

# BANNER

NOVEMBER 2020

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Same-Sex  
Relationships  
and the CRC

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No one knew what Setia's smile looked like. She wasn't mean, but her life in a rural Indonesian village was often dark and stressful. Her husband is an alcoholic and has been for years.

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# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

We were curious: What words are the most common in Christian Reformed Church names (besides “Christian,” “Reformed,” and “Church”)? Here are the totals for 20 or more churches who share at least part of the same name. Don’t see your church name on this list? Check it out at [crcna.org/church-finder](http://crcna.org/church-finder)



### What’s in a Name?

Community.....	158
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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.)

- » News: Youth Ambassador of Reconciliation Program Goes Online
- » Television: 5 Bingeable Shows to Stream Now
- » Audiobook: *Well-Read Black Girl*
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**Editor** Shiao Chong

**Associate Editor** Sarah Delia Heth

**News Editors** Alissa Vernon, Gayla R. Postma

**Mixed Media Editor** Lorilee Craker

**Art Director** Dean R. Heetderks

**Designer** Pete Euwema

**Contact Us** 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 [info@TheBanner.org](mailto:info@TheBanner.org)

**Address Changes and Subscriptions** 800-777-7270 or visit [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org)

**Classified Advertising** 616-224-0725 [classifieds@TheBanner.org](mailto:classifieds@TheBanner.org)

**Display Advertising** 616-224-5882 [ads@TheBanner.org](mailto:ads@TheBanner.org)

**Editorial** 616-224-0824 [editorial@TheBanner.org](mailto:editorial@TheBanner.org)

**News** [news@TheBanner.org](mailto:news@TheBanner.org)

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# Ministry Shares at Work

Did you know that there are 153 Christian Reformed chaplains reaching millions of people on your behalf in hospitals, hospice care, the military, prisons, long term care facilities, and workplaces around the world? Ministry shares help make their ministry possible.

Elizabeth Guillame-Koene serves in two long-term care facilities in Bowmanville, Ontario.

“I’m a one person department and it can get very lonely,” she said. Ministry shares support of the CRC’s Chaplaincy and Care Ministry has provided Elizabeth with endorsement, training, and connection with other chaplains. “It really gives me a sense that I’m not just by myself.”

Thank you for supporting Elizabeth and other chaplains around the world. Learn more and watch a video about Elizabeth at [crcna.org/MinistryShares](https://crcna.org/MinistryShares)



[crcna.org/MinistryShares](https://crcna.org/MinistryShares)

# Religious Persecution

Religious freedom protects people from unreasonable restrictions of their faith, but not from offense and ridicule.



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

Spanish and Korean translations of this editorial are available at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

이 기사의 한글번역은 [TheBanner.org/korean](http://TheBanner.org/korean) 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

**I WAS BORN AND RAISED** in Malaysia, an officially Muslim country. Christians can freely gather for worship, and openly celebrate Christmas, a statutory holiday. But it's illegal to proselytize to Muslims there, and most Christian literature has the standard disclaimer "For non-Muslims only" to protect the publishers. Christians can face prison if found guilty of trying to convert Muslims. I know a bit of what it means to live in a culture where Christianity is marginalized.

The annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church is the first Sunday of November. The Christian Reformed Church's 2016 synodical Committee to Study Religious Persecution and Liberty encouraged each congregation to appoint a prayer coordinator or team to keep religious persecution on the church's mind and prayers. Four years later, I wonder how many congregations have done so.

The 2016 study committee report defined religious persecution as "the unwarranted violation of religious liberty." Religious liberty is defined as people's freedom to express their religion, publicly or privately, without interference from the state or anyone else. I want to highlight two helpful observations from the report.


First, religious freedom protects people from unreasonable restrictions of their faith, but not from offense and ridicule. People can mock or disapprove of our Christian faith, but that is not necessarily an attack on our religious freedom even if we Christians are deeply offended by it. Hence, the report cautions, "Christians in North America must be especially careful to disentangle feelings of offense from real threats to religious liberty."

Anti-Christian sentiment in North America is real. We can find veiled

or even overtly anti-Christian bias expressed in media and in society. But just because we are offended by such expressions does not mean we are being persecuted. Neither does it mean that real persecution never happens in North America.

Secondly, the report says, "religious freedom is not absolute." Religious persecution as an *unwarranted* violation of religious liberty means that sometimes it might be reasonable to violate religious freedom for the sake of others' rights and duties. For example, if a person's religious practice endangers or harms others, then it is reasonable for the government to interfere and restrict that practice. An extreme example would be the historical Hindu practice of burning widows at their husbands' funerals. Banning such a practice would be warranted.

Unfortunately, we don't always have such clear-cut cases. We increasingly need much wisdom to determine what counts as a reasonable restriction. An example is the current tension between the rights of Christians to uphold a traditional view of marriage versus the rights of people who are LGBTQ+. North American Christians, who have access to due legal process, must be careful not to be too quick to shout "persecution" when our beliefs or practices are challenged. The state might be trying to balance competing rights to discern what's warranted.

If we shout "persecution" too quickly and too often, we might, first of all, insult fellow Christians who truly are persecuted in other parts of the world. Secondly, like the proverbial boy who cried "wolf," we might lose our credibility for when we truly do need it. May God grant us wisdom and prudence in this matter. 



## REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at [thebanner.org/letters](http://thebanner.org/letters).

### Denomination Restructuring

It was my opportunity to be in meetings where the governance and administrative structure of World Renew was conceived in 1989-90. ... Our intent was to have a structure that honored the tax and charitable laws of our respective countries. Our vision was a stronger development agency because it was binational (and) could tap into both country's gifts, resources, and ministry perspectives so that dark and impoverished communities worldwide would know and experience the gospel. It demanded collaboration, cooperation, teamwork, and a healthy dose of servant leadership. The fact that this structure exists 30 years later at World Renew attests to this model's sustainability and effectiveness. I applaud the work of our Council of Delegates ("Governance Restructuring Gives CRCNA in Canada More Ministry Control," Mar. 2020) and feel very positive about the restructuring the denomination is proposing given that it is drawing on World Renew's experiences. At no time did we envision two separate national agencies, and I know that World Renew is a stronger more effective agency as a binational body.

» Ray Elgersma // Ottawa, Ont.

### Ambiguous Loss

I have never written to *The Banner* despite reading it for over 15 years and truly enjoying many articles. However, I needed to write to say thank you to Gayla Postma for her article on ambiguous loss ("A Death Without a Funeral," July/August 2020). Her raw honesty was refreshing and heartfelt. She admits that she doesn't know the answers but she

is doing her best, and isn't that the most any of us can expect or hope for? Thank you for being brave enough to write this and share your story. You are correct, an ambiguous healing is enough.

» Kelly Bossenbroek Fedoriw // Pittsboro, N.C.

### Wild Tails

Thank you for the article in the March (2020) issue of *The Banner* titled "Wild Tails," by Rachel Lancashire. It was used at our sing-along devotional time at the Memory Care / Christian Homestead in Waupun, Wisc. The residents responded well with memories of wild tails.

» Junice R. Rens // Waupun, Wisc.

### Divisive Times

The latest issue of *The Banner* led its cover with the headline "Christian Love in Divisive Times" (Sept. 2020). I take issue with the word "divisive." I would suggest that the word "disruptive" is more accurate. ... Now is not the moment for moderating between sides as though all "tribes" are somehow equally in the wrong.

"Tribes" that are asking that Black and brown bodies be valued or that ask for equal rights under the law for the LGBTQ community or for inclusive immigration policy should not be labeled as divisive or contributing to divisiveness. They are arguing and causing disruption for the sake of diversity, equality, and inclusion—not exclusion or division. Conversely, "tribes" advocating for women's voices to not be heard at a conference or who are asking for walls to be built to exclude the "dangerous foreigner" are in fact advancing division. The two "tribes" are not on equal ground. On issues of inclusion, one is more formally rooted in Christian values than the other.

» Lance Kraai // Grand Rapids, Mich.

"Christian Love in Divisive Times" made me glad that there are young people who are thinking. As an older, liberal-minded person I applaud the two essays in *The Banner*. We should see through our white supremacist attitudes to see the Black, Native American, and Latinx people who try to live by documents that did not include them. I am writing as an American when I say this about our Constitution and other documents that tried sincerely to not see people of color and women. So I am happy to see that some young people see with eyes radiating with the love of Jesus that they gained from the Scriptures.

» Pam Adams // Sioux Center, Iowa

### Walking Well

The June *Banner* included a remarkably thoughtful, insightful, compassionate, and caring article by Laurie Krieg on "How to Walk Well Alongside LGBTQ+ People." It was clearly born out of her experience of doing just that in a biblically faithful manner. One would have expected an outpouring of affirmation. Instead readers of the September *Banner* were treated to two lengthy letters by respected CRC leaders denouncing the article. There is no doubt that, as both letter writers point out, members of the LGBTQ+ community have suffered rejection and abuse from the church as well as (from) society at large. For this we need to repent. But it does not mean we must fail to lovingly call to repentance fellow sinners like those of whom Paul said, "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

» J. Cameron Fraser // Lethbridge, Alta.



# The Apostles' Creed: A Liturgical Gem

## Individualism

As the election campaigns gather steam, passions warm, (and) protests and counter-protests increase, I am reminded of "The Heresy of Individualism" (May 2020). That is a message for our time. We are not our own. Today, too much political talk is about protecting freedom, and the government is portrayed as the enemy of freedom. Good government is not the enemy of freedom; it is its guarantee. Talk about social distancing and mask-wearing being infringements of individual rights, (or) government taxation, social programs, (and) rules and regulations burdens to be liberated from—all such talk should not be heard among followers of Jesus, because such provisions are among the instruments by which, in an interconnected age, we are our brother's keeper.

» Nick Loenen // Richmond, B.C.

READ MORE ONLINE



## As I Was Saying

Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

- » A New Approach to Christian Love
- » Churches Need Hugs and Consent, and We Can Have Both
- » How I Realized I Was an Alcoholic

**LET'S LOOK** at several reasons why the Apostles' Creed is a liturgical gem.

First, the Apostles' Creed is biblical. The authors carefully read the whole of Scripture and summarized it in a brief, easy-to-understand format. The creed clearly points us to the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The authors also took a long look at the broad sweep of redemptive history—creation, the fall, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, his ascension into heaven, the final judgment of the living and the dead, and the new world order.

And as we wait for the second coming of Christ, the Apostles' Creed reminds us that in the midst of crises, chaos, cruel wars, and sin, we have the Holy Spirit as our comforter. The creed assures us that though we live in a world of hatred and hostility, we are not isolated. We are a part of a vast number of people (the holy catholic church) who support one another with prayers and partnership in sharing the gospel. That church is a worldwide community of believers that rejoices with those who rejoice and weeps with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). That is worth celebrating.


Additionally, in a time when we are overwhelmed with guilt, we have the assurance that in Christ we are a forgiven people—renewed, washed in the blood of the Lamb. When we are gripped with grief because of untimely deaths or overwhelmed with disease and destruction all around, a perfect world free from sin, sorrow, pain, tears, and death seems better by far. Thankfully the creed points us to that day. So come, Lord Jesus!

Second, the Apostles' Creed is a gem because it calls us not only to receive

The creed is not designed only for the head but primarily speaks to the heart.

its contents, but to believe in the triune God it points to. The creed is not designed only for the head but primarily speaks to the heart. It deals not only with facts, but with faith. I believe in the triune God, the Creator, the Christ of Calvary, the Comforter (the Holy Spirit).

Third, the creed gives us the opportunity to verbalize our beliefs in the presence of fellow believers. Rom. 10:9 says, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." The creed gives us the opportunity to articulate our beliefs. When we recite the creed out loud, we are witnessing and encouraging one another to keep the faith and urging each other to look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Let us then consistently use this liturgical gem in our church services and give adults and children the opportunity to profess their faith in their triune God. 



Rev. Calvin VanderMeyden is a Christian Reformed pastor. He and his wife, Marge, are members of LaGrave Ave. CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

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# Same-Sex Relationships and the CRC

By Gayla R. Postma, news editor

*Note: Readers are strongly encouraged to read the reports referenced here for fuller understanding. A summary of the CRC's position can be found at [bit.ly/2Zl97Ro](https://bit.ly/2Zl97Ro).*

**I**n 1970, after Canada decriminalized homosexuality, synod (the broadest governance body in the Christian Reformed Church) appointed a study committee to articulate the church's position on same-sex attraction. The result, *Report 42*, was adopted in 1973 ([bit.ly/30230Sm](https://bit.ly/30230Sm)).

Report 42 said that being same-sex attracted is not sinful, but that same-sex sexual intimacy is. That distinction was considered progressive in its time. In fact, there were CRC congregations and even other denominations asking the CRC to declare that being same-sex attracted was sinful.

Forty-seven years and at least four study committee reports later, the CRC's stance has not changed. It remains consistent with the pastoral advice initially offered in 1973, namely that "homosexual practice must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture."

What many people do not know or have forgotten is that Synod 1973 also called members of the CRC to a very high standard of pastoral care for those who experience same-sex attraction, calling churches to encourage full participation from them in the same way that is expected of heterosexual people, including holding offices of elders, deacons, and pastors. Pastors were called to be informed about homosexuality and to call members and officebearers to the responsibility

they bear toward same-sex-attracted persons in the church.

## Woeful Pastoral Care

It turns out that the CRC fell well short of the mark on pastoral care. A committee that reported to Synod 1999 surveyed clergy and found that 74% said they knew the 1973 report well; 25% said they knew only about the distinction made in 1973 or else knew almost nothing about the report; and 65% percent said the pastoral care guidelines of 1973 were not effectively carried out in their congregations.

That committee also reported that while the church was quite silent, a community made up of persons who love the Lord deeply, many struggling with their sexual identity, had all been waiting for their church to keep something of its promises. Synod 1999 called the church to repentance, and three years later, that committee provided the church with a plethora of resources to improve pastoral care for persons who experience same-sex attraction.

## Societal Landscape Changes

Since then, same-sex marriage was legalized across Canada in 2005 and in the U.S. in 2015.

In light of that, Synod 2013 appointed a Committee to Provide Pastoral Advice on the Issue of Gay Marriage to give guidance on how CRC members, clergy, and churches can apply the denomination's position in the new legal landscape.

The committee came to Synod 2016 with two reports, both of which were provided to the churches. However, synod recommended the guidance of only the minority report, which

included "prohibiting the solemnization of same-sex marriages and (strong) cautions about involvement of officebearers in such ceremonies as well as distinctions between participation in the life of the church and participation in its leadership."

## Looking Ahead to 2021

Synod 2016 also appointed a new Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality to provide "clear ethical guidance for what constitutes a holy and healthy Christian sexual life." Part of its mandate is to outline how a Reformed hermeneutic "does or does not comport with readings of Scripture being employed to endorse what are, for the historic church, groundbreaking conclusions regarding human sexual behavior and identification."

The committee's report is expected to adhere to the CRC's view on marriage and same-sex relationships as adopted in 1973. After an interim report in 2019, the committee's final report will be sent to the churches in November 2020 to prepare for discussion at Synod 2021.

We asked six people for their thoughts about their biblical view of same-sex relationships and the CRC. Three of them are heterosexual and three are same-sex attracted. They are equally divided on wanting to see the CRC affirm same-sex marriage and wanting the CRC to reaffirm its traditional view of marriage. One person requested anonymity because of the ramifications feared if she were identified. *The Banner* has agreed to grant that anonymity, using \*Sylvia as a pseudonym.

