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BY THE NUMBERS

In last year's denomination survey, here's the top 20 ways we completed the sentence, "To me, the term 'Christian Reformed' means...."

What it Means to be Christian Reformed

| | |
|---|-------|
| Christ-centered | 84.0% |
| Scripture-centered | 81.3% |
| Faith formation for all ages | 60.9% |
| "Every square inch" belongs to Christ | 58.8% |
| Worship-filled | 55.8% |
| Welcoming | 51.9% |
| Conservative | 49.5% |
| Traditional. | 48.6% |
| Spirit-centered. | 43.0% |
| Intellectual | 39.8% |
| Inviting | 39.4% |
| Intentional | 38.5% |
| Community-oriented | 36.7% |
| Justice-seeking | 34.6% |
| Evolving. | 33.1% |
| Wholistic (word and life) | 32.2% |
| Evangelical | 31.4% |
| Academic. | 29.2% |
| Relevant | 29.1% |
| Diverse | 25.9% |

The survey was conducted in January and February 2020 by the Calvin University Center for Social Research. A total of 769 participants completed the survey.

WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: Christian Universities Report Record Enrollment
- » News: Campus Ministries Connect Amid COVID Pandemic
- » Podcast: *SHE*, by Jordan Lee Dooley
- » Book: *The Key to Everything*, by Valerie Fraser Luesse
- » Streaming: 3 Literary Adaptations: *Enola Holmes*, *Rebecca*, and *The Personal History of David Copperfield*

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Former Things

Didy Prinzen // Remembering the beginning of a church.



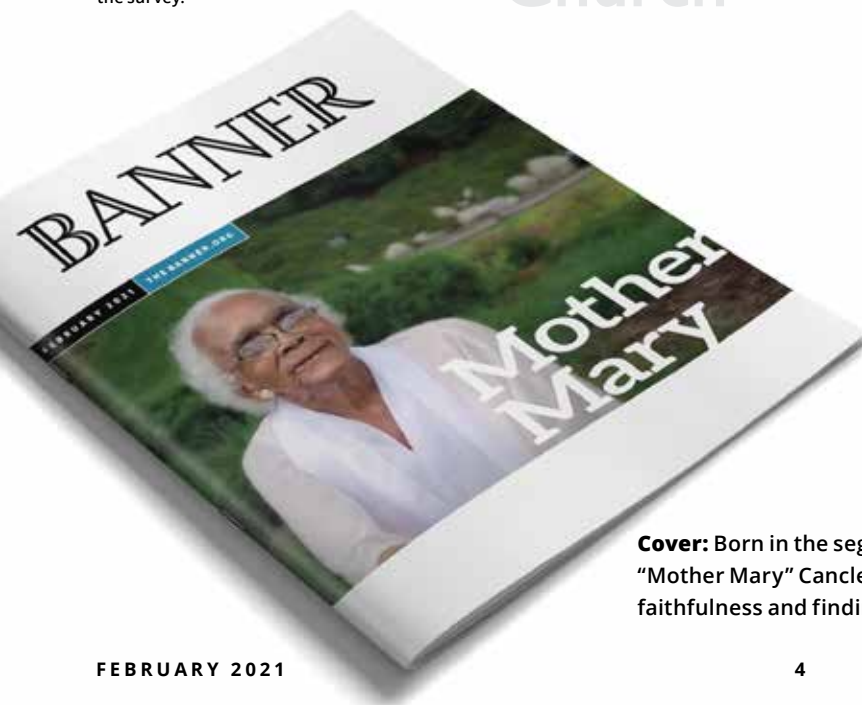
Managing Anger in Troubled Times

Judy Cook // Anger is normal. Rage is a deadly sin.



The Other Six: 'Mother Mary': A Matriarch at Madison Square Church

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Correction

The status of Do Hyeong Kim's release from ministry (reported in "Classis Watch," Jan. 2021) was not recorded in Classis Lake Erie's meeting minutes of Oct. 3, 2020. *The Banner* has been alerted to this omission and wishes to clarify that Do Hyeong Kim was honorably released.

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Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



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God Is Not Colorblind

By avoiding conversations on race, or by “not noticing” race, we can inadvertently overlook injustice and discrimination.



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

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

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

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

A VERY COMMON anti-racism approach of North American white Christians is called racial colorblindness. Even using the description “white Christians” is problematic—they would counter that there is no such thing as white or Black Christians, only Christians. This is typical of the colorblind approach.

But God is not racially colorblind. True, God shows no partiality or favoritism (Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9). But God does not erase our ethnic or racial differences either. We need to avoid two extremes. On the one hand, we cannot make our racial identities define us so much so that we are divided. At the other extreme, we cannot ignore or dismiss race entirely as if it does not matter at all.

In Revelation 7:9, the apostle John saw a great multitude from “every nation, tribe, people and language” worshipping God in heaven (see also Rev. 5:9). He further saw that “the glory and honor of the nations will be brought into” the new, heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. 21:26). The original Greek word translated as “nation” is *ethnos*, from where we get the word “ethnicity.” Our ethnic differences will remain in God’s new heaven and earth, but united in our love and worship of God.


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”—does not mean that our ethnic and racial differences are erased. After all, our gender differences aren’t erased. But it does mean that in Christ the social barriers dividing races, cultures, genders, and economic classes are broken down. Hence Paul rebuked Peter for withdrawing from Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:11-14).

Because God has ordained that I was born Asian, to ignore or dismiss my

Asian identity is to ignore something that God has made to be part of who I am. That seems disrespectful of the God who created me and every person of color. See and recognize the differences, but don’t define or limit people by their differences.

The colorblind approach has a laudable goal of getting rid of racism by creating a world where race no longer matters. But we cannot get to that world by everyone merely acting as if it’s already here. Simply ignoring race—not talking about or drawing attention to race, racial issues, and differences—without intentional reconciliation efforts and racial justice efforts won’t get rid of racism. It’s hard to educate people against racism if we can’t use racial descriptions such as white and Black. In fact, by avoiding conversations on race, or by “not noticing” race, we can inadvertently overlook injustice and discrimination. Racial colorblindness can unintentionally make us blind to racial injustice.

As far as I know, we don’t use this type of approach to any other social ills. We don’t tackle discrimination against people with disabilities, for example, by simply ignoring their disabilities.

The individualistic approach needs to be complemented by other approaches. Yes, every individual needs Jesus. But systems also need to be reformed. Remember that most slaveholders in America’s past loved Jesus too. So did the Afrikaners who created apartheid in South Africa. But neither social reform alone nor individual change alone will rid us of racism. Ultimately, only God can bring the lasting change we need. As we faithfully pursue our biblically informed anti-racism work, we have confident hope that Christ will one day usher in his new heaven and earth, where all of us, with all our differences, are united as one in God’s love. 



REPLY ALL

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

Neland Avenue CRC

A Council of Delegates letter expressing disappointment with the Neland Avenue congregation for “breaking covenant” assumes the denomination’s unity is based on adherence to a code of conduct, with all its pitfalls of legalism and hypocrisy (“Council of Delegates Discusses Neland Avenue CRC,” November 2020). The early church dealt with conformity of conduct related to food, keeping holy days, and circumcision. Very big issues in those days. Paul says the unity of the church is not found in a common code of conduct; it is found in our common love for Jesus (Romans 14; Galatians). If Paul could proclaim such freedom in Christ 2,000 years ago, what is wrong with us today? Paul says what you do matters not if you do it unto the Lord. We are not held together by conformity to a code of conduct, but by our love for Jesus, manifested in a rainbow variety of different behaviors.

» Nick Loenen // Ladner, B.C.

In regard to Neland Avenue CRC’s position on installing a woman in a same-sex marriage as a deacon, I agree with their Mr. Koster that it was “shocking” that accepting a person in a same-sex relationship would not be against denominational policy. Annetta VanderLugt, a member of Neland, says, “I think an issue like this isn’t going to change in the denomination unless someone pushes a little, just like what happened with women in office.” VanderLugt should be reminded that that decision pushed tens of thousands of people out of our denomination. I agree with Neland member Michelle Dykstra, who said, “I think that

unfortunately our church is following cultural norms and listening to the ways of the world.” Years ago, the CRC’s denominational objective was 300,000 members by the year 2000. If Synod approves (of) the Neland CRC decision, I predict we will have fewer than 200,000 by 2030. It will also have a negative effect on applications to our denominational university.

» John L. Steen // Franklin Lakes, N.J.

Same-Sex Relationships

The November 2020 *Banner*, speaking about same-sex relationships, had a loving concern for (those with) same-sex orientation (Same-Sex Relationships and the CRC). However, Jesus’ definition of marriage in Matthew 19:4-6 did not come out clearly. In this passage, Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24, telling us that a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. This is a creation ordinance. Creation ordinance is part of our Reformed thinking. ... Further, we have the responsibility to think biblically, not existentially. Existential thinking can cause wrong understandings of Scripture. We must, as in the Reformation, let the Word of God stand. What the Bible says, not what we feel, must guide our thinking. ... Let us not harbor thinking that would cause God to remove our denomination’s lampstand from its place. Let us find ways to show love and care for our same-sex-oriented (brothers and sisters) while not crossing the biblical line.

» Calvin Hoogstra // Holland, Mich.

The two sides of the argument are driven by either staunch adherence to the commands of God-breathed Scripture or by the influence of a progressive cultural movement toward love and acceptance despite what is written in Scripture. To illustrate this point, I quote from one of the pieces shared in the article by Fred

Heerema: “I would urge the CRC to stop thinking that the Bible alone has the answer.” This brings to question, then: Are those who are eloping with this school of thought victims of blind naiveté, kidnapped by claims of “love” being the golden answer? Or is this an instance of willful ignorance, where one has read the Bible, heard what God has to say, and hardened one’s heart towards God’s commands? I fear for what the future holds, but take comfort in knowing no matter how compromised this church becomes by the secular world, we can always turn to the Scripture for truth and guidance.

» Anna Zeerip // Wyoming, Mich.

Abortion and Voting

In his response to the question “Is abortion a non-negotiable factor in a Christian’s voting?” (“Big Questions,” November 2020), Prof. Barkman answers that question in the affirmative. But it’s not that simple. The real question politically is whether enacting legislation that punishes folks for abortions really saves lives—including the lives of babies and mothers—or ruins them. For example, when Canada dropped its abortion laws, both sides of the political divide could now cooperate to prevent abortions by educating, counseling, and supporting those who see this to be their only option. So it’s not so clear that we should vote for a government that levels threats of prosecution, criminalization, and punishment over one that opts for prevention through openness, education, help, hope, and healing. ... Here is a (rare) case where imposing a seemingly just law might actually destroy more human beings than it saves, which defeats its very purpose.

» Bob De Moor // Edmonton, Alta.

Listening Well

This is a good article (“A Theology of Listening,” December 2020). The author is in a good position to write on this subject well. What I see is having a child with Down syndrome is a blessing. They have

Mental Illness and Moral Judgments

so much to teach us. It is refreshing to be reminded we need to slow down, put aside our personal agendas, and practice the art of listening. That is one love language, I think. People need to feel they are valued and worth listening to. The best gift is the gift of time spent with another for each other's personal growth.
» Chris Kredit // online comment

Striving for Unity

This is a well-thought-out piece and is timely as well ("Striving for Unity as We Pastor Through a Pandemic," November 2020). The turmoil caused by the current pandemic will have all kinds of unintended consequences that are almost impossible to oversee or anticipate. In this climate, the CRCNA has a member church (possibly others) that is (are) challenging the biblical interpretation of marriage. ... For years I have wondered why those who are not happy with the CRC positions cannot muster the integrity to follow their conscience and find a church that has already dealt with this (or other) issue(s).

» Harry Boessenkool // online comment

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- » Event-Oriented Lives
- » Christmas in the Trenches

EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN me that there are still those within the Christian Reformed Church who believe that those with depression or other mental illnesses should "pray it away" rather than take medication. Nobody in our denomination would dream of saying that to someone with heart disease or arthritis, but if you have a mental illness, people feel entitled to make assumptions about your morals or your spiritual life.

Unless people know you intimately, they have no business assuming that having a mental illness is synonymous with a moral failure or spiritual wandering away from God. Prayer does not replace medications for any condition, whether physical or mental. It is not either/or, but both/and. I find that too many people are afflicted with tunnel vision and binary thinking in life, and they should expand their intellectual horizons a good deal more.

In reality, things are seldom as cut and dried as people try to make them out to be. Could that be because oversimplifying issues gives them a false sense of security? If so, it's an illusion, and that illusion creates a lack of empathy and compassion toward those who suffer from psychiatric disorders. Those who suffer from mental illnesses have enough trouble without having to deal with people's assumptions on top of it all. Helpful resources for learning about psychiatric disorders include the websites mentalwellnesstoday.com and network.crcna.org/disability-concerns.com, and the book *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges*, by John Swinton.

In reality, things are seldom as cut and dried as people try to make them out to be.

One thing people should know about severe mental illnesses is that medications don't cure them. All they do is control the "positive" symptoms. If you stop taking them, those symptoms will start reappearing. That's why telling people to pray away their illness is such bad advice. God has allowed people to develop mental illnesses for the same reason some people have heart disease or cerebral palsy: it's a consequence of original sin and nothing they did. Nobody deserves to start hearing voices out of the blue that tell them they're worthless and should kill themselves. We must stop judging and show compassion to those who live with such disorders. 



Michèle Gyselinck is an artist and a member of First Christian Reformed Church, Montreal, Que. She has been a Disability Concerns regional advocate for Classis Eastern Canada since 2016.



Members stand outside the church in the early days at Bloomfield Christian Reformed Church.

Former Things

By Didy Prinzen

As I sat there in the back of the church, attending the funeral of a dear friend in the church where I had started my life in Canada almost 70 years ago, I found my thoughts drifting back to the first post-war immigrants of that church, including my own father and mother. Now seeing the children and grandchildren of these first immigrants sitting in the pews in front of me, I saw them again—my father, my mother, the fathers and

mothers of many who were sitting there. And I found myself becoming emotional, my eyes misting as I mourned not only my friend, who had been a faithful member of this church, but also the fathers and mothers who had begun this church.

They were all gone now, these first immigrants. The beautiful hymn “By the sea of crystal, saints in glory stand” came to mind. They had moved on to the church triumphant. After having lived through a devastating war, and

no doubt after much prayer, they had left their homeland to come to this faraway country to start a new life. And because they knew they needed God too, they bought a small, old Quaker church. I remember it was purchased for \$2,000. It became their church, a stronghold and a refuge in this foreign land.

I taught Sunday school in that old Quaker church—sometimes in a less-than-perfect way on its balcony, with congregants milling around

down below when the weather did not permit them to be outside. And I attended a large youth group in that building. Soon after I got married in that old church, it was torn down and a new one was built—the one where I found myself today. I had moved away from the area, and although I had been back many times to visit relatives, it had been a very long time since I had attended a service in the church.

Memories continued to flood my mind. I remembered how our fathers and mothers had to build a new life for themselves and for their children in a rather short span of years. Most of them were already middle-aged when they arrived. There was, however, a beautiful unity in and among these families. The grown children contributed their wages toward the goal of buying a farm or just helping their family to get ahead. At the same time, these immigrants contributed to the building of their church. I can still see my dad preparing his little white envelope for the church on Saturday nights.

I remembered the many frustrations they experienced as well. Fathers struggled with the language, and employers did not always keep their promises. Mothers brought up large families on their own without the conveniences we have today and without much help from their husbands, who were working from morning until night to get ahead. I remembered mothers banding together to help each other clean their substandard houses.

