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"Lost and Unheard"

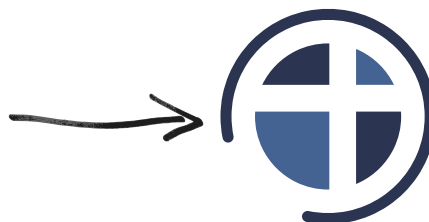


That's how 9-year-old Amelia felt when she began her counseling sessions. But between games of Monopoly, she began sharing her heartbreaking experiences with Ginnette, her counselor. Stories of verbal arguments between her parents and struggles of adjusting to a new home after their divorce.

Then Ginnette shared a resource from ReFrame Ministries that offers biblically-based stories, advice, and activities for kids and parents involved in a divorce.

"While reading through the pages, Amelia's mom broke down for the first time in three years since I'd been working with her family," Ginnette says.

The Christian Reformed Church's media ministry may have a new name, but that won't change the way God's story reaches Amelia.



**ReFrame
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is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International


ReFrameMinistries.org



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BY THE NUMBERS

Church Juice and ReFrame Ministries provided grants to churches and ministries who needed help with their media ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic. In all, 15 churches received grants totaling \$52,001.93. Grants went to Christian Reformed churches in 12 states and provinces.

For Granted

\$52,000 

15  

churches  

12 States/Provinces

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.)

- » Partner Churches in Michigan and Honduras Worship Together Online
- » Likes and Prayers: Facebook Tests New 'Prayer Post' Feature
- » Podcast: *BECOMING: (us)*, by Moriah and Joel Smallbone
- » Children's Book: *Pugtato Finds a Thing*, by Sophie Corrigan
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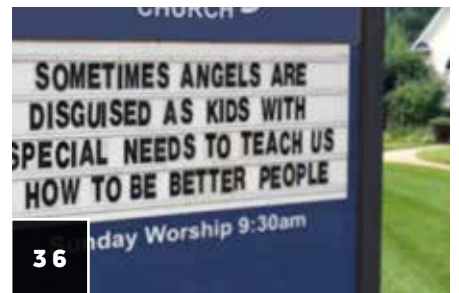
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Correction

The name of Rev. Robert Cumings was misspelled in "Classis Watch: Spring 2021," May 2021, p. 16. We regret the error.

OUR SHARED MINISTRY

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Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



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BANNER

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Editor Shiao Chong

Associate Editor Sarah Delia Heth

News Editor Alissa Vernon

Mixed Media Editor Lorilee Craker

Art Director Dean R. Heetderks

Designer Pete Euwema

Contact Us 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids MI 49508-1407 info@TheBanner.org

Address Changes and Subscriptions 800-777-7270 or visit TheBanner.org

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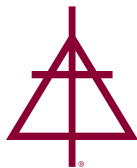
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Diversity / Candidacy Committee / Chaplaincy and Care Ministry / Pastor Church Resources

Revival and Spiritual Pride

Collectively, we are guilty of spiritual pride—pride in our rich theological heritage and in getting our doctrines “right,” pride in our organizational strengths and in our ability to get things done.



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.

SEVEN YEARS AGO, Henry Wildeboer wrote a *Banner* article suggesting the Christian Reformed Church needs a spiritual revival (“These Bones Can Live,” October 2014). I agree. Our churches need a spiritual revival more than anything else at this time. But what holds us back is our sinful pride. Collectively, we are guilty of spiritual pride—pride in our rich theological heritage and in getting our doctrines “right,” pride in our organizational strengths and in our ability to get things done. These are all good things, for sure, but we have placed too much trust in them. Of course, we never say these are where our trust lies, but our default behaviors betray our inner beliefs.

I say this as someone who also struggles with the sin of pride, especially intellectual pride. I know pride when I see it. I have hinted at our need for revival in past editorials (see “Praying for Our Lives,” July/August 2018). I have written that we need “A New Reformation” (October 2017). This time, I want to be clear: the CRCNA needs a spiritual revival or it will die, regardless of what else we do.

There are many reasons, within and outside the church, for declining church membership across North America. There is no silver bullet to stop it. We have relied on study committees, organizational restructuring, and refining our Church Order as ways to solve our problems. But if these collective strengths that we pride ourselves on can solve our decline, wouldn’t they have solved it by now?

It’s time we humble ourselves, collectively and individually, begging God to fill us with the Holy Spirit and confessing and repenting from our spiritual pride. We must immerse ourselves in Scripture with humble hearts and eyes, without agendas. Revival might not be the silver bullet, but without it, nothing else will work.

Jonathan Edwards, the 18th-century American revivalist preacher, warned against spiritual pride and listed a number of its symptoms. First, the spiritually proud often overlook their own faults, failing to recognize their pride. Instead, their pride makes them focus on the faults of others. A spirit of fault-finding is a sure symptom of spiritual pride. Humble Christians worry more about their own sins and faults.

Second, the spiritually proud are often harsh in their criticisms of others, even of other Christians. Edwards bemoaned how they often would cloak their prideful harshness in sanctity and bold zeal for Christ to call things out. Rather, humble Christians, said Edwards, should “treat one another with as much humility and gentleness as Christ, who is infinitely above them, treats them” (*Works*, Vol. 1, ix.v.i).

Edwards listed more symptoms, but we can already see ourselves in the above list. Almost every camp in CRC disputes has shown these symptoms of fault-finding, harshness, and overlooking one’s own faults or weaknesses. Just look at how we argue online over anything.

We are collectively guilty of spiritual pride. I am sure we can rationalize it away. But if we choose to be stuck in our prideful ways, we can be sure God will oppose us: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5; Prov. 3:34). If we repent and humble ourselves instead, God will dwell with us: “I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Isa. 57:15).

I am committing myself to praying daily for God’s revival and that he would cleanse us of spiritual pride. Who will join me? **B**



REPLY ALL

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

Threats to OSJ

I was deeply disturbed by the *Banner* article “Mercy and Justice Staff Report Escalating Intimidation” (online: bit.ly/3tiq6Rv). Staff of the CRC Office for Social Justice have received offensive comments, racist remarks, and threats violent enough to involve the police from people within our denomination. ... No one should have to do their job, a job mandated by Synod, under fear, intimidation, or the threat of violence, and this needs action on the local church level as well as by the Council of Delegates and the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church. Discussion is appropriate, but it is not enough. This type of threatening behavior, as well as the inaction by the denomination, feel very far from Jesus of Nazareth and the kingdom of God.

» Sandy Navis // Grand Rapids, Mich.

I was deeply saddened when I read of the attacks—from “pastors and other office bearers in the CRCNA”—on the staff of the Office of Social Justice, including “threatening postcards and letters” sent to staff by officebearers and pastoral staff. Not only that, but the fact that it has been going on for years—so much so that staff members have left their positions over it! ... It is no wonder our denomination is failing to thrive. My own lifetime of support and membership is growing very near the breaking point. We should all be ashamed.

» Aaron Jonker // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Governance Restructuring

I am a member of the Council of Delegates and also a director of the CRCNA Canada Corporation. As Canadian directors, we have done everything in our power to ensure that there is no separation between countries (“Governance Restructure Causing Confusion, Angst,” bit.ly/3fXafUI). At every meeting of the directors it is stressed: we are ecclesiastically one denomination in two countries. This must not change. All we want to do is ensure we do not lose our charitable status by not complying with Canada Revenue Agency regulations: money donated by Canadians must be controlled by Canadians.