Here are their thoughts, in their own words.

**Jen Vander Heide, 36, librarian**

I am a child of this denomination. I grew up in Holland, Mich., going to Christian school, attending services twice on Sunday, and discussing the sermon with my grandfather during coffee time. I was a fourth-generation Calvin University graduate, and, after finishing graduate work, I took a teaching position there.

Being gay was not something I grew up wanting to be; for the first half of my life it was a source of deep shame. I hid it from those around me because the CRC taught that if I revealed who I was, I would live a life of aloneness and brokenness.

When I finally came out in my late 20s, unable to carry the secret any longer, I went on a quest to try to understand



Jen Vander Heide (in blue) and her wife, Sarah Jacobson, are members of Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

what type of God would allow me to be gay. I was shattered and angry.

I searched the Scriptures. I found the verses in the Bible often used to talk about gay people. I listened to the debates ... none of the arguments satisfied my questions. I kept searching.

I will always remember when I found John 10:10. There Jesus says: "I have come that they may have life, and have

Report 42 said  
that being same-  
sex attracted  
is not sinful,  
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intimacy is.

it to the full." For me, this was the radical truth of the gospel. Jesus came to bring me life—a full life.

To me, the CRC's theological stance that LGBT people are broken and incapable of righteous love does not bring life. Instead it brings death, either physical or emotional, to LGBT people in our denomination. This troubles me because our interpretation of the Bible and resulting theology should bear good fruit—it should bear life.

Jesus confirms this in Matthew 7 when he speaks of true and false prophets: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (v. 16). What fruit has been born from the CRC's stance about LGBT people and their ability to love? Look at my life. Look at the lives of the LGBT people you know and their families. Look at those who have been forced to leave. Where is the good fruit of this theology? I see none.

What, then, is the path that bears good fruit? Perhaps recognizing that the New Testament is a radical story of inclusion that made even the first Christians uncomfortable. The first thing that God called the new church to do was to include the Gentiles. This was hard for Peter. In Acts 10, God instructed him: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (v. 15). Jesus was clear that he came for more people than the early Christians

originally imagined. In John 10:16, Jesus tells us: "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." Let us more fully become one flock in love.

**Sylvia\*, 30s, married and living in Canada**

I believe that God calls us to holiness in all areas of our lives, including sexuality, and that the creational design for sexual intercourse is between a man and a woman bound together in marriage.

But I think the church has made numerous errors in the way it has approached questions of sexuality. We have often focused primarily on LGBTQ+ questions while avoiding other large cultural shifts on questions of love, sex, and marriage that have taken root in our pews.

One example of this type of largely unexamined but accepted shift is our perception of marriage. We have loudly affirmed, per 1973, that God has called same-sex-attracted Christians to celibacy and that this is a rich and full life. Meanwhile, we have exalted marriage far beyond what the New Testament does. For heterosexual Christians, marriage has become a status marker, a coming of age, and it's been enrobed in nearly Disneyesque fairy tales. Our church programming and adult discipleship ministry assume adult members are married (and having children).

The contradictions should be obvious. By buying into marriage as the be-all, end-all, heterosexual Christians have failed to examine the ways sinful narratives and practices have come into our understandings of marriage and sex while emphasizing (over-emphasizing) same-sex sexual sins. Heterosexual Christians must uphold for themselves the same standard of discipleship and obedience expected of LGBTQ+ Christians, name the ways we have sinned, repent, and ask for continued accountability for faithful discipleship.

There's a persistent narrative around that goes like this: a person grows up in church, holds a traditional perspective, then meets gay friends for the first time. Eyes are opened, and the person becomes affirming (of same-sex relationships). To be sure, this happens. But narratives like this can also lead to the assumption that those of us who still hold a traditional perspective don't know or aren't in close relationship with gay or lesbian Christians. If we were, we'd obviously change our position. For me, that hasn't been the case.

I've wrestled with these things in the living rooms of close friends (including close friends who are gay and friends who are on the opposite "side" of this) and shed tears over them. I've heard the deep hurt that has come from the way the church has spoken about these issues and the stances the church has taken. These experiences have added complexity to the narratives I've once held, have moved me deeply, and called me to repentance for the ways I've erred. But I've not changed my fundamental position. I have, however, gained rich, life-giving friendships.

I believe there are quieter, deeply biblically faithful, and pastorally sensitive voices that are getting drowned out by the tone and tenor of this conversation—not that this conversation is not rightly passionate; these are indeed deeply weighty things. But weightiness need not bring about shouting matches, incivility, hostility, and broken relationships. There has to be a better way.

**Fred Heerema, 71, retired mediator**

I believe the Bible sets out the norm for all intimate human relationships—faithfulness guiding self-giving love to maturity. This norm also applies to myself as an LGBT believer in a committed, same-sex relationship.

I think LGBT persons are often thought of by CRC believers as driven only by their sexual desires and needs when they would never consider their own



Fred Heerema and his partner, Lyle Clark, are members of First CRC in Toronto, Ont.

heterosexually oriented sons and daughters in such a reduced way. It would help the CRC if it could truly hear the full life experiences of its LGBT members, including their joys, challenges, questions, longings, and the ways we experience enrichment through committed relationships. As a part of God's good creation, I want my gift of sexuality affirmed and celebrated, not locked away. My healthy (and sexual) life has developed in a manner both parallel to and uniquely different from those of heterosexual people. Celibacy is not the way for me any more than it would be for a heterosexual person, unless I choose it or perceive it as a gift.

Much time and energy has been spent by the CRC on the isolated biblical texts that make some possible reference to homosexual activity. I believe such studies are unhelpful in the church's desire to understand and include its LGBT members. I would urge the CRC to stop thinking that the Bible alone has "the answer" to every question it might have on these matters. I wish the CRC would place more emphasis on how God's call to love our neighbors as ourselves can lead to new, Spirit-led discernment of how the church can embrace the multiple types of diversity within our human community. I believe the CRC must also engage meaningfully with current scientific understandings and social attitudes lest its witness be compromised and its relevance questioned.

Given the self-limiting constraints the CRC has to date placed on study committees reporting to the church on matters involving its LGBT members, many LGBT members despair of belonging in the CRC with their full lives and have left the church in their past.

After so many decades involving repeated study committees, there are CRC congregations that just wish to move forward and to be more fully inclusive of their LGBT members regardless of their relationship status. I believe such congregations must be allowed to be fully welcoming without fear of censure or discipline by the larger church bodies. This "local option" has been an important means of accommodating conflicting views on various other contentious issues within the CRC, and it should also be available in this case.

**Joseph Bowman, 52, student at Calvin Theological Seminary**

I am a same-sex attracted man, committed to celibacy for life. I believe that homosexual practice is sin; I have always believed that. In fact, I have never physically acted on my attractions.

I spent 20 years of my life begging God to make me straight. I owned every book written in the 1980s or 1990s for Christians who wanted to overcome

unwanted same-sex attractions. I went to ex-gay support groups and Exodus conferences for years. I even went to a residential ex-gay live-in program for a time. These things were supposed to fix me. But when all was said and done, there was no change in my attractions.

In the summer of 2007, my counselor asked me, "Joseph, if your attractions never change, will you still follow Christ?" And my initial answer was no.



Joseph Bowman is a member of Alliston (Ont.) CRC.

Absolutely not. I wanted to be fixed. I wanted to be married with kids, like "normal" people. How could I possibly continue to trust in God if I'm never going to be healed of this?

My counselor said to me, "Joseph, the issue isn't that you're same-sex attracted. The issue is that you hate yourself because of it." And he was right. Almost immediately, my self-hatred disappeared. I felt like an authentic person for the first time in my life. Yet my attractions remain to this day.

For years, I said no to God's call to ministry in my life because I thought I was unfit for ministry until I was fixed. But I could no longer ignore God's call in my life. I graduated from Tyndale Seminary in Toronto in 2010. I was licensed to exhort in Classis Toronto for six years, and I am now completing

my studies at Calvin Theological Seminary, hoping to be declared a candidate for Minister of the Word by Synod 2021.

The CRC stands at a crossroads. It is time to make a choice. God's word is clear. Marriage is for one man and one woman. No amount of proof-texting and (faulty) hermeneutics can make Scripture read that God blesses a marriage between two people of the same sex. People can tell their stories to pull on the heartstrings, but my story must submit to the truth of Scripture. For me, to live is Christ, and I must die to my sin nature.

Our denomination cannot allow both opinions to coexist. As a soon-to-be candidate for ministry, I personally could not serve in a denomination that does not take a clear, unequivocal stance that homosexual practice is sin. One side is biblically solid; the other is not. One side or the other must leave the denomination. That might sound harsh, but to those who are perishing, the gospel is the smell of death (2 Cor. 2:15-16).

#### **Leonard Vander Zee, 75, retired pastor**

The CRC's 1973 Synodical Report on Homosexuality appeared around the time I was just beginning as an ordained pastor. I saw the report as generally enlightened, especially its conclusion that homosexuality is an orientation rather than a perverse choice.

Increasingly, however, the lives and experiences of real people began to alter my views. I could no longer see them abstractly as "homosexuals," but as whole, loving, gifted human beings, many of them committed Christians.

The 1973 Report's distinction between choice and orientation is not found in the Bible. In Romans 1:18-27, Paul describes human rebellion against God. "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness

... and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator."

Then Paul gives an example. "Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women. ..." Paul is condemning what historians say were typical homosexual relationships in his time that often involved exploitation, pederasty, and sexual slavery. Paul was not being a homophobic bigot, but condemning widespread, perverse practices among the empire's elite.



Leonard Vander Zee is a member of Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

But these are not the same people we are talking about today, as the very language of the text shows. We are talking about baptized CRC members, not "godless" people who "suppress the truth." They do not "exchange natural sexual relations" but form relationships out of their sexual orientation, which is as natural to them as heterosexuality.

Still, the 1973 Report demands that they remain celibate. But on what basis? Though Paul advocated celibacy for all unmarried Christians, he still acknowledged that not all are so gifted. Therefore, he wrote, "It is better to be married than to burn with passion"

(1 Cor. 7:8-9). Since God ordained marriage as the covenant commitment in which sex belongs, the real issue here is same-sex marriage. Not all of our gay and lesbian members are able to or desire to live celibate lives.

Same-sex marriage is a relatively new, difficult, and complex issue for Christians. Unfortunately, Synod 2016 limited participation on the Committee to Articulate a Foundation Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality to only those who agree with the 1973 report. Instead of sparking a real and open denominational discussion, the present committee can only defend our 50-year-old stance.

We need an honest, open, and thorough new look at the biblical evidence and the contemporary situation on this issue. That will demand a longer journey of study and mutual engagement in an atmosphere of love, trust, and forbearance. Choosing this path, the CRC could be a beacon of light for North American churches today.

#### **William Koopmans, 61, pastor**

The Bible teaches that all people, and especially Christians, must seek to be pure, holy, and obedient in all realms of life, including their sexuality (Col. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Thess. 4:3-5).

With regard to sexuality and marriage, the Bible indicates that God's original intent, which remains normative for today, is to be a covenant relationship between a man and a woman (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:23-24; Mark 10:6-8; Eph. 5:25-33; 1 Tim. 3:2), and same-sex practice is inappropriate (Rom. 1:29; 1 Cor. 6:9).

While holding this view, it is important to develop an understanding of factors that might be part of the development and experience of sexual orientation and desire. Though it is easy as individuals to become myopic, the church collectively is looking at the many aspects of this issue—from Biblical interpretation to biological, epigenetic, sociological, psychological, and pastoral care dimensions.



William Koopmans and his wife, Louise, are members of Hope CRC in Brantford, Ont.

Although through biblical conviction we ought not condone same-sex practice, we must nevertheless hear God's call to show compassion and care for those who struggle because same-sex attraction is an issue, either for themselves or for a family member or friend. As God calls us all to obedience, difficult as that might be, he does not entitle us to substitute compassion for faithfulness to him. Contrary to a sentiment often implied, calling each other to obedience and accountability is not unloving per se—as Jesus demonstrated (John 8:11; 14:15) and Scripture emphasizes (Gal. 6:1-2; 1 John 5:2-3). In fact, mutually assisting each other in godly living is a genuine expression of love that is superior to the secular liberties advocated apart from God's Word.

Differentiating between same-sex attraction and same-sex practice is very important. We also need to acknowledge the corporate, communal, and cultural dynamics that are part of this issue and take appropriate steps to promote responsible living in the framework of a Christian worldview. For example, it is now known that various chemicals can influence epigenetics. Children that are affected by such factors, perhaps even prior to birth, are not responsible for their condition. But what is being done to eliminate these negatively impacting chemicals? The products may be economically beneficial, but they should not be maintained if they lead to epigenetic compromise.

Sociological factors are also extremely influential. We are too complacent about the unbiblical curriculum that is being presented in many educational institutions in our society, and too often silent about the unbiblical lifestyles that are presented as normal, acceptable—and even desirable—in our present culture.

God calls us to reform in all areas of life. It is my hope and prayer that the CRC will adhere to a biblical position that does not permit same-sex practices while becoming better educated about the complexity of same-sex attraction and developing appropriate pastoral care and compassion for those who are dealing with such issues. **B**

1. How well do you know and understand the CRC's current position on homosexuality? How clear were you on the 1973 distinction between same-sex attraction (or orientation) and same-sex sexual intimacy? Were you aware that persons with same-sex attraction can be an officebearer in the church?

2. In reading the six viewpoints, where do you see commonalities and shared concerns among them?

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## BIG QUESTIONS

### Missional Living

#### What assumptions might the COVID-19 pandemic be challenging us to rethink as we seek to be the church participating more fully in God's mission?

I can think of a few.

1. The assumption that all we need is the right program implemented well. We're discovering that God is at work outside of our services, programs, and strategies and that being present with our neighbors might be more missionally churchy than we thought.

2. The assumption that more is better. Many have measured church "success" in terms of having more and more people attending Sunday worship and participating in church educational opportunities, service projects, or other programs, but if God is to be found "out there" (as we're discovering now that we can't be in our facilities), then perhaps being missional is about following—and equipping others to follow—the Incarnate One who lived among and loved others unconditionally right where we live. Success would then be more about being faithful than about counting the people in our pews.

3. The assumption that it's all up to the professionals. As God's people are discovering that God is at work in their neighbors and neighborhoods, they are also discovering that God is at work in them! Being missional means recognizing the Spirit at work gifting, empowering, and using the priesthood of all believers. We know this! Now we have an opportunity to live it.



Illustration for The Banner by Laurie Sienkowski

4. The assumption that it's about me. How often has church been all about me—meeting my needs, providing me with the religious goods and services I like and want (otherwise I'll just go to the church down the street). Yet on so many levels, COVID-19 is revealing that we're an interdependent species, made to be in community, in this together! And we're experiencing a deeper community among our actual neighbors in smaller, more intimate gatherings. What if it's not about us and we're made and sent to be in community, practicing vulnerability, mutuality, reciprocity, and authentic relationship with those around us?

Other assumptions? How about assuming that it's all about right beliefs or that the church can exist in some abstract way without being rooted in a place? If these and other assumptions are bubbling up for you, perhaps your assumption about being missional is being challenged, too!

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.

### Ethics

#### Is abortion a non-negotiable factor in a Christian's voting?

When faced with important decisions, it's good practice to think of all the relevant factors involved and then decide if there are any non-negotiable

factors. The list of what constitutes a non-negotiable could vary, but, morally speaking, Christians have typically argued that murder (unjust killing), lying (unjust deception), and stealing (unjust taking) are non-negotiable as such.