But at the church there were soon cars to be seen on Sundays—second-hand cars that were the first signs of the immigrants getting ahead, of gaining some independence. They needed a car to go town on Saturdays and to church on Sundays.

Attending church was the highlight of the week. They loved their home

There was a
beautiful unity
in and among
these families.


missionary from the U.S., the Rev. Garret Andre, and his wife, whose help was invaluable in their everyday life too. Rev. Andre put thousands of miles on his car driving immigrants to church and often preached three sermons on Sundays, serving neighboring churches too.

The strong Reformed faith the immigrants had brought with them from the Netherlands was clearly visible in the sincerity with which they conducted their worship services. In church they felt the tie that bound them all together. They sang their Dutch psalms with gusto and in the evening tried to learn the English ones. After church they would share their burdens and experiences of the week with each other in their native language. The farmers among them discussed their progress in the buying or renting of a farm; the mothers talked with other women about their households and families.

These conversations helped encourage one another, for in many hearts lived loneliness, especially among the women longing for family that they did not expect to see again. Some also

harbored doubt about whether they had done the right thing to uproot their family and leave their homeland. Life was hard for them in this new country, and it soon became evident that sickness and death were part of life here too.

That morning, seeing the descendants of these first immigrants filled me with melancholy as I thought about those who had built this church and had sacrificed so much for the future of their children and grandchildren. I was comforted, however, when my eyes fell on the bulletin I was holding in my lap. I read, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4, KJV).

I will never forget the hardship that our ancestors endured when putting their feet on foreign ground. Neither will I forget their legacy: the establishment of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada. For me it had all started in the 1950s in that small Quaker church in a village of Ontario. 



Didy Prinzen lives with her husband in Durham Christian Homes in Whitby, Ont. She is a member of Hebron CRC. She immigrated with her family to Bloomfield, Ont., in 1950.

BIG QUESTIONS

Vocation/Calling

Does being overwhelmed by my job mean I've mistaken my calling or am doing something wrong?

We have a sense that we should love and even enjoy our jobs. Frederick Buechner talks about vocation being “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” Besides this, the Reformed tradition highlights how work—all work—is a calling from God (see *Our World Belongs to God*, 48). If work is a calling and a place of deep gladness, it can feel deeply disappointing if we’re overwhelmed.

Ideally our jobs would allow us to use the gifts God has given each of us to love our neighbors well. But, like all of creation, work too has been affected by the fall. Genesis 3 describes the effect of sin on work: thorns and thistles, sweat and weariness. All jobs will be at times wearying and hard.

As hard as it can be, being overwhelmed might also be a signal from God that something is going wrong. Our emotions can encourage us to look more closely at our lives and hearts. Am I overwhelmed because this is a difficult season, like this pandemic where we’ve lost so much structure and connections with people we care about? Do I have an unhealthy perception of how much joy I should have in my work, forgetting how the fall means that sometimes work is sweat and weariness and not just joy?



Illustration for The Banner by Laurie Sienkowski

Finally, being overwhelmed might mean that we’ve neglected God’s call to not only work but also rest. Resting might help us find again a love for what we’re doing or even peace that this job is best for now. But it might also help us make space to hear the Spirit challenge us into something different. A regular practice of Sabbath allows us to step back from all the things we think we need to do. We can then recognize how much we need God’s grace and help in doing everything. Perhaps it might even allow us to open our eyes to how God works both through and in spite of our efforts.

May God give you hope and wisdom in the middle of being overwhelmed.

Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink is the CRC chaplain at the University of Toronto. She attends Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ont.

Bible/Church Doctrine

A couple in our church is unsure about infant baptism and has asked for their child to be dedicated instead.

Is that OK?

Dedicating our children to God’s care and promising to raise them in the Christian faith is definitely something to be encouraged, but it should not be a replacement for the sacrament of baptism. Parents who are

unsure about infant baptism should be welcomed to ask their questions and to learn why the Christian Reformed Church has always practiced infant baptism, as have most parts of the historic Christian church. Most parents will be pleased to learn that baptism is a sign and seal of what God has already done in choosing their child to be part of God’s own family, and in placing this child in a family of believers. They may find comfort in the belief, grounded in our Reformed confessions, that baptism signifies God’s gracious action and is not dependent upon our own ability to choose. A helpless infant demonstrates the truth of baptism—that God chooses us—in a way that is less apparent when adults are baptized because it may seem from adults’ testimony that they, not God, are the primary actors in their salvation. But the truth (which those adults often acknowledge) is that they were chosen by God to enjoy the riches of God’s grace, and they come before the church as helpless “infants” too even though they recognize and affirm God’s work in their lives.

The truth is that when infants and children are baptized in a Christian Reformed congregation, the parents and the congregation make promises to raise the child in the faith, which really is a form of dedication. So we do encourage infant dedications—in combination with the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. But synod has said that ministers should refrain

from performing infant dedications instead of infant baptisms. We need to disciple people toward understanding and affirming infant baptism, not only because our confessions and church order call for it, but because this beautiful doctrine is taught in God's Word.

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

Stewardship

When considering saving for retirement, how much is enough or too much? How much should we worry about retirement income in light of Jesus' words "Do not worry about tomorrow"?

The sort of retirement advice one typically finds on the internet consists of building up a nest egg of, say, a million dollars, or perhaps setting a goal of ensuring an annual return of 90% of one's pre-retirement income. Another commonly offered strategy is to set aside, starting in one's 20s or 30s, a percentage of income each year (15% or so) as a virtually religious obligation.

There is nothing inherently wrong or unfaithful in these suggestions, formulaic as they may be. Note, however, that these ideas come from a sector whose profits lie in maximizing investments and, like much of advertising, inducing fear in people that they currently do not have enough. Lying behind the suggestions is an assumption that people's retirement goals include lifestyle choices that are both consumptive and expensive. Surely everyone wants to travel the world and enjoy the more sumptuous things of life!

While Jesus tells us not to worry about tomorrow, what he does not say is do not plan for tomorrow, always aware that tomorrow's uncertainties are in God's hands. So how not to worry about retirement?

Find a good financial/retirement planner whose own financial success is not dependent on getting you to invest in a particular financial package and who is willing to look at your whole array of potential assets and risks—savings, retirement benefits, pensions, insurance, Social Security, medical bills, and so forth. Thankfully, there are such level-headed people around who understand modest lives and the contentment inherent in the word "enough."

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

Digital Life

After reading your suggestion to ditch social media entirely, I see you have accounts on all the major platforms. What's up with that?

Busted! I was inclined to invoke the perennial parental response—do as I say, not as I do—but it's more complicated than that. My work requires it. Yes, I work for the CRC, and both this denomination and this magazine want as many likes and shares with their posts on social media as you do. It's likely your church does too.


Social media in one form or another is here to stay. I have no illusions that what I write here is going to convince

you to begin the difficult task of closing down your Facebook or Twitter account. So what's a person to do?

For starters, know you are being manipulated. At their core, Google and Facebook are ad agencies. And they are enablers on an unfathomable scale. Let's stop blaming them entirely for what we willingly allow them to do with our information—and I mean information in the broadest possible sense: your name and location, but also your online behavior, including that millisecond pause on one thing or another as you scroll through your feeds.

Need convincing? Watch the film *The Social Dilemma*. It's a docudrama that clearly and alarmingly explains how social media platforms target individuals. Again, what's a Christian person to do?

Maybe we shouldn't run away scared. Maybe I am wrong to suggest we ditch social media. Aren't we challenged to do our part to redeem every bit of this fallen world? Maybe we need to act more like Christians online. Comment as we'd like to be commented on. Post something original. Do our personal best to engage "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable" (Phil. 4:8).

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

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Restructuring, New Mission Agency, and ‘Mutually Generous Separation’ Recommended for RCA

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The Vision 2020 report for the Reformed Church in America, released in June, proposes a way forward for the denomination that has found its member churches at odds on matters of sexuality, its approach to social justice, and more. Meant to have been presented at the RCA’s 2020 General Synod, the report was postponed due to the cancellation of that synod amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report makes three recommendations, with the authors noting their conclusions are a combination of the three possible future scenarios they were originally asked to consider: staying together, reorganizing, or dividing.

The authors recommend a restructuring to be determined by members who choose to stay with the denomination; the formation of a new, independent mission agency; and changes to the RCA’s *Book of Church Order* that would make generosity in separating—a reality the report sees as “inevitable” in some cases—“prescribed rather than simply permitted.”

The first recommendation calls for the General Synod Council to appoint a team to create a restructuring plan “with a view to optimizing the RCA’s sustained spiritual and organizational health.”

The Vision 2020 team declined to map out the restructuring, though it did provide suggestions it believes will provide “the best chance for success.” These include that classes (regional assemblies of churches) be reorganized as affinity-based, that classes be responsible for decisions related to ordination and marriage, and that discipline of individual consistories occur at the classis level.

In recommending a new mission agency, the RCA’s Vision 2020 team suggests it “be formed independent of the RCA (but in partnership with the RCA) to house what currently makes up the RCA’s work in global missions.” The team sees this as



a way that “everyone, regardless of their decision to leave or stay, could continue to be connected to that legacy.”

This new agency could be seeded from the current RCA Global Mission budget, the report suggests.

Two team members differed from the majority on this recommendation. Their minority opinion—that assigning RCA global missions to an extra-ecclesial body “weakens our Reformed practice of keeping covenant promises to each other”—is included with the report.

The Vision 2020 team’s third recommendation recognizes that “some separation is inevitable,” and calls on the RCA to “act in an exemplary way by providing a generous exit path for those churches which decide to leave and by inviting those churches to also act generously.” It lays out necessary changes to the *Book of Church Order* to make that possible and describes some potential scenarios, including provisions that departing churches “retain their property and other assets and would be solely responsible for any liabilities.”

The report, now being discussed by video conference in regional gatherings of the RCA, is expected to come before the RCA’s 2021 General Synod.

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

Council of Delegates Convenes 'Special Listening Session'

Additional legal advice regarding the restructuring of the Christian Reformed Church's administrative governance prompted a special closed meeting of the church's Council of Delegates on Dec. 7.

The Council acts on behalf of synod, the widest assembly of the CRC, between sessions of synod. The Council typically meets three times a year (February, May, and October).

"The listening session was held largely in executive session because we were dealing with confidential legal matters as they pertain to varied national laws and requirements," Council chairperson Paul DeVries told *The Banner*. "We simply needed space to discuss confidential matters with the full body." He added that "confidentiality, executive sessions, and times of simply listening to one another are a healthy part of any organization."

The move toward restructuring the governance of the Christian Reformed Church in North America along Canadian and American lines began last February after the Canadian Corporation of the CRCNA informed the full Council of Delegates that it was necessary according to an obtained legal opinion about requirements for Canadian charitable organizations (See "Restructuring Gives CRC in Canada More Ministry Control," April 2020, p. 18). Carrying out the proposed restructuring has continued since then, and so have questions about the necessity of the moves.

At its October 2020 meeting, the Council reviewed the proposed job descriptions for Canadian and American denominational leadership positions as well as a proposed ecclesiastical officer role. It then struck a task force to work out details of how the positions will mesh together. The task force was to report to the Council this month, but at a Nov. 24 meeting of the Council's executive committee the task force's mandate was expanded. The committee asked the task force to "take into account the range of legal opinions and provide preliminary guidance to the COD in February for moving the process forward," and it called for the Dec. 7 listening session of the full Council.

Public minutes of the Dec. 7 meeting, which was conducted by video conference, say the preliminary report to be received in February will be "substantial enough" for the Council to give the task force "a green light to move forward and present a final report in May."

Meanwhile, two Canadian classes (regional groups of churches), Toronto and Alberta South & Saskatchewan, are formally asking Synod 2021 to stop all proceedings related to the administrative restructuring of the Canadian CRCNA churches (See "Classis Watch: Fall 2020," January 2021, p. 19).

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

Noteworthy



Sioux Falls (S.Dak.) Christian School's boys cross-country team won its second consecutive Class A State Championship in October. Four team members earned all-state honors.



Lansing (Mich.) Christian School won its first state championship in girls cross-country in November. Three of the team's seven runners placed in the top 12 and earned all-state recognition.



Justin Trudeau, prime minister of Canada, was the special guest for "**The Contribution of Faith Communities in a Pandemic,**" an online conversation moderated by Peter Noteboom, a commissioned pastor of the Christian Reformed Church and general secretary for The Canadian Council of Churches. About 450 people attended the Dec. 3 event co-hosted by the Council, the Canadian Interfaith Conversation, and the Canadian Multifaith Federation.

Approved Approach to Church Planting Reflects Variety of Church Expressions in the CRC

In October, the Christian Reformed Church's Council of Delegates, which acts on behalf of synod between annual synodical meetings, endorsed a definition of church planting and the implementation of three church planting strategies proposed by the Collaborative Church Planters Team. The endorsement is one important step furthering a conversation that reaches back into the denomination's history and forward in the desire to see the CRC "share the gospel, live it missionally, and plant new churches" (*Our Journey 2025*, fourth milestone).

What Is the Collaborative Church Planters Team?

Representing all five areas of calling within the CRC (faith formation, global mission, gospel proclamation and worship, mercy and justice, and servant leadership), the Collaborative Church Planters Team was formed in 2019 out of a desire to address concerns unearthed in an expansive survey of church planters and their supporters.

Conducted by Resonate Global Mission and Calvin University, the survey, which covered 10 years of church planting history, revealed two main things: participants highly valued church planting, but they had deep concerns about the disconnect they felt with the denomination, a lack of a common vision, limited training, and a lack of context-specific understanding.

Jul Medenblik, president of Calvin Theological Seminary and a former church planter (New Life CRC, planted in 1995 in New Lenox, Ill., by Orland Park (Ill.) CRC), resonates with those concerns. "In my experience, church planters and church plants were seen as being on the edge of the denomination," he said.



Church planters (from left) James Lee, Joel Kiekinveld, Allen Pontarelli, John Vanderstoep, Juan Sierra, Shawn Sikkema, Mark VanAniel, Jeff Heerspink, and Kevin Adams at the first gathering of the Cultivate Spiritual Formation retreat in September 2018. The Cultivate training is one of the ways the CRC supports church planters.

"Church planters want to know that they are not alone in this work of mission."

Kevin Schutte, church planting team leader with Resonate and a catalyst in forming the new team, said, "It's really a shift to say, in response to the research, how do we collaboratively, as a denomination, approach this vital area of church planting?"

"The Collaborative Team helps reshape the vision so that church planting is not only part of the mission of the denomination, but it is now seen as central to that mission," Medenblik said.

Looking Back: The CRC's Relationship with Church Planting

In a conversation with *The Banner*, Schutte, Medenblik, and Resonate director Zachary King sketched a thumbnail history of the CRC's engagement with church planting.

After World War II, denominations followed their people, planting churches in neighborhoods where families were settling. Medenblik said these churches "were a result of immigration, migration, and procreation." In the mid-1970s, church planting shifted to a church growth model, focusing on attractive environments to draw back the de-churched and appeal to the unchurched. The mid-2000s saw the rise of the incarnational method of church planting, focused on limited geographical areas and strong local relationships, often with bivocational pastors. All of these approaches are still present in church plants today in a variety of expressions, compounding the team's challenge to find a common vision everyone can get behind as well as context-specific strategies for diverse approaches to church planting.