» Aaltje van Grootheest // online comment

Synod Canceled Again

I understand and affirm the need to cancel synod for a second year in a row (“Council of Delegates Discusses Synod 2021, Ministry Share Pledges, Governance,” April 2021). The 2022 agenda is going to be massive. I wonder if it might be wise and necessary to extend synod to 10 days or even two weeks next year.

» Bill Vis // online comment

Are We Evangelicals?

I would add this to the article (“Are We Evangelicals?” March 2021): whatever Christians may decide to do in terms of embracing or rejecting or divorcing themselves from the word “evangelical,” politicians of today will use the term (as a praise or as a condemnation) for the sole purpose of attracting some voters and denouncing others. And sadly, what politicians do with the word will have a greater effect on its definition in the minds of the broader population than what those who actually are “evangelicals” claim for the word.

» Doug Vande Griend // online comment

Growth Chart

Regarding the chart in the April *Banner* showing “Growth spurts” in the number of Christian Reformed churches in Canada since 1940: would it not be more relevant to highlight the 17% decline in denomination-wide membership in the past 10 years, or the 20% decline in membership in Canada for that period? (Data from the 2011 and 2021 editions of the CRCNA Yearbook.) We in the CRC are far from being in a growth mode, which would seem more pressing to address than the increase in churches that occurred between the 1940s and 1990s!

» Burton VanderLaan // Byron Center, Mich.

Healing

I am grateful for the healing that Andrea received and for her willingness to share that (“The Trauma of Bullying,” April 2021). After seven years in healing prayer ministry, I struggle with her line that she had to “imagine I was in a safe place and Jesus was with me.” I believe that Jesus can cross time and space and that what Andrea experienced was the resurrected, living Jesus bringing healing to her. I have seen so many miracles that it is hard to believe that this is just people’s imagination.

» Theo D. Beels // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Vigilance Is Needed

The Gifts of Sundays

Wonderful article! Thank you for writing it! ("The Gifts of Sundays," April 2021.) I really like the phrase "What restores and delights you?" I know that, since choosing to be more sabbatarian as a family, Sundays have quickly become a day to look forward to. A day of restoration! It was hard at first. Shifting thinking to remember to go to the store Saturday night so that you have everything you need in order to avoid consumerism on Sunday was a hard transition. But it has been so worth it! Making it to the evening service every week was a rough transition at first too, but it has paid off immensely for us as a family.

» Trevor Mouw // online comment

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- » Pastor and Council Teamwork
- » Time Lost or Time Gained
- » 5 Lessons from a Pandemic Year

BILLY GRAHAM reputedly once referred to the Christian Reformed Church as a "sleeping giant." I understood that to mean we were a potent force for good even if he was implying that we were not as engaged as we ought to have been. If he were alive today, I doubt that's how he would describe us now.

Several decades ago, Christian Reformed families held tenaciously to the discipleship and nurture of children as a three-fold responsibility: at home, at church, and at Christian schools. Members were well-schooled in the Bible, the catechism, and the tenets of the Reformed faith. Although this was not a utopian system, families were generally Scripturally literate, doctrinally informed, and convicted to transform their square inches for Christ. I think this "three-legged stool" of home, church, and school is now cracked and wobbly because we are neglecting discipleship and instruction as a result of our preference for absorbing the world's culture rather than transforming it, often at the expense of Scriptural knowledge and intentional Christian living.

What am I suggesting? If I needed to choose only one word, it would be vigilance.


At home, Christian parents have a difficult time parenting in the present culture. The busyness and stresses of everyday life wear us down. Often it is easier to give in to the mainstream than to object to what is against Scripture. Media saturates everyday living—often with violence, immorality, or vulgar and profane language, as well as inane and meaningless content. I suggest vigilance in our habits of consumption—particularly those habits that consume our time and convictions.

Church: Naturally, bringing unbelievers into the church fold and deepening the knowledge of Jesus Christ in all believers is our Christian calling. But

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do we apologize for our Reformed theology, or do we offer it as a remarkably relevant message for our challenged times? A steady diet of "happy only" messages is only half the gospel. Sin, hell, and the challenges of right living in a secular and often godless society should also be preached. Confronting the brokenness of our hearts and the world should make us more eager to celebrate covenant grace. God in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament did not avoid offense and did not promise an easy path.

Christian schools equip students academically and in preparation for earthly and kingdom citizenship. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). When choosing schools for our children, should we not be vigilant about prioritizing moral and spiritual formation in the lives of our children as much as their academics? Isn't the same true for those who choose to pursue higher education?

"This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:3-4). 



Marion Dykstra is a former Christian school teacher who led church Bible studies for 30 years. She is a member of Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church in Palos Heights, Ill.



If I'm Such A Good Christian Girl, Then Why Am I Still Alone?

By Dana Drosdick

If 12-year-old me were to look at my 23-year-old self, sitting in my bed alone on Valentine's Day with brown smudges of chocolate staining my crisp, white sheets, she would probably be shaking her head and saying, "Girl, get your life together."

Because this was not how my 20s were supposed to go.

In my 12-year-old mind, I figured I would probably meet a solid, Christian guy when I was about 18, and we would date a respectable length of three years or so. Then he'd propose at the end of college, and I would be blissfully wed by 21 years old. (I don't know—I was 12!)

But even if that was a bit unrealistic, I still never expected to be 23 with a dating history about as fruitful as the barren fig tree in Luke 13:6. I thought I'd at least have had a few solid relationships to look back on, all of which would end for completely legitimate and mutual reasons like moving far away, realizing we weren't "equally yoked," or discovering that he didn't know the difference between "your" and "you're."

I fervently believed I would have those kinds of relationships because it seemed like that was just what happened to good Christian girls. They spend their youth staying pure and doing good, and then they are

rewarded with solid marriages and live happily ever after.

Except, that is, when they aren't.

I grew up a child of the True Love Waits movement, meaning I was indoctrinated from a young age to believe that my waiting (in Christianese, waiting almost always refers to sex) would result in a happy and fruitful relationship. I heard horror stories of young women who didn't wait and endured hardships of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and relational abuse. That is not meant to delegitimize the realities that can sometimes come with premarital sex. It is meant to emphasize the opposing philosophy

I grew up believing: if premarital sex leads to pain, then purity must lead to paradise.

This purity-to-paradise philosophy led me to a separate belief: a belief in the relational prosperity gospel and the notion that if I stay pure until marriage, then I will inevitably be blessed with a future happy relationship.

The Relational Prosperity Gospel

The relational prosperity gospel, also described as the sexual prosperity gospel, is a relatively new term that falls under the prosperity gospel umbrella. Unlike the more generic prosperity gospel, which emphasizes health and wealth as key indicators of a solid faith, the relational prosperity gospel is a subtler form, one that equates faithfulness with relational reward. Within the relational prosperity gospel ethic, there is the idea that a person's faith can be judged by their relational success. Those who are married are deemed more faithful and good, while those who are single or divorced are seen as lacking in faithfulness.

It's a belief system that has no real Scriptural rooting, but something I clung to nonetheless. Believing in the relational prosperity gospel gave me a sense of control. It made me feel that if I attended enough Sunday services, consumed enough grape juice and matzo crackers, and listened to enough Christian music, then God would bless me with a man. I continued to wait for God to reward me with the man of my dreams delivered directly to my door, conflating my Christian piety with the plenitude of a healthy relationship.