But while moral principles are fairly clear, the application of moral principles to the ever-changing particulars of the world is less so. Murder is wrong, but what counts as murder? Abortion is a case in point. Some medieval Christians—including one saint—argued, using the best science of the day, that a fetus only attains the status of human after either the 40th day (boys) or 80th day (girls), and so aborting a fetus before then would be bad insofar as it disobeys God's commandment to "go forth and multiply," but it wouldn't be murder—a non-negotiable.

The CRC's position (using the best science of our day) is that a fetus, upon conception, is a human, but it denies that all abortion is murder. For example, letting the baby die to save the mother's life might be considered just killing since when two innocent lives are in tension, we need to consider additional moral factors in order to make the right decision. For instance, to let the mother die might be to indirectly harm her husband or other children and so these factors, though secondary things, would still rule in favor of the mother over the baby when considering all the moral factors.



Here the right decision isn't what we call an ideal situation, but God only calls us to do what is right—we can do no more.

So Christians must decide if non-mother-saving abortion is a non-negotiable or simply a very important moral factor to consider when voting. Non-mother-saving abortions are likely murder, and so in its directness, seriousness, and widespreadness should probably be a non-negotiable for Christian support. But even if not, this issue, when pitted against capital punishment, for example, should be seen as more important, since murdering innocent babies is worse than killing an adult criminal; or again, supporting the direct murder of babies is worse than supporting, in the case of climate change, the (probable) indirect killing of innocents through pollution and coastal flooding.

Adam Barkman is a professor of philosophy at Redeemer University.

### Faith Formation

## **I recently completed my second Bible study. Should I just keep going until I have covered all 66 books of the Bible? What should my goal be for adult faith formation?**

Faith formation is the process of being formed to be like Christ. It's a lifelong journey rather than a goal. Bible studies are one way to be formed. It might be a good idea to keep going until you have covered all 66 books of the Bible. But faith formation is more than just acquiring knowledge. It is about transformation.

In *Invitation to a Journey*, M. Robert Mulholland describes faith formation as “the process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.” There are echoes of God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12 here, where

God told Abraham that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

A few lines earlier, God's word to Abraham begins with God's promise to make him into “a great nation.” We are a people of God as much as we are individuals. Studying the Bible with brothers and sisters in Christ helps us know more about God, and it also helps us know that we belong to God and that we are a part of his people, the church. God transforms us through his Word.

Other faith practices have been used by Christians to become more Christlike. Even our habits, like prayer at mealtimes, can seem perfunctory, but they are shaping us. A walk in which you take the time to think about how you can bless your neighborhood can be a faith practice. It reminds us that our lives are fully intertwined with what God is doing in the world and in us.

There are lots of ways you can grow in your faith. Give it some thought, read some books, talk to your pastor and other wise friends, and, yes, continue to study the Bible. Find out what God is calling you to do as you grow in your faith.

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

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

### Relationships

## **Is patriarchy sin, or is it God-ordained? My father thinks it's God-ordained, but my mother disagrees. Who is right?**

Very likely there are aspects of both your parents' thinking that are right and wrong. To sort out your own beliefs about this confusing topic, consider the following:

1. Patriarchy was the result of disobedience to God. Read Genesis 3, and

notice in particular verse 16. Ponder also the meaning of Genesis 3:21. That verse highlights the new normal. It describes how a loving God adapted, killing an animal because Adam and Eve's shame required better clothing than what they were able to make for themselves using fig leaves.

2. God then went about creating a people set apart under that new normal (patriarchal reality), beginning with Abraham, continuing with Moses, and finally ending this era with the birth, life, and death of Jesus. God interacted with his people as a patriarch would, adapting to our fallen state and teaching us about obedience via the law.

4. When God resurrected Jesus, everything changed. Patriarchy, along with slavery, animal cruelty, and death, were defeated. The church was established and described as the body or bride of Christ and as the family of God. Instead of an Old Testament patriarch or a New Testament healing and preaching rabbi, the Holy Spirit—God with us—began to establish the church and usher in the kingdom.

Consider that it is not, first of all, so necessary that your parents be on the same page with respect to patriarchy. What is necessary, however, is that their heart, mind, and strength be focused on serving and forgiving each other, since building God's kingdom will always require sacrifice of some sort. That is the new normal of our era.

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



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

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# Safe Church Ministry Director to Retire

## NEWS

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After nearly a decade serving as director of the Christian Reformed Church’s Safe Church Ministry, Bonnie Nicholas is retiring in November.

Before becoming director in 2011, she was active on the abuse prevention committee of River Terrace Church in East Lansing, Mich., and on the Safe Church team for Classis Lake Erie (a regional group of churches).

In her own healing journey, Nicholas said she has experienced the benefits of being in community with others who have similar experiences of abuse. She has found this true in secular settings, such as “Take Back the Night” marches and community vigils, as well as in Christian settings, especially in small groups. At Michigan State University, where Nicholas worked in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship campus ministry, stories of abuse would come up, and as difficult as the stories were to tell, they were a vital component to healing.

“It is through the love of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that we experience deeper healing and understand our value; the church can provide the perfect context,” Nicholas said. “My passion is to help churches become places where the healing power of God can be revealed.”

During Nicholas’ tenure as Safe Church Ministry director, an online space called “S.O.S.: Sharing Our Stories” was created for victims of abuse to share their stories (anonymously, if they choose). This program has helped make it easier for people to speak up.



**Bonnie Nicholas**

“Raising the voices of survivors needs to be a key element in safe church ministry. The people who have been most impacted by abuse, and who have also experienced a measure of healing, will become the future leaders. We need to learn from them,” Nicholas said.

The Safe Church Ministry’s mandate includes abuse prevention, awareness, and response. Nicholas has been interested particularly in prevention and in cultivating leaders.

Jane H. DeGroot credits Nicholas for encouraging her growth. “Wise words and a caring spirit from Bonnie Nicholas have inspired me to go from an attendee at the 2016 Safe Church Conference to serving as the Safe Church coordinator for Classis Muskegon,” DeGroot said. “I am so thankful for Bonnie’s grace-filled leadership throughout the process. I will miss working with her as director, but have a hunch that her passion for making our church communities safer places will be used in another, equally powerful way.”

—Callie Feyen

## B.C. Churches Organize Literal Mountaintop Experience



Worship team members sing and play atop Vedder Mountain in British Columbia.

Willoughby Christian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C., and Gateway and Living Hope CRCs in Abbotsford, B.C., collaborated Aug. 13 to lead a worship service from the peak of Vedder Mountain, a public-use space in British Columbia's Fraser Valley.

Fifteen people—six for the worship team and nine for the tech team—used all-terrain vehicles and 4x4 trucks to carry equipment up the trail to the 924-meter (3,031-foot) summit.

"A week before the event, the forecast showed heavy rain the night of the event, so we started praying," team member Jeremy Vaandrager said. "God answered by giving us the hottest day of the summer." Equipment was kept in vehicles with air conditioners running to keep it from overheating.

Lena Blain, a worship team member and the worship director at Living Hope CRC, said the event had two purposes: "to share the hope of the gospel message of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible, and to share in joyful worship in God's creation." The service included hymns, worship songs, Scripture reading, and prayer.

Vaandrager said he "thought this would be a great way to have some fun and worship our Creator in his beautiful creation. Our world is hurting so bad lately, and (we) needed to have something to smile about and enjoy."

With the use of generators and satellite dishes, the team was able to livestream the hour-long worship experience on Facebook and YouTube. In just one day the service had more than 4,000 views.

—Dan Veeneman

## Dunamis Fellowship Canada is Equipping Churches for Spiritual Growth

Several Christian Reformed congregations in Canada seeking to deepen understanding and relationship with the Holy Spirit have found help from Dunamis Fellowship Canada, an organization whose programs "aim to grow spiritual leadership for the movement of the Holy Spirit."

"A group of people in the Winnipeg (Man.) and Thunder Bay (Ont.) area(s) have been praying for the last 30 years for the CRC in their area to be more Spirit-led, prayerful, and empowered," said Marg Rekman, a pastor at Bethlehem CRC in Thunder Bay.

Rekman is one of three pastors leading an online Dunamis Project this November. Called Gateways to Empowered Ministry, it's the first of a series of six events focused on different aspects of the Spirit's work that will run until spring 2023.

"By looking through the Old and New Testament—especially the life of Jesus—the series) gives a biblical basis and understanding of who the Spirit is, how the Spirit is at work in our lives and the church, and how we can become more discerning of his leading," Rekman said.

Trevor Payton, a CRC pastor who last served Rockpoint Community Church in North Haledon, N.J., became the executive director of Dunamis Fellowship Canada in 2018. "We want to see every church in Canada thriving and doing ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit," Payton said.

Payton said the organization, which teaches from a biblical and Reformed perspective, provides resources in four different ways: conferences, meeting with churches to assess their ministry needs, an annual youth camp, and a video course.

Dunamis has been asked to provide workshops on prayer at Inspire 2021, the CRC's biennial ministry conference. "Dunamis has enhanced prayer, given direction to discernment, and helped many benefit from accessing the whole Trinity," said Beth Fellingner, regional mission leader for Eastern Canada with Resonate Global Mission.

Dunamis Project series are also offered in the United States through Presbyterian-Reformed Ministries International.

—Kristen Parker



Participants worship together at a Dunamis training event in Edmonton, Alta., in September 2019.

## Creative COVID-19 Ministry

### Michigan Church Offers Homework Club for Students Learning Online

Photo by Anita Ensing Beem



Student Geoffrey and volunteer Karen Foerg at First CRC's Homework Club.

When the Grand Rapids Public Schools opened with only online learning for the first nine weeks of this academic year, First Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., decided to welcome neighborhood students to an in-person daily homework club.

First CRC member Shelly Ydenberg wanted to provide the support after noticing the stress the weeks of virtual school in the spring term put on families.

Fifteen or more volunteers from First sign up for two-hour time slots Monday through Friday to supervise K-12 students at the church, helping with all subjects as needed. Ydenberg said a volunteer "only needs a heart for kids and a desire to show the love of Jesus to others."

Participants and volunteers follow safety protocols, including daily health screenings and mask wearing, to mitigate potential spread of the coronavirus.

### Safe in the Storm: Family Bible Event



Bethel Christian Reformed Church and Wolf Creek Community Church, two CRC congregations in Lacombe, Alta., hosted a one-day immersive Bible story experience Aug. 15.

"Because of the uncertainties of COVID-19, the theme of 'Safe in the Storm,' represented by the story of Noah, became our focus," said Harriet Luymes, a planning committee member from Bethel.

Noah's "ark," a 30-foot flat-deck trailer pulled by a one-ton truck, was lent to the churches by a local farmer. It shuttled participants from Bethel CRC to Cranna Lake, about a five-minute ride, for various activities at different stations. Aboard the "ark," Noah's son Ham (Wolf Creek member Darryl Klopstra) spoke to the children about what it was like to live through the great flood.

"People were reminded that through all the years of building, gathering food, (and) time spent on the ark, God was with them as he is with us now," Luymes said.

### California Church Hosts Drive-in Church as Pandemic Continues



Pastor Andy Hanson leading Hope Community Church's parking lot worship service in Riverside, Calif.

When state guidelines allowed limited-capacity meetings after an initial prohibition in March against indoor gatherings, Hope Community Church in Riverside, Calif., decided in-person worship still wasn't a suitable option. Given the congregation's percentage of vulnerable members, the council and worship leaders worked toward having a drive-in Sunday service where members could worship safely from their vehicles.

About 30% of the congregation has been attending the drive-in services. An FM transmitter relays the service up to a quarter mile (1.6 km). To beat the midday heat, services begin at 9 a.m. instead of the usual 10:30 a.m., but even with that change one service had to be canceled when temperatures rose to 117 degrees Fahrenheit (47.2 C). Pastor Andy Hanson also posts weekly worship recordings on the church's website. He's grateful for the in-person connection made possible in the church parking lot.

—Banner correspondents

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## Support for Pastors Includes Their Spouses

A pilot program to provide support to spouses of pastors within Classis Georgetown, a regional group of Christian Reformed congregations in western Michigan, will continue through June 2021.

The program developed out of a discussion with regional co-pastors Dave Jolman and Marc Nelesen and their wives. It's part of an overall effort by the classis to support pastors in their marriages and families, Jolman said.

Though they found there is a call for the new program, it's not for everyone.

Though some spouses "strongly identify as a clergy spouse," Jolman said, "we surmised that some spouses don't want to be identified as a clergy spouse." And some spouses "may feel isolated and desire support from someone who understands their situation."

Classis Georgetown agreed to put up seed money to back the spousal support program as well as funds to continue the program into next year. Connie Den Haan, whose husband, David, served for almost 25 years as pastor of two different congregations in the CRC, agreed to a request to work on the initiative.

"As a pastor's wife, she understands the joys and challenges that come along with that role," Jolman said. "We believed Connie would be the perfect person to pilot this project."

Den Haan began to reach out to spouses of Classis Georgetown pastors, and a small group of them began to meet each month to share their experiences and their struggles in supporting their partners while also trying to take care of their families. Seven spouses have attended at least one meeting, although in-person meetings were put on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"So far there have been two to four of us each time," Den Haan said. "We are still in the process of getting to know each other, but conversation has flowed easily because of so many similar life experiences as pastor's wives."

Other projects Classis Georgetown has undertaken in the past five years to support pastors and their families include outings, concerts, and counseling services through a Christian mental health agency, Jolman said.

—Greg Chandler

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. John T.C. Tong*

1936-2020

Co-founder of the Chinese Christian Reformed Church in Monterey Park, Calif., John Tong especially loved and cared for the lonely, the forsaken, the widowed, the children, the weak, and the outcast. Tong died June 20.

Born Tsung Chu Tong in Xiamen, China, the third of seven sons, Tong was sent away as an infant after his mother believed the superstition of a palm reader. He reunited with his immediate family as an adult and learned his mother had given her life to Christ.

Tong accepted Jesus as his Savior in a period of loneliness and emptiness while working and studying mathematics at college in Hong Kong. He joined Ling Liang Church and served as choir director. While enrolled at Alliance Bible Seminary, Tong translated hymns into Chinese and wrote more than 200 hymns and poems.

After pastoring in Macau, Tong moved to Taiwan to join his brother Rev. Peter Tong in Christian radio broadcasting. There he became convicted of the five solas of Reformed theology. Tong then attended Calvin Theological Seminary, was ordained in the CRC, moved to California, and co-founded the Chinese CRC, serving there until retiring in 1991.

Tong is survived by his beloved wife, Becky, and two daughters.

—Janet A. Greidanus

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Henry Dykema*

1938-2020

For 36 years Henry Dykema served as a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. Strong, enthusiastic, and eager to tackle anything and everything, it is said that when making a pastoral visit he often arrived with a Bible in one hand and a toolbox in the other. He was a good storyteller. "He was a 'hands-on' grandpa," one of his grandchildren said. After living with Alzheimer's disease for six years, Dykema died July 12. He was 81.

In 1948, at age 10, Dykema immigrated to the U.S. from the Netherlands. He later graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and was ordained in 1965.

After serving as a missionary in Guam for 12 years, Dykema pastored the following Christian Reformed congregations: Decatur (Mich.); Maple Avenue, Holland, Mich.; Bravo Community, Fennville, Mich.; and Hollandale (Minn.). After retirement in 2001, he served as interim pastor for congregations in Wheaton, Ill., and Paw Paw, Mich., and was for several years the director of the Ditto retail store, an organization benefiting Christian schools in Holland, Mich.