In the past, Home Missions offered standard three-year grants to church plants. In January 2016, church planters were transitioned to Resonate, where they

received more training, support, and individualized grants.

But the responsibility of church planting still rested on a single agency, said Medenblik. Now something new is happening. “The big change” the Collaborative Team brought is that “the denominational vision is formed, developed, shaped, and resourced by many offices, agencies and leaders,” Medenblik said. This gives church planters “the assurance that their stepping out in faith is supported and encouraged not by a few, but by us all.”

Different ‘Expressions,’ Different Strategies

Mark VanAndel, who planted Hesus Community Church in Detroit, Mich., in 2018, explained that the image of church planting people have in their minds often doesn’t reflect the reality.

“We need to move beyond assumptions and listen to those who have been doing it and learn how to speak a common language and have a shared imagination for new church expressions,” he said.

The team has tried to move beyond one standardized model and to describe these new expressions along a grid. Three broad models of church planting—classic & multi-site, micro-church, and multiplication hubs—are laid out, noting how each varies in its approach to denominational affiliation, ordination and leadership, worship and preaching, discipleship, mission and justice, and funding and sustainability. Each is designed to accomplish the common goal of church planting in a unique way reflected in the types of support offered by the denomination.

Van Andel said the emphasis on different church planting strategies validates the work church planters do. “The growth that is happening within church planting becomes enfolded and integrated into the CRC ... (as) a vibrant part of the body as a whole.”

Why Does This Matter?

A rule of thumb is that a denomination should plant 3% of its churches every year, “a target that the CRC is falling far short of,” Schutte said. Reaching it would mean every classis in the CRC would plant a church every other year. “That’s change-the-world-type stuff,” Schutte admitted.

But classes are already reimagining their connection to church planting. Albert Postma (Classis Renewal, Pastor Church Resources) is on the church planting team. He believes church plants benefit both parent churches and the entire classis (a regional group of churches).

With Schutte, Postma developed the *Classis Guidebook for Church Planting*. “We intentionally created one guidebook that had classes, parent churches, and church planters all in mind, since they all need to work together in our system,” Postma said. The guidebook provides these groups with a common understanding and language—one more tool moving the conversation forward.

Van Andel appreciates the forward momentum and looks to God to keep speaking, too. “This emphasis on church planting from the COD (Council of Delegates) is a start, but we have a long way to go before these statements are felt on a local level,” Van Andel said. “We need both an overarching denominational vision and an organic move of God in our local communities to continue to embrace the value of missional engagement.”

—Maia Vandermeer

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Kenneth R. Slager
1925-2020

Ken Slager, a man of integrity who loved the Lord and the Christian Reformed Church, died Nov. 18.

Slager was drafted into World War II after high school, serving with the U.S. Marine Corps as a military policeman in Guam, Okinawa, Guadalcanal, and China. After discharge, he studied at Calvin College (now University) and Seminary.

Ordained in 1953, Slager served the following: Willmar (Minn.) CRC (now called Rock of Life CRC); Lincoln Center CRC, Grundy Center, Iowa; Sibley (Iowa) CRC; Trinity CRC, Vancouver, Wash.; and Monroe (Wash.) CRC (now called New Hope Fellowship). Retiring in 1988, Slager returned to Michigan, where he served as a visiting pastor at Second CRC of Kalamazoo. From 1971-2006, in Vancouver, Monroe, and Kalamazoo, he served as a chaplain of the Civil Air Patrol.

Slager ran 5K and 10K races well into his 70s. He enjoyed classical music, reading, crossword puzzles, and sudoku. Living at Raybrook in Grand Rapids, Mich., since 2006, he enjoyed morning coffee hours and playing pool. He joined the Singing Men from Raybrook, proudly wearing his wedding suit-coat for performances.

Predeceased in 2018 by Alice, his wife for 68 years, Ken is survived by seven children, 21 grandchildren, and 20 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Earl C. Marlink
1931-2020

The life of Earl Marlink epitomized the words of 1 Corinthians 15:58: “always abounding in the work of the Lord” (ESV). Although Parkinson’s disease had taken his strength and his voice, it did not take Marlink’s faith, and he was able to minister to the end of his life. Visitors who went to minister to him left feeling as if he had ministered to them. Marlink died Nov. 19.

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1955, Marlink served Ackley (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church and then Oak Park (Ill.) CRC. In 1966 he accepted a call to Sacramento (Cal.) CRC (now Living Stones CRC), a multicultural congregation where he remained for 16 years. Marlink had a gift for bridging people’s differences, bringing them together in joyous fellowship.

He then served Christian Reformed Home Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission) for 13 years as an interim ministry specialist. Because he loved to travel, Marlink’s years in places such as Honolulu, Hawaii; Zuni, N. Mex.; Calgary, Alta.; and Corvallis, Oreg., were a perfect fit.

Marlink was predeceased by Lenore, his wife and ministry partner of 61 years, and a granddaughter, Amy. He is survived by five daughters and their families.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Kiwoong Kim
1958-2020

A person with compassion for people in need, Rev. Kiwoong Kim was approachable, kind, and warm to anyone who needed help. Kim died Nov. 24 in Grand Rapids, Mich., after a sudden illness with COVID-19.

In 1992, Kim studied at Chong Shin Seminary and served for nine years as a local pastor in Korea. He continued studies at various seminaries and learned Hebrew and French. In Michigan, he pastored Saginaw Presbyterian Church, Kalamazoo Korean Christian Reformed Church, and Hahn-In CRC of Grand Rapids in Wyoming, Mich. He retired in 2019.

In 2014, Kim served as president of the Korean Council, a networking association among Korean CRC pastors. He was loved by many fellow pastors. Rev. G. Kim, an old friend, said from Washington, “I am so sad to learn of the passing of brother Kiwoong. He was truly a dedicated man of God who served the call to the body of Christ. I am sure that his loss will be deeply felt for the many who have loved him for a long time.”

Kim is survived by his wife of 35 years, Kyunghee, and twin sons Euseok (fiancee Yeonkyung) and Yongseok (wife Leah).

—Jonathan Kim

‘The Pastor and the Broadcaster’ Podcast Features Church Member Interviews



Broadcaster Harry O (inset) works with Pastor Phil Boender to create Rolling Acres CRC’s “The Pastor and The Broadcaster” podcast.

At Rolling Acres Christian Reformed Church in Mason City, Iowa, conversations that happen between members after church over coffee time were replaced much of last year by a weekly podcast, “The Pastor and the Broadcaster.”

The “pastor” is Phil Boender, pastor of Rolling Acres CRC, and the “broadcaster” is Harry O’Neal, a professional radio DJ, a member of Rolling Acres, and a great conversationalist. “Before COVID, I used to like to eavesdrop on Harry as he left the sanctuary,” Boender said. “He would instantly be in conversation with someone.” That appreciation led Boender and O’Neal to talk about sharing stories with each other, and the idea of a podcast came to be. They ran the segments on O’Neal’s podcast channel from April to November.

To record the podcast, O’Neal, who goes by Harry O professionally, would be in his studio, with Boender and another Rolling Acres guest joining by phone or via Facebook Messenger. They covered various topics throughout the discussion, including family, faith, and church engagement, as well as the passions and hobbies of the interviewees.

Boender said this opportunity has reminded him that people are a blessing. “Everyone is unique—personalities, gifts and abilities, experiences, stories, faith journey ... It is fun to get to know each other better. It is just another layer of love and care in relationship with each other.”

In December Boender said he and O’Neal were taking a break and would be “meeting soon to brainstorm new ideas” for continued ways to connect.

—Kyle Hoogendoorn

Report Calls CRC to Catch Up with Trend of Pastors Holding More Than One Job

A task force studying bivocationality within the Christian Reformed Church is recommending changes to the Church Order and greater support for this growing sector of pastors.

The task force was commissioned by Synod 2019 (the CRC's annual general assembly), and its report, now available for congregations to review, will be received by Synod 2021, expected to convene in June.

Bivocational pastors are those who have two jobs: one in the church and another outside the church. The second job can be ministerial, as when a pastor works part time in a local congregation and part time as a chaplain for another institution, or apart from ministry, as when a pastor works part time for a church and part time for a business. The classic example of bivocational ministry is the apostle Paul, who was a tentmaker as well as a missionary (Acts 18:3).

Discouraged in the Past

Despite the example of Paul, the Christian Reformed Church has not traditionally encouraged bivocational ministry. The Church Order (the rules that churches of the denomination covenant together to follow) allows pastors to take a second job "by way of exception and with the approval of the classis" (a regional assembly of churches). The assumption is that as soon as the local congregation is able, they will move the pastor's position to full time (Church Order, Art. 15). In another article, the Church Order implies that employment deemed to be "non-ministerial" is incompatible with the office of Minister of the Word (Art. 14d).

There have been other practical impediments to bivocational ministry, including barriers to participation in the denominational pension and health insurance plans and a lack of proper support and supervision.

The study committee report addresses these and other issues.

The committee included an evaluation of what it calls "nontraditional pastoral arrangements" that are not, strictly speaking, bivocational. These include co-vocational ministries in which the pastor's occupation outside the church is directly related to mission, such as when a pastor of a local church operates a coffee shop as part of the mission of the church. Another nontraditional arrangement involves clergy couples who together fill a single pastoral position. And sometimes a pastor might serve part time without other employment or volunteer with no compensation at all.

The report argues that these and other nontraditional arrangements for pastors are already important for the denomination and should be supported.

A Growing Trend

The report cites an informal survey of ethnic subgroups within the CRC indicating that up to 75% of pastors in African American congregations, 65-70% of pastors in Hispanic churches, and 40% of pastors in Chinese congregations are bivocational. Among Korean churches, most lead pastors are employed full time, but a majority of associate pastors are bivocational. In new church plants, according to Resonate Global Mission, about half of the leaders (48%) are bivocational.

If these trends continue, the report says, bivocational ministry will become more common across the denomination. Christian Reformed congregations are, on average, smaller than they once were. Shrinking churches in urban and rural settings find it challenging to support a full-time pastor.

A Way Forward

Besides fitting the demographic trends, bivocational ministry can offer strategic advantages for the church going forward, the committee reports. It allows the flexibility to begin and maintain

congregations in settings that lack the numbers or wealth to support a full-time pastor. It allows larger congregations to add staff without having to support a full-time salary. It gives small and struggling congregations the "toughness" to survive in difficult times. And it provides flexibility in missional settings.

For these reasons, the committee recommends that the CRC take steps to encourage bivocational ministry. These steps include modifying Articles 14 and 15 of the Church Order to remove language that characterizes bivocational ministry as an exception. They propose adding a supplement to Article 15 that defines what "proper support" of pastors looks like for full-time and various part-time pastoral arrangements. And they suggest adding language to Article 23, which concerns commissioned pastors, to support bivocational ministry in that office as well.

The committee also asks the pension boards of the denomination to come up with an option for pastoral couples serving one church to be treated as a single entity, lessening the burden on the couples and the church who otherwise would have to fund two pensions. Finally, the committee makes various proposals for assessing the health and welfare of bivocational pastors and providing them with stronger support.

—Clayton Libolt

This report, the one on ecclesiastical marriage (see p. 20), and that of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-Laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality—all to be addressed at Synod 2021—are available online from CRCNA synodical services, with summaries in English, Korean, and Spanish. *The Banner's* summary of the human sexuality report was published in the January 2021 issue, pp. 14-17.

Don't Sanction Marriages Without the State, Report Urges

Is it OK for Christians to marry in the eyes of the church but not in the eyes of the state?

After wrestling with this question, a denominational task force is offering its report for Christian Reformed churches to review.

The Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force was appointed by Synod 2019, the annual decision-making body of the CRC. Classis Georgetown, a group of churches in West Michigan, had requested clarification on church policy because congregants sometimes request a non-civil or ecclesiastical marriage.

Defining ecclesiastical marriage as “marriage sanctioned and solemnized solely by the church to the exclusion of the state (civil government),” the task force asks Synod 2021 to “strongly advise” CRC pastors not to officiate such marriages. Synod is expected to meet in mid-June.

Avoid Legal Conflict

“Sanctioning such a marriage ... will bring the church into a dangerous situation whereby we will be serving as arbitrators of quasi-legal relationships, which could easily put us in legal conflict with the states and provinces in which we reside,” the task force report warns.

As part of its process, the task force “listened to the stories of those who were seeking or raising the question of ecclesiastical marriages.”

Situations mentioned in the report include:

- » couples with one Canadian and one American spouse who choose to have separate ceremonies for immigration reasons—a church ceremony in one country and a legal ceremony in the other country;



- » widows and widowers who are interested in non-civil remarriage to avoid losing government benefits or complicating their children's inheritances; and
- » immigrant couples who were married in their country of origin or in a refugee camp without government documentation but with family and community accountability.

Don't Tolerate Deceit

The report is unsympathetic towards couples who eschew legal marriage for financial reasons, calling this practice “deceptive and unlawful.”

“If people are entering an ecclesiastical marriage explicitly in order to avoid obligations of a civil union, is the church not simply aiding in perpetuating fraud? Such action cannot be condoned,” it states.

Respect Immigrant Cultures

Taking a much different tone, the committee asks synod to advise churches to “respect and honor” marriages of immigrants who arrive in North America without a civil marriage. It adds, however, that churches should “counsel [such immigrants] in the understanding of Christian marriage and its relationship to civil authority in our countries.”

Not all countries even offer civil marriages, the report points out, and these marriages are often strong and well-supported: “In the interest of grace and acceptance, we want to acknowledge the beautiful Christian marriage traditions that have developed in various cultures.”

As for situations in which a couple wants two separate ceremonies, one legal and one a larger church ceremony, the report advises that “it would be best to obtain the civil marriage first.” However, the writers acknowledge that in some situations, such as when a county clerk's office is closed for COVID-19, obtaining a civil marriage may not be possible. In any case, pastors should seek expert legal advice before officiating at such a wedding, the report cautions.

The report includes a history of the relationship between biblical marriage and the state, noting that John Calvin viewed marriage as jointly sanctioned by church and state.