When God didn't reward me for my good behavior, I began to wonder what I was doing wrong. The longer I was single, the more convinced I became

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that it was a result of a lack of faith or some hidden sin. Every date I went on (however infrequent) contained deep religious anxiety for me as each unsuccessful connection seemed to testify to some deep-set sinfulness. Dating eventually became so painful and stressful that a mere offer of a blind date set-up would trigger panic as I tried my hardest not to hyperventilate and think about the existential spiral that would inevitably result.

And yet, despite my dating anxieties, I still longed for a relationship. I longed to reach that benchmark of religious success and have that golden stamp of approval that I was worthy in the eyes of God and men. But the more I tried and failed, the more I begged God to reveal my great sin, the thing keeping me from total love and affection.

The True Gospel

Finally, after countless prayers, it clicked. Maybe there was no great sin that was keeping me single. Maybe my greatest sin was believing that there was anything I could do to earn my way into God's good grace in the first place.


After years of striving to do more, be more, and love more, I found rest for

the first time in God's sufficiency. I realized that God's love is not something to be earned, and blessings are not a result of good works. God's grace is based on God's goodness, not my own.

The moment my mentality switched from seeing relationships as something to be earned to something to be experienced, I felt years of existential guilt and shame melt from my being. I grew less anxious on dates since rejection no longer indicated a lack of God-given worth. I stopped envying my friends in relationships since relational status no longer represented some sort of moral superiority. And most importantly, I felt less alone because I finally realized that what I lacked in romantic relationships was made up for in the peace of God's goodness.

Now I look back at my 12-year-old self, the one who thought her worth was dependent on the eyes of men and of others, and I wish I could tell her how loved she was. If I could, I would wrap her up in the warm embrace of God's grace and tell her that she didn't need to be perfect or faultless. She would sin, make mistakes, and mess up, but none of that would or could ever change God's unending love. With one's repentant heart and spirit, God's forgiveness and grace know no bounds.

Sweet girl, I would whisper into those ears ringing with fears and religious insecurities, you are not alone. You are loved and beloved by God.

God's grace is enough. 



Dana Drosdick is a Calvin University graduate and a marketer in Glens Falls, N.Y. Her work, inspired by her Christian Reformed roots, has been previously featured in *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and at The Odyssey Online. Follow her on Instagram @danadrosdick.

BIG QUESTIONS

Stewardship

We want to put up a clothesline to dry our clothes outside in warm weather so we don't have to waste gas or electricity using a dryer. However, our housing subdivision prohibits clotheslines. What do we do?

Drying clothes outside on a line or a rack is so pleasantly old-fashioned. There's a lot to be said for it. It's solar-powered. You get to spend time outdoors. It's cheap. And you don't need those wasteful dryer sheets to give your clothes that fresh-laundered smell.

Restrictive covenants banning clotheslines were put in place starting in the 1960s as a way to protect property values, but bans are now being challenged and in many cases have been struck down as part of solar energy initiatives. In some states, guarantees of solar energy use have been interpreted to include the use of solar energy for drying.

If your community has a restrictive covenant, another way to approach the situation is to talk to your neighbors and explain what you would like to do and why, telling them that one day a week you would like to be able to place a clothes rack or line in your back yard for a couple of hours to dry your clothes. The reason you are doing



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

this is to limit your electrical usage or natural gas consumption and to rely on solar energy for clothes drying. If they express any concerns, explain that the drying will not be visible from the front of the house. If you show that you are concerned about aesthetics, most neighbors will be willing to show some flexibility. (And I agree: using a clothes dryer on a sunny, 90-degree summer day feels like a waste of solar energy!)

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

Digital Life

I sometimes find myself scrolling mindlessly through my social media accounts. I think that's a problem. Would you agree?

I suspect any parent would answer this question with a resounding "Of course that's a problem!" But if we take the shiny digital device out of this picture, would you also say that mindlessly weeding a garden is a problem? I don't knit, but as I watch some people do it while carrying on an intelligent conversation, it doesn't appear to be a problem for them.

But if it's doomscrolling you're doing, that could be a problem.

Doomscrolling, sometimes called doomsurfing, is a new-ish word to describe the practice of scrolling through your social media feeds looking for negative material: troubling headlines, horrific news photos, and graphs that prove we are indeed living in the worst possible times. We're naturally drawn to them all.

Social media is designed for endless scrolling, of course, but it's our brains that are wired to notice anything that might pose a threat—our survival depends on it. These days, there's lots to grab our attention.

In the real world, noticing the occasional car coming dangerously close to us is one thing, but it's another thing to believe every car anywhere is a threat. Likewise, doomscrolling can cause anxiety and lead to depression.

Acknowledging this bad habit is a good first step. The next time you grab your phone and launch into your social media, ask yourself what it is you plan to do once you're in. And after that lost hour of scrolling, ask yourself what caught and kept your attention. Was it everyday stuff of interest, or did it lean more toward the dark side? Take heed.

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.

Vocation/Calling**I'm not sure what I ought to be doing next. Why does deciding this feel so hard?**

When we see our skills and work as gifts from God, we can put pressure on ourselves and others to get it exactly right. It's hard not to feel like something is wrong with us when we're struggling with decisions. How do we be gracious to ourselves and others in this situation?

One way we can make better decisions is through seeking advice. But even getting helpful advice is often difficult. So much has changed in the past decades in terms of technology, jobs, and economic uncertainty. There were times when getting a university degree translated easily into getting a well-paid job, regardless of what you studied. Now a university education often means accumulating a lot of debt without the certainty of a job. But not going to university also limits what job you can do, so it feels like a no-win situation. Whether we're giving or receiving advice, it's hard to know what advice, even if it comes from experience and love, is truly wisdom for today's situation.

Perhaps indecisiveness is not the biggest problem. It's genuinely hard to know how to shape the things we are passionate about into a paid job. It's not likely to be a straight path either. So many jobs, such as teacher, journalist, or musician, are either hard to find or unlikely to pay a living wage. Following God's calling to use your gifts to meet the world's needs then requires creativity. It might mean piecing together several jobs, volunteering, or learning to live with less. Determining what's next is a complex journey that is less about how good you and your efforts are in pursuing the job you love and more about how you might love God and others by

being faithful with the gifts and opportunities you've been given.

May you also trust that the Spirit will guide you into the right next steps and redirect you as necessary. This doesn't change how hard the decision(s) might be, but we can have comfort in knowing that God—and the community God has given us—are with us on the journey.

Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink is a Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of Toronto.

Church/Bible/Doctrine**How many categories of members do we have in the Christian Reformed Church? What should councils do about members who disappear?**

The CRC has two categories: baptized members and confessing members. Baptized members have been baptized as infants or as adults or at any age. Confessing members have professed their faith in Jesus Christ and affirmed the confessions of the CRC. Confessing members were also called "communicant members" until 2011, when we disconnected partaking of communion with making profession of faith. Now all baptized members, under the supervision of their elders, are welcome to participate at the table in age- and ability-appropriate ways.

What about members who don't participate in the sacrament, or worship, or anything else? Aren't inactive members a third category? No, inactive members are baptized or confessing members who for one year have not made faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the Lord's Supper, unless there are extenuating

circumstances that make it impossible, like military service, nursing home residence, missionary service, or being away at school.