Predeceased by son Mark in 2013, Dykema is survived by Cora, his wife of 60 years; four children and spouses; a daughter-in-law; and eight grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Woman in Same-sex Marriage Installed as Deacon



Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., installed a woman in a same-sex marriage as a deacon last June.

In August, the church's pastors and council sent a letter of reflection to the congregation explaining how they reached this decision.

Larry Louters, president of the Neland council, told *The Banner* the church did not specifically choose this path. "Neland was given the gift of LGBTQ+ members with whom we worshiped, members with clear gifts of ministry and leadership, members we loved. We simply worked slowly and prayerfully over the past 10 years to find ways to encourage rather than ignore their gifts."

The August congregational letter noted that a "2016 survey of positions in the congregation reveal(ed) a broad range of views from traditional (40%) to affirming (40%), and in between (20%)." It acknowledged, "We don't all agree on SSM (same-sex marriage), or on having a SSM member in leadership. However, we also don't believe that having a uniform position on this matter is necessary to maintain unity as a body of Christ."

### Advised by Classis

The letter says there was "an extensive study and report by our Nominations Committee in 2019" and that church leadership "requested and received assistance from church advisers from Classis GR East." It noted a Classis Grand Rapids East 2016 report "that shows a wide range of biblical interpretations one can support with a Reformed view of Scripture."

Al Mulder, stated clerk for Classis Grand Rapids East, confirmed to *The Banner* that "an ad hoc committee of the Neland council requested advisers to meet with them to discuss and advise the committee regarding Neland's nomination process for electing elders and deacons." Mulder said three ministers served as advisers and submitted a written report, which was received by the classis executive team in December 2019. Mulder said there was an understanding "that Neland would be presenting its own report to classis at such time as they deemed appropriate." Louters told *The Banner* the church council "will likely file a report to classis concerning our action this fall."

The minutes of Classis Grand Rapids East's Sept. 17 meeting note that Neland's

congregational letter was presented to classis in its agenda supplement and that the president of classis, Thea Leunk, "invited comments and questions from the floor. None were forthcoming."

The letter says there was "much greater congregational participation in the selection and election of office bearers this year (2020), and a very strong affirmation vote of all nominees (each received over 87%)."

### Synod's Pastoral Advice

In taking this action, Neland's council does not believe it has "crossed any line of orthodoxy, only pastoral advice," the August letter reads. It describes its understanding to be "that all synodical reports and decisions related to homosexuality have been *pastoral advice* given to the churches (1973, 2002, and 2016)" (emphasis and parentheses original to the letter).

Kathy Smith, Calvin Theological Seminary's adjunct professor of church polity, confirmed to *The Banner* that she explained the same in adult education sessions at Neland, noting Synod 1975's consideration of "the status of various

types of synodical decisions and their relationship to the confessions.”

The report to Synod 1975 said, “All synodical decisions ‘shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order’ (Art. 29). But there is an obvious difference between the use and function of a pronouncement as interpretation of the confessions and a decision involving ‘guidelines’ or ‘pastoral advice.’ It is the wording of synod’s decision that usually indicates the precise character of its decision, and this wording of the decision determines its use and function. No synodical decision involving doctrinal or ethical pronouncements is to be considered on a par with the confessions” (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 598).

“So matters of pastoral advice would not be considered matters of orthodoxy—doctrines found in our confessions—since it is possible to disagree with synod’s positions on matters of pastoral advice, as noted by Synod 1975,” Smith told *The Banner* in an email.

## Questions

In doing this, is Neland getting ahead of synod or breaking CRC rules? The letter says no, but Annetta Vander Lugt, a member of Neland Avenue for 31 years, said she knew that would be a question in the wider denomination. “I think an issue like this isn’t going to change in the denomination unless someone pushes a little, just like happened with women in office. Somebody had to push it a little, and then finally, I think, the denomination changed their stance. I think that’s the kind of thing that could happen here,” Vander Lugt said.

Does this decision mean that Neland is an “affirming” church? The letter says Neland members “will continue to be a community with diverse opinions on that.” Vander Lugt appreciates that answer. She said it’s hard to tell whether there are

still many varying opinions because she hasn’t experienced people discussing this much and the congregation hasn’t been having as many in-person gatherings because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nick Koster, a member of Neland Avenue CRC since 2005 who has served as elder and church school teacher, said “the congregational letter was late in coming.” To him it was “shocking” that accepting a person in a same-sex relationship into church leadership would not be against denominational policy.

Koster said he feels there has been an emphasis on science and social movements in trying to move the church to accept something it has historically judged to be counter to Scripture. He recognizes that we don’t know everything, has compassion for those with other views, citing 1 Corinthians 13:12, and looks forward to the day when we will know in full. But in the meantime, Koster said, “I’m not going to go along with society and the mockery aimed at Christians because we believe in the traditional biblical view.”

Michele Dykstra, who was elected as deacon at Neland in 2017 and finished her term in May, left Neland’s fellowship before the August congregational letter was sent. She said she and her family made the painful decision to leave out of obedience to God.

To Dykstra, what the congregational letter describes as “Neland’s journey toward LGBT+ inclusion” has been a move away from Scripture. “I don’t think that all of a sudden, after 2,000+ years of Scriptural interpretation, that things have suddenly changed. I think that unfortunately our church is following cultural norms and listening to the ways of the world. What we are asked to be is countercultural. How are we showing God’s love by condoning a sin?” Dykstra said.

Dykstra was hesitant to go on record for this article. “The world portrays those of us that interpret Scripture this way as being a hater when I want nothing more than to stand alongside these people and support them,” she said. “But I want to support them doing the hard thing, which is to obey God and point out his call for celibacy. Our church by doing this completely undermines the LGBT folks who interpret Scripture in the traditional, biblical way.”

Chris Veenstra, a member of Neland since 1992 who has previously served as an elder, described the church’s deliberative process, which he thinks was valuable. “They have done due diligence in terms of bringing certain people to speak with us and not just arbitrarily forging ahead without being deliberate,” he said.

Of those who disagree with the decision, Veenstra said, “I can respect where they are coming from insofar as this isn’t an easy call considering our church history and our historic reading of the Bible. For some people, taking this position means that we are discounting, or reinterpreting, or, in the worst-case scenario, rejecting what they believe the Lord is saying. So that’s pretty heavy, and one needs to be mindful of that.”

The congregational letter noted that the church experienced “lament over the gradual departure of some of our members who felt we needed to nail down either more ‘traditionalist’ or more ‘affirming’ positions.”

The 2020 CRCNA *Yearbook* reports that Neland lost 19 members to other CRCs or other denominations in 2019.

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

## Noteworthy



**Redeemer University**

Over the summer **Redeemer University** in Ancaster, Ont., **launched a new logo** to correspond with its name change

announced in January. In an Aug. 10 online press release, the school said, "The story of Redeemer's new logo is that the world is changing rapidly, and Redeemer is changing too, innovating within a Christian liberal arts mission to provide a relevant education for students today and tomorrow. The university is also strengthening its roots in the Reformed tradition, and that anchor and stability is pictured by the cross at the centre of a shifting shield."



**Youth Unlimited**, the North American mission organization best known for SERVE teen

mission trips, **changed its name in September. Now known as ThereforeGo Ministries**, the organization is focused on "assisting the church and its many local congregations with their ministry to our youth and emerging adults." In its announcement of the change, ThereforeGo said the new name is based on Scripture (Matt. 28:16-20 and Heb. 12:1-3), reflects how their work is expanding to include more than youth, and avoids confusion with other organizations using the name "Youth Unlimited" in Canada.

## From the Archives



**One hundred years ago, on Oct. 30, 1920, the Christian Reformed Church's first missionaries to China left by ship from San Francisco.** A photo of the three departing missionary families was published on the Nov. 5, 1926, cover of *The Banner*. The photo caption read, "From the top, Dr. and Mrs. Lee (S.) Huizenga and daughters; Rev. and Mrs. John De Korne and sons; Rev. and Mrs. Harry Dykstra."

## Banner News Editor Retires



Gayla R. Postma, *The Banner's* longtime news editor, retired effective Oct. 30. Postma served in the role (shared for the past three years) since 2002.

Her writing career with the Christian Reformed Church's magazine began in 1983, when the periodical launched its news network. Postma, then 23, covered Classis Toronto and neighboring Classis Hamilton (regional groups of churches).

Postma began covering synod, the CRC's annual general assembly, in 1997 and in recent years has written a guide to the lengthy agenda for the yearly gathering. Under her editorship, *The Banner's* synod reporting earned recognition from the Associated Church Press for several years, including Awards of Merit for in-depth coverage in 2015 and 2016.

Postma says she's most proud of helping the news section keep up with readers' changing consumption of media and being able to "make governance issues, like the work of synods and boards, more accessible to our readers."

*The Banner's* editor-in-chief, Shiao Chong, agrees. "Gayla has a great ability to make dry and sometimes dense church governance materials accessible," he said. "We will also deeply miss her wealth of experience and institutional memory."

Postma worked with four different editors-in-chief as news editor. She was part of the team that transitioned the magazine from its subscription model after Synod 2005 adopted an every-household *Banner*.

Bob DeMoor, *Banner* editor from 2003 to 2015, said, "Her creativity and hard work contributed immensely to our shaping *The Banner* into an every-member magazine with both print and online components."

DeMoor remarked on Postma's courage and persistence that "came with a deep love for the Lord, the church, our readers, and our *Banner* staff as a whole."

"Gayla wasn't always immune from controversy or getting into a pickle or two," DeMoor added. "But she was always a heaven-send for a respun magazine trying to find its way and for those who cared enough about our church to read and heed the truth."

Postma, 61, lives in Morrisburg, Ont., with her husband, Gary, who retired as a Christian school administrator in 2017.

—Alissa Vernon, news editor



# Being Christ's Witnesses

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Erika Dekker is a chaplain at Blodgett Hospital in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Bernard Ayoola is a pastor and director of the African Resource Center in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Laura de Jong is lead pastor at Second CRC in Grand Haven, Mich.

# What Is a Pastor?

By Margaret Mwenda, Calvin Theological Seminary

“Calvin Theological Seminary prepared me well. It gave me a solid biblical, theological, and historical foundation that continues to ground me as I live, learn, and minister in diverse and constantly changing settings,” said Erika Dekker, a chaplain at Blodgett Hospital in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Dekker is among the five pastors who shared their experiences about what it means to be a pastor and how they serve in various ministry or pastoral contexts.

Each of these pastors—a chaplain, a Bible translator, a bivocational pastor, and congregational pastors in different settings—revealed that while they shared similar seminary training through their academic programs, their callings and pathways to ministry are as diverse as their backgrounds. They also reflected on the joys and challenges of ministry as well as their sources of encouragement along their journey.

### Equipping Pastors

For all five participants, preparation for ministry was primarily through a variety of seminary academic programs (Ph.D., M.Div., and Th.M.).

While the degree programs share similar courses, each pastor had a unique academic path to prepare them for their individual pastoral contexts.

Ann Kapteyn, for example, has worked for 22 years to help communities around the world translate the Bible into various languages. She noted that training in biblical exegesis and languages, as well as in systematic theology and church history, were good preparation for her work in the international context, especially when it came to understanding historical theological disputes and being able to spot them as they come up in her work with Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL International.

Bernard Ayoola is the pastor and director of the African Resource Center, a nonprofit meeting the social and spiritual needs of African immigrants in Grand Rapids, Mich. Rodrigo Cano is a location pastor for Community Christian Church in Aurora, Ill. They both said their training provided them with a deeper understanding of Reformed theology and a readiness to serve in contexts where those they serve are primarily from non-Reformed traditions.

“Over the years, the Reformed accents of kingdom, covenant, and sovereignty have resonated effectively with the

people I serve, some of whom are new to the gospel,” Ayoola said. “Some members of our community, for example, who arrived in the U.S. as refugees from very traumatic circumstances find comfort in knowing that God is aware of their situation and is willing and able to heal their physical and emotional wounds.”

For Laura de Jong, lead pastor at Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, Mich., her seminary training meant gaining key competencies including the “ability to unpack difficult theological issues, exploring the Bible, and practicing pastoral care.”

Dekker noted her seminary education helped her hone “the ability to think critically and wonder imaginatively.”

Beyond coursework and experiential, contextual learning at seminary, some saw a need for further training to prepare for their specific ministry. Kapteyn, for instance, took further training in linguistics, phonology, orthography, and discourse analysis for Bible translation, while Dekker participated in a yearlong Clinical Pastoral Education program followed by an examination process through the Association of Professional Chaplains to become a Board-Certified Chaplain.

CPE in particular helped her not only to train as a chaplain but also to know herself more fully “in order to be able to offer (herself) as a safe, nonjudgmental, non-anxious presence in the face of deep pain and suffering.”

### The Journey to Being A Pastor

“I went to seminary with the intention to become a chaplain,” Dekker said. “Along the way, this focus was challenged and broadened to include a yearlong stint as a pastor-intern in a congregation,” a formative experience that helped her realize she had a passion for preaching and leading worship.

However, after graduating from seminary, Dekker’s trajectory changed back to pursuing chaplaincy when many of the doors to pastoral ministry closed.

De Jong’s pathway to her current ministry and calling started after an undergraduate course in which she researched what the Christian Reformed Church could learn from Orthodox Judaism about incorporating ritual into worship and daily life. After seminary, de Jong received the call to Second CRC in Grand Haven.

As a bivocational pastor, Ayoola started his pastoral journey in Nigeria as director of music for a local church while also

working as an engineer for 15 years. After moving to the U.S. with his family, he decided to pursue a full-time career in ministry. He earned an M.Div. at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary and a master's degree in theology and a doctorate at Calvin Seminary. He also served as a pastoral intern and as a pastor at the African Community Fellowship and Kentwood Community Church in Grand Rapids before beginning his current ministry at the African Resource Center.

Cano's journey to his current ministry began as a church planter. After seminary training in the Latino Ministry Program and M.Div. program, he was called to serve as a pastor at Community Christian Church.

After completing her master's degree in theology at Calvin Seminary, Kapteyn started her ministry work with Wycliffe/SIL, where she has worked on Bible translation in Cameroon, Brazil, and now in the Central African Republic.

### Joys and Challenges of Ministry

"We do not bifurcate spiritual activities from those that ultimately meet physical, economic, or emotional needs," Ayoola said. "The gospel is holistic; God meets us at our point of need."

The greatest joy that comes with being a pastor, Cano added, is "being able to be with people in their most important moments of their lives; it is a great privilege and a great responsibility."

This response was unequivocally shared by all respondents, noting their greatest sense of joy comes from walking alongside and ministering to those they serve through their joys and sorrows. For these pastors, "walking alongside" means grieving with those in sorrow, praying for those who are sick, and providing material resources for those in need.

"This might seem like a strange way to talk about joy," Dekker said, "but ultimately a truly good chaplain/pastoral care visit is one in which I and another person encounter one another as the broken, beautiful human creatures that we are. The word 'God' might not even be mentioned, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, I know deep in my bones that God was, is, and will be in all of this."

Responding to needs with prayer, a word of encouragement, and material resources and then seeing how God uses their gifts to comfort, encourage, and guide their congregants gives each of these pastors and ministry leaders a great sense of gratitude and awe in light of the work of the Holy Spirit.