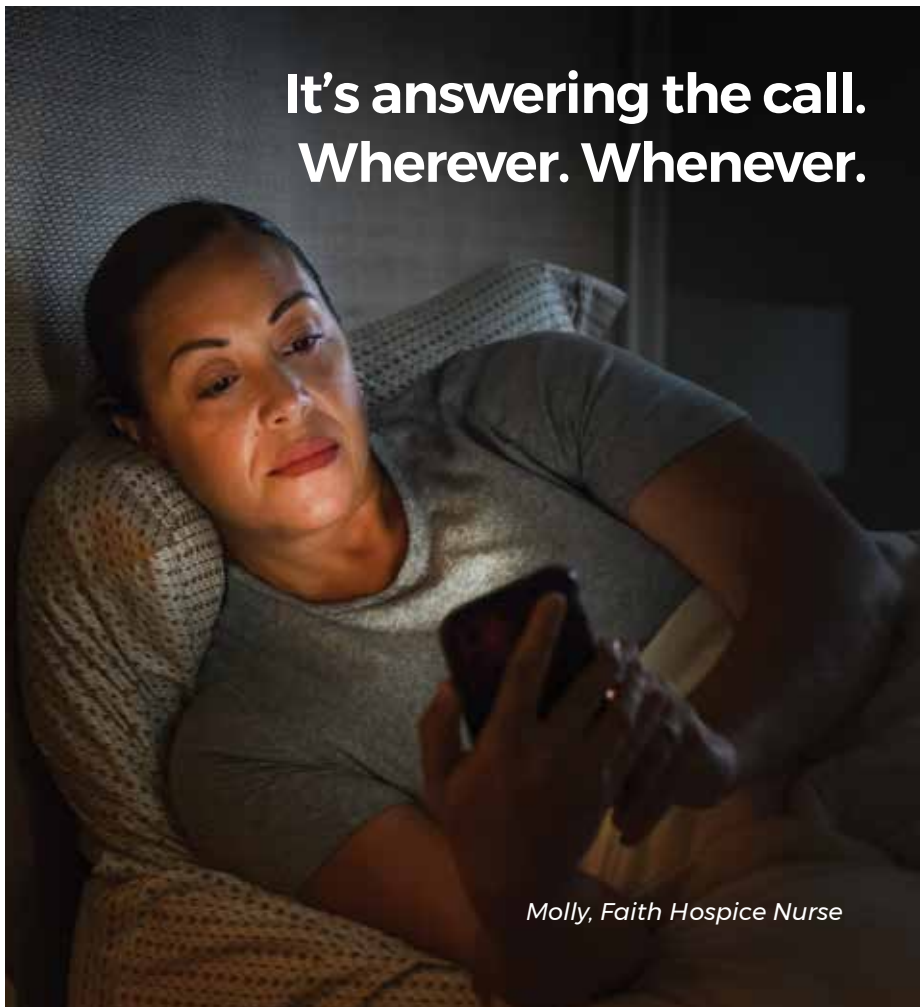
—Roxanne Van Farowe

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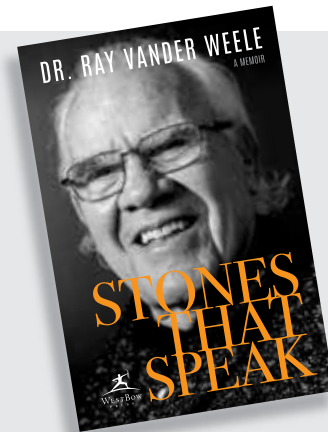


Molly, Faith Hospice Nurse

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Ray shares his perspective of growing up in the CRC, of which he has been a member all his life.

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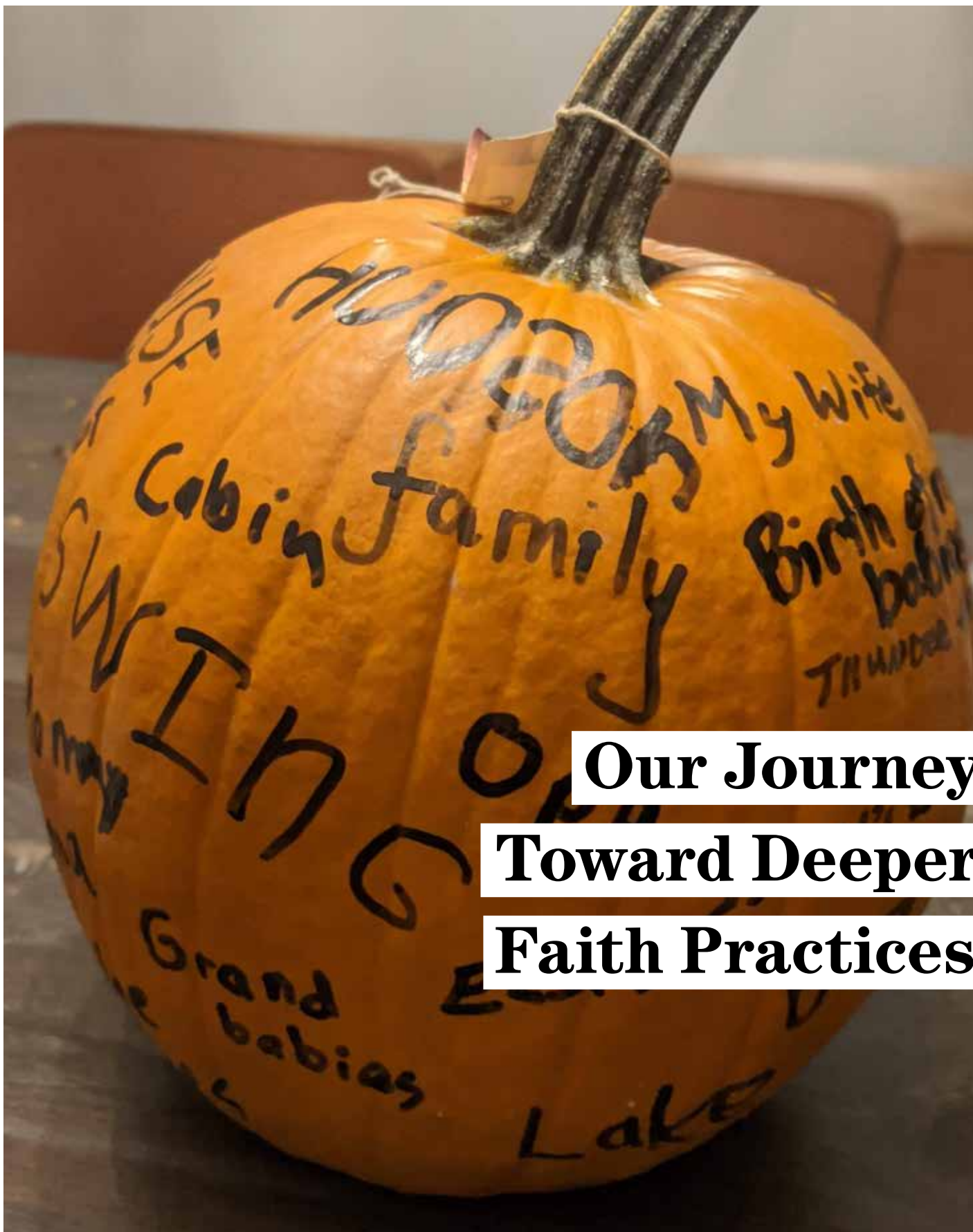
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**Our Journey
Toward Deeper
Faith Practices**

The first goal or milestone of *Our Journey 2025* reads, “Cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline, transforming our lives and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit.” If we’re honest, a directive to “practice spiritual disciplines” can feel a bit like the church equivalent of “eat more veggies.” Few would dispute that doing so would contribute to long-term health and well-being, but it still sounds unappetizing.

Reframing spiritual disciplines as “faith practices,” however, can help relieve the endeavor of its dull and unappetizing baggage. In addition, hearing stories from churches already exploring faith practices in their unique contexts can inspire us and remind us that these practices are life-giving and community-building.

Here are a few examples of Christian Reformed churches, members, and pastors who are already deepening their spiritual practices in transformative and life-giving ways.

One Church’s Year-Long Experiment

Granite Springs Church near Sacramento, Calif., has been encouraging members to grow through a deliberate focus on spiritual practices as they relate to the liturgical year. They are calling this emphasis “Deepening Practices.”

“(Deepening Practices) was really another step in something that we’d been doing for some time,” said Matt Timms, associate pastor of spiritual formation and administration at Granite Springs. “From a formation perspective, I’d say we have, as a church, been growing in our emphasis on practices and the rhythms of the church year, particularly over the last five to 10 years, as we recognize the grace that is found in regular rhythms.”

Timms said Deepening Practices emerged out of the work of a previous associate pastor, Sam Gutierrez. Looking at the liturgical year, Gutierrez started sketching out practices that could accompany each liturgical season.

“The idea was that for each season there would be a ‘church practice’ (typically Sunday worship), a piece of Scripture to memorize, and a home practice,” said Timms. “As part of this, we started doing house blessings during Epiphany, developed a Jesse Tree devotional for Advent, and a few other things.”

Timms said he calls Deepening Practices an “experiment” because some things caught on and others did not. The

Children’s Ministry director Nicole Rekman gave “Gratitude Pumpkins” to families of First CRC in Sarnia, Ont., to help children focus on what they are grateful for.

house blessings, for example, were a success that he particularly enjoyed.

“In our Northern California suburbs, having a pastor come to your house to pray and even chalk the door is not a typical experience, but it was such a gift to be invited into people’s space, to see eyes glisten as you prayed over their kitchen and living space and bedrooms, and to extend blessing in this way,” he said.

In total, he was able to visit and pray over the homes of 30 individuals or families in his congregation.

Granite Springs Church recently wrapped up their year of Deepening Practices, but the habits the congregation developed through the project still shape their ministry.

Faith Practices for People of All Ages

Although the *Our Journey 2025* ministry plan publicly launched in January 2021, Faith Formation Ministries has been releasing resources focusing on spiritual practices since September 2020. They have called this the Faith Practices Project, and many churches have already been using and adapting it to fit their unique contexts.

Nicole Rekman, children’s ministry director for First CRC in Sarnia, Ont., incorporated elements from the Faith Practices Project into hands-on, faith-forming activities families can do at home.

After perusing the “Gratitude” resources page from the Faith Practices Project, Rekman asked church members of all ages to drop off pumpkins that families with children could use as “Gratitude Pumpkins”—

canvases of squash on which to write gratitude lists.

Those who dropped off pumpkins at the church left notes with their addresses so the families who received the pumpkins could respond and foster intergenerational relationships.



First CRC in Sarnia, Ont., used “giving jars” to highlight gratitude and generosity.

"I delivered the pumpkins with a Sharpie attached and a printed copy of the Faith Practices page. It was very well received!" Rekman said.

In addition, Rekman created "giving jar" and "giving tree" activities for families at her church to help them develop the spiritual discipline of gratitude.

"I see families being more intentional in their devotional time, using these activities as they provide concrete, relatable ways to incorporate them into daily life," said Rekman. "Parents are thankful for meaningful ways to engage kids in faith-building practices."

Elsewhere in Ontario, a youth group at Immanuel CRC in Hamilton also explored spiritual disciplines. The group discusses a specific faith practice during its socially distanced meet-ups and Zoom calls. Afterward, members invite the rest of the congregation to join them in exploring the practice through the church's daily devotional episodes of the "Wilderness Wanderings" podcast.

Anthony Elenbaas, pastor of faith formation at Immanuel CRC, noted that engaging faith practices seems particularly necessary when much of life—work, school, church, and more—takes place virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Something about our faith cannot be digitally mediated but needs to be incarnate," he said. "Faith practices ground us in time and space through acts of attention to God, the fully embodied others around us, and the incarnate work of Christ in our own embodied flesh. Something about that seems really important to our faith lives right now."

Support for the Journey

Since July 2019, Faith Formation Ministries' regional catalyzers have connected with at least 174 churches with the aim of equipping and encouraging them in their unique ministry contexts.

In addition to the coaching they provide on formation-related subjects such as discipleship and intergenerational worship, these catalyzers have also been gearing up to help churches explore faith practices. Catalyzers have been exploring the practices themselves, both personally and in experimental small groups.

Trudy Ash, regional catalyzer for the Midwest U.S. and a member of Pease (Minn.) CRC, began a small group at her church to start exploring faith practices as a sort of "pilot project." The group meets twice a month: once to go over resources for the practice, and once to share stories of how members have used them.



Trudy Ash (top center), a Faith Formation regional catalyzer, meets regularly with a small group to explore faith practices.

"My hope is that this project will be a way to get people to tell their stories, talk about their faith, and grow together in the daily part of experiencing God and intentionally doing things to grow closer to him," said Ash. "I think that's important for churches right now ... to stay connected on deep levels and in new, meaningful ways."

As the variety of these stories show, there's no right way or wrong way to explore faith practices. Even so, the words "our journey" remind us it's something we're doing together.

Other ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America also offer resources for learning and living out faith practices, including a podcast series about spiritual disciplines from Reframe Media, opportunities to practice justice and hospitality from the Office of Social Justice and World Renew, the Deeper Journey program of Resonate Global Mission, and more. Whether you explore the resources from these ministries on your own or contact one of Faith Formation Ministries' regional catalyzers to support your church, you're invited to be part of our denominational journey as we seek to "cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline, transforming our lives and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit." **B**

—Megan Herrema,
Faith Formation Ministries

A Church to Bridge the Racial Divide

KYLE BROOKS was a church planter reaching mostly young white professionals in Oakland, Calif. He worked from a gospel understanding of a God who transforms lives and communities.

On Nov. 8, 2015, he was running late for the Bay Area Clergy Cohort, a social justice conference for Christian leaders, and stumbled into a group exercise after it had already started. The meeting facilitator had placed chairs in a pyramid shape with instructions for participants to sit based on their place in society. When Brooks arrived, the only chair left was at the very front, representing the place of most privilege.

Bernard Emerson, a Black pastor from East Oakland, sat at the base near the back of the room. When the facilitator reminded them to be intentional about building the kind of world God wants, Brooks found his way to connect with Emerson. That was the beginning of a shared vision to merge two different churches into one multiethnic congregation that would eventually become Tapestry Church.

Oakland is known as a great city in which to live, but it also has trust challenges across generations, ethnicities, and economic classes. Brooks and Emerson each believed that bringing their two churches together could help bring down that division. However, each also wanted to remain faithful to his faith tradition without dominating the other.

Brooks was steeped in the Christian Reformed Church, and Emerson was raised in the American Baptist church. While they recognized their differences, the two pastors wanted their churches to display God's love for the world. "We cannot do that effectively if we do not love each other," said Brooks.



The pastors of Tapestry Church and their spouses are (left to right) Jeremy Evans-Smith, Pastor Catherine Evans-Smith, Pastor Bernard Emerson, Kim Emerson, Pastor Kyle Brooks, Stephanie Brooks.

Emerson added, "It was always the intent of our Lord that the church be multiethnic, but that's not been the way of the church in America."

Both pastors knew creating an interracial church was not going to be easy. They took long walks through Oakland's Dimond District and dreamed out loud about it. Then in 2017, after they saw neo-Nazis marching in Charlottesville, Va., they felt as if they could no longer wait. It was time for their ministries to merge.

While everyone in their churches was excited about the merger, the process was not easy. Congregants felt discomfort with different songs, being in a different neighborhood, and different styles of worship. White congregants also felt the discomfort of witnessing and hearing about American racism.

A church member compared the merging process to people speaking different languages. "We all have to learn

how to talk to each other," she said. "Interactions can come off as rude with the smallest of things, like what kind of food to serve at coffee hour."

Learning to bring about a united vision of the church is ongoing. In November and December, Tapestry Church participated in a six-week class called "Race, Class, and the Kingdom of God," produced and taught by David Bailey and Elena Aronson. The congregation hopes to gain shared knowledge, language, and best practices around engaging in the work of racial justice and community flourishing. Scheduled conversations following the course were expected to be facilitated by Tapestry members and staff. [B](#)

—Rudy Gonzalez,
Office of Race Relations

The View from Here

A People of Prayer

LAST JUNE, the Council of Delegates, acting in lieu of synod, approved a new denominational ministry plan called *Our Journey 2025*. This plan was built based on conversations with leaders and members of myriad Christian Reformed congregations across North America. In these conversations, four key priorities—which we are calling “milestones”—rose to the surface no matter what country, culture, age demographics, or gender the people represented.

As a denomination, we truly feel that God has called us to:

- » **Cultivate practices of prayer and other spiritual disciplines**, transforming our lives and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- » **Listen to the voices of every generation**, shaping us for ministry together.
- » **Grow in diversity and unity** by seeking justice, reconciliation, and welcome, sharing our faith as we build relationships with and honor the cultures of our neighbors and newcomers.
- » **Share the gospel, live it missionally, and plant new churches** in our neighborhoods as we discover how to connect with our local and global ministry contexts.

