andy and Mary Potts along with 13 grandchildren and 19 great grandchildren are grateful for their legacy of love and service. Greetings may be sent to 4930 Weston Ave, Kalamazoo, MI 49006.



HOEKMAN, Steve and Jeanne (999 W 2nd St, #148, Ripon CA 95366) will celebrate their 70th anniversary on Sept 1st. Congratulations, dear parents,

and love from your family: Mark & Giny, Kent, Tim & Carla, Joel & Debra, Tom, and Rebecca & Andrew Chiesa. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!



MEMMELAAR, Bernie and Marion, 2772 Pfeiffer Woods Dr SE Apt 2305 Grand Rapids MI 49512, formerly of N. Haledon, NJ celebrated their 70th

wedding anniversary on August 18. God has blessed them with 5 children, Bernie & Pam, Ed & Anna, Donna & Phil, Robin & Gary and Todd & Dale. They have 17 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren. To God be the glory!

SCHOOLAND John and Helen will celebrate 70 yrs. of marriage on Aug. 8. John will be 95 on Aug. 17. They have been blessed with 4 children, Judy Postma (Pete deceased), Jerry (deceased), Gary(Gail), Renee (Ted) Viss. They have 13 grandchildren and will have 33 great grandchildren by the end of Aug. Praise be to God for the blessing of God-fearing parents!

VANDER VEEN, Henry and Anjean celebrated 70 years of marriage on August 14. Their 5 children, 16 grandchildren, and 29 great grandchildren join them in thanking God for many blessings and happy years together.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 68 YEARS

VAN DER WIELE Sam & Mary Van Der Wiele will celebrate their 68th wedding anniversary on August 21. The family is grateful for God's faithfulness and love which fills their marriage and shapes our family.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 65 YEARS

DOEKSEN, Wilbur "Duke" and Lois (Tolle) will celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary on Aug 2. They were married on Grandpa Aart Van Den Brink's 71st birthday in Northwest Iowa in 1955. Lois grew up in Sumas, WA. and Wilbur grew up at Doon IA. They were blessed with 3 children, 3 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren. Their address is 4900 W. Stanford Ave, Denver, CO 80236. Email brinktax@gmail.com. To God be the Glory and Thanks.



GENZINK, Jerry and Leona (Busscher) are celebrating their 65th wedding anniversary. They were married on June 7, 1955 at Graafschap Christian Reformed

Church. God has blessed them with four children: Roger and Sharon Sneller, Larry and Marcia Genzink, Steve and Pam Genzink and Bob and Jane Genzink. They also have been blessed with 16 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren. Their children and their spouses are so grateful for the excellent example of Christian love and marriage they demonstrate every day. The family recognized this significant event with a celebratory dinner.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS

BIELEMA, Ron and Sally celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on August 26, 2020. Congratulations and love from your family: Dave and Jill Bielema (Ben and Lindsay Gandy, Reed, Kara, Fox, and Sage Loney, Matt and Kristin Capparelli), Ken and Jane Wolffis (Jon, Elizabeth, Emma, Owen, and Andrew Wolffis, Scott, Emily, Annie, and Molly Teusink, Zach and Lizzie Van Wyk, Daniel and Becca Geeting), Bill and Sue Morren (Blake, Elise and Macy - in Jesus' arms- Jessa, Brynna and Lindy Morren). Praise be to God for the blessing of God-fearing parents.

COLE, Stan and Barbara (Geels) celebrate 60 years on August 31. 12202 Meadow Green Rd, Whittier CA 90604. Their children Debbie & Mike Fitzgerald, Carmen & Bill Bandstra, and Melanie Grigg, 8 grandchildren and 2 great-grandsons thank God for their love and example.

HOEKSTRA, Congratulations to Ken and Elizabeth (Betty Hooker) of Hudsonville, MI, who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on August 5. Immediate family gathered to share a delicious meal and many happy recollected memories.

VAN MANEN, Jack and Johanna celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 24. God blessed them with 4 children: Jeff & Deanna Van Manen, Julie & Jon Kuyers, Joy & Joel Rusticus, Jill & Chris Larsen, 12 grandchildren, and 1 great grandson. Thank you for your constant love and prayers. Praise God for his faithfulness!



ZUIDERVEEN Henry and Verla will celebrate their 60th anniversary on August 26, 2020. Congratulations and love from your family: Mark and Julie,

Marc and Sharon, Scott and Pam, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Praising God for his faithfulness!