The five pastors also seem to face similar challenges, ones that are not unusual given the diverse ministries in which they serve. These range from navigating multicultural, multi-ethnic, and international settings to working with people of different faith and religious backgrounds and even simply to navigating the administrative components of the work.

### Sources of Encouragement

Mentors and coaches within and outside of ministry, ministry peers, spiritual directors, and home church ministries such as small groups are among the places where pastors and ministry leaders draw strength and encouragement for their ministry work.

The five pastors interviewed mentioned that ministry peers provide counsel and encouragement, engage them in discussions about current issues in their shared ministries, encourage them, and pray with and for them.

"(Our area) pastors meet monthly to discuss how our ministries are going, what challenges we're facing, and to encourage and pray for each other," de Jong said. "All these relationships remind me that I'm never alone in this, and (we) are witnesses to God's faithfulness in the lives of those he's called into ministry."

The respondents also said that resources such as podcasts, books, and conferences provide encouragement, inspiration, and instruction too.

### Advice to Seminary Students Thinking of Similar Ministries

During seminary training, students should strongly consider signing up for Clinical Pastoral Education to explore gifts, passion, and ministry, these five pastors said. They also suggested shadowing pastors, chaplains, and other ministry leaders.

Those preparing for ministry in intercultural settings should start early by "cultivating cross-cultural friendships while at seminary," Kapteyn advised.

Dekker noted that if one wants to pursue chaplaincy, they should "talk to chaplains who are in different areas of ministry and see what resonates with you. While there are many similarities, there are also many and significant differences among the different chaplain settings, such as hospitals, the military, prisons, workplaces, hospice, long-term care, (or) mental health."

In the process of discerning one's ministry calling, listening to where God is leading one to serve is important.

"Look for where God's grace is needed, and pitch your tent there!" said Ayoola. "Many seminary students think they know where they would like to work after graduation. Meanwhile, God may be leading them in a different direction."

Finally, once actively serving in ministry, continuing education, finding a mentor, and being in a peer group are highly recommended.

Ultimately, it's important never to lose sight of the reason for ministry. Cano said: "Never lose the sense of awe (at knowing that God uses people like you to minister to other people." **B**)

## Keeping Christ at the Center for Diversity

**ALBERT CHU AND HIS BROTHER** grew up as the only two Chinese kids in their Edmonton, Alta., neighborhood. It wasn't easy.

"It was an uphill battle in terms of racism and stereotypes," Chu said. But he had a sense that things could be different.

The son of a church planter, Chu grew up hearing stories from the book of Acts. He noticed that whenever these early churches began, they almost immediately became more diverse. All kinds of different people from different ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds started to gather around the gospel.

"The book of Acts kind of knocked me over," Chu said, reflecting on this vision of the kingdom that began stirring in his soul.

Unfortunately, Chu also noticed that institutions such as the Chinese immigrant church of his youth were often quite resistant to welcoming those who are different.

"There's a cost to hospitality," Chu observed, noting that even posting signs in English as well as Chinese at his childhood church was sometimes too much to ask. In fact, many of the churches Chu knew of did not seem willing to pay what it might cost to welcome people who were truly different.

The Tapestry, the church Chu helped plant 15 years ago in Richmond, B.C., seeks to be different. It strives to be a community that is not just willing, but



even eager to extend its welcome. Early on, for example, the church invested significant money to widen doorways and add accessible parking to better welcome neighbors who lived in a nearby group home.

Yet even at a church that celebrates and strives to see different kinds of people woven together, dealing with these differences can be difficult.

"I'm pretty terrible at conflict," Chu admitted. The Tapestry has found that celebrating diversity is one thing when it has to do with trying a new type of food or making spaces accessible; it's quite another when it comes to divisive issues.

For this reason, the Tapestry brought in The Colossian Forum ([colossianforum.org](http://colossianforum.org)), a Christian organization

that equips churches to have Christ-centered conversations in the midst of conflict. The Colossian Forum helped a group of leaders at The Tapestry talk about their faith and how it related to issues around human sexuality.

Following the structured process recommended by The Colossian Forum, including prayer, worship, and spiritual disciplines, these leaders were able to have a difficult conversation while keeping the focus always on Christ and on following him together. For Chu, that's the common thread. Whether it is leaders engaging conflict through The Colossian Forum or installing accessible doors, when Christ is at the center, diversity among Christians is not just possible, it's also beautiful, even if it is still a lot of work.

"We are always returning the conversation back to Christ at the center," he said.

It's part of a comprehensive return to that kingdom vision from Acts: a Christ-centered missional church, growing in Christ-centered diversity, led by people relentlessly seeking to put Christ at the center of their own lives.

—Sean Baker,  
Pastor Church Resources

## The View from Here

# Striving for Unity As We Pastor Through Pandemics

**THE MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY** defines “church” as “a building for public and especially Christian worship.” We know, however, that this definition falls far short of reality. Obviously, church is much more than a building. Our local church is a collection of people called by God to worship, serve, and do God’s will as a community of believers.

The same can be true about pastors. We believe that God has called some of us to serve as preachers and teachers—to guide the flock of saints as a local shepherd, even as we all follow our great shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13 reminds us, “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

A definition for “pastor” might then be “someone called by God to preach and teach the Word so that the body of Christ may be built up.”

But in recent years, this pastor role has been expanding. In addition to preaching, teaching, and shepherding, pastors are being asked to manage, leading staff and volunteers toward various ministry goals. They might be expected to fundraise for a capital project or even their own salary. They need to be performers, using cutting-edge technology to ensure an entertaining and meaningful

worship experience. And as churches grow, pastors also often find themselves called to be psychologists, serving as mediators and discerning what actions to take when inevitable conflicts arise.

As the list of expectations grows, pastors then find themselves having to navigate rules, practices, and procedures put in place to support the organizational complexity of today’s churches.

According to Ephesians 4, pastors are called to equip people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up *until we all reach unity in the faith*. Too often in our local congregations this growing complexity of the pastoral role can lead not to the unity to which we are called, but to division.

These trends were already affecting pastors before 2020. Then came COVID-19, racial upheaval (especially in the United States), and a downwardly spiraling economy. Pastors have had to minister locally, caring for their members and community, while at the same time taking steps to ensure the health of each member. They’ve needed to make decisions about masks, physical distancing, and the size of gatherings even as members of their congregation had differing opinions about these things. Pastors have had to find ways to connect for worship and community in a virtual way, hoping it would resonate with all of their members.

I am pleased to report that across the board, our pastors stepped up to the challenge, with God’s help. Though there has been pain, and though some have navigated these waters more easily than others, we see evidence of God’s handiwork via pastors

throughout the Christian Reformed Church. We see congregations continuing to thrive and communities collaborating for the benefit of others. In fact, the CRCNA’s COVID-19 Church Engagement Fund shows unity among our churches as they collaborated to share resources with congregations who were struggling.

With that in mind, as we consider the additional pandemics of racial upheaval and growing economic hardship, I wonder if these, too, can be an opportunity for unity to blossom.

Perhaps there are some lessons to be learned from our COVID experience as pastors and congregations face these new challenges. Perhaps we can agree to work together for the benefit of all of our communities. Perhaps, if we continue to remember God’s command for unity and God’s call for us to be neighbors to each other, then maybe pastors—and all of God’s people—can be catalysts for broader societal change until we all “reach unity in the faith” and attain the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”



Colin P. Watson Sr. is the executive director of the CRCNA. He is a member of Madison Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Spanish and Korean translations of this article are available at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

이 기사의 한글번역은 [TheBanner.org/korean](http://TheBanner.org/korean)에서 보실 수 있습니다.

Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

## A Faith Under Fire

**IRENE NAVIS ATE** several meals from a different table this summer. A giant map of 1967 Vietnam spread across her dining room table didn't leave much room for food.

Navis has been spending countless hours retracing the year that her husband, John, who died in September 2018, spent in the Vietnam War. Using John's letters, pictures, and postcards, she carefully pinpointed locations on her map and recorded a detailed timeline. She has also been typing each of John's 100-plus letters to preserve them for her children.

As Navis re-read each letter, some on scraps of paper and others 20 full pages, she uncovered a story of God's faithfulness—one in which Back to God Ministries International played a part.

"I began seeing these letters as a man's faith walk—a faith under fire," Navis said. "He was tested severely in Vietnam, but he stayed faithful to God during that time."

### Three Letters

Three letters in particular marked a turning point for John. First, John sent a letter filled with discouragement and despair.

"I don't care anymore what happens," John wrote. "I can't see wasting my time, effort, or energy on something that destroys my joys, hopes, honesty, and beliefs."

But John wrote a second letter later that day. Filled with words like "shalom" and "reawaken," John clearly



Irene Navis spent much of her extra time at home reading letters and looking at photos from the time her late husband, John, spent in Vietnam.

had experienced a transformation. In the letter, John attributes this change of heart to a transcribed sermon from Joel Nederhood recorded for *The Back to God Hour* radio program. The sermon, sent in a monthly devotional pamphlet, reflected on Lamentations 3.

"God was talking to me personally (through the sermon)," John wrote in a letter to his wife. "Now I'm mentally singing, 'I've wandered far away from God, now I'm coming home.'"

Little did John know the sermon had prepared him for another challenge. Just two days later, John and his company were ambushed by snipers, who ultimately killed a soldier John knew well. John's next letter again illustrated his renewed strength.

"Because I read that sermon, because I am (God's), I grieve at the man's death, but I'm not downcast. I can and do go on," John wrote. He added that he was praying for the courage to share the message with fellow soldiers "so that they too may feel the joy and peace I feel in spite of the attacks of mortars and snipers."

### Untold Stories

Sometimes stories like John's—stories of God's work—don't reveal themselves until decades later. Yet we know God is at work around the world through the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. As we commemorate Veteran's Day and Remembrance Day this November, may this story remind us of God's faithfulness despite the trauma of war, just as John experienced.

"After John returned from Vietnam, he rarely talked about his time there," Navis said. "I, too, hesitated to share, but this is a story of God intervening at exactly the right time and the Holy Spirit's movement throughout the church."

—Brian Clark,  
*Back to God Ministries International*

## ‘In the Storm Together’

**ALMOST FROM THE OUTSET** of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was clear that everyone in the Christian Reformed Church might all be in the same storm, but we are not all in the same boat. This metaphor applies to individuals, families, and entire communities (and often did well before this virus).

But it also applies to churches. While some CRCs have seen their giving increase since the pandemic hit in March, others have watched most of their income wash away along with members' jobs.

In response, the CRCNA's COVID-19 Church Engagement Fund stepped in. Since May, several CRCNA ministries have united to send checks to churches disproportionately affected by the virus, shutdowns, and recession.

One such church was Jesus Love Church of Southern California, a CRC congregation in Gardena, Calif.

Pastor Sangkyu Oh made sure the funds kept the congregation not only afloat, but rowing together.

“Thanks to this (funding), I was able to pay the rent for the church even during the pandemic,” Oh said. “In addition, we held a small sharing



A grant from the CRCNA's Church Engagement Fund helped Jesus Love Church pay the bills and be a blessing to the neighborhood.

event with neighbors to overcome the pandemic.”

Each week before and after worship, church members distributed masks and good news to their neighbors.

“Our congregation has gained a lot of courage,” Oh said.

Like many other pastors during the pandemic, Oh led creatively. Early on during the shelter-in-place orders, Oh and his wife, Joy Heesun Oh, visited members' homes, encouraging them and praying for them outside from a distance and leaving care packages with essentials like masks and hand sanitizer.

Jesus Love Church also used a special portion of the grant from Back To God Ministries International to purchase equipment for online worship.

Timely aid from the Church Engagement Fund helped this small Korean CRC continue to share Jesus' love in southern California.

Our churches are still weathering the storm, and they are still in vastly different boats—some churches have stabilized and even thrived; others face hardship and uncertain futures.

The Church Engagement Fund disbursed most of its initial funding over the first four months, but needs still remain.

The COVID-19 Church Engagement Fund is a collaboration among the Christian Reformed agencies Financial Shalom (part of Pastor Church Resources), Resonate Global Mission, and Back To God Ministries International.

—Nathan Rauh-Bieri,  
Financial Shalom



## More Than a Leadership Program

### A CAR DROVE CHHY OFF THE ROAD

while he was driving his motorcycle in Cambodia. The driver rode off, leaving Chhy alone alongside the road with a serious head injury.

“Someone passing by stopped, picked up his phone, and called the most recent phone number—another Onyx 2 student,” said Justin Van Zee, who works in leadership development with Resonate Global Mission.

The Onyx 2 students gathered to support Chhy because that’s the type of community Onyx 2 fosters. Onyx 2 is a leadership development program for young adults in Cambodia that Van Zee and Mission DOVE Cambodia, a Resonate partner, launched. The program is a follow-up to Onyx, a one-year leadership development opportunity for young adults that DOVE started in 2014. The initial program continues to be successful. But after graduating from the cohort, young adults wondered what came next for them.

“Young people had experienced authentic spiritual community through Onyx and wanted to continue that,” Van Zee said.

There are a lot of young adults in Cambodia—the median age of the population is just 26—and these young people are hungry for opportunities to grow. But there are many layers to leadership development in Cambodia, where no person has escaped the trauma caused by the genocide of the Khmer Rouge and the decade of civil unrest that followed. Today, unprocessed pain leads to domestic abuse and substance abuse, and many people struggle to afford housing, food, medical care, and other basic needs.

“There’s a huge need for emotional healing,” Van Zee said.



Chhy (right) participates in a team-building exercise at an Onyx 2 retreat before COVID-19. Onyx 2 has provided an authentic spiritual community for young adults to grow.

With Van Zee’s partnership, DOVE was able to launch a program to continue equipping young leaders—but God turned Onyx 2 into more than Van Zee and Resonate’s ministry partners ever expected.

“(We) started Onyx 2 thinking it was a leadership formation opportunity, and it is,” said Van Zee. “Even more than this, though, it’s about community formation—and individuals are formed in the community.”

While young adults might get a lot of information about faith and the Bible at church in Cambodia, Onyx 2 specifically helps form spiritual practices and mindsets. Van Zee said that being part of a community that’s learning and

growing together resonates with the young adults.

“While the lesson content is important,” Van Zee said, “what’s even more important is processing in community. I’ve been amazed at how openly and vulnerably young people have shared about their lives when they are confident that their listeners are trustworthy and care for them.”

The young adults involved in Onyx 2 support and strengthen one another in their walks with Christ. They’re there for one another when needed most.

So when Chhy was in the motorcycle accident and another Onyx 2 student got the call, she sprang into action. She called Chhy’s parents and other Onyx 2 participants. Within a few hours, nearly half of the Onyx 2 community had gathered at the hospital to pray with Chhy. But that’s not all. In Cambodian hospitals, family and friends are responsible for feeding and bathing patients. For the next week, students stayed at the hospital to care for Chhy as he recovered.

“I’m really proud of how the community rallied around him,” Van Zee said.

That’s the kind of supportive faith community Resonate strives to foster throughout the world. “I see myself as a facilitator,” said Van Zee. “I’m not the source of knowledge or transformation. I help bring people into the room and get the conversation started. I facilitate connections among students and with God.”

—Cassie Westrate,  
Resonate Global Mission

# On Being Exceptional

We fail to see that truly exceptional people have one quality in common: they do not see themselves as exceptions.



John Lee is the head of the Upper School at The Geneva School of Manhattan, a Christian classical school. He also serves at City Grace Church in the East Village of New York City.