Over the next few months, the “Our Shared Ministry” section of *The Banner* will explore each of these four milestones a bit more in depth, starting with the desire to cultivate practices of prayer and other spiritual disciplines.

Let’s commit to building some discipline into our prayer and spiritual lives this year.

It is not surprising that this desire was so universally felt across our denomination. We live in times that seem unspiritual and undisciplined in so many ways. We know that we are called to pray continuously (1 Thess. 5:17), yet our lives are so busy that prayer often takes a back seat. Many of us pray episodically at best.

This is exactly why your collective advice, reflected in *Our Journey 2025*, talks about the need to return to spiritual *disciplines*. In order to have a robust prayer life, we must have the discipline to work at it.

For me, knowing that God’s love pervades every environment, is present with me in every situation, and is working to bring about his kingdom on earth is not only comforting but motivating.

Not only that, but God is my Father who wants to spend time with me. Though I may not speak to God in prayer continually, he is still present and only a word away.

The same is true not only for me personally but for us collectively as a denomination. As congregations within the denomination, as communities, regions, and nations within the family of God, we can and should come to our Father with our concerns, whether they be about COVID-19, the economy, race relations, or other issues.

So let’s commit to building some discipline into our prayer and spiritual lives this year. Here are a few quick suggestions. First, let’s add prayer time to our schedules, carving out specific times to come to our Father no matter what else may be seeking to make use of our time. Second, let’s approach prayer in a way that focuses on God first, seeking to build our relationship with God and listen to what God wishes to tell us. Third, let’s create prayer lists that focus on others but aren’t restricted just to those in need or those we love. We also need to pray for those most unlike ourselves (see Matt. 5:44).

As we do, I believe we will improve in our relationships with God and each other. What’s more, I trust that when we are disciplined in coming to God with our prayers, God will speak to us about God’s desires for us individually and as a church.



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.

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

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

Spiritual Direction Blesses Those 'Stuck in Their Faith'

YOORI SHEN SHOULD HAVE been in her spiritual sweet spot. Shen became a Christian after coming to Canada as an international student. Since then, her faith had been maturing. She found a church home at New Westminster Christian Reformed Church (Burnaby, B.C.), and she even began serving in International Student Ministries at nearby Simon Fraser University.

It seemed as if she had found a calling that perfectly matched her own story. Yet Shen sensed something was wrong.

"I was stuck in many ways," Shen said. "I was burned out. I felt like it was time to restore my foundation with God."

But Shen believed that since she was a "Christian ministry professional," she was supposed to be the one who helped other people with their faith. Who would help this helper?

Shen, like an increasing number of Christian Reformed members and ministers, found help by meeting with a spiritual director for monthly sessions of spiritual direction.

In spiritual direction, the director "gives 100 percent of their attention to listening along with you to what the Spirit is saying," said David Deters, a CRC minister and one of about 40 CRC spiritual directors. "A director doesn't give advice," said fellow director and minister Carol Muller. "A director listens with you to the voice of God in your life."

That's what Shen needed. In her monthly meetings, her director helped her notice there were parts of her life



Photo by Christine@wacintechchat.com on Unsplash

that she resisted letting God enter. "Direction helped me see that God was in (those parts) too. He was present in all those moments. Direction gives me space to bring my real struggle. I don't have to pretend everything is well."

Spiritual direction has proven to be so helpful for ministry leaders like Shen that Pastor Church Resources has leveraged grants to form a cohort of regional pastors across the U.S. and Canada to receive direction themselves. Regional pastors are active or retired pastors who provide pastoral support to active clergy and spouses in a classis. Often referred to as "pastors for pastors," they have been grateful for the opportunity to obtain spiritual direction.

One regional pastor, Jon Huizinga, said, "I've had coaches and supervisors. But (my director) is a person who helps me not with my performance but just with me—how am I doing in the presence of Jesus. ... It's been so delightful to come to a meeting where it's not my job to perform but just to rest in the presence of Jesus."

—Sean Baker,
Pastor Church Resources

A Simple Invitation

ALTHOUGH IT CAN be scary at times to share God's story, it doesn't have to be that way. Marcos did it just by turning on his favorite television program.

Over the years, Marcos had grown his faith through a television program called *Verdade e Vida (Truth and Life)*. The half-hour program is hosted by Rev. Hernandes Dias Lopes, ReFrame Ministries' Portuguese ministry leader. (ReFrame Ministries is the new name of Back to God Ministries International.)

Every Saturday, Marcos tuned in to this program and invited his wife, Quésia, to watch with him.

Quésia grew up in a Christian home in a small town in Brazil, but she never really knew what it meant to follow Christ.

"At first, I only watched because Marcos invited me," Quésia said. "I didn't know what it meant to hear God, and I didn't know what salvation meant."

But then one day, something changed.

Without realizing it, Quésia had formed a new spiritual habit. That's why one Saturday morning, even



Quésia grew up knowing who Christ was, but she didn't fully understand what it meant to follow him.

though Marcos was away from home, Quésia wanted to watch the program by herself.

"That day changed my story," Quésia said. "I remember that I was six months pregnant with our firstborn son, and it was a beautiful morning. I turned on the television, and Pastor Hernandes preached on John 3."

Lopes' message explained the importance of salvation in a way that Quésia had never fully understood before. And at that moment, one prepared by God just for her, Quésia totally surrendered to Jesus.

"It was the best experience of my life," she said.

A New Partner in the Church

Today, Quésia looks back on that moment as a turning point. Now she is joining you in sharing God's Word in Brazil, especially with women in the Presbyterian Church of Brazil.

"Quésia helps women get together to read Scripture, organizes conferences, and equips them to be leaders in their own churches," Lopes said.

God used the faithful prayers and financial gifts from the Christian Reformed Church to lead Quésia to him. Please pray for Quésia as she disciples women and serves churches in Brazil.

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

A New Radio Program in Uganda Digs Deep into God's Word

When the novel coronavirus pandemic hit, many believers wrestled with questions of faith: If God is good, why is this happening? Is God punishing us?

"In (Uganda), where the false prosperity gospel is usually taken for granted as truth, many Christians don't know how to think about suffering in their lives, especially sickness and poverty," said Resonate Global Mission missionary Anthony Sytsma.

Sytsma and Richard Okiror, who serves with the Pentecostal Assemblies of God Soroti Pamba Church, started preaching every week over the radio to provide support to believers during COVID-19 restrictions. In Uganda, internet access is hard to come by, so many people tuned in to the radio for worship and teaching.

"We learned that people really appreciated hearing sermons that had more theological depth than they were used to hearing," said Sytsma.

Discovering a hunger in listeners to learn more about God's Word, Sytsma, Okiror, and their team knew they needed to continue teaching over the airwaves even as COVID-19 restrictions started to loosen. They launched a new radio program called *Going Deeper*. The program teaches people basic theology and how to read and interpret Scripture, and it shares ways they can grow in relationship with God.

The team has covered a variety of topics, including prayer and the fruit of the Spirit. But the first series of episodes focused on God's sovereignty, the problem of evil and suffering, and God's providence, which was especially comforting to believers.

"The teaching on God's providence has encouraged me to have hope of life during this pandemic," one pastor said.



Richard Okiror (left) and Resonate missionary Anthony Sytsma are seeing people come to Christ and grow in relationship with God through a new radio program in Uganda.

Photo by Anthony and Sara Sytsma

A retired bishop shared with the team that it was the first time he had heard good teaching about God's providence. He plans to preach about it in churches where he ministers.

"It is a great encouragement to us when we see Christians experiencing great joy at finally understanding aspects of the Christian faith or specific Bible passages that have confused them for years," said Sytsma.

And while the radio program focuses on teaching people who are already Christians, Sytsma and the team are amazed at the number of people who have come to know Christ.

One day, a woman contacted the team. Her father struggled with alcoholism; her mother was religious but didn't personally know God's love and grace. The woman was raised to be religious but didn't have a relationship with God. Listening to the radio program, however, gave her hope.

Moses, one of the program's translators, talked and prayed with her. He asked her if she wanted to accept Christ as her Savior, and she said yes. Her mother has also accepted Christ. As the team does for all new believers through the program, they worked to make sure the woman and her family were connected with a local church and ministry leader.

"I am continually inspired and encouraged by my team members," Sytsma said. "They are passionate and gifted evangelists who never fail to share the good news of the gospel with people who call in with questions or to ask for prayer."

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

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Deep-Sea Discoveries

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what it would be like to take a submarine trip into the ocean? If you did, you would discover all kinds of amazing things! Let's take a dive into the ocean to see what we find!

The Sunlight Zone

The sunlight zone is the part of the ocean that is closest to the shore and gets the most sunlight. In the sunlight zone you will find sea animals like colorful fish, dolphins, seals, and sharks. The sunlight zone is also home to underwater plants like seaweed, kelp, and sea lettuce.

The Twilight Zone

The twilight zone is the next layer of the ocean that is about 650-3,000 feet (200-1,000 meters) underwater. The twilight zone is also known as the mesopelagic zone. No plants live in this zone, and many sea animals make their own light here! Cool sea creatures like lanternfish, dragonfish, squid, and eels live in this zone.

The Midnight Zone

Are you ready to go even deeper on our submarine ocean adventure? Let's go! After you pass the twilight zone, the next stop is the midnight zone. The midnight zone is about 3,300-13,000 feet (1,000-4,000 meters) deep! Animals living in the midnight zone include vampire squid, angler fish, and sea cucumbers.

The Abyssal Zone

The abyssal zone can go as deep as 20,000 feet (6,096 meters) underwater. The name for this zone comes from the word "abyss," which in the Greek language means "bottomless sea." No sunlight ever reaches this zone, making it very dark and cold. The abyssal zone can reach temperatures of 35 degrees Fahrenheit (about

1 degree Celsius). That's as cold as a winter day in the northern U.S. or Canada! Some of the animals that live in this zone are deep-sea jellyfish and tripod fish.

The Trench Zone

We've reached the very bottom of the ocean! Our submarine has landed in the trench zone. Ocean trenches are long, deep openings on the ocean floor—the deepest parts of the ocean. The deepest trench in the world is the Mariana Trench near the island of Guam in the western Pacific Ocean. It is seven miles deep, or about 36,200 feet (11,000 meters) underwater! Animals in this zone include giant tube worms, cusk-eels, and amphipods.

The Ocean: God's Amazing Creation

I hope you enjoyed your trip to the amazing zones of the ocean! The Bible has a lot to say about the ocean. In Psalm 104:25, it says, "There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number— living things both large and small." There are so many awesome creatures in the zones of the ocean, and God created them all! 🐠



Christin Baker is a full-time stay-at-home mom who also writes for Faith Alive. She is a member of Resurrection Fellowship Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Illustration for *The Banner* by Anita Barghigiani



Managing Anger in Troubled Times

By Judy Cook

It may come as a surprise to you to learn that excessive anger or rage is not a characteristic you were born with. Although anger, as one of the five primary human emotions (anger, sadness, joy, fear, guilt), is just as much a part of us as our five senses are, rage or wrath, described by Christian theologians as one of the seven deadly sins (wrath, sloth, pride, greed, envy, gluttony, lust), is not. And there you have it in a nutshell: anger is a normal and at times necessary emotion; rage is a deadly sin.

Anger can also be a horrible thing—like a force of nature. Anger can flash like lightning; it can obliterate like a blizzard; it can overwhelm like a flood. It seems as if anger is often bad and destructive and therefore best avoided. But is there a legitimate place for white-hot anger? If so, how do we manage our anger, and when do we let it flash? Can it even be “managed,” or do we simply suppress anger in

the hope that it will go away if we ignore it?

Add to that the stresses created by the new normal of mask wearing, distancing, and isolating due to COVID-19. This virus seeks to infect all people worldwide and has led to hundreds of thousands of deaths, particularly among older people, those with compromised immune systems, and especially those with preexisting respiratory conditions. With the fear generated by this virus, a new fury—COVID rage—has joined other angers such as road rage. Clearly we must sort through the different feelings we experience, and we must navigate negative emotions in a way that is both instructive and constructive.

If we believe with Paul that there is a way toward contentment in all circumstances, then surely in our time that journey begins with understanding the different angers we feel and how we can release, discharge, or manage this created emotion.

Anger Energy

One thing anger does is provide energy for action. Anger energy needs to be discharged. If it cannot be discharged safely, it does not disappear. It will be stored in a person's body, in one's conscious or subconscious memory. It can then be discharged safely, either through a challenge (e.g., running a race) or by projecting onto someone we deem to be “safe” (i.e., someone who will not retaliate).

When anger energy gets stored, it turns bitter and will begin to attack the self, most often by creating feelings of depression—that is, the experience of sadness coupled with the bitterness created by stored anger. This is the worst thing anyone can do with anger. Stored anger is psychologically painful and debilitating. It becomes a weight that creates a paralysis and a sense of hopelessness—the very opposite of anger energy, which can lead to constructive action or clear the air between two people.

It is of course true that those who feel helpless and powerless are most often in danger of internalizing legitimate anger and turning it on themselves in the form of depression. It is healthier to find a scapegoat to blame and on which to vent your anger than it is to internalize anger energy that cannot be discharged or cleansed. A good example of safely scapegoating one's anger is given in Matthew 21:18-19. In this passage Jesus is hungry. He goes to the fig tree in hope of some fruit. When the fig tree doesn't provide food for him, his anger flares (unfairly) toward this innocent tree, and Jesus lets that anger flash via a curse on the tree, which then dies. This is safe scapegoating.

COVID rage is an example of unsafe and sinful scapegoating. We blame our spouse or children, our boss, or God for hurting us, which helps us justify the anger we feel against them. We then let our stored anger energy flash to discharge the pressure. When we hurt an animal or other people or destroy someone's possessions—when we wreak vengeance—we are purposely hurting someone or something “safe” to rid ourselves of anger caused by something we cannot change or control. It helps us feel justified when we scapegoat.

How to Discern

You might ask, “How can I decide whether my anger is legitimate rather than sinful? Isn't all rage destructive?” But there is a difference: Legitimate anger focuses on the needs, honor, or defense of someone else, whereas sinful rage is in defense of oneself.

Notice Matthew 21:12-13. Here Jesus' anger also flashes, but this time on behalf of the marginalized (the blind, lame, and poor). Jesus clears the temple courts of its commercial activity, overthrowing tables and chasing out merchants selling small animals and birds for sacrifice to those who have come to worship God. His anger flashes in defense of the poor and for the honor of God. Jesus declares that

A good argument
can bring clarity
to viewpoints and
can clear the air.

the temple courts should be a place of prayer for the benefit of the sick and the marginalized, not a marketplace for the benefit of local businessmen.

It is reasonable to assume that Jesus, at this point nearing his suffering and death on the cross, is under stress. He knows what lies ahead for him, and he is utterly alone in that knowledge. He knows the hosannas and adulation that will be poured out soon are nothing but a prelude to his torture and death.

With hindsight we know that for us this is good news. Because Jesus walked the road of obedience through his torture, death, and resurrection, and because Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to help us to follow the risen Lord who is now King of kings, we, like Jesus, can let our own anger flash in appropriate ways on behalf of those who are marginalized or unjustly oppressed. Like Jesus, we can speak up and use the anger energy we feel to respond to the cries of those targeted by systemic injustice—to be the voices that shine a light on privilege, sexism, and marginalization of the poor and the differently abled, that hear the voices of those who are denied inclusion at the table because of gender or sexual identity issues where they alone must change before they are welcome to join the rest of us at the banquet of our Lord.