If members move away or stop attending for longer than two years and claim to have a new church but don't transfer, their memberships can be lapsed, which is a technical term essentially meaning they are removed from the membership rolls of the church. But lapsing should never be used to avoid following up on people who slip away from the church. Sometimes elders discover lists of members who have not been around for years and become eager to go on a cleaning spree to "clean up the rolls." This can be needed, but faithful, loving discipling all along would be preferable. The elders should always think first of the people involved and be very reluctant to lapse members who might then lose their official connection to the church of Jesus Christ and have their last experience with the church be a negative one. Better to reach out to them occasionally and give the Spirit time to work in their lives. Treat them with great patience, love and care—the way you would want the church to deal with your children if they were inactive members. And make these missing members of the church a matter of your prayers.

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



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

Candidacy Committee Gets New Director; Koll Retires

NEWS

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David Koll, 66, will retire from the Christian Reformed Church’s Candidacy Committee at the end of June. Koll was the first director of Candidacy and has served since 2008. The new director, Susan LaClear, whose appointment was approved by the Council of Delegates in February, started April 5.



David Koll, Susan LaClear

The Candidacy Committee was established in 2004 and is meant to guide the process of preparing candidates for ministry in the CRC. In the past, the majority of those wishing to become CRC pastors would go to Calvin Seminary. As the denomination grew in diversity, Koll said, the committee “was created by synod to bring better hospitality and integrity to the ways that we ordain pastors.”

LaClear, 48, was a commissioned pastor in the CRC before being ordained as a minister of the Word in 2013. She has served on the Candidacy Committee for six years. LaClear describes her own journey into the CRC as one formed by many Christian traditions.

“I learned spiritual practices in college from mentors who were mostly Baptist and Methodist. Then, as a young adult, my faith was stretched in a Pentecostal Haitian mission and an Assemblies of God megachurch,” she said. “My first leadership role was as an assistant pastor/music minister in an Assemblies church plant, and it was out of that unlikely place that God launched me into the CRC.”

Classis Red Mesa, a regional group of churches in Northwest New Mexico and Northeast Arizona, ordained LaClear as a commissioned pastor in 2005, and she pastored Maranatha CRC in Farmington, N. Mex., until 2016. Classis Red Mesa “supported me to pursue my M.Div. and go through the EPMC (Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidates) program so that I could be ordained as a minister of the Word,” she said.

Her most recent position was pastor of discipleship and care at Alive Ministries in Jenison, Mich.

In the Council of Delegates meeting in February, LaClear spoke of the variety of candidates hoping to serve as pastors in the CRC, each bringing “experiences and gifts” that “will enrich the CRC and make us better.”

“God has given us candidates who are as native to America as you can possibly get, contributing a leadership that’s been shaped by their rich traditional culture; also, candidates whose strong Reformed worldview has been instilled in them through generations of Dutch heritage,” LaClear said. “Some candidates are recent immigrants, still fluid in their languages, bringing with them a piety that’s unique to their culture. Others, such as our Black and brown brothers and sisters, bring the strength of an unwavering faith and overcoming love that’s been formed through the fires of generational suffering and injustice here in America.”

Koll said he has enjoyed being part of the growing diversity in the CRCNA. In retirement he intends to continue mentoring younger pastors, specifically pastors from ethnic minority groups. “If people my age can become supporters of the younger pastors,” Koll said, “the church will be better off.”

—Callie Feyen

Noteworthy



The Banner and communications from RCA-CRC Disability Concerns were recognized in April with nine **"Best of the Church Press"** awards from the **Associated Church Press for work produced in 2020.**

The Banner received the Award of Excellence for **"Best in Class, Denominational or Other Special Interest Magazine,"** and former news editor **Gayla R. Postma** was recognized with **Awards of Excellence for "Convention or Meeting Coverage," short and long format** for "The Synod That Wasn't," July 2020, and Council of Delegates Coverage, April 2020.

"Making a Difference Through Mentoring," by Lemarr Jackson and Meghan Donohue (February 2020), "Mindfulness and the Christian Faith," by Irene Kraegel (March 2020), and *The Banner Update* electronic newsletter received honorable mentions.

Breaking Barriers, the newsletter of RCA-CRC Disability Concerns, received Awards of Excellence for "Best in Class, Newsletter" and for "Theme Issue, Section, or Series" for its Spring 2020 edition, "Visual Impairment and Blindness." The **CRC-RCA Disability Concerns blog on network.crcna.org** received an **Award of Merit.**

David Zietsma, provost and vice president of academics at Redeemer University in Ancaster, Ont., has been named as the school's interim president. Zietsma, a professor at Redeemer since 2007, was appointed after president Robert Graham announced he was resigning. Graham had been president since 2018. Ongoing health concerns and difficulties in visiting his family, who live in the U.S., because of pandemic travel restrictions were key factors in Graham's decision to step down.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Ralph Adrian Bruxvoort
1933-2021

Ralph Bruxvoort, who died on March 23, preached, taught, and lived out a theology centered on God's unconditional love and grace.

He was born in Tres Arroyos, Argentina, where his father was a missionary on behalf of the Christian Reformed Church to the Dutch immigrant community. The family returned to the U.S. in 1935. Bruxvoort eventually graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary. Following ordination in 1958, he pastored Alamosa (Col.) CRC. He went on to serve Pompton Plains (N.J.) CRC, Ada (Mich.) CRC, Manhattan (Mont.) CRC, Hope CRC in Stony Plain, Alta., and Quincy (Wash.) CRC. After retirement in 1998, the Bruxvoorts moved to Bloomer, Wisc., to be near family. He continued to preach when needed for Christian Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Bruxvoort loved watching sports, served on the Bloomer school board for almost a decade, was an avid reader of histories, biographies, and books about social justice, and swam regularly at the local pool until the Thursday before he died.

Survived by four children and their spouses, a daughter-in-law, 16 grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren, Bruxvoort was predeceased by his wife, Elaine, two sons, and one grandchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Council of Delegates Meeting Included Intense Debate

When the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church met for its May meeting, it covered a large agenda, including the first denominational budget based on ministry share pledges, a decision to take Bethany Christian Services off the list of organizations recommended for church offerings, and recommending a new leadership structure.

The 53-member Council includes a delegate from each classis (regional assembly) of the CRC plus four at-large delegates. It serves in the interim of synod, the church's broadest assembly, between synod's annual meetings. All items recommended to Synod 2021 will be processed when the Council meets in June in lieu of synod, which was canceled due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The Council met May 5-7 by video conference. It has not convened in person since February 2020.



In Friday morning devotions delegates responded to questions about cultivating the practice of prayer and other spiritual disciplines—part of a set of conversation cards developed to prompt discussion about the four milestones of the *Our Journey 2025* ministry plan.

Divided Votes

Delegate opinions about a few matters were divided, but a heated debate about the denomination's proposed new leadership structure took the most time.

The proposal intends to bring the denomination's governance structure into compliance with Canadian tax laws governing charities. Many Canadian delegates were unhappy, saying the new leadership structure does not achieve parity between the U.S. and Canada. Their attempt to pause the process failed in a 28-18 vote (see "New Leadership Structure Recommended Amid Much Disagreement," p. 20).

Another issue that divided delegates was whether to remove Bethany Christian Services from the list of organizations recommended for church offerings. Bethany changed its policies to now offer its services, including foster placement and adoption of children, to same-sex couples. Some delegates thought the organization should still be supported because of all the good work it does. Others said that the Bethany policy contradicts the CRC's position on same-sex relationships and should no longer be recommended. The Council voted 23-21 to recommend that synod remove Bethany from the list.