**A QUEUE OF PEOPLE**, huddled and hatted, waited in the arctic cold at a new restaurant. I was ready to walk to another establishment, but my friend moseyed past the line to the host and had the owner of the restaurant on the other end of his phone. Words were exchanged, breath vapors catching light in the dark night, and the host seated us. My friend grinned. We became exceptions; no one else did. Social capital and the “good ol’ boys” network gave us power to float through people, doors, and walls. We liked the feeling of being exceptions.

This stance starts young. Children imagine that the moon and the stars bend and bow to them. Middle school students assume that an extension will be granted on an assignment because of dance lessons. High school students presume that they will get an understanding nod on their papers because they were doing charitable work on Saturday. Parents are no different. “Your Honor, I agree we cheated the system, but we are talking about my daughter.” We are all in the same boat. We fail to see that truly exceptional people have one quality in common: they do not see themselves as exceptions.

In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus offers a parable in which a Pharisee prays to God, eyes tilted to heaven, to thank God that he is an exception. He is not a robber, not an evildoer, not an adulterer. He then gazes yonder and says, “or even like this tax collector.” In the distance lies a tax collector, prostrate, pounding his bruised breast: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Unknown to the Pharisee, God’s favor rests on the tax collector because he does not see himself as an exception.

The tax collector’s call for mercy underlines a profound truth. He asks God not to give him what he deserves. He sees with clarity what he deserves: not favor, not entitlements, not extensions, not bonuses, but deserved wrath. So the cry for mercy fills his lips, and the beating of his breast fills his actions. In that bare honesty, the ancient publican finds mercy and grace.

The best people have this same heart. The irony of exceptional people is that they do not know they are exceptional and do not seek to be exceptions. That is why they are exceptional. More importantly, as they walk down this path, they find a surprising revelation: God honors the humble and exalts them. **B**

# Connections



**ONE OF THE THINGS** that fascinates me the most about creation is how interconnected everything is. God's creation is designed in such a way that each part works with and depends on many other parts. Sometimes we tend to think only the big and impressive animals are important, but without all the little insects doing their very important jobs, many other creatures would not be able to live and do their jobs, and then even more creatures would not be able to live their best lives and do their jobs. Because everything is so connected, each job is equally important.

The flower's job, for example, is to produce seeds. To do that job, it often needs help from a bee. Without the bee, the flower cannot become a nut, or seed, or fruit, and it cannot in turn feed the squirrel, who in turn cannot do its job of spreading seeds and feeding the fox, and it goes on and on from there. The bee and the flower might seem unimportant, but without them many other creatures are affected. God's design for creation means everything works together and depends on each other in order to live its best life. There are no small jobs or unimportant jobs in God's creation.

Just like the physical creation, the kingdom of God is designed to have members depend on each other and work together in order for all members to live their best lives. And just like our example from creation, there are no small jobs or unimportant jobs to be done. Sometimes we might not appreciate our gifts and talents, or we might think they are unimportant, or we wish we were good at something else, but we need to remember that "God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them

to be" (1 Cor. 12:18). Each of us has a job to do in the kingdom of God, and no matter how insignificant it might seem, each job is equally important.

### **Check It Out!**

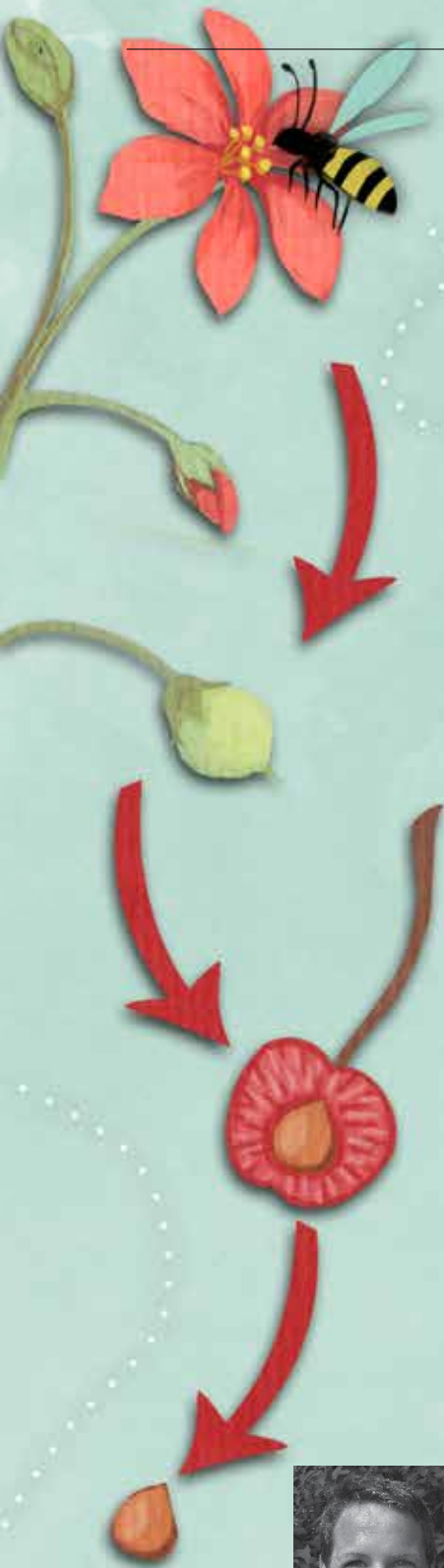
Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 to find out more about what the Bible says about the church as a body.

### **Try This!**

Think about a squirrel (or any animal or plant you want). Now think about everything that a squirrel is connected to. Make a list of everything that the squirrel depends on and is dependent on. How many things did you come up with? **B**



Illustration for *The Banner* by Anita Barghigiani



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

# Robust Faith

“Robust” is a synonym for “strong,” whether used for physical or intellectual strength or strong faith.

**I ATTEND A WRITER’S GUILD** where each month we are assigned a short essay on a one-word topic. The word for one month was “robust,” which seems to be an “in” word these days (along with starting answers with “so”). One seldom hears or reads a news story without reference to a robust debate on some issue. Other uses of the word I’ve come across recently include being physically, intellectually, economically, or flavorfully robust. Even the bread I buy at the grocery store claims to have robust flavor and texture!

Of course, “robust” is not a new word, although it seems it wasn’t used before the 1540s. To give one example from the more recent past, in 1965 J. Oswald Sanders wrote *Robust in Faith: Men from God’s School*. It provides brief biographies of characters (all men!) of faith in the Old and New Testaments. So is “robust” a biblical word?

Not in any translation I use. However, *The Message*, a Bible paraphrase, uses it 26 times, and the New American Standard Bible translates Judges 3:29: “They struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men, and no one escaped.” The International Standard Version uses “robust” to describe the coming Day of the Lord. There are a few (three in all, as far as I could find) New Testament references in other translations, all referring to robust faith (Rom. 15:1; Titus 1:13 and 2:2). Most translations use “strong” instead of “robust.”

Clearly—and as dictionary definitions confirm—“robust” is a synonym for “strong,” whether used for physical or intellectual strength or strong faith. What, then, does biblically robust faith look like? The Romans 15:1 reference in the classic edition of the Amplified

Bible reads: “We who are strong (in our convictions and of robust faith) ought to bear with the failings *and* the frailties *and* the tender scruples of the weak; [we ought to help carry the doubts and qualms of others] and not to please ourselves.” The first of the Titus references (in the Weymouth New Testament) is a rebuke to Cretans who are “always liars ... (and) idle gluttons.” Titus is urged to rebuke them so they may be robust (translated “sound” in the NIV) in the faith. Then in Titus 2:2 (also in the WNT), “aged men” are urged to be “temperate, grave, sober-minded, robust in their faith, their love and their patience.”

As other passages make clear, robust faith is thus the opposite of lying and living as idle gluttons. Rather, it exhibits the virtues of Titus 2:2. It is a faith that does not look down on others, but is full of love and patience as well as being sound in content, meaning all that is revealed in the Bible culminating in Jesus Christ as savior and Lord (Jude 3). Those with a robust faith are able to teach others (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9), even to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim. 6:12), but to do so with humility, love, and patience, not pride and arrogance. **B**



J. Cameron Fraser is a retired Christian Reformed pastor in Lethbridge, Alta., who now concentrates on preaching and writing.

1. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “a robust faith”?
2. Do you think you currently have a “robust faith”? Why or why not?
3. The author suggests that a robust faith “does not look down on others.” How then would you characterize someone who is proud and arrogant in their faith?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

# Giving the Gift of Regret

Remorse is also a gift if the painful feeling leads us to do something.



Al Bandstra teaches sixth grade at Sioux Center Christian School. He is the author of *Beyond Control: Heart-Centered Classroom Climate and Discipline*. He and his family attend Faith Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

## “WHAT DID I DO?”

“Why are you always punishing me?”

Parents and teachers lament two troubling trends among today’s youth: greater disregard for others and a weakened sense of remorse when confronted about wrongdoing. How should we discipline when these tendencies appear in our children?

Remember that showing regret is painful. When we’re sorry, we admit we were wrong. Worse, if the mistake was motivated by unkindness, we’re faced with the reality that our problem resides within our hearts.

On the other hand, remorse is also a gift if the painful feeling leads us to do something. For example, regret should send us running to Jesus, where we grasp his atonement and move beyond our guilt. Grace-inspired remorse should also prompt us to apologize and make amends. Finally, we might think of regret as an elbow in the ribs to help us turn the other way when we’re tempted to repeat our mistakes.

How can mentors give the gift of regret to guilty young people? Let’s acknowledge that remorse cannot be forced; it’s a gift. Adults preoccupied with making children feel sorry activate defensiveness or shame. Defensiveness makes offenders sorry they were caught, but not always regretful about what they did. And shame might leave wrongdoers thinking they have fallen beyond redemption. Only God’s Spirit can assess true repentance and prompt inward change. However, adults can participate in the Spirit’s work by leading children through doors that open their hearts to repentance.

Healthy regret flows out of empathy. Children who empathize with others

need less “help” to feel guilty, and their apologies are usually more sincere.

Bringing about empathy requires waiting for calmness. Brain research shows that distress activates the limbic system, which spurs us to fight back or run away (i.e., sassing or denying). Gentleness in an environment of felt safety mobilizes the prefrontal cortex, that brain area that identifies with others. Remaining calm also encourages honesty: children who trust their caregivers won’t pounce on them are more likely to admit their guilt.

Not long ago, I grew irritated with a student who belittled a science demonstration I gave in my classroom. Even though he deserved to experience my anger, I spoke with him instead, after his classmates had exited. I explained how he had diminished my work and caused others to miss the wonder of creation I was highlighting. I didn’t expect an apology; I just wanted him to know how I felt. Surprisingly, he turned and said he was sorry.

Conversations about wrong don’t always lead to apologies, though. Should we then require children to show contrition? Perhaps. Consider these questions first:

- » Can the person trust that you hold his or her best interests in mind?
- » Do you set an example by acknowledging your own mistakes?
- » Have you spoken calmly and listened well?

If yes, you might gently lead the youth through the steps. Teaching the actions of regret is befitting as long as we don’t fixate on making the child feel repentant. In short, parents and mentors “start children off on the way they should go,” but we leave the work of creating new hearts up to God. **B**

# Reflective Reads and Listens for the Busiest Time of the Year

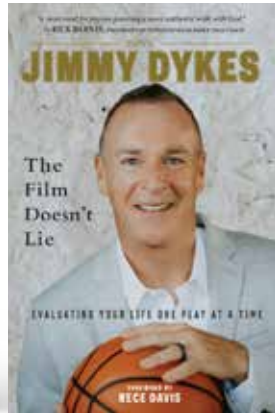


## Joy of Every Longing Heart

*By Sara Groves*

Reviewed by Paul Delger

On her new Christmas album, Sara Groves centers songs on individuals with roles in the nativity stories—the angels, Magi, and shepherds. Groves uses her simple, soothing voice to bring a sense of peace and calmness to the music. The album features nine songs, both traditional ones, such as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” “Angels from the Realms of Glory,” and “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen,” and original offerings including “We Wait,” “Tidings,” and “Let Our Gladness Have No End.” With a bluegrass and folk feel with a twang of steel guitar, this album offers opportunity for quiet reflection during the sometimes-chaotic Christmas season. (Fair Trade Services)



## The Film Doesn't Lie

*By Jimmy Dykes*

Reviewed by Paul Delger

ESPN commentator Jimmy Dykes challenges readers—particularly men—toward heartfelt self-examination in “The Film Doesn’t Lie.” Dykes addresses commitment, forgiveness, toughness, focus, and obedience with pithy maxims. On toughness, for example, he says, “I believe toughness can be defined as: you do what’s right when it’s hard to do what’s right.” And on focus: “Not everything that gets your attention deserves your attention.” Dykes said he struggled with different areas of the book. “Every chapter challenged me,” he said in a telephone interview. “Writing the book was a cleansing process for me.” Dykes offers biblical and present-day examples of people overcoming their obstacles, resulting in an easy read centering on a “deeper and more obedient walk with God.” (Triumph Books)



## The Beautiful Ashes of Gomez Gomez

*By Buck Storm*

Reviewed by Trevor Denning

Lives change in unexpected and hilarious ways in this novel about love, forgiveness, and Elvis’ ghost. Populated with quirky, memorable characters, Buck Storm’s novel spins a laugh-out-loud tale perfect for a lazy day. These are people we want to spend time with even at their most pathetic or most despicable. They’re relatable. Maybe we’ve never talked with a snake or the ghost of Elvis. But like Gomez Gomez, we’ve felt full of holes and wondered how to fill them. Like Jake, maybe we’ve held onto faith despite trials and still found ourselves at a loss for direction. But don’t be surprised if, after all the laughter, there’s some water in your eyes by the end of the story. (Kregel)



## All Creatures

*By Rain for Roots*

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

*All Creatures*, the new album from Rain for Roots, a group of women who write and sing songs for children, is a delight from start to finish. As the title suggests, many of the songs are about animals. It opens with a new setting of the hymn “All Things Bright and Beautiful.” Combined with the next song, “Hallelujah (Psalm 148),” we see the album’s two themes: nature and the psalms. You’ll soon find yourself singing along. That’s the real strength of this album: it combines simple yet thoughtful musical arrangements with rich texts. Rain for Roots has once again given us an album to be treasured by both children and adults. (Rain for Roots)



## The Beethoven Connection, Vol. 1

*By Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, pianist; sonatas by Clementi, Dussek, Hummel, and Wölfl*  
Reviewed by Otto Selles

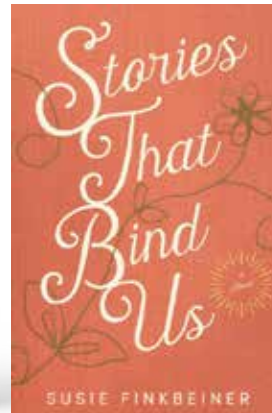
In his introduction to this album of sonatas by contemporaries of Beethoven, French piano virtuoso Jean-Efflam Bavouzet notes that those composers, including Clementi, Dussek, Hummel, and Wölfl, were no slouches when it came to writing and performing their own music. Bavouzet arranges his performances “in an order progressing from the most classical style to the most romantic,” allowing the listener to appreciate Beethoven’s genius in context as well as the changes in composition style during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. With fluid and flawless playing, Bavouzet scales many musical peaks, offering moments of cliff-hanging emotion and majestic tranquility. (Chandos Records)