It is this kind of anger, expended on behalf of others, that is a “righteous anger.” It can be a strongly felt energy, as potent as deadly rage, but instead of

sin it is “righteous” because it is anger used to right a wrong on behalf of a neighbor.

Normal Anger vs. Destructive Rage

But what about ordinary angers we all experience that have to do with day-to-day interactions with spouses, children, friends, church families—in short, anger that needs to be understood and managed in the normal exercise of life, love, work, and play? How do we give a voice to the anger we might on occasion feel toward those we love?

It might be helpful to distinguish between anger that functions normally and a violent anger that rages destructively. Just because voices are raised and strong opinions are expressed and accompanied by strong feelings on both sides does not mean that something is wrong. A good argument can bring clarity to viewpoints and can clear the air.

All people, Christians included, must learn to manage strong emotions. Unchecked anger that builds into a state of rage can do an untold amount of damage to our spouses or children, to extended family members, to colleagues and church family, and of course to ourselves. When we've learned patterns of anger that hurt others, when we channel softer emotions like sadness or self-accusing emotions like guilt and shame into anger because anger is familiar and more comfortable, then we are at risk of having our anger flare up into rage—or quietly smolder as bitterness only to fly into a rage when we least expect it. So how do I get rid of rage and learn to keep my anger in check?

Learning to do this—or unlearning our anger habits—is not a simple process. Being full of wrath and learning how to experience and manage normal anger takes commitment. It is a bit like having to learn a new language while also having to forget a secret language full of curses and condemnations. To embark on this course of study takes commitment, a dedication to practice.

It helps to ask someone you trust to take this journey of unlearning and relearning with you.

Three Principles

If deadly rage is part of what you struggle with, the following three principles might be of help. The first principle is: *I must take responsibility for my anger, stop blaming others, and stop believing I am a helpless victim.*

Even if you were victimized as a child and the anger you still carry because of that victimization was entirely justified, you must decide that this legitimate anger of the past has now become something hurtful in the present. It hurts those who are close to you when you get triggered and feel stressed enough to lash out at someone unfairly. You also end up hurting yourself. Stored anger is bitter and heavy, and there's always the danger of it becoming depression, which is even more debilitating.

The second principle is that *I must learn to understand the triggers from my past that still create anger in the present.*

This part of the journey might best be undertaken with the help of a therapist who can journey with you as you explore your history. If therapy is not available, turn to someone else you trust—an elder, a pastor, or a trusted and wise mentor.

If professional therapy is not affordable, use a well-written resource instead. The second edition of *Anger Management for Dummies* is an excellent course of study for self-therapy. The authors, Charles Elliott and Laura Smith, are both clinical psychologists well versed in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which is the therapeutic approach most helpful for understanding what's behind the thinking that fuels the rage you feel when you get triggered.

Be intentional in discovering what makes your anger flash, and learn techniques to cool down your anger

before you allow it to damage a relationship with someone you love.

The third principle is that *I must learn to forgive quickly and thoroughly when I feel anger moving toward rage.*

Forgiveness is not a one-time proposition. In Matthew 18, when Peter asked Jesus how often forgiveness was required, Jesus basically said, "As often as needed." This truth is foundational. It is much easier to rehearse one's anger by internally replaying a perceived slight than it is to forgive. And, of course, what is rehearsed in thought slowly grows into feeling.

When anger energy begins to surge toward rage, it is completely counterintuitive to, at that very moment, forgive those in the present as well as those in the past who owe you your deserved anger. Rehearsing your own anger and justifying why you have a right to be angry feels much better than choosing to forgive the perceived wrong in another person. It takes courage and resolve to do something that feels painful and difficult. In the Lord's Prayer Jesus encourages us to do this hard thing by tying his forgiveness of our sins securely to our forgiveness of our neighbor—that is, anyone we come in contact with.

Right up until his death, Jesus consistently modeled how to live a life in which even our enemies receive forgiveness that was not deserved. This releases not only the person who deserves our anger; it releases us from the burden of bitterness and the destruction of rage.

Shane Pennells, a filmmaker and writer who works with at-risk youth, wrote a short column for the weekly *Ancaster News* of Sept. 17, 2020, in which he likened destructive anger to a forest fire, which is "captivating and terrifying" and which will destroy the whole forest if left unchecked. But a "slow, controlled burn, while not as exciting, leaves fertile soil in its wake, with more life afterwards than before." Pennells then describes how forgiveness "is not about releasing someone

from the responsibility of their actions, but ... about taking back the power that was taken from you." In other words, forgiveness (love) in response to evil and destruction is more powerful than the power of our rage.

We need the power only forgiveness can give if we want to let righteous anger speak in response to injustice. We also need that power so that, using anger energy as a constructive vehicle, we can resolve the differences and irritations we all experience, not only at home and at church, but also as workers and citizens in the world. We need to learn to forgive quickly if we want to belong to that kingdom of peace and honor the King of kings even with our anger.



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

1. How have you viewed anger in your life? How do you normally manage it?
2. What are other examples of unsafe scapegoating?
3. What are some generally known "triggers" for people, and how do we avoid them?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

The Shalom-berg

Every act of shalom is a reflection of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the Prince of Shalom we worship.



Kelly Vander Woude is the pastor of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Fort Collins, Colo. He loves to smoke all kinds of food, hang out with his wife and kids, and try to build things.

MOST OF US RECOGNIZE the word “shalom” when we see it and understand that it means “peace.” And yet that’s just the tip of what I’m calling the “shalom-berg.” It’s not just peace, and it’s not just a word. It’s a life-giving, life-enriching, life-breathing peace like none other—a peace that the English language just cannot grasp.

The Hebrew writers of the Old Testament use the word “shalom” more than 200 times. In Exodus 20:24, it’s used to describe the peace offering to consecrate a relationship between God and people; in Genesis 15:15 it refers to one’s well-being or success and even one’s salvation. But then we have a scattering of “shalom” meanings: being complete and unharmed, prosperity, unity, and perfection. The list is long, the texts are beautiful, and the “shalom-berg” gets bigger the further down we go.

Where do all of these shaloms come full circle in Scripture? In Jesus. The Bible declares that Jesus is our “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). Jesus embodies all these beautiful understandings of shalom; he is our Prince of Shalom. Every “shalom” we hear or read points us directly to Jesus Christ.


Jesus speaks to us and gives us peace. His words, love, and guidance are peaceful and good. His is a peace that always was and will always be. And when we begin to see Jesus as our shalom, we begin to understand the depth and hope of that shalom:

- » We read in 1 Timothy 2:5 that Jesus Christ as mediator restores our broken relationship with God and gives us shalom with God. Jesus’ death was the payment for our sins, the restoration of our lives, and the declaration of eternal shalom that awaits us.
- » Jesus also restores our relationships with others. In his death and

resurrection we are given shalom as all the animosity between us is washed away by his blood.

- » With Jesus’ return we’ll have shalom with the earth in the new creation. No more will we be living the words of Genesis 3:17-19, when animosity and sin wreaked havoc on the relationship of humans to creation.

As I look at this world I am thankful for the shalom we’re given and the shalom that awaits us. This world is messed up, and clearly, when it’s left up to us, we don’t make it better. But we cannot just toss up our hands and do nothing, because on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), shalom came down to us once more and took root in our lives—an indwelling of shalom that convicts and sends. That means that we are to live out shalom within and outside ourselves and around the world. And as we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ here on earth, to be his representatives here and around the world, we must therefore bring shalom. Every act of shalom is a reflection of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the Prince of Shalom we worship.

So how are you sharing shalom today at home, at work, at the grocery store, on the soccer field, on the airplane, talking to your neighbor, or with your family? 

1. What did you understand the word “shalom” to mean?
2. How do we recognize shalom in our world? What are some of the marks or signs of shalom we can see?
3. How do we, either individually or collectively, work alongside Jesus in fostering shalom?

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

'Mother Mary': A Matriarch at Madison Square Church

When Mary first came to Madison, there were just a few other Black families. Still, she felt at home there instantly.



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., in a house full of teenagers, pets, exchange students, and houseplants. The author of 15 books, including *Anne of Green Gables*, *My Daughter and Me*, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*.

AT MADISON SQUARE CHURCH, she's known as Miss Mary or, to some, Mother Mary, because Mary Cancler is a true matriarch of the church she has been a member of for almost 50 years.

Born Mary Bingham on Aug. 8, 1927, in Muncie, Ind., Mary was raised from the age of 4 in a little Kentucky town called Cadiz, population 500—but only with “counting the chickens and the hens.” (Besides Mary, Cadiz's other luminary is “Yakety Sax” saxophonist Boots Randolph.)

Mary was 8 when her baby sister, Deloris, was born, one of 11 children born to the Bingham family with roots in Europe, Africa, and the Indigenous tribes of North America. Deloris Traylor also attended Madison for decades, but before the sisters would move to Grand Rapids and begin attending a Christian Reformed church, there was growing up to do in the Jim Crow South. There was also an unjust history with which to reckon.

Mary's family tree includes one great-grandfather, a Native American, who was bought as a slave in Texas and brought to Cadiz with whip scars on his back. “That's how we ended up in Kentucky,” Mary said. Her white grandfather, a man for whom her Black grandmother worked, never knew his son—Mary's father—who could “pass for white.”

“My father was never bitter,” Mary said. “He was a good, loving Christian man.”

The Bingham girls and their siblings attended a segregated school to which they were transported daily in the back of a pickup truck, rain or shine, 20 miles each way. They attended a Black Baptist church, and she was baptized at the age of 12 “out in a river” after “going down to the mourning bench.” In the Black Baptist church of the South, when you turned 12 years old you were expected to “go

down” to a bench or seat at the front of the church, set apart for sinners seeking salvation, as a sign that you were repentant and you wanted to be baptized and join the church. When Mary was taken to the river to be baptized, her younger sister Laura was “hollering and crying,” Mary said. “She thought they were going to drown me.”

In 1954, teenage Deloris got caught in the updraft of the Great Migration, the relocation of more than 6 million African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North, Midwest, and West from 1916 to 1970. “Driven from their homes by unsatisfactory economic opportunities and harsh segregationist laws,” *History.com* says, “many Blacks headed north, where they took advantage of the need for industrial workers.”

Deloris had plenty to do in Grand Rapids, where she quickly found work in a factory that manufactured body mounts for GM, Ford, and Mercedes, and painted car parts. According to Mary, who was left behind in Cadiz, Deloris had “money in her pocket and nice clothes and a nice suitcase” when she came back for a visit. Sometimes when Deloris called her on the phone, she jingled her money into the receiver so Mary could hear it.

Mary, lured by Deloris' success, moved to Grand Rapids herself a few years later. She found work at Blodgett Hospital, and she met and married Lee Cancler, an electrician at General Motors. They would be married for more than 40 years before his death.

By the 1960s, the couple had five children: Jacqueline, Lee Coy, Rodney, Bruce, and Marsha. They moved to Prospect Street in the Madison Heights neighborhood, home of Madison Square CRC. At the time, Mary was attending True Life Baptist Church, the church she had attended since



moving to Grand Rapids with her brother's girlfriend.

The church came across the sisters' radar when a pastor's wife named Martine Griffioen began tutoring one of Delores' sons at Iroquois School on the southeast side of Grand Rapids. Griffioen's husband was the interim pastor at Madison, and she invited Delores and her family to come be a part of it.

By this time Deloris had seven boys and one girl. A woman named Hilda Ackerman picked up her children every Sunday morning and drove them to church and Sunday school. Mary's children also began attending youth programs there.

In 1973 the sisters attended a special Mother's Day program at the church. Mary was impressed with the quality of the program and how well her children sang. "The Bible says 'a little child shall lead them,'" Mary said. She and Deloris began attending the almost all-white church and have stayed ever since.

When Mary first came to Madison, there were just a few other Black



families. Still, she felt at home there instantly. "I just loved it," she said. "It was 'come as you are.'" The congregation quickly became "a home church for me." (Lee Cancler, Mary's husband, attended a Methodist church.)

It wasn't just that her children enjoyed the kids' programs. Mary was drawn to a couple of facets of life at Madison.

One draw was the weekly reciting of the Apostles' Creed.

"I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth" That's the beginning of the code and canon Mary heard that first Sunday morning at Madison. It filled her then and now with substance, a sense of belonging, and an identity whose roots ran deeper than race, gender, geography, or economics. "The best thing about that is, you know who you are" after listening to the creed, she said.


She knew who she was in Christ, and also in the body. "Back in those days, we knew everyone in church," Mary said. "Pastor Vern Geurking used to visit me all the time. He was a real sweet man."

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic the sanctuary at Madison has been quiet save for the occasional recording of a pastor preaching a sermon to an empty room. Mary watches the sermons on her phone from home and continues to pray "every day for the leaders and the pastors of the body of Christ." She prays for her fellow church members, and awaits the day when she can safely worship with them again.

Mary also prays daily for the homeless and takes twice-weekly drives into downtown Grand Rapids with her daughter to see firsthand how the vulnerable people she prays for are faring. "'Lord, open a door for them,' I pray," she said.

Mary has belonged to Madison for 47 of its 106 years, and she hopes her offspring will continue to grow at church and make it their core and foundation until they are all together enjoying "the life everlasting."

"One day I prayed that my children would be going here until they are in the grave," Mary said with a laugh. "But then I realized that wasn't right. They just needed to go to a Bible-believing church.

"But you know what?" She can't help but smirk a little. "They are still all here!" 


A Review of *Caste*, an Instant American Classic

WHEN I PICKED UP *Caste*, by Isabel Wilkerson, I had high expectations. The 2020 book was written by the same person who wrote *The Warmth of Other Suns*, a stunning Pulitzer Prize-winning book. It also came highly recommended by a friend of mine very much involved in racial justice work. At first the book's length put me off, but I soon found that it was a book I needed to read slowly. The book promised to link America's caste systems to those of India and Nazi Germany. Even knowing this before picking up the book, I found that my heart wasn't always prepared for what I would read.

My mind was prepared. I am a sociologist by training. I am also a trained anti-racist facilitator. I have had personal experiences with America's caste system, and I can still recall the stories my grandparents and parents shared of their caste-system encounters. But in the telling of our experiences of racism and classism, we never used the word "caste." A caste system, Wilkerson writes, "relies on dehumanization to lock the marginalized outside the norms of humanity so that action against them is seen as reasonable."

The brilliance of Wilkerson's writing is that her well-researched work is filled with relatable stories that connect academic definitions, social concepts, and the historical past to present-day indignities. In one example she tells of her experience on a flight with a first-class ticket but without a first-class experience. She describes a rather nasty encounter with a man who loudly states to the person next to him about her, "That's what happens when they let just anybody in first class." The person continued to make her trip miserable by challenging her right to sit with her seat back so she could sleep. She concludes her story with, "I went back and sat up straight, across

the length of the country. The caste system had put me in my place."

But *Caste* is not just about personal indignities. If that were the case, it would not be much of a book. *Caste* strives to raise awareness of the reality and consequences of a 400-year-old system of structured inequalities. Wilkerson's book awakens readers to the nearly invisible historical and social forces that limit, harm, and kill people who are not at the top of our socially constructed hierarchies. "Once awakened," she says, "we have a choice. We can be born to the dominant caste but choose not to dominate. We can be born to a subordinate caste but resist the box others force upon us. And all of us can sharpen our powers of discernment to see past the external and to value the character of a person rather than demean those who are already marginalized or worship those born to false pedestals." *Caste* is not a light read, but it is an important book for those wanting to better understand the social forces that have created and sustain our American caste system. 