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS

STOB, Leonard and Sharon, 2116 Ravenscourt Dr, Thompsons Station, TN 37179 celebrate 50 years of marriage on Aug. 21, 2020. They have been blessed with four children: Jeff and Stephanie Cooper, Nathan and Tessa Stob, Jamie and Alison Wierenga and Josh and Carolyn Cooper. They have 15 grandchildren. Praise God for His faithfulness!

SYTSMA, William and Jenny (Diekjakobs) of Holland, Michigan celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on August 8 with gratitude for God's faithfulness. A time of joyful celebration is planned with their children and grandchildren: Jim Sytsma, Amy Drown (husband Daron, five children), and Mark Sytsma (wife Katie, four children).

WESTERHOF, Bill and Grace were married on August 12, 1970 by Rev. T. Versepunt in Muskegon, MI. Celebrating God's faithfulness with them are Kristen and Andrew Link (Stanley, Hendrick), Shelley and Tom Toolis (Thomas, Sean, Cordelia), Nathan and Annie Westerhof, Justin and Rachel Westerhof (Alexander). "Jehovah bless thee from above" -family wedding Psalm 134.

Obituaries

HEYNE, Ahleen M. (1918-2020) passed away on July 9 in Anchorage, AK. She is survived by her daughter, Mary Mellema (Joel) and sons Dan Heynen (Gwen) and Dave Heynen (Nancy). <https://beyondthedash.com/obituary/ahleen-heynen-1079517451>

LOGTERMAN, Earl, 93, of Denver, CO, entered glory on July 29, 2020. Preceded in death by his wife of 64 years, Lyola. Survived by children Kim (Ken) Hengeveld, Susan, and Jim; 3 grandchildren, 2 great grandchildren. Great is His faithfulness!

VAN'T LAND, Irene (Hogan), age 84, of Grand Rapids, MI, formerly of Midland Park, NJ, passed away on July 20, 2020. Preceded in death by her husband, Theodore (Ted) Van't Land; she is survived by her children, Donna (Rick) Snoeyink, Linda (Frank) Bylsma, and John (Faith) Van't Land; twelve grandchildren, and 11 great grandchildren.

VANDERWOUDE, Eleanor (nee Kuiper) of Grand Rapids, MI, died on Friday, July 3, 2020. She is survived by her husband of 63 years, Hugh VanderWoude; children, Cathy (Doug) MacLeod, Lori Diepstra, Susan (Dan) Cavanaugh, Barbara (Phil) Tucker, and Bob (Sheila) VanderWoude; twelve grandchildren; five great-grandchildren; her brother, Chuck (Barbara) Kuiper; and sister- and brother-in-law, Joanne (Roger) Ganzevoort.

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WORD PLAY

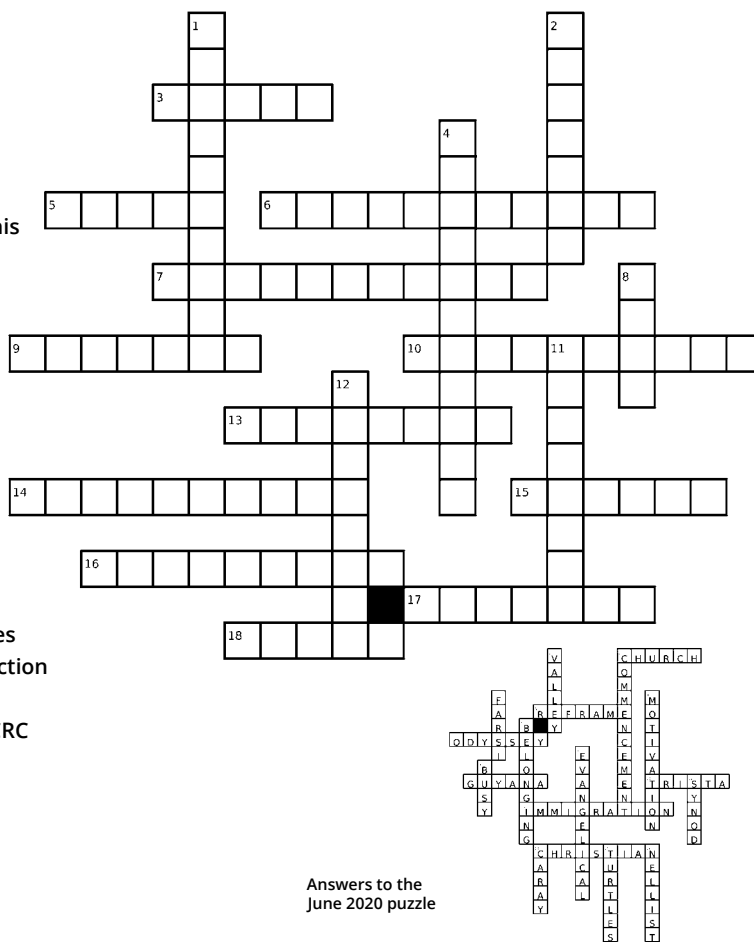
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