## Restoration

*By Lecrae*  
Reviewed by Micah van Dijk

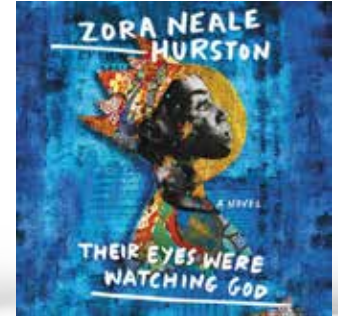
When Christian hip-hop artist Lecrae performed his song “Welcome to America” on *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon* in 2014, mainstream America was introduced to Lecrae’s passion for racial justice. Ironically, this declaration sparked intense criticism from some Christians. On Lecrae’s newest album, *Restoration*, he admits he was deeply shaken during this challenging journey, but he reveals a renewed spiritual peace and continues to build important bridges with the mainstream hip-hop community. We sense his faith is stronger and more mature than ever. Collaborations include John Legend, Kirk Franklin, and newer female hip-hop artists such as Blu June and Gwenn Bunn. (Reach Records)



## Stories That Bind Us: A Novel

*By Susie Finkbeiner*

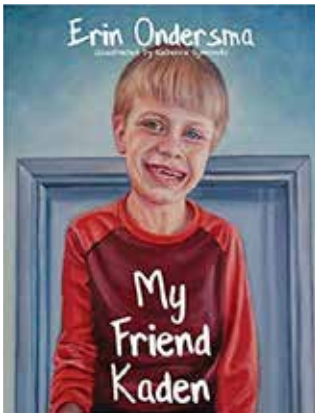
Reviewed by Cynthia Beach  
With a folksy voice, Betty Sweet draws us into the bygone world of the 1960s, when iconic Chevy Impalas fill the roads and the conflict in Vietnam hovers like a thundercloud. The novel revolves around an odd pairing: 40-year-old, newly widowed Betty and her 5-year-old biracial nephew, Hugo. Betty feeds Hugo’s heart with story after story, and he opens and grows despite all that has happened to him. Bit by bit, Betty relinquishes her rosy reality as she confronts her own suffering and then the suffering of those around her. What of those bruises on Hugo’s arms? What of her estranged sister’s seemingly endless struggle with mental illness? This novel’s meandering pace is refreshing as it reminds us of God’s presence with us in our suffering. (Revell)



## Their Eyes Were Watching God (Audiobook)

*By Zora Neale Hurston, narrated by Ruby Dee*  
Reviewed by Michelle Loyd-Paige

Originally published in 1937, this classic novel is a glimpse into Black life during the early years of the 20th century. It follows the life of Janie Crawford and the development of Eatonville, Fla. Four themes weave in and out of Janie’s story: longing for love, the role of women, racial oppression, and the will of God. The audiobook is narrated by Ruby Dee, whose rich voice masterfully conveys the earthiness and cadence of rural Southerners. Listening takes us back into time and connects us to the present; it reminds us of how far we have come and how far we have yet to go in race and gender relations. (HarperAudio)



## My Friend Kaden

*By Erin Andersma*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

This informative children's picture book shares the story of a boy named Kaden who has autism. Through the voice of Kaden's fictional day-care friend, children learn about the limitations Kaden faces, but more importantly they discover all that Kaden contributes to his family and friends. The narrator concludes, "If Kaden could use his voice to talk to you, he would say, 'I am different from you in a lot of ways. But mostly, I am just the same.'" Ondersma's warm, gentle illustrations and caring, sensitive narrative capture the beauty and uniqueness of a boy with autism and the loving community in which he spends his days. An excellent resource for parents, teachers, and caregivers to teach children about God's love and purpose for all people regardless of their abilities. (Black Rose Writing)

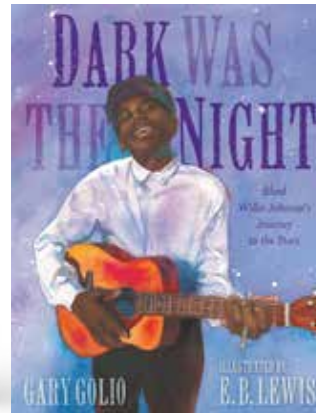


## Fins

*By Randy Wayne White*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In this fast-paced, adventurous novel for middle-school readers, Doc Ford, a marine biologist in Florida, invites three children—Luke, Maribel, and Sabina—to help him on a new research project: tagging sharks to protect the threatened shark population from poachers who cut off the creatures' fins to be used in shark fin soup. Luke has just moved from Ohio to Florida to live with his grandfather, leaving behind sadness and burdens too heavy for him to cope with. Sisters Maribel and Sabina are newcomers too. They escaped the hardships of life in Cuba on a raft, with all the dangers and deprivations that entailed. White weaves together adept characterization, marine biology, a compelling plot, and a glimpse of the reality faced by newcomers. Some profanity. (Roaring Brook Press)



## Dark Was the Night: Blind Willie Johnson's Journey to the Stars

*By Gary Golio, illustrated by E. B. Lewis*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Born in Texas in 1897, Willie Johnson grew up to love singing. When his father recognized Willie's passion, he made his son a cigar box guitar, and Willie learned to play it. A few years later, darkness descended on Willie's life. His mother died, and, at the age of 7 or 8, Willie became blind. In the years following, Willie became a recording artist. In 1977, decades after Willie's death, his song *Dark Was the Night* was chosen to "represent humanity" on the Golden Record (along with pieces by Bach and Beethoven and songs from various global cultures) carried into space on Voyager I. Renowned illustrator E. B. Lewis has once again created sensitive art for young children to complement Gary Golio's compassionate, stirring narrative. (Nancy Paulsen Books)



## The Summer We Found the Baby

*By Amy Hest*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Eleven-year-old Julie Sweet, her 6-year-old sister Martha, and their 12-year-old neighbor Bruno Ben-Eli live on Belle Beach, Long Island. It seems like an idyllic summer setting for the three children, but World War II, though being fought on foreign soil, has life-changing implications for them. What begins as an average day soon becomes anything but routine as Julie and Martha discover a baby in a basket on the steps of the new children's library and Bruno watches from a distance. What follows is a masterfully crafted unfolding of surprises, with poignant revelations of secrets and the children's private musings. Hest deals age-sensitively with the consequences of war and portrays families as places where children are loved, nurtured, and offered hope even when life is difficult. (Candlewick)



# Do All Religions Point to the Same God?

For all our striving  
to love one  
another ... we  
all fall short of  
God's character  
and glory.



Chris Schoon serves as the director of Faith Formation Ministries for the Christian Reformed Church and is the author of *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character* (Wipf & Stock, 2018).

**ON A RECENT FLIGHT TO HOUSTON**, I figured I'd spend my time reading and napping. As I was reading, the man next to me leaned over and asked, "Is that book religious?" He quickly added, "Are you a Christian?" In the conversation that followed, Carlos\* talked freely about his life story. I mostly listened, but shared some of my story as well.

After one pause, he stated this: "I believe God is love, and as long as we live with love we're all following the same God." I said a quick prayer of "Holy Spirit, lead us," and then asked him how he came to believe that. Our conversation meandered through more life stories. At a few different points, he asked me what I thought.

Though not in a linear fashion, I shared three responses as we talked that afternoon. One was to affirm that, indeed, God is love and that we come to know something of God through experiencing and witnessing love. In fact, it is hopeful and encouraging that Carlos could see love in other people and say, "This way of life must be connected to God."

The Belgic Confession's second article teaches us that God reveals something of God's own character through the fabric of the universe, including in healthy human relationships. So when we see love in action, we are glimpsing God inviting us to come and get to know God.


Another response was that his statement fits with a long history of humanity trying to seek God's face. Carlos' longing for all of us to end up at the same God through our own efforts to love each other is a contemporary spin on an older question: "Do all religions point to the same God?" Essentially, if the end result is that we love others,

does it really matter which religion helped us get there?

Our track record, however, presents a challenge here. We haven't actually loved each other all that well. In fact, we have gone to war in the name of our religions, religious leaders have abused others in horrific ways, and ordinary religious folks still cling to patterns of racism, classism, and misogyny. For all our striving to love one another, and even though God's self-revelation is so evident that we are "left without excuse," we all fall short of God's character and glory (Rom. 3:23). None of our religious efforts can save us.

My third response to Carlos was that I believe the Bible points to a different way, one in which God reaches out to save us. The second article of the Belgic Confession explains that there is another way we come to know God—a way that provides all we need "for God's glory and for our salvation." While creation tells us in general that there is a God, God's fullest self-revelation is found in Jesus Christ, whom the Holy Spirit continues to make known to us through the Bible.

From this perspective, while we can affirm God's self-revelation in creation, including through our relationships, as followers of Jesus Christ we recognize that all our religious efforts, even our attempts to love one another, are insufficient. Ultimately, it's not about whether we humans can take different paths to find our way to the same God, but about the one God taking a singular way in Jesus Christ to come and find us.

\* Name changed because I do not have a way of contacting him for his permission to share this story. 

# When We 'Other' Another

The problem with othering for Christians is that it's exactly the opposite of how Christ calls us to live.



Jenna C. Hoff is a freelance writer and editor in Edmonton, Alta. She is a member of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church.

**ONE EVENING LATE LAST YEAR** I found myself at an airport on the outskirts of the city. The night was cold and dark, and the airport as a whole was fairly quiet—except for the bustling commotion of an excited group gathered at the arrival gate waving a brightly colored welcome sign.

That group was made up of several members of my church family, people who had spent the past four years involved in fundraising, seemingly endless paperwork, beseeching prayer, and a faith that God would bring all their efforts to fruition.

We were waiting at that gate for three young men, brothers who had faced incredible hardship throughout their lives, including the loss of both parents, multiple experiences of fleeing for their lives, and the desperation of refugee camps.

With us was a man, the brothers' uncle, who for many years—and in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds—had held onto hope that one day his nephews would join him in Canada.

And then, suddenly, there they were, three young men the age of my own kids, coming through that gate. They ran into the tearful embrace of their uncle's loving arms and into new lives of safety and promise.

It took all my strength not to burst out crying.

That experience deeply moved me, and even months later my eyes still well with tears at the memory.

My heart will never be quite the same. At a very profound level, watching the welcoming of these brothers caused me to reconsider what it means to wholeheartedly embrace and welcome others into my life—and

also to consider what it means not to welcome another, to be closed of heart. It happens much more frequently in our society and lives, even in our churches and families, than we might ever expect, and the roots of this can be so insidious as to be almost imperceptible.

## The 'Other'

Simply put, I believe this closed-heartedness begins when we react to or categorize another human being as "other," however unintentionally. And this is wrong.

I see this "otherness" in how, when we encounter someone who is different than us in some way, our hearts tend to automatically build walls. We're not as open. We don't smile as widely at them as at someone we identify as "like me." We don't invite that person into our lives or allow them the opportunity to earn a place in our hearts as we do with another. If we are truly honest, we all do this—you and me both.

This "otherness" is a categorization that many people of color regularly experience. As highlighted recently through the Black Lives Matter and Indigenous Lives Matter movements, this "otherness" is based on inequities and injustices that result in vastly different treatment and significantly different opportunities for people of color, even to the point of life and death.

Recognizing people as "other" always divides and excludes instead of bringing us together.

Another categorization that excludes—one that hits close to home for my family—is the "otherness" that often exists in a world that can be very

inaccessible to people who live with disabilities and diversities.

I see this in the incredible struggle it has been to find employment opportunities and build relationships for my young adult kids who live with developmental diversities.

I also see this myself when I am not able to enter certain shops, restaurants, or other buildings simply because they have a small step at the door that my power wheelchair cannot go up.

Even more, I sometimes sense it in how people act around me when they first meet me. I can very much tell when people see me as “disabled” instead of as “Jenna.”

Sometimes strangers demand, “What’s wrong with you?!” before they even ask my name (if they ever ask it). Other times people will ask the typically abled person who is with me to speak for me, as when waitresses take one look at my wheelchair and communication machine and ask my husband what I would like to order.

I also see this “otherness” in a society that deems some people of worthy of welcome as neighbors and others worthy of languishing in refugee camps, many of which brim with hardships such as poor sanitation, food insecurity, overcrowding, significant levels of violence, and a very high risk of sexual assault, especially toward women and girls.

Why does our society deem some people as worthy of kindness, dignity, and respect (e.g., a well-dressed businessman in a suit and tie) and others as far less worthy (e.g., a homeless woman living with mental illness)? Why do we Christians often seem to do this just as much as general society?

How is it that we can look away when another is suffering? Why do we see a fellow human being as “other”?

I think it is because often, especially in a time of challenge or struggle, our natural reaction is to run toward protectionism and self-interest, to go on high alert against anyone and anything we think could hurt us or threaten our position in life. Sometimes that heightened sense of vigilance and mistrust is a trauma response.

This year, 2020, has been difficult for many of us, so we need to guard especially against this hypervigilant trauma reaction that results in unjust “othering” toward our fellow human beings.


### The Christian Response

The problem with othering for Christians is that it’s exactly the opposite of how Christ calls us to live. Jesus was known for loving and welcoming all types of people: women, children, the sick, the hurting, the struggling, those with varying amounts of wealth, and people of different ethnicities.

He didn’t just love people who looked like him—a good thing for me, as I am of an ethnicity, gender, and physical (dis)ability level different than Jesus was when he was on earth. How easy it would be for Jesus to look at me and see “other,” and how incredible that he instead looks at me and calls me “sister.”

Our calling as Christ’s followers is to look past our initial natural tendencies to “otherize” others, to realize that there is no “other” even in a time of challenge, pain, and struggle in our own lives.

We must hold onto the words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

If we are all “one,” then there is no “other.” Christ is for us all. How can we not dedicate our lives to helping, embracing, and welcoming people in need, those who are seen and classified by this broken world as “other”? 

**DEADLINES:** 11/2/20 for December; 11/30/20 January. Subject to availability. Details online. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

**PRICES:** Most ads are \$0.42<sup>US</sup> per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.35<sup>US</sup> per character and \$50 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

**TO ADVERTISE:** Place your classified ad online at [thebanner.org/classifieds](http://thebanner.org/classifieds) or email it to [classifieds@thebanner.org](mailto:classifieds@thebanner.org) or fax it to 616-224-0834. Questions? Call 616-224-0725.

**Announcement of Candidacy**

We are pleased to announce that **NAMJU BAE** 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 **TRAVIS JAMIESON** 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 **AHNNA CHO** 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.

We are pleased to announce that **DEREK ELMI-BUURSMA** 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 **NATHANIEL SCHMIDT** 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.

**Available for Call**

The council of the Peace CRC of Menno, S. D. announces that **REV. STEVE MOERMAN** is eligible for call. He may be contacted at [pastor-moerman@yahoo.com](mailto:pastor-moerman@yahoo.com) or 605-759-0954.

**Church Positions Available**

**ASSOCIATE PASTOR** Sunnyside CRC in Sunnyside, WA is seeking an associate pastor to help us realize our vision of "connecting the valley to Christ." Job description is available at [suncrc.org](http://suncrc.org). If interested contact [pastor@suncrc.org](mailto:pastor@suncrc.org)

**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 [bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com](mailto:bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com). Job description and church profile are available on the Portal.

**LEAD PASTOR** Cornerstone Prison Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota is seeking a lead pastor. We are prayerfully searching for a relational, self motivated and strong in biblical knowledge pastor. He must also be confident as well as compassionate in a prison setting. Please contact Gord at 507-215-2530 or email [office@cornerstonepcsd.org](mailto:office@cornerstonepcsd.org).