Other Matters

The Council of Delegates also:

- » voted 33-16 to allow Calvin University to change the process for appointing a president. Instead of synod, Calvin's board of trustees will now appoint the university's president. The change allows Calvin to recruit a president in a more timely way.
- » approved a budget based on ministry share pledges that are about 11% less than last year's income (see

"Pledge-based Budget Sees Income Down, Allocations Changed," p. 18).

- » noted that Dr. Pablo Kim has been hired in Canada as senior leader for anti-racism and intercultural conciliation.
- » heard that there would be a temporary pause in the work of the Collaborative Church Planting Team due to a staffing change at Resonate Global Mission.
- » recommended to Synod 2021 that all Council members must sign a Code of Conduct prior to service on the Council in addition to signing the Statement of Agreement with the Beliefs of the CRCNA.
- » approved raising salaries of denominational employees by 3%, with a 4% merit program.
- » adopted search team mandates to hire new directors for Disability Concerns and the Office of Social Justice / Office of Race Relations. Mark Stephenson, current director of those agencies, announced he will retire at the end of 2021.
- » heard updates on the morale of the CRC's justice staff and spent about two hours engaged in conversation, prayer, and reflection focused on cultivating love and civility.

—Gayla R. Postma

In Lieu of Synod 2021, Council Will Process New Pledge Budget, Restructuring, Some Overtures

The Christian Reformed Church's Council of Delegates will meet in a special session June 11-12 and 15-16. The meeting is in lieu of the CRC's annual synod, which was canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Synod 2020 also was canceled. That was the first time the CRC's annual general assembly had been canceled in its more than 160-year history.

The Council's role is to serve in the interim of synod. It won't tackle everything in the *Agenda for Synod 2021*, but will address only those items that cannot wait until Synod 2022. The synodical program committee decided which items to include. That committee is made up of the officers of the last synod, in this case Synod 2019. (The full *Agenda* and the reports noted below are available online at crcna.org/synodresources.) *The Banner* will cover the special meeting. Look for stories in the July 2021 issue.

What to Watch For:

- » **Setting the first denominational budget under the Reimagining Ministry Shares plan.** The budget will be based on ministry share pledges from the classes (regional groups of churches) rather than on an expected remittance of a specified per-member amount to support shared denominational ministries. (The Council decided at its special meeting in lieu of Synod 2020 to go ahead with the plan, which had already been approved in principle by Synod 2019.)
- » **Continued processing of administrative and leadership structure changes** begun at the end of 2019. At that time Canadian members (known as the Canada Corporation) determined that they had to direct and control all resources collected in Canada to be in compliance with the Canadian tax laws governing charitable organizations. Council will discuss restructuring matters deferred from 2020 as well as matters intended for Synod 2021 (see

p. 23 of *Agenda for Synod 2021*). All of the related material will remain on the agenda for Synod 2022. (See "New Leadership Structure Recommended Amid Much Disagreement," p. 20.)

- » **Addressing tasks assigned by Synod 2019 about preventing abuse of power.** Recommendations adopted by the Canada and U.S. Corporations in the past year include employee training and changes to the employee handbook, a policy regarding nondisclosure agreements, training for all candidates for the ministry, a code of conduct for all ministry personnel, record keeping to increase collaboration between Safe Church Ministry and Pastor Church Resources, and a Dignity Team to foster a culture of respect. The Abuse of Power Ad Hoc Committee report is included in the *Agenda*, pp. 44-70.
- » **Discussion of a number of requests from classes and congregations regarding Neland Ave. CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.** (*Agenda for Synod 2021*, pp. 352-376). The overtures range from asking that the church be admonished or even disaffiliated for ordaining a deacon who is in a same-sex relationship (See "Woman in Same-sex Marriage Installed as Deacon," November 2020, p. 22) to requesting that the Council rescind its decision to communicate directly with Neland's council. (See "Council of Delegates Discusses Neland Avenue CRC Decision," December 2020, p. 21.)

What NOT to Watch For:

- » **The reports of three study committees** (people appointed by synod to study a particular issue at length and then make recommendations to a subsequent synod). The Council decided in February to defer the much-anticipated report of the **Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality** (assigned by Synod 2016).

Reports from the **Ecclesiastical Marriage Task Force** and the **Bivocational Task Force**, both assigned by Synod 2019, now also are deferred to Synod 2022. (*The Banner's* summary of the human sexuality report is in the January 2021 issue, pp. 14-17. *The Banner's* February 2021 issue includes summaries of the bivocational report (p. 19) and the ecclesiastical marriage report (p. 20).)

- » **Items deferred from the agenda for Synod 2020**, including Faith Formation Ministries' review of the New City Catechism (requested by Synod 2019), a report on the definition of heresy (see "What is Heresy? Synod 2019 Asked; Report Tries to Answer," p. 19), and three overtures requesting that synod consider changing who may be delegated to assemblies of the church (classis and synod) and how large those delegations should be.

RCA Synod Watchers

Although the CRC decided to cancel its synod for 2021, the Reformed Church in America is carrying through with its general synod but postponing it until October. On the agenda is deciding on a path forward as laid out in the RCA Vision 2020 report released last June (see "Restructuring, New Mission Agency, and 'Mutually Generous Separation' Recommended for RCA," February 2021, p. 14). As of April 30, neither the dates nor the venue for the October general synod had been finalized.

Decisions made by the RCA affect the CRC because of the agreement between the two denominations struck at Synod 2014. That accord commits the denominations to "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel (them) to act separately."

— Gayla R. Postma

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Henry Katerberg

1936-2021

A gentle, honest, and sociable man, Henry Katerberg loved people and was devoted to the church. He died April 4 at age 84 following a suspected heart attack.

Born into a farming family in the Netherlands, Katerberg immigrated with them in 1956 to Ontario, Canada. He worked farm-related jobs to support his family until he attended Calvin College (now University) and Seminary.

He was ordained in 1969 and served four Ontario churches: Zion Christian Reformed Church, Pembroke; Maranatha CRC, Belleville; Riverside CRC, Wellandport; and Maranatha CRC, St. Catharines. He led churches with sound business sense, his sermons were direct and to the point, he enjoyed visiting parishioners, and he interacted well with young people. After retirement in 1994 he continued to serve local churches as needed.

Katerberg loved sports and played soccer at Calvin. As a young pastor he developed a passion for golf, often playing with other local clergy. In retirement, he enjoyed more golf, volunteering, travel, and daily coffee with friends.

Predeceased in 1993 by his first wife, Jean, and in 1968 by a toddler son, Wesley, Katerberg is survived by Janet, his wife of 26 years; three children, three step-children, and their spouses; and three grandchildren and eight step-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Pledge-based Budget Sees Income Down, Allocations Changed

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church approved a denominational ministries budget based on ministry share pledges of \$18.4 million, approximately 15% less in the U.S. and 5% less in Canada compared to last year's income.

While the total income is less, CRC director of finance and operations John Bolt said more churches participated in the pledging system. In the past, only established churches, not emerging or newly planted ones, were invited to make contributions.

Ministry shares are the money sent by local churches who covenant together to support shared denominational ministries. The ministry share system has been called both the jewel of denominational fundraising and the wild card of budgeting. The cost of raising money through ministry shares is negligible, taking about 20 cents for every \$100 raised. Raising that money via advancement activities can take \$20 for every \$100 raised.