Michelle Loyd-Paige is the executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion at Calvin University, a member of Maple Avenue Ministries, and the founder of Preach Sista! (preachsista.org).

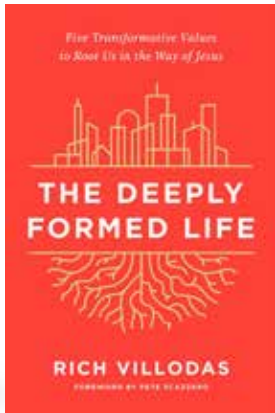


William Still and His Freedom Stories: The Father of the Underground Railroad

By Don Tate

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

William Still, who became known as the father of the Underground Railroad, was born in 1821 to freed slaves living in the North. Still recorded the stories of Black people who came through his "station," and his records helped reunite families like his own who had been torn apart by slavery. In 1872, Still published his book *The Underground Railroad*, which included stories of encounters with Harriet Tubman and Henry "Box" Brown. Don Tate's captivating, educational children's picture book concludes with an ode to the power of stories and a call to proclaim them: "That's what stories do. Protest injustice. Soothe. Teach. Inspire. Connect. Stories save lives. William's stories need to be told, so slavery's nightmare will never happen again." (Peachtree Publishing Company)

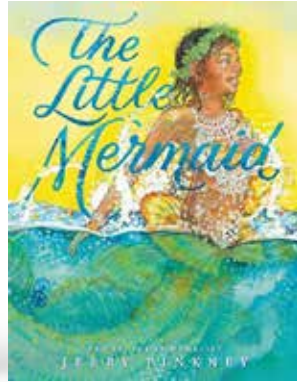


The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus

By Rich Villodas

Reviewed by
Kristyn DeNooyer

Rich Villodas invites us to journey with him in exploring time-tested values and practices for pursuing wholeness in mind, body, and soul. The five values are contemplative rhythms (in contrast to the cultural norms of hurry and busyness), racial reconciliation (acknowledging the urgency and necessity of a church characterized by healing), interior examination (using the psalms as a blueprint), missional presence (practicing justice and hospitality), and sexual wholeness. Villodas offers a simple resource that is refreshing, compelling, invitational, and kind, and gives us accessible steps to enter into deep and meaningful formation and guide us closer to the heart of God. (Waterbrook)



The Little Mermaid

By Jerry Pinkney

Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

“Far out in the ocean and miles below the surface, two realms sat divided by sea mountains.” So begins renowned children’s picture book illustrator Jerry Pinkney’s riveting re-conceiving of Hans Christian Anderson’s classic story. Immediately, young readers are introduced to the conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, and the noble Sea King’s merfolk kingdom and the greedy-hearted Sea Witch’s domain. The Sea King’s youngest daughter, the mermaid princess Melody, has a beautiful voice and an insatiable curiosity about the world that exists beyond the ocean’s surface. A feast for the eyes, Pinkney’s artwork dazzles with its vivid detail and alluring vision of worlds beneath the sea where evil is destroyed by a young protagonist who reclaims her gift. (Little, Brown Books for Young Readers)



The Queen’s Gambit

Reviewed by Jenny deGroot

Since the release of *The Queen’s Gambit*, chess boards have been selling like toilet paper in a pandemic—and girls are in on the game like never before thanks to Anya Taylor-Joy’s portrayal of Beth Harmon, the fictional chess-playing star of this TV mini-series. The story follows Harmon’s troubled childhood, beginning with her arrival in an orphanage at the tender age of 5. Flashbacks at the beginning of each episode fill in haunting memories. But Beth develops an unlikely friendship with the orphanage’s janitor, Mr. Shaibel (Bill Camp), and becomes his chess protégé, quickly surpassing him in skill. The episodes follow Beth into early adulthood, when her skills and her drug use push her to new levels of chess success in Kentucky, in the nation, and finally on the world stage. Rated TV-MA for coarse language, suggestive sexual content, and self-harming drug and alcohol abuse. (Netflix)

The Lowdown

Till I Want No More: When the man she loved years ago returns to town, a young woman’s complicated past rises again, threatening to expose her well-kept secrets in Robin W. Pearson’s sophomore novel. (Tyndale)

DC Legend: Jefferson Pierce made his choice: he hung up the suit and his secret identity years ago. But with a daughter hell-bent on justice and a star student being recruited by a local gang, he’ll be pulled back into the fight as the wanted vigilante and DC legend Black Lightning. (The CW)

Tell Them We Are Rising: Though much of the history of the nation’s historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) was eclipsed by the explosiveness of the 1960s, the essential role they played in shaping Black life, creating a Black middle class, and dismantling segregation cannot be overstated. (PBS Documentaries, Amazon Prime)

Rousing Biography: Called “a dangerous negro agitator” by the FBI and a “brave woman” by Frederick Douglass, *Ida B. the Queen* is an inspiring biography of the journalist and civil rights pioneer Ida B. Wells by her great-granddaughter Michelle Duster. (Atria)

Why Do We Blame God for Natural Disasters?

God entrusted
God's good world
to our care. But in
our selfishness,
we have not
lived up to that
partnership.



Mary Hulst is university pastor for Calvin University and teaches at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Mich.

TORNADOES, HURRICANES, or floods used to be called “acts of God.” The language we use now is less theologically loaded: “natural disasters.”

But that doesn't really take God off the hook, does it?

For those of us who proclaim God the Creator, Redeemer, and sustainer of the world, we know that creation is under his control:

The LORD does whatever
pleases him,
in the heavens and on the earth,
in the seas and all their depths.
He makes clouds rise from the ends
of the earth;
he sends lightning with the rain
and brings out the wind from his
storehouses (Ps. 135:6-7).

How then should we think about natural disasters?

God created the world to work in certain ways and follow certain rules. The sun rises and sets. Seasons come and go. And when conditions are right, tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods result. The Belgic Confession describes this as God's “orderly arrangement” of the world (Art. 13). Storms arise because that's how God designed the world to work. We might be in the way of a storm and suffer loss as a result, but we do not say that God sent a storm to punish us. “The Lord sends rain on the just and the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). Everyone is affected by bad weather.

We also need to be clear that natural disasters are not caused by Satan. Satan is a creature, just as we are. Satan does not control creation. Satan can, however, influence us. Satan can turn us toward selfishness and the exploitation of creation for our own purposes. That's when God's “orderly arrangement” gets disordered.

God designed us to work with creation as God's covenant partners (Gen.


1:28-29; Ps. 8). God entrusted God's good world to our care. But in our selfishness, we have not lived up to that partnership. We have broken God's rules for caring for creation, and are paying the price. Scientists predict that natural disasters will continue to get worse because of what we have done.

Think about it this way: If I pour gas on my lawn, the grass will die. Is God in charge of the grass? Yes. Has God made me God's steward to care for the grass? Yes. Did God cause the grass to die? No. I did. I was working against God's “orderly arrangement” for grass.

What has happened across our planet is that we have “poured gas” on the lawns we've been given to steward, and we are living with the consequences of our actions. Just as I can't pour gas on my lawn and then say, “Well, if the grass died, it's God's will,” we can't wantonly pollute the earth and then say, “Well, if the storms are getting worse, it's God's will.”

To pour gas on a lawn and not expect the grass to die is ignorant. To ruin God's good earth and not expect things to get worse is just as bad.

Thankfully, God loves the world, and God loves us. If we listen to creation groaning (Rom. 8:22), if we repent of our sin against creation and work for restoration and renewal, God can use us to bring some healing back to God's beautiful world.

We all marveled at the images from major cities when commuting stopped and pollution plummeted. We saw the animals come back into national parks and into our backyards. We heard the birds louder than we had before. God invites us to care for creation when the pandemic is over, too, acting in covenant partnership with our Creator and restoring God's “orderly arrangement.” 

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

Down:

1. Reformed Church in America's _____ 2020 Report
2. A zone where vampire squid live
3. A pastor who is bivocational holds more than one _____
4. A pastor starting new churches is a church _____
6. A spiritual _____ listens with you to God's voice in your life
7. This should not necessarily replace medication
9. A CRC started by immigrants in Ontario
11. Title of a book by Isabel Wilkerson
12. Where new radio program *Going Deeper* was launched
15. It means more than peace

Across:

5. God is not racially _____
8. *The Queen's* _____
10. Anger is a kind of _____ that must be discharged
11. Two Christian schools won championships in cross-_____ last fall
13. A matriarch at Madison Square Church
14. Spiritual disciplines can be called "faith _____"
16. Annual general assembly of the Christian Reformed Church
17. _____ B. *the Queen* is an inspiring biography of a journalist and civil rights pioneer

Answers to the January 2021 puzzle

1. REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA'S 2020 REPORT
 2. VAMPIRE SQUID ZONE
 3. BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
 4. CHURCH STARTER
 6. SPIRITUAL LISTENER
 7. MEDICATION
 9. ONTARIO REFORMED CHURCH
 11. THE CASHIERS
 12. GOING DEEPER
 15. PEACE
 5. RACIALLY
 8. THE QUEEN'S JOURNAL
 10. DISCHARGE
 11. CROSS-COUNTRY
 13. MARIANNE
 14. FAITH DISCIPLINES
 16. ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY
 17. BETSY B. THE QUEEN

Free Family Faith Formation Resources

Want to help families learn to pray together, explore God's Word together, and grow in faith? Check out *Dwell at Home's* "5 Ways" series at DwellCurriculum.org/Home.

These FREE one-page tip sheets give parents and caregivers practical, creative ideas for nurturing faith at home.

They're perfect for sharing with families via email, social media, and your church's website. Or download and print them to hand out.

For more ways to connect children's ministry and family faith formation check out DwellCurriculum.org/Home

dwell AT HOME

DEADLINES: 2/1/21 for March; 3/1/21 April.

Subject to availability. Details online.

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

PRICES: Most ads are \$0.43^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.36^{US} per character and \$60 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 or email it to classifieds@thebanner.org or fax it to 616-224-0834. Questions? Call 616-224-0725.

Church Positions Available

DISCIPLESHIP, YOUTH, AND WORSHIP LEADER. Christ Community Church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin is searching for a full-time ministry leader who is in love with the Lord, humble, Spirit-led, relates well to all generations, has a heart for prayer and worship, appreciates contemporary and traditional music, and is ready to join us in following the Lord to reach our community in bold and creative ways. This person must be ready to work hard and embrace our family just as we will welcome this person with open arms for what we expect will be many years of growing together. Interested Candidates please send resume to jimriemersma@gmail.com.

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. Job description and church profile are available on the Portal.

SENIOR PASTOR Faith Presbyterian CRC of Guam is seeking a senior pastor for our multi-ethnic congregation. We desire a candidate with strong Bible-teaching skills and a heart for evangelism. Web: www.faithchurchguam.org. Interested applicants may email kvoldsteadt@gmail.com or fprcguam@gmail.com or call 1- 671-734-7778.

WORSHIP COORDINATOR The Junction Church in St. Thomas, ON is seeking to fill a 16-20 hour per week position for a Worship Coordinator. This position requires music proficiency and an ability to plan a variety of worship styles in a multi-generational setting within the Christian Reformed perspective of Blended Worship. Interested candidates can visit our website at thejunctionchurchstthomas.com for a more detailed job description and to submit a resume with references.

Congregational Announcements

COME WINTER WITH US Escape the harsh winter and enjoy the sunny beaches of Bradenton, FL. Make Bradenton CRC your church home away from home. We offer multiple services for safe gathering during the pandemic. For details, check our website at bradentoncrc.org. We look forward to you worshipping with us!

WORSHIP IN CENTRAL FLORIDA you are invited to worship with us at Lake Alfred Ministry, a church of Reformed persuasion in Central FL, meeting from Nov. 15-April 11. Services: 10AM & 5:50pm. Pastors: Rev. Ed Tamminga, Feb. 7-28; Rev. Ron Noorman, March 7- April 11. Address: 140 Mallard, Lake Alfred FL. Directions: lakealfredministry.org or call 269-720-6413

Denominational Announcements

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2021 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the office of the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda: a. Overtures, communications, and appeals to synod are due no later than March 15, and must first be processed through the local council and the classis. b. Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the Credentials for Synod form, as well as the completed information form for each synodical delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes and the appointed delegates as soon as possible, but no later than March 15. Materials

will be included in the Agenda for Synod if received before the synodically established deadlines. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director of the CRCNA

ANNUAL DAY OF PRAYER Synod has designated the second Wednesday in March (March 10, 2021) as the Annual Day of Prayer. All CRC congregations are requested to take this opportunity to ask for God's blessing upon the world, our nations and communities, crops and industry, and the church worldwide. U.S. Councils, if it is judged that the observance of the Annual Day of Prayer can be more meaningfully observed in conjunction with the National Day of Prayer (U.S.), you have the right to change the date of a special service accordingly (Acts of Synod 1996, p. 578). The National Day of Prayer (U.S.) is Thursday, May 6, 2021. Colin P. Watson, Sr., Executive Director of the CRCNA

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 101 YEARS

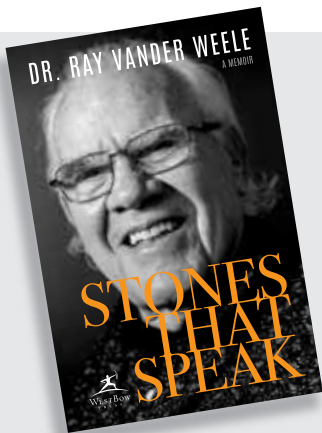
HILDA MANTING (VAN MEETEREN) celebrates her 101st birthday on February 4th. She is honored by her children David and Kathy Manting and Joan and Wes Knapp for her positive spirit and vibrant faith. She continues to share her joy of life with her many friends, children, five grandchildren and nine great-grandsons.

BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS

ROSE (KLOOSTER) ZIGTERMAN of 16300 Louis Avenue, #620, South Holland, IL 60473, will celebrate her 95th birthday on February 28. Wife of the late Clarence Zigterman, mother of Karen (the late Case) Admiraal, Kent (Kathie) and Paul (Bonnie), grandmother of 15 and great-grandmother of 20 (1 deceased). Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

PETER BUMA of 1224 Bates St. S.E. GR MI 49506 will celebrate his 90th Birthday on February 24. Pete enjoyed 60 years of marriage with his beloved wife Milly before her death in 2017. Blessed by his presence in their lives are Pete's children - Craig and Shari Buma, Doug and Kathi Buma, Mark and Jane Haverkamp - his grandchildren - Chris and Keri Buma, Grant and Carolyn Buma, Matt and Kelly Styf, Jonathan and Gina Buma, Seth and Audrey Buma, Matthew Haverkamp, Timothy Haverkamp - his great grandchildren - Clara, Emma, Sophia, Zoe, Kinsley, Boden, Noah, Leila, Benjamin, Harper, Josilyn. Ere Zij God!



Ray shares his perspective of growing up in the CRC, of which he has been a member all his life.

'This breakout memoir by a humble educator is an unraveling of the human experience, written in a raw and honest style that will prompt you to exhale and take stock of how you've lived your own life so far... and what you might do to enhance the time you have left.'