Down:

1. An Ethiopian in King Zedekiah's court
2. Ann Arbor CRC provides emergency _____
4. Two young seafarers wanted to know if there was hope for this
8. Dordt engineering students worked on making a wheelchair that can _____
11. You are to love this as yourself
12. This worldwide event will likely affect this school year

Across:

3. Youth Unlimited adapted its summer mission so teens would _____@Home
5. The book by Kristen Kobes DuMez, *Jesus and John* _____
6. First-place winner of essay contest
7. A housing investment group from Eastern Avenue CRC, _____ Row LLC
9. Chief Inspector Armand _____ of Louise Penny's book series
10. This tool is highlighted in this issue's Our Shared Ministry section
13. Yes, Jesus still does these today
14. Hope _____ opened a second location at Westend CRC
15. In Christ, you are the _____
16. Works as an online chaplain at Family Fire
17. A teenager living in Burkina Faso
18. Movie title *Just* _____



Answers to the June 2020 puzzle



Photo by James Coleman/Unsplash

Model Kingdom Disciples

By Shiao Chong

It seems to me that Christians often underappreciate, underrate, and underestimate the Beatitudes from Matthew 5:1-12. They are not read as often as the Ten Commandments. They are rarely mentioned in confessions or catechisms. Yet the Beatitudes paint for us an ideal portrait of a disciple of God's kingdom. They are meant to give us ethical guidance in the same vein as the Ten Commandments.

Bible scholars have pointed out that Matthew, the gospel writer, was drawing parallels between the Old Testament prophet Moses and Jesus. For example, as Moses gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai in Exodus 20, Jesus gave the Beatitudes in his Sermon on the Mount. To some degree, Matthew saw these Beatitudes as a new set of commandments for God's kingdom disciples.

We see the emphasis on God's kingdom from how the eight Beatitudes or sayings are bookended with the

phrase "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 3 and 10). (I count the last two blessings as one as they both deal with persecution.) In fact, the whole Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) summarizes the way of God's kingdom, and the Beatitudes set the tone early. The first half of each beatitude (the "Blessed are" part) describes a quality of a kingdom disciple while the second half (the "for theirs" or "for they will" part) reflects a different dimension of God's kingdom. God's kingdom promises comfort from sorrows, a new heaven and earth, a world where God's righteousness and justice reign, where mercy abounds, where we will see God (have close communion with God) and be called sons and daughters of God, where our faithfulness will be rewarded. Essentially, the eight Beatitudes are all making one point: God's disciples are blessed because they are part of God's kingdom.

The qualities of a kingdom disciple are not entrance requirements for God's kingdom; for that we need only to trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. But the Beatitudes do paint for us a portrait of a model kingdom disciple.

First, a kingdom disciple is poor in spirit, which means we recognize our own spiritual poverty or spiritual bankruptcy. This does not exclude those of us who are materially rich. We who are rich may likely be tempted to distract ourselves from our spiritual emptiness by meeting our physical needs and desires. But the emphasis here is on recognizing our own spiritual poverty, on humbling ourselves before God and depending on God to save us. Jesus' parable contrasting the self-righteous Pharisee with the repentant tax collector in Luke 18:9-14 illustrates this posture.

We need to
recapture the
New Testament
understanding
of righteousness
as encompassing
moral and justice
dimensions.

Second, a disciple mourns over sin. We are spiritually poor because we recognize our sins and the world's sins and injustices. We grieve over what grieves our Lord.

If we are truly poor in spirit and mourn over our sins, we will have a meek, gentle, and humble spirit in us. Matthew 5:5 harks back to Psalm 37:7-11, which contrasts the fleeting success of wicked people with "the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity" (v. 11). In Psalm 37, meekness does not mean being a doormat or being weak. Rather, meekness means refraining from anger or resentment over evil's seeming success and instead trusting patiently in the Lord. Our essential posture and attitude toward everyone should be that of godly humility, gentleness, and patience rather than anger, aggression, and arrogance.