However, as Bolt told delegates at a 2019 Council meeting, creating a budget of millions based on hoped-for receipts means operating "on a wish and a prayer." Indeed, in recent times the amounts received fell far short of what was asked. Last year, churches were asked for \$346.48 per adult professing member. Only 58% of that was received.

So Synod 2019 turned the system on its head. Now churches are asked to pledge how much they will contribute, and the budget is based on that amount. The budget for 2021-22 is based on the \$18.4 million pledged.

The traditional allocation of the funds among agencies has also been adjusted. For the coming fiscal year, the biggest percentage changes are at Resonate Global Mission and Congregational Services. Resonate's share of the pie is now 26%, down from 31%, while Congregational Services' share is now 29%, up from 23%.

The Congregational Services office, which houses many smaller ministries including Chaplaincy, Faith Formation, Indigenous Ministries, Pastor Church Resources, Safe

Church, Social Justice, Race Relations, and Worship, gets nearly 70% of its budget from ministry shares.

The rest of the denominational agencies (Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, ReFrame Ministries, and Synodical Administrative Services) saw their portions of ministry shares go up or down by less than 2%. World Renew, the

While the total income is less, John Bolt, the CRC's director of finance and operations, said more churches participated in the pledging system.

denomination's international relief agency, has never received ministry shares. Its support comes from church offerings and individual donations.

Bolt has convened an administrative team to conduct a strategic financial review of the agencies. Among its goals are to compare each ministry's working mandate to the original mandate given by synod, to discover where there is duplication of service, to determine which ministries are difficult or impossible for a congregational budget and staffing levels. The team expects to present a final report to the Council of Delegates in October 2021.

—Gayla R. Postma

What Is Heresy?

Synod 2019 Asked; Report Tries to Answer

What constitutes heresy? That's a question addressed in a report to the Christian Reformed Church's synod, the denomination's broadest assembly, whose annual meeting has been canceled for a second time because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Synod 2019 requested the report after it was asked to declare Kinism (a theology that teaches that races should remain separate, among other things) to be heresy. In many respects, Kinism resembles the theology that supported apartheid in South Africa. In 1984, synod declared apartheid a sin and the theological justification of apartheid a heresy. Taking its cue from the decision on apartheid, Synod 2019 declared Kinism a heresy.

But this declaration led to questions. Synod asked how to define heresy, noting that not all theological differences are heresies. Christians can differ from each other even on important doctrines and not call each other "heretics." Synod 1984 used as its working definition for heresy: "a theological view or doctrine that is in conflict with the teachings of Scripture as interpreted by the Reformed confessions" (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 179). But Synod 2019 observed that definition is "too broad" (*Acts of Synod 2019*, p. 819). Baptists, for example, differ from the Reformed confessions in their views of baptism, but this does not make them heretics. Synod, expressing the need for more reflection on what constitutes heresy, asked the Council of Delegates (the denomination's governance board) to convene a group of scholars to study the issue and report to Synod 2020.

The study group's report was included in the *Agenda for Synod 2020* (pp. 68-77) but, because of the subsequent cancellations of synod, has yet to be taken up.

Heretic Described, Not Defined

Briefly surveying heresy in the Bible and subsequent Christian history, the authors of the report settled on a

descriptive approach including nine typical characteristics of heresy rather than trying to nail down a precise definition. Heresies, they say, are serious distortions or denials of core Christian teachings. Heresies tend to mislead people, cause confusion in the church, and bring disrepute to the gospel. Heretics exhibit a stubborn refusal to be corrected and destroy the unity of the church. Heresy in this respect is not only a theological matter but a moral one.

The characteristics of heresy laid out in the Council of Delegates' report are meant "to help future discussions in the assemblies of the CRCNA when determining what heresy is and what heresy is not" (*Agenda for Synod 2020*, p. 69). The report amply cautions future synods that declarations of heresy should be a last resort. The church, they say, should "not be quick to designate people or movements as heretical" (*Agenda for Synod 2020*, p. 76).

Testing the Definition

Classis Illiana did not wait for the study on heresy to be approved by synod before using the report's findings to pursue another declaration of heresy. Published as Overture 12 in *Agenda for Synod 2021* (an overture is a formal proposal to synod), the request asks synod to declare denials of the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement as heresy. They define penal substitutionary atonement as "the historic Christian belief that Jesus satisfied God's wrath against our sin at the cross" (*Agenda for Synod 2021*, p. 377).

Classis Illiana says this is necessary because we "must be diligent in defending the historic Christian faith, especially when denials such as these are within our own walls," a claim the classis supported with sermon excerpts "preached from a pulpit in the CRCNA" that they believe demonstrate a heretical departure from the church's teaching on atonement.

What is at stake here is not whether Christ died for sinners. Both Classis Illiana and the minister whose sermons are quoted in the overture believe that Jesus died to atone for sin. The quoted sermons suggest there are other ways to understand Jesus' death on the cross that do not involve the view that what's at issue in the atonement of sinners is satisfying the wrath of God.

The broad history of Christianity offers a variety of emphases in theology of the atonement, including the victory of Christ over the powers of evil (a view favored by the early church), the medieval idea of the cross as a demonstration of God's love teaching us how to live, and the later emphasis on Christ dying as our substitute. Each of these views has Scriptural support.

The question facing Synod 2022 is whether the denial of one such view, the theology of penal substitutionary atonement, constitutes heresy.

The classis is asking that synod "declare that any officebearer who explicitly denies penal substitutionary atonement or promotes teachings contrary to the penal substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of special discipline in accordance with Church Order Article 83." That article requires suspension or deposition of any persons bearing office in the church who "in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct" (*Church Order*, p. 97).

—Clayton Libolt

IN MEMORIAM

*Rev. Merle Den Bleyker*

1947-2021

Pastor, missionary, and administrator Merle Den Bleyker died March 23. "He was a man who stood tall in the Lord and bent low to serve him with all his heart," a friend said.

Den Bleyker's childhood among the Zuni and Navajo people in northwest New Mexico, where his parents served as missionaries, greatly influenced his understanding of mission and future ministry.

He was ordained in 1972 after graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary. Den Bleyker and his wife served for 10 years in Puerto Rico with Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission). He then pastored Calvin Christian Reformed Church in LeMars, Iowa. For the next 14 years he served CRWM, first as director of international programs, then as agency director. He pastored Ebenezer CRC in Berwyn, Ill., before retiring in 2013 to Mesa, Ariz. Until the time of his death, Den Bleyker taught future leaders in Hispanic churches through Timothy Leadership Training.

He is survived by Donna, his wife of 51 years, four children and their spouses, and 12 grandchildren, who all agree that "the same man the public saw and loved was the same man we saw and loved at home."

—Janet A. Greidanus

New Leadership Structure Recommended Amid Much Disagreement

The Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church voted to recommend to Synod 2022 a new leadership structure that it hopes will solve issues of compliance with Canada Revenue Agency rules for nonprofit organizations. The decision comes after more than a year of discussion about how the denomination's leadership should be structured. (The Council serves in the interim of synod, the CRC's annual general assembly. It met May 5-7 via video conferencing.)