- Tom Rademacher, Author / Writer, and National Columnist of the Year 2017 & 2018

Purchase @ WestbowPress.com / Amazon.com
Connect @ StonesThatSpeak.com

JANE KAMMINGA celebrates her 90th birthday on Feb 3. She resides @ 725 Baldwin St #2005, Jenison, MI. 49428. She is enjoying good health & is a joy & blessing to her children, grandchildren & great grandchildren. We love you Mom & Grandma.

Anniversaries

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

REINDERS, Alice and Hank, Feb 18, 2021 celebrate their 70th anniversary. Their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren thank God for their love and faithfulness. 7-81 Wood St Drayton ON Canada N0G1P0

Obituaries

BERGSMA, Rev. Derke P., age 93, went home to be with his LORD and Savior on November 17, 2020. 1050 S. Euclid Ave, unit 2304, Elmhurst, IL 60126; Beloved husband of Doris Bergsma, nee Bielema loving; father of father of Deborah (Dan) Van Prooyen, Derk (Cheryl) Bergsma, Diann Otten, and Danette (Robert) Buikema; grandfather of 13; great-grandfather of 17. Professor, pastor, author, inspirational speaker for many Christian organizations, Captain in the US Navy and a reserve chaplain. Funeral services were held on Saturday, November 21, 2020, at Faith Christian Reformed Church in Elmhurst. Interment Abraham Lincoln. Memorials to Trinity Christian College and Westminster Seminary California, are appreciated.

BLANKESPOOR, Morris (Morry), age 78, of Pella, IA, joined his grandson, Micah De Kam, in heaven on November 24, 2020. He is survived by his wife of 53 years, Rose, his three children, Mark (Laura) Blankespoor, Lora Seifert, and Lisa (Matt) De Kam, 9 grandchildren, and soon to be a great-grandchild.

BROUWER, Harvard, 92 years old, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Tuesday, Dec. 29, 2020. Preceded in death by his wife Marion, he is survived by his 4 children: Kathy (Larry) Wells, Brian (Janice) Brouwer, Karla (Daniel) Harris, Timothy (Laura) Brouwer and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He loved our Lord and Savior and was eager to correspond with prisoner Bible studies and help his friends repair mechanical issues. A humble servant to all!



DE KONING, Gelske (nee Terpstra) was born on May 31, 1937, in Menaldumadeel, Friesland. After a long struggle with Alzheimer's, she died peacefully in her sleep on the early morning of November 28, 2020, when God called her home. She was the beloved

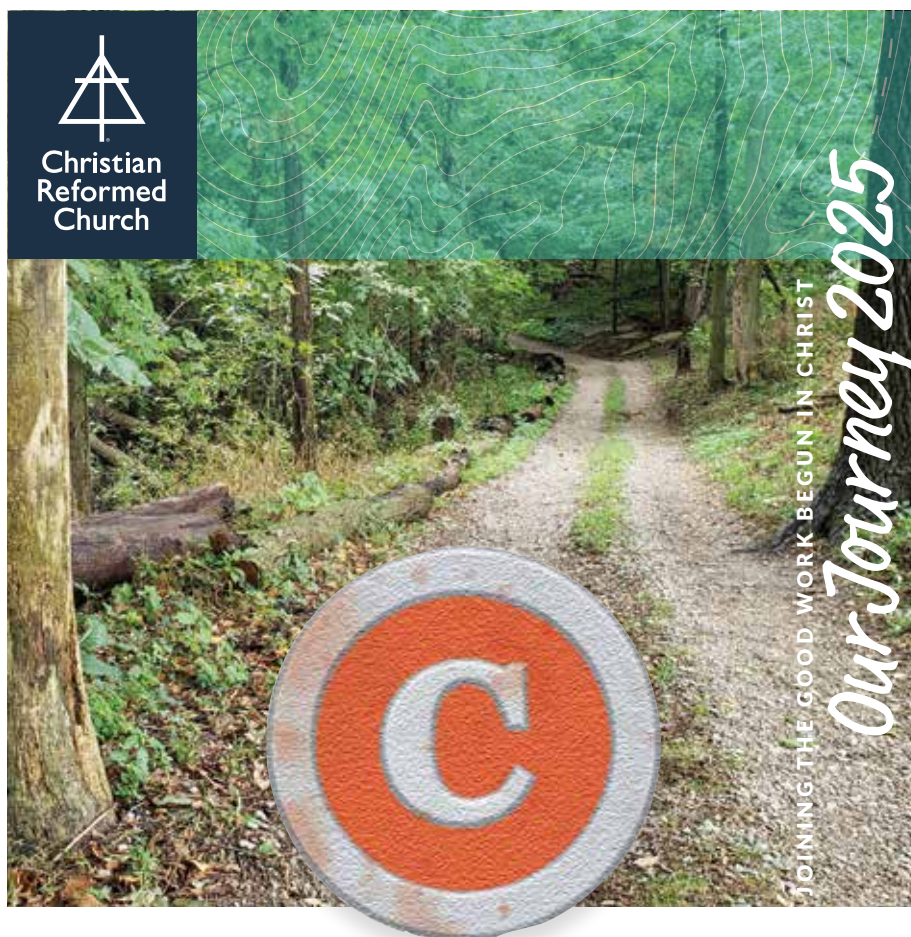
wife of Geert de Koning for 55 years; mother of Curt Andrew (Natasha Teerling), Edward (Christina Moedt), Ian (Katie Restoule) and Ronald (Colleen Cameron); and Grandma/Oma of Aaron and Eli; Brianna, Joshua, and

Sean; Rhys and Nola; Nathan and Samuel. Gelske is survived by a sister and two brothers in the Netherlands and preceded by her parents and five siblings. Gelske loved, trusted and faithfully obeyed her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ throughout her life. A private family service was held at Eden Brook Funeral Home with Gelske's final resting place at Eden Brook Memorial Gardens. Memorial donations can be made to Wycliffe Bible Translators. Condolences may be forwarded to the family by visiting www.edenbrookcemetery.ca.

FEENSTRA, Glennys, 87 of Corsica, SD passed peacefully on Dec. 4, 2020. Preceded in death by her husband John in 2015. Loving mother of Marjo (Jerry) BaanHofman, Delwin (Linda) Feenstra, Maxine (Tim) Haagsma, Marcella

(Brian) Nies and Darcy (Renee Dilts) Feenstra; 18 grandchildren & 27 great grandchildren.

FERWERDA, Bernice (Reynen) Ferwerda, age 91, went to celebrate with her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on December 23, 2020. She was born in Albert Lea, MN in 1929. She graduated from Central College in Pella Iowa and then taught at Whitinsville Christian Schools where she met her husband Martin Ferwerda of nearly 64 years. She also taught at Marian HS in Framingham, MA, as well as in Mexico and Japan. Bernice was first, a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, and second, a loving and faithful wife and mother of five boys. Third, she was a servant-minded missionary, venturing on many short-term mission trips. In her retirement, along with her husband Marty, she



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served as a teacher at Merida Christian School, Merida, Yucatan, Mexico and at Christian Academy in Tokyo, Japan. She enjoyed gardening, music (piano, guitar, autoharp, psaltery, dulcimer, and harmonica), writing (she published a book of poetry), Spanish, and had an uncontrolled passion for decorating. Memorial contributions may be made to Hollandale Christian Reformed Church, Hollandale MN.

GOOTJES, Dick, 82, of Grand Rapids, went to his heavenly home on November 17, 2020. Survived by Carol (DeBorst); children Mark and Kathy Gootjes, Katie and Tim Vinger, Christine and Eric Hoffmann; grandchildren Alex and Molly Vinger, Carter and Will Hoffmann. Welcoming Pop in heaven is granddaughter Olivia Hoffmann. Also survived by sisters Winnie Prins, Betty Postema, Annette Gootjes; brothers Peter Gootjes (Ann), Paul Gootjes; sister-in-law Ann Gootjes, brother-in-law John Vos.

HOEKSTRA, Martin, age 94 went to be with his LORD on December 9, 2020. 1150 S. Prospect Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126. Beloved husband of Joan Hoekstra, nee Tuma; loving father of Lynn (Wayne) Veldman, Ben (Darlene) Hoekstra, and Jon Hoekstra; devoted grandfather of Gregory (Sarah) Veldman, Rebecca (A. David) Thomas, Tim Veldman, Brent (Kelly) Hoekstra, Jacquelynn (fiancé Matt Jensen) Hoekstra, and Randy (Anna) Hoekstra, Stephanie (Daniel) Kasten; dear great-grandfather of Micah, Laura, Jethro, Cordelia, Milinda, and Sage; fond brother of the late Lorraine and the late William Jelinek, uncle of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to Timothy Christian Schools, 188 W. Butterfield Rd, Elmhurst, IL 60126, are appreciated.

HUYSER, Harry, 83, of Crest Hill, IL, and formerly South Holland and Lansing, IL, went home to his Lord on Dec. 15, 2020. With a love for music, his tenor voice was part of many church choirs. He is survived by his wife, Cheryl, his three sons, Larry (Tammie), Kevin (Lynne), Rev. John (Julie), 7 grandchildren & 2 great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Carol.

KINGMA, Helen Joyce (Bennett), 92, from Grand Rapids, MI died on December 6, 2020. Preceded in death by her husband Edward, she is survived by her children Joyce (Robert) Andriessen, Edward (Nancy) Kingma, and Beth (John) Van Tongeren; 19 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren.

SMEELINK, Elaine, 90, of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on December 2, 2020. She was preceded in death by son Joel. She is survived by her loving husband of 67 years, Jud; her children Judy (Harvis) Beene, Jack Smeelink, Joy (Paul) Boerman, Joni (Rob) Mitchell; 13 grandchildren, 11 great grandchildren.

SNAPPER Jan, age 87 of Holland, MI, passed peacefully on November 17, 2020. Preceded in death by his wife Theresa (Andriese) Snapper and son Eric Snapper. Survived by son Mike (Amy) Snapper and daughter Nancy (Cal)

TenHarmsel and 6 grandchildren. Rejoice in the Lord Always!

VANBRUGGEN Dean, 78 of Grand Rapids, MI, passed away on Nov. 18, 2020. He is survived by his wife, Carol, their 2 children, Kathy(Doug) Tanis and Miki (Dave) DeWindt, 6 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren.

Employment



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4 Reasons Chadwick Boseman's Death Hit the Black Community So Hard

We will miss him for how he lived his life and what he represented: a strong Black man who used his power to help the ones around him.



Darrell L. Delaney lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and is pastor of Madison Church, Square Campus. He and Kia, his wife of 16 years, have three children.

WHEN *BLACK PANTHER* star Chadwick Boseman died of cancer at the age of 43 in August 2020, his death hit the Black community especially hard. It's an understatement to say that *Black Panther* merely inspired Black people. But it might be difficult for those who are not Black to understand why it was so hard for us. Here are four reasons:

1. In a world where many images of people of color are negative, Chadwick Boseman was a positive one, filled with dignity, character, and respectability. That is why *Black Panther* was more than just a film for people of color; it was a movement. It was finally a moment when a hero that looks like us was portrayed in a major role. Even though Wakanda is a fantasy world, it was real enough for people of color. It's a place where Black people are not subjugated, not discriminated against, not racially profiled, but in complete control of their destiny. *Black Panther* awakened something in us, and Boseman was the actor that embodied it. Boseman resurrected dreams of our changing the world, empowered by stories from our history.
2. Boseman's portrayal meant the world to our children. Something wonderful happened in their hearts. They felt the joy of having their own hero. In a world where the majority takes this for granted, it might not seem like much. When I was a child, most movie heroes were white. That does something to the psyche of a Black child. After *Black Panther* came out, we could say to our children, "You can be anything you want to be, even a superhero."
3. The timing of Boseman's death, in the midst of a traumatic year of pandemic and racial unrest, made the loss cut even deeper. To lose Boseman on top of everything else—particularly the killings of George

Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others—seemed like too much to bear.

4. We mourn Boseman because of who he was as a real person. He was a believer in Christ, so we will see him again. We will miss him for how he lived his life and what he represented: a strong Black man who used his power to help the ones around him. Diagnosed with Stage III colon cancer at the age of 39, he fought through four years and seven films while quietly undergoing treatments and never complaining. During his secret illness, he visited and encouraged children with cancer. He spoke at commencement ceremonies about integrity and the value of not taking stereotypical roles as a Black man. He used his platform to uplift a people group, to encourage, to bless and not curse, and to speak for those who do not have a voice.

We know someone like that. His name is Jesus. Boseman believed in him. Boseman followed him. Boseman's character came from Christ's character. He embodied that holy character in every film, venue, interview, tweet, and post.

The character of T'Challa, played by a real man with tremendous character, lifted us, and that is why Black people in particular were so devastated by Boseman's death at such a young age. Yes, we know where he is going, and do not grieve like those who have no hope. But part of us hopes that he can come back to life like he did in *Black Panther* and say, "As you can see, I am not dead!" We know that he will live again when Christ returns, but for now we miss him. May God be with you, Chadwick Boseman, until we meet again. **B**

Read a longer version of this article online at thebanner.org.

Saying Good Night to Derek

Soren would jump up, race to the end of the couch, leap to the floor, and run down the hall to Derek's room.



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

OUR SON, DEREK, who lives with us, went to the animal shelter 18 years ago to rescue two kittens. The tiny, frightened black kitty mewling and crying in the back corner of the cage won his heart. Her brave brother came too. We thoroughly enjoyed their antics.

Time slowed them down. They developed routines. They staked out territory. Blaise, the big boy cat, commandeered Derek's bed. Soren, the tiny girl, slept on the back of the living room couch. She was wonderfully quirky and yakky. She did not like to be held or petted and would only sit on Kathy's lap.

Kathy would rise early, and Soren would meow at her. They would have a "conversation" while Kathy got ready to go. In the evening, Soren would sleep on the back of the couch while we ate our dinner and watched television. Her ears would perk up a bit if we talked to her, and then she'd doze off again. As the evening wore on, Derek would go to his room, and Kathy would go read in her rocking chair. Eventually Kathy would decide it was time to go to bed. She'd walk over to the couch and say to Soren, "Let's go say good night to Derek."


Soren would jump up, race to the end of the couch, leap to the floor, and run down the hall to Derek's room. She'd meow at him, and he would scratch her ears and pet her for a moment. Kathy would wish him good night as well. Soren returned to the back of the couch. Every night it was the same routine. "Meow. Good night, Derek."

Soren got older and had difficulty jumping from the back of the couch. Sometimes she'd hop to the arm of the sofa, step to the seat, and then jump down. She'd still race to Derek's room and meow her goodnights, but not as quickly as before. Eventually, she just walked down the back of the couch,

and Kathy would pick her up and lift her down to the floor.

If Kathy happened to be out of town, I could step in and help Soren say good night. When Derek spent a couple of months in the hospital with H1N1, she'd go to his room to say good night anyway. It was heartbreaking to watch her meow into the emptiness. She joined Blaise by the door to the garage, awaiting Derek's return. You couldn't explain to cats what was happening to the man they loved and who loved them. It was an awful time. We wondered if we had said our last goodnights. God was gracious. Derek returned home. The cats were happy to see him back in his room. So were we.

We live in an age of decay. Soren started to have difficulties eating. She couldn't climb to the back of the couch any longer. Walking to Derek's room was a slower, more painful process. We ordered some special food for her, but she eventually ignored that as well. We took her to the veterinarian, who told us with tears in his eyes that it was time to end her suffering. He gave us a few moments to say our goodbyes. She was too sick even to meow as we petted her.

The house is quieter now. Saying good night to Derek will never be quite the same. 

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