Disciples of God's kingdom also hunger and thirst for righteousness. First, model kingdom citizens are not already righteous or perfect, but they do continually strive for righteousness. Second, righteousness is not simply being morally upright. In Jesus' ancient Jewish worldview, the term "righteousness" includes personal morality and public justice. So this is not only a striving after personal rightness but also a striving for public justice.

This striving for public justice, however, should not be pursued without mercy. As Micah 6:8 tells us, we should not only do justice but also love mercy. We show mercy to anyone who needs mercy, not just to some. Jesus makes no qualifications here. He calls us to "be merciful, just as your (heavenly) Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

"Pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8), in its ancient Jewish context, means primarily honesty, transparency, sincerity, and true motives. We are not talking here about ceremonial or outward purity. Neither are we talking simply about purity before God. We also are talking about purity before others. Those pure in heart deal truthfully with their neighbors, without guile or mixed motives.

This, in turn, is an essential quality needed for peacemakers. Lies often aggravate or even cause conflicts in our world. Christians are not called to peacekeeping, but to peacemaking. We cannot hope to make peace without honesty, transparency, and sincerity. Peacekeeping focuses on ensuring, by force if necessary, that violence does not erupt or escalate. Peacemaking, in contrast, requires the parties in conflict to change, to forgive, to reconcile. God's shalom is not simply a lack of conflict. It describes harmonious relationships between God, humanity, and creation. That is a whole lot harder to accomplish. But this is what God's kingdom citizens are: ambassadors of God's reconciliation, both spiritual and relational, reconciling people to God and to each other (2 Cor. 4:20; Eph. 2:14-18). And we can only pursue such peacemaking work with a pure heart, not one with

hidden agendas or mixed motives, or one that peddles lies.

Finally, if we faithfully strive for public justice and peacemaking, we will likely face opposition and even persecution. Because if we seek to make peace in a conflict-ridden world, if we seek to be sincere and honest in a world full of lies and treachery, if we seek to be merciful and gentle in an aggressive and unforgiving world, if we seek righteousness and justice in an immoral and unjust world, we are going to be in conflict with sinful people and sinful systems that want to keep the status quo. This was what God's prophets of old faced when they were faithful to their calling. This was what Jesus faced from the religious leaders of his time. But God will not forget our faithfulness in suffering opposition for Christ's sake (not for our own sakes or for being sinful and unjust).

When we start applying this portrait of Christian discipleship to our present day, we find that it is rather countercultural—and many of us fall short on various points. For starters, the emphasis on recognizing our spiritual bankruptcy flies in the face of our culture's emphasis on self-affirmation and self-confidence. Biblically speaking, our affirmation comes not from our achievements or abilities but from our belonging to Christ our Lord.

Meekness as a distinctive quality is sadly lacking these days, even among many Christians. Too many Christians on either side of a debate display more outrage than grief over injustice and sins. This outrage, in turn, is routinely expressed through aggressive, antagonistic, and arrogant words hurled at each other. Gentleness, patience, and humility have become rare. We

seem more intent on imitating the put-downs and mocking styles of late-night comedians or the aggressive public shaming on Twitter.

We need to recapture the New Testament understanding of righteousness as encompassing moral and justice dimensions. There is no biblical justification for the current divide in America between Christians who advocate for social justice issues like racism and those who focus on personal morality issues like abortion. I fear that division is more politically driven than biblical. For the Bible, neither social justice nor personal morality is optional.

Similarly, neither justice nor mercy is optional. Outrage, with very little else besides, fuels and shapes too many of our current calls for justice. On the other hand, some Christians offer forgiveness and mercy too quickly and/or cheaply, and only to some and rarely to others. Disciples of God's kingdom should be modeling to the world a third way that embodies striving for justice and morality tempered with mercy and grace.

We also need to recapture the sense of purity as honesty, sincerity, and transparency. So often Christians have reduced the meaning of purity to sexual purity and the category of impure thoughts to sexually immoral thoughts. That is only the tip of the purity iceberg.

Christians, including Christian media, are often as guilty as anyone these days in spreading misinformation and half-truths. Do we verify truthfulness and/or accuracy before clicking "share" on that viral post or meme? Or are we more intent on scoring points and increasing our social status with our Christian circles? Are our hearts pure in the handling of truth, especially God's truth? Or are we more intent on winning arguments for our positions? Have we been fair and just in understanding our opponents' viewpoints and positions? Or are we more intent on misrepresenting them in

order to help our "tribe" win the argument? Have we examined our hearts to see if our motives are pure and not driven by pride?