The new model was brought forward by the structure and leadership task force (SALT), appointed by the Council last October after members of the Canada Corporation (the Canadian delegates of the Council) learned in late 2019 that the current structure was not compliant. The Council implemented interim changes while seeking a long-term restructuring plan. At issue is the requirement that Canadian nonprofits retain direction and control of all resources acquired in Canada. That duty is not met if decisions made by the Canada Corporation are subject to approval of the entire Council, where U.S. delegates hold a majority.

After various task forces made recommendations during 2020, the SALT report was expected to solve many of the issues presented by the tax compliance issue.

What it didn't solve is a struggle that's been going on for more than three decades over how much autonomy Canadians have in directing how ministries of the Christian Reformed Church are carried out in Canada.

Task force chair John Lee (Classis Iakota) acknowledged the issue and the strong emotions evident during the Council's debate about it. "There are different visions of what the CRC should look like," he said. "I don't think that these competing visions will suddenly go away. If this was a compliance issue only, you wouldn't see tears and anger. There are many other things going on in our hearts." He wondered if this structure could be a way to walk together to advance ministry.

General Secretary, Chief Administrative Officer, Executive Director-Canada

The approved model creates an Office of General Secretary housing two leadership positions: general secretary and chief administrative officer. The general secretary would report directly to the Council and the CAO to the general secretary. The Office of the General Secretary would guide and direct the entire CRCNA organization. Either position could be

"The CRA compliance issue is not the main point. The main point is partnership."

—Bev Bandstra,
Classis B.C. South-East

held by an American or a Canadian. According to the SALT report, the rationale for creating the office of the general secretary is to "ensure ecclesiastical and administrative integration" for shared governance of the binational denomination's ministry and mission.

Additionally, there would be an executive director-Canada to oversee all CRC ministries in Canada. That person would report only to the Canada Corporation. The executive director-Canada would work in partnership with the office of the general secretary but would not report to it. The general secretary could assign tasks to the executive director-Canada.

Many Canadians Unhappy

Recommending the new model was not an easy decision for the Council. The

Canada Corporation drafted a communication to the full Council expressing concerns with the proposed model, and during debate some Canadian members vigorously opposed the plan. While the proposed joint management agreements bridging U.S. and Canadian ministries have potential to solve the legal risks with CRA, they said, the SALT report was not clear enough about the process to create the agreements or about their intended function, which ought to be not only to “clarify but also to *govern* the working relationships.”

In discussion some Canadian delegates objected that the report failed to address cultural differences between Canada and the U.S.

Task force member William Koopmans (Classis Hamilton) said he agrees with the principles of the SALT report. Regarding Canada Corporation’s concerns, he said, “It’s a mark of humility and teamwork if we can acknowledge our work isn’t perfect and that we can work together to make it better.”

Canadians Want Collaboration

The communication from the Canada Corporation said that while collaboration was championed in the report, some parts of the structure contradict that. “The CRA compliance issue is not the main point,” Bev Bandstra (Classis B.C. South-East) said, her voice trembling. “The main point is partnership. And that is what I am missing in the SALT report. We have had these discussions for 30 years on the Canadian side of the denomination. We want to maintain unity. We need that new culture of partnership.”

Task force reporter Fred Koning, a retired pastor who has served in both countries, questioned the Canadian delegates’ reasons for opposing the report, suggesting they might have different priorities than the people in Canadian churches—namely, a separation from the American church. Darren Roorda,

“If this was a
compliance issue
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see tears and
anger. There are
many other things
going on in our
hearts.”

—John Lee,
Classis Iakota, chair of SALT

Canadian ministries director, directly challenged that.

“That is not what is creeping up in this discussion,” he asserted. “This is all about being the most effective church in the context we are in.”

Ralph Wigboldus (Classis Huron) echoed that, contending, “If he [Koning] thinks that is what Canada Corporation is saying, he completely doesn’t understand the Canada Corporation.”

Several Canadians wanted the whole proposal tabled until October to allow more work to be done. An attempt to pause the process failed by a vote of 28-18. Voting is anonymous unless a delegate chooses to register a vote, so it is not known if the votes were divided along national lines.

Why No Executive Director-U.S.?

As agreed to in principle last October, the new model does not have an executive director-U.S. in parity with the Canadian structure.

The new model calls for establishing a Canadian Office of the CRC. Roger Sparks (Classis Minnkota) wondered why there wasn’t also a U.S. office. “Even though

membership is larger in the U.S., it would be reasonable to mirror as much as possible. Why is there a strategic stated purpose not to have parity?” he asked.

“The question we were trying to answer was not parity. It was ministry need,” Lee replied.

Delegates voted 35-10 to establish a Canadian office. Wigboldus and Aaltje van Grootheest, Canada at-large delegate, registered their negative votes to this and four other recommendations.

What’s Next

Lee stressed to the delegates that the model is not set in stone. It must be vetted by lawyers and the Canada Revenue Agency. Then it will go to the churches and classes for input prior to Synod 2022.

In preparation for that, the Council of Delegates and the Canada Corporation will create search teams and identify candidates for the newly approved positions, pending Synod 2022’s decision. Roorda is serving as interim executive director-Canada. Colin Watson Sr. will remain the executive director until Synod 2022.

—Gayla R. Postma

For more details on the proposed structure, look for “SALT FAQ” online at crcna.org.



**Responding to the
Global Effects
of COVID-19**

By Beth DeGraff and Laurisa O'Brien, World Renew

When COVID-19 erupted worldwide last March, 16-year-old Ekadashi and her family in Asia were already struggling. Ekadashi's father had been in poor health, became unemployed, and then was bedridden. Under pandemic restrictions that made it impossible to get to work, her mother also lost her job as a housemaid. Ekadashi had to drop out of school, and her family slid deeper into poverty.

With little to no income, Ekadashi's parents decided the best action for the whole family was to arrange her marriage to a man in their village. Ekadashi would become the financial responsibility of her husband's family, and the dowry they would receive for her would keep them from hunger and homelessness in the days ahead. The decision would help the family survive the pandemic, but Ekadashi's future was bleak.

Then, a World Renew partner connected with the family and found a new job for Ekadashi's mother. A women's group in their community helped them register for food distributions, and Ekadashi enrolled in a tuition-free school program. With support from World Renew, Ekadashi's family now has some economic stability in the COVID crisis, and her opportunities for a fulfilling future have improved.

Similar to Ekadashi, there are many people who have experienced social and economic setbacks since the COVID-19 outbreak swept the globe. By the end of the year, the number of people living in extreme poverty worldwide rose by an estimated 115 million.

In fact, crises such as the coronavirus outbreak affect those who live in poverty first and most. In the COVID-19 pandemic, ministries of the Christian Reformed Church were able to respond with resilience through partners and networks in North America and around the world.

"We know that people who are at highest risk of falling into extreme poverty also face the greatest challenges, pain, and loss during COVID," said World Renew Canada director Ida Kaastra Mutoigo. "This includes thousands of displaced persons like the Rohingya in Bangladesh, Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and many others who are barely surviving their current circumstances."

In response, CRCNA ministries reached out in new and expanded ways to ensure that needs would be met.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused social and economic setbacks for many across the globe, including early marriages for many young girls in Asia.

Providing Emergency Supplies

In North America, many churches turned to online services at the start of COVID-19. But several church plants didn't have the funds or technology to help keep people connected. To meet this need, Resonate Global Mission provided technology grants.