**MUSIC & MEDIA COORDINATOR:** Graafschap CRC of Holland, MI is seeking a part-time Music & Media Coordinator to work 20 flexible hours a week with a focus on our Sunday Worship Services. Follow the Link for more information and how to apply: <http://www.graafschapcrc.org/job-opportunities>

**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](http://www.inglewoodcrc.org) or email [pastorsearch@inglewoodcrc.org](mailto:pastorsearch@inglewoodcrc.org)

**WORSHIP DIRECTOR RIVER ROCK CHURCH,** located in Rockford Michigan, currently is searching for a part-time Worship Director. More information at [www.riverrockcommunity.com](http://www.riverrockcommunity.com).

**Congregational Announcements**

**MARANATHA CHURCH INVITES WINTER VISITORS TO WORSHIP WITH US BEGINNING DEC 6** We meet at 10 am in Farnsworth Hall, 6159 E University, Mesa, AZ 85205. Our special rules to protect your health in worship are found on our Facebook page: Maranatha Community Church. For more information, call Harry Weidenaar 206-595-9852.

**Worship Services**

**WINTER WORSHIP IN BRADENTON FL.** Bradenton Chapel invites you to join us for Sunday Worship and Wed. Bible Study. Visit our website at [bradentonchapel.com](http://bradentonchapel.com)

**Birthdays**

**BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS**

**JOAN TIGCHELAAR;** Living faithfully, loving family and laughing frequently after 100 years of practice! Happy Birthday December 8, 2020. We love you: Arnie, Sharon, Carol (deceased), Paul, Jennifer, nine grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren.



**REV. FRANK EINFELD** of 725 Baldwin St #177, Jenison, MI 49428 celebrated his 100th birthday on September 23. Husband of the late Angie Huls Einfeld and of the late Hildred Vonhof Einfeld. Father of Sharon (Dave) Gould, Doug (Nancy), Dave (Xiaoyan), & Carl (Gloria). Grandfather of 10, great grandfather of 14.

**BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS**

**ANGIE VANDEN HEUVEL** celebrated her 95th birthday on October 9 along with her husband Dennis, children Jack & Karen Vanden Heuvel, Doug & Dawn Terpstra, and Doug & Nancy Einfeld, 11 grandchildren and spouses, and 21 great-grandchildren. We thank God for His love and faithfulness in Angie's life.

**LOIS GESINK TINKLENBERG** Celebrates her 95th birthday on Nov. 19, 2020. She is the wife of the late Adrian Tinklenberg. She lives at 12 S. Zeeland Parkway, Zeeland, MI 49464. Her children, Rachel & Paul Spek, Nancy & Bruce Lutke, 8 grand children & 1 great grandchild celebrate with her. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

**NELLIE DEVRIES** (Nydam) celebrates her 95th birthday on November 7, 2020. She is the wife of the late Eddie DeVries and resides at 343 Williams St, Uxbridge, MA 01569. Her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are thankful for her love and Godly example.

**BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS**

**GERRY (BRAAKSMA) DEYOUNG** celebrates her 90th birthday on November 7, 2020. She was married for 64 years to the late Alvin H. DeYoung and resides at 18428-1/2 Roseton #11, Artesia, CA 90701. Her children, Susan (Diek) Meyer, Nancy (Stan) Winters, Bruce (Michele) DeYoung plus 14 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren are thankful for her generous, happy spirit and grateful to our Lord for her great health and long life! Happy Birthday to our Mom, Grandma and Gigi!

**MARIAN BREUKER**, 121 N Decker, Fremont, MI, celebrates her 90th birthday November 5. Wife of the late Andrew Breuker, her children Dale & Pam, Phil & Jodi, the late Larry & Laurie, Andy & Judy, Jim & Sarah, Mark & Bobbie, Mary Jane & Ron Baylor, Pam & Larry Orgeck, along with 35 grandchildren and 37 great grandchildren praise God for her life and the blessing she is to so many.

## Anniversaries

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS

**BULTHUIS**, Peter and Lorraine, (Ripon, California) celebrated their 60th anniversary September 30, 2020. Congratulations dear parents with love from your family: Connie & Doug Sikma, Ray & Katie, Duane & Mona, Deanna & William Sterious, Rachele & Jake Dobbins, grandchildren and great grandchildren. We thank God for the love, faithfulness and legacy of our Christian parents.



**KOSTER**, Ed and Joyce (nee Brinks), of 6363 Mansfield Ct, Hudsonville MI 49426, celebrate 60 years of marriage on November 18th.

Their children, the late Rev. Timothy & Mary Koster, Beth & Brian Meekhof, and Revs. Steven & Deb Koster, with 10 grandchildren & families, give thanks to God for their legacy. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

## Obituaries

**DE YOUNG**, Marjorie (Oling), age 97, of South Holland, IL, died on May 29, 2020. Preceded in death by her husband Henry D. De Young MD, daughter Sylvia and son in law John C. Groenewold. Survived by descendants; Jeanne (Larry) Bright, Barbara Groenewold, David (Joan) De Young and James A. (Cheryl) De Young, 6 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren. We praise God for what our mom has done for us.



**FLETCHER**, Kenneth, 77, of Kalamazoo, MI, passed peacefully on September 25, 2020. He loved athletics, playing basketball and baseball at Calvin College (1961-65), and serving Heritage CRC and many ministries. Ken taught,

coached, and was AD at Kalamazoo Christian High School for 40 years. He leaves behind his loving wife of 56 years, Judy (Oosterhouse) and children, Dan (Lori) Fletcher, Dr. Sara (James) Patterson, Jr., and Mary (Paul) Schuurmans, 8 grand-children and 6 great-grandchildren. We praise God for Ken's life and for the Christian influence he had on those around him.



**GEORGE TAMMINGA**, age 91, went to be with His Lord on September 26, 2020. Beloved husband of the late Henrietta Tamminga; loving father of Cindy Tamminga, Kristy (Dan) Bootsma, and Scott (Denise) Tamminga; devoted grandfather of

Joshua (Charis), Joseph (Alyssa) and Matthew Bootsma, Nathaniel, Kathryn, and Micah Tam-

minga; fond brother of the late William (the late Hazel) Tamminga, the late Jessie (the late Gerrit) De Boer, the late Albert (Dorothy) Tamminga, the late James (the late Lyda) Tamminga, the late Wilma (the late Gerry) Van Leeuwen, the late Luke (Eleanor) Tamminga, Millie (the late William) Dekker, and Joe Tamminga; uncle of many nieces and nephews. George was devoted to Christian education, in which he served for 35 years. The majority of his time was spent as principal at Timothy Christian Elementary School from 1970-1994. George served in the United States Navy during the Korean War. He remained in the Naval Reserves, serving his country a total of 35 years. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools, 188 W. Butterfield Rd., Elmhurst, IL 60126 or Elim Christian Services, 13020 Central Ave., Crestwood, IL 60418 are appreciated.

**MULDER**, Marguerite, age 102, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed peacefully into the arms of Jesus her Lord and Savior on September 10, 2020. Marguerite was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers, Clarence (Doris) and Robert (Roberta) DeHaan, and by son Donald Mulder. She is survived by three sons: Jim (Ruth) Mulder, Ray (Linda) Mulder and Bob (Sheryl) Mulder and sister Dorothy Vander Zee; nine grandchildren; eighteen great-grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews.

**OTTE**, Henry "Hank" Wm., age 81 of Dyer IN passed away on August 24, 2020. He is

survived by his loving wife of 59 years, Mary (nee Bosch), his children, Rodney (Jeana), Kevin (Wendy) and Larry (Johnna), 8 grand kids and 3 great grand kids. Hank was in Christian education for 29 years - first teaching at Highland Christian School and then becoming principal at Illiana Christian High School. For another 17 years he enjoyed being a brick salesman. Upon retirement he taught a class for prisoners at Westville Correctional Facility, volunteered at ETC Resale Shoppe, and served in many other leadership roles.

**TUBERGEN**, David G., MD went to be with his Lord August 28, 2020 in Grand Rapids, MI at age 83. David was born March 9, 1937 to Renard and Annette (Hertel) Tubergen in Grand Rapids, MI. On June 13, 1958, he married Marianne Peuler in Grand Rapids, MI. David graduated from Calvin College and University of Michigan Medical School. After completing a fellowship in pediatric oncology at University Hospital, Ann Arbor, he did a research fellowship at Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation in La Jolla, CA. Among his various appointments, he was Senior Vice President and Medical Director at Children's Hospital Denver, Professor at the University of Tennessee School of Medicine, Vice Chairman of the Department of Hematology at St Jude Children's Research Hospital, Director of the Pediatric Clinic at MD Anderson, and Medical Director MD Anderson Physicians Network. David was most proud of his work as Principal Investigator on the historic clinical

## STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

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13. Publication Name: The Banner; 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: September 2020.

15. Extent and Nature of Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	77,487	76,335
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
(1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	52,771	51,961
(2) Paid In-County Subscriptions	0	0
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution	19,525	14,597
(4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	3	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation	72,299	66,558
d. Free Distribution by Mail		
(1) Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541	0	0
(2) In-County as Stated on Form 3541	0	0
(3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	12	0
(4) Free Distribution Outside the Mail	0	0
e. Total Free Distribution	12	0
f. Total Distribution	72,311	66,558
g. Copies Not Distributed	5,177	9,777
h. Total	77,488	76,335
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	99.98%	100%

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete.

Jane E. Hilbrand, Operations Manager

trials that dramatically improved therapy for acute lymphoblastic leukemia. The trials conducted by the national Children's Cancer Group demonstrated the optimal pace and schedule of chemotherapy and led to a better understanding of how to manage many forms of cancer in addition to childhood leukemia. David's bibliography includes 72 scientific papers and book chapters. He was a member of Caledonia Christian Reformed Church. David was an avid fisherman and golfer. He was preceded in death by his wife of 60 years, Marianne. He will be missed by his children, Joyce (Jim) Desmond of Tampa, FL, Renard (Cheri) Tubergen of Caledonia, MI and Jennifer (Larry) Warden of Boise, ID; grandchildren, Sean Desmond, Lauren (Ian) Lynch, Berend Tubergen, Boyd Tubergen, Brice Warden and Brock Warden; and his loving sister Jan Tubergen. David was preceded in death by his sister, Renee Tubergen.



**VAN NAMEN, Rita, 98**, Palos Park IL, entered glory on September 9, 2020. Preceded in death by husband Jacob, son Tony, granddaughter Jacqueline Coakley, daughter-in-law Cyndy; beloved mother of Jack/Carolynn, John/Tracy, Joyce/Rick Mast, Ineke, Jim/Barbara; 14 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren. Memorials to Faith CRC Tinley Park IL and Trinity Christian College. Great is Thy faithfulness!



**WYBENGA, Ferdinand Augustus (Fred)**, age 86, died peacefully at home in Tallmadge, Ohio on August 31, 2020. Fred was born in Alphen a/d Rijn, The Netherlands, and immigrated to the USA with his family in

1950. He graduated from the University of Maryland with a Mechanical Engineering degree, then worked 44 years for the Babcock and Wilcox Company. Fred is survived by his beloved wife of 57 years, Sandra, children Susan (Jamie George), Thomas, and Timothy (Susan Lyon), grandchildren Robert (Bethany), Maggie, Annie, Mia, Jane, Kees, Mitchell, Marieke, and Cassandra. Fred rested in the blessed assurance of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1, that he belonged--body and soul, in life and in death--to his faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. Memorial gifts to Haven of Rest Ministries ([www.HavenOfRest.org](http://www.HavenOfRest.org)) are much appreciated by the Wybenga family.

### Employment

**ADA CHRISTIAN SCHOOL** is seeking candidates for the position of principal beginning in the 2021-22 school year. The principal is the top administrative position at Ada Christian School and is responsible for all aspects of instruction, personnel, operations and public relations. Ada Christian School is a PK-8 school located in Ada, MI. Please send inquiries to: [search@adachristian.org](mailto:search@adachristian.org)

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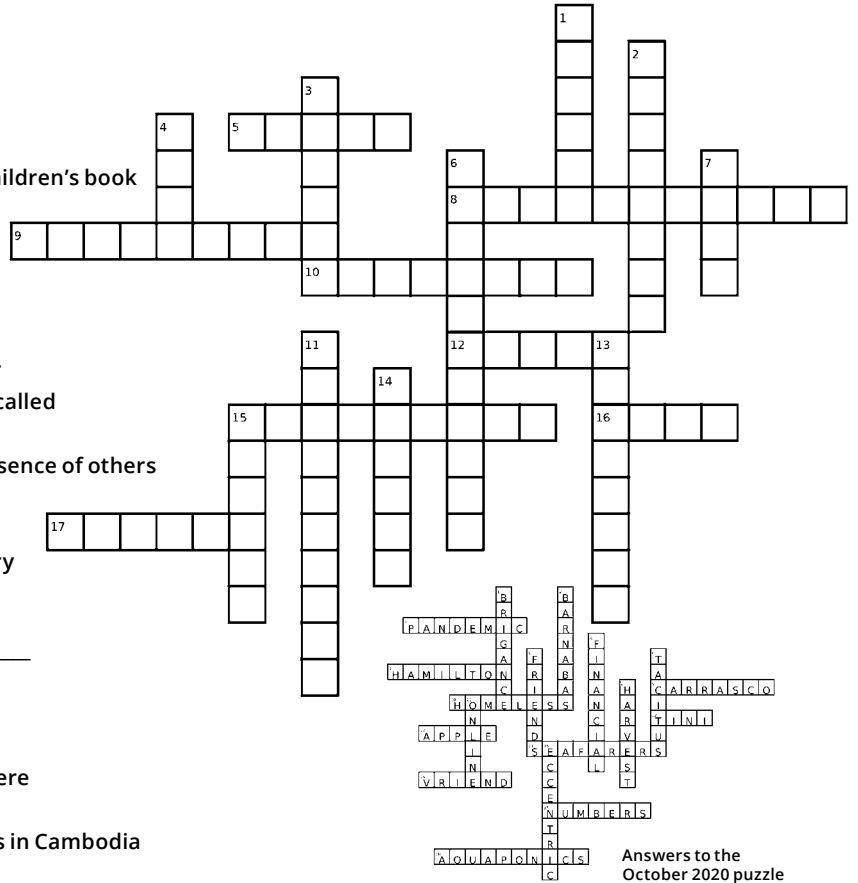
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

**Down:**

1. Blind \_\_\_\_\_ Johnson, blues artist and subject of a children's book
2. Where three British Columbia congregations hosted worship
3. A synonym for strong
4. Remorse is a \_\_\_\_\_ when it leads to repentance
6. Unwarranted violation of religious liberty
7. The first name of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* author
11. The organization best known for SERVE trips is now called ThereforeGo \_\_\_\_\_
13. A creed that helps us verbalize our beliefs in the presence of others
14. This confession teaches that God reveals his character through creation
15. Bonnie Nicholas is retiring from Safe \_\_\_\_\_ Ministry

**Across:**

5. Alberta churches' family Bible event, Safe in the \_\_\_\_\_
8. Ironically, \_\_\_\_\_ people don't know they are.
9. *All \_\_\_\_\_*, the new album from Rain for Roots
10. Multicultural church in Richmond, B.C.
12. One hundred years ago the CRC sent missionaries here
15. Everything God created is \_\_\_\_\_
16. A leadership development program for young adults in Cambodia
17. Someone called to preach God's Word



Answers to the October 2020 puzzle



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