This leads to examining whether we are truly driven to seek God's peace—shalom—within the Christian body and in the world. Biblical peacemakers seek to reconcile with our adversaries, not to defeat or silence them. Do we even value peace, especially God's peace, over "winning"? Do we seek first to build on common ground with non-Christians and other Christians alike, or do we focus first on what divides us?


North American Christians today need to find that balance between compromising our faith in order to avoid opposition and inconsiderately imposing our ways on others. Not every case of opposition is persecution. If we are in the wrong, we should be opposed. We also need to discern the difference between discrimination, marginalization, and persecution. Yes, Christianity is losing its privileged status in our present society. Yes, there are cases of discrimination against Christians. But that is far from persecution. Persecution is more like what Christians in China face when some churches are closed down and Christians arrested, or when Christians in India often face violence.

We should respond proportionately but still gently—with meekness—to discrimination and marginalization. To this Christian born and raised in Malaysia, making a huge fuss about not hearing or reading "Merry Christmas" seems disproportionate. I guess having grown up in a Muslim country where Christianity has very few privileges, I have a higher threshold of what counts as a real offense to my faith.

When Christians are wrongfully discriminated against, as when Christians are not hired because of their faith, then we should pursue justice tempered with mercy, without unnecessary sensationalism. When

we lose only a traditional privilege, but not a religious right, we can graciously and creatively adapt. It might even be better for Western Christianity in the long run to be slightly marginalized in society. We might learn to take less for granted and grow to be more humble. We might learn to evangelize better as we can't assume we have credibility. We might also learn to get back to what's essential to our faith rather than to focus on cultural trappings. Ultimately, we must be sure we are persecuted for being faithful to Christ, not for defending lost privileges.

What if Christians today looked more like the model kingdom disciple portrayed in the Beatitudes? Would we be opposed more for striving after righteousness and justice than for defending our traditional privileges? Would we be admired for our gentleness and patience rather than disdained for our judgmentalism and arrogance? Would we be respected for our relentless pursuit of peace with pure hearts and pure hands? Would we live in such a way that the world will ask us why we are so refreshingly different?

This portrait of a model kingdom disciple is a hard one to measure up to. But thankfully, recognizing our spiritual failures, acknowledging our spiritual poverty, and relying on Christ are already the beginning of the journey. 



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

The Question Is Asked

How amazing it is, then, that we can lead people through the Scriptures to help them in their search.



John Van Huizen is commissioned and sent as a missionary chaplain to Seafarers. He, along with his wife, Grace, maintain International Seafarers Ministry during the winter in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. When not there, they reside in St. Catharines, Ont. They are members of Riverside Christian Reformed Church.

THE QUESTION IS ASKED, often in the midst of severe brokenness, when the situation seems completely hopeless: “How can God ever forgive me?”

My wife, Grace, and I spend our winters in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., with International Seafarers Ministry, affiliated with Action International Ministries, visiting the staff and crew of various cruise ships as they call into port for the day and sharing with them the love of God and the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. We bring Bibles in various languages, offering them to anyone who has need, and we spend time interacting with many who hunger for biblical words of encouragement.

Once, a young female crew member asked for a private meeting, insisting that no one must know of this meeting. I agreed, with the condition of including my wife. We met the following day, and the woman wasted no time in small talk. With overwhelming grief and emotion she confessed that due to a “casual encounter” with another crew member, she had become pregnant and, in a hastily made decision, aborted the child at a recent port of call.

A young man confessed to me, with similar grief, how he had previously been involved in a life of crime, drugs, gangs, and violence before eventually being arrested, charged, and convicted. He longed for a deeper relationship with the Lord.

Both people had the same question. Convicted of their past sin and consumed with the ensuing guilt, they experienced the same crushing concerns.

“After all I’ve done, after I’ve fallen so far, how can God ever accept me to

be in his family? How can God ever forgive me?”

This is the issue for many. It isn’t about outright rejection of the gospel of salvation; it’s more about authentic doubt that salvation could ever be possible because of the weight of what they had done.

We will never be able to convince people with our human words that God forgives them. We need to show them from the Word of God. How amazing it is, then, that we can lead people through the Scriptures to help them in their search. We can show them Hebrews 11 and explain that all these “heroes of faith” had some very disturbing things in their pasts. We can show them Psalm 103, where it is written, “He does not treat us as our sins deserve. ... As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (vs. 10, 12). Even the dying criminal crucified with Christ was granted salvation in his last earthly moments. Christ has paid the penalty for all of us who believe.

With genuine repentance comes God’s gracious forgiveness. We praise him for the opportunities to share this gospel with those crying out from the heart for such peace in their lives. **B**

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