Resonate also provided COVID-19 relief grants to help church plants and campus ministries care for communities and students. Many international students studying at Western Michigan University, for example, weren't able to travel home, and some of the students lost their jobs. A grant from Resonate helped International Campus Ministry to provide food, money for rent, and other supplies to more than 3,000 students over just a few months.

Around the world, World Renew provided disaster programs specifically designed to prevent the spread of the virus. These included distributing emergency food and hygiene supplies, providing families with food vouchers, and sharing vital health information.

In one country in Africa, children and adults met in small groups or with their families to learn about face masks, social distancing, and handwashing. They discovered how to identify harmful practices and misinformation about COVID-19 that were prevalent worldwide in the first months of the outbreak.

"The pandemic radically changed our lives and work," said a World Renew development worker. "We are thankful to God for wisdom and creativity in serving people in need during the COVID-19 outbreak and other life-threatening circumstances. Trusting God and being available are at the heart of World Renew's ministry. Our faith inspires us and our partners to continue to serve him and others in uncertain times."

One Christian partner worked through World Renew community groups to establish 1,700 kitchen gardens that helped many families and neighbors access nutritious food. One participant said, "Our kitchen gardens were even more valuable for feeding our families as the local food markets became unreliable or just closed."

The families are also using their hygiene training with a new awareness of its value. There has been a surge of interest in handwashing stations; program participants in communities where World Renew works had already learned how to construct this simple mechanism made of sticks, rope, and a gallon of water.

"We can now clearly see that God ordered our steps," said Bridget, a health program leader and committed hand-washer. "God saw the end from the beginning when he

brought about introducing handwashing and hygiene programs in our community before COVID-19 started!”

Working Through Churches and Christians

CRCNA ministries provided resources to help Christian churches safely reach out to their neighbors during the pandemic with broader health education, information, and the gospel.

In West Africa, World Renew distributed a workbook for adults called *Loving Your Neighbor in the COVID-19 Pandemic* and lessons for children called *Peace, Be Still* to local congregations. The children’s workbooks equipped parents and guardians with the tools to support their children spiritually, emotionally, and physically during the pandemic.

In Berlin, Germany, Resonate Global Mission missionaries Mary Buteyn and David Kromminga partner with the Berlin City Mission to lead a church plant with and for newcomers. They adjusted quickly to the challenges and restrictions caused by COVID-19 as well.

“People, especially those in the refugee community, are experiencing so many other losses. There’s a kind of heart desire for contact with other human beings. And if we as a church can provide that, and also connect with God, that’s part of our mission,” Kromminga said about the importance of maintaining some sort of community even when Sunday worship could not continue in person.

As the church begins meeting in person again on Sundays for socially distanced and masked worship, they have also continued meeting online. Buteyn and Kromminga have witnessed much growth, spiritually and relationally, through the online practice.

And as people began spending more time at home, ReFrame Ministries staff around the world began developing new video and radio programs that offered timely biblical messages that people could access while adhering to stay-at-home orders.

“I am not seeing anyone other than my family these days due to coronavirus,” said Kanbe, a listener in Japan. “Still, when I hear your voices on the radio each day, it makes me feel like I’m seeing you, and I feel energized.”

Responding to Hidden Needs

With COVID-19 lockdowns around the world, economic hardships were not the only challenges facing families and congregations. As in Ekadashi’s story, pandemics can cause many difficulties behind closed doors. This includes increased gender-based violence, domestic violence, child marriages, and mental health issues.

World Renew increased its efforts to help girls and women complete their education, stay unmarried throughout childhood, remain free from sexual or domestic violence, and become leaders in their communities.

CRCNA ministries also offered trauma-healing training and opportunities to the communities they served. This helped people to process the trauma of the pandemic itself but also to name and address some of the consequences.

“Men and women who participate in the trauma-healing program begin to shift their thinking about gender equity,” said a World Renew development worker. “One result is that women gain access to and control their own resources. Couples begin to share decision-making and workloads, and as a result, healthy relationships develop and domestic violence decreases.”

With so many needs during the coronavirus pandemic, ministry leaders were also weary and stretched thin.

“Missionaries have been giving themselves to the people around them as if they were running a 100-meter dash. Their souls are tired and broken,” said Paul Yu, Resonate’s regional mission leader for East and Central Asia.

That’s why he led a discipleship course for 30 missionaries from four different countries to take time to rest and recharge for ministry.

“The need (was) great,” Yu said. “I can see they (were) really hungry for genuine and intimate connection with God.”


Fostering Resilience

As in North American CRCNA congregations, one of the things COVID-19 taught ministries especially well was to be adaptable, creative, and flexible. This has been a lesson learned by those they serve as well.

“In the pandemic, we recognized that ministry must be resilient,” said World Renew U.S. director Carol Bremer-Bennett. “We do a lot of work to support our staff and partners, but at the center, the process and transformation is owned by the communities themselves. They rose to the challenge of travel restrictions and new technology and helped one another with education and PPE (personal protective equipment).”

In one income-boosting program in Africa, for example, leaders of established village savings and loan associations had to step in when World Renew staff were unable to travel to visit. These community leaders, mostly women, began coaching and supporting others. They promoted household-level economic improvements and encouraged improvements in health care, food security, peacebuilding, gender justice, leadership development, and adult literacy.

Some of these leaders became so well-respected in their communities that they were considered essential service providers and were exempt from travel restrictions during the pandemic lockdowns.

“It is amazing how local leaders have grown in these times,” said Bremer-Bennett. “God has been gracious. Looking back now, we can see that as a church, we didn’t just pivot; we allowed the paradigm to shift.” 

Embracing Change: What We've Learned from the Pandemic

IF YOU HAVE YOUR PHONE NEARBY, take a moment and look at the photos you took back in January and February of 2020. You'll see how things were just before the COVID-19 pandemic swept into our lives.

We had no idea back then, did we? We couldn't have guessed all the ways the pandemic would invade our "normal" and change how we do work, church, family, travel, and countless other things.

What have we learned since then?

We've certainly learned a few new skills: How to work from home. How to engage worship virtually. How to physically distance in the places where we used to rub shoulders with others.

We've also learned about our weaknesses. After all, disruptors tend to expose underlying dysfunction. Strains in relationships, weaknesses in communications, and gaps in technology and structures have revealed themselves—sometimes painfully—in these trying times.

Perhaps our most significant learnings, though, are the old things COVID has forced us to understand in new ways. It's as if the pandemic has given us new glasses through which to see ourselves and our world. We've seen with fresh eyes the fragility of life, the power of community, and the challenge of change.

Let's think about that last one for a moment—the challenge of change. At Pastor Church Resources we have seen churches and pastors try to deal with the suddenness, frequency, and accumulated impact of change. Church leaders and church members together feel like bruises that keep getting bumped. And old truths about change are experienced in new ways:

1. Change is hard. It requires us to say goodbye to something familiar and learn a new way—sometimes



an unpleasant new way. Church members should take this into account as they experience weariness in themselves and crankiness in others.


2. Change usually involves loss. We lose a routine, the old normal, or perhaps something or someone we cherished. Leaders would be wise to help their congregations name this truth, not just because of specific losses but because loss has become a dominant theme of life for so many.

3. Loss causes grief. We mourn what we miss, but we don't often know that this is what we are experiencing. Let's notice our griefs, share them with one another, listen deeply to each other, and bring our griefs to God.

4. Grieving requires time. You can't rush it. It takes a while for life to move on and for us to sense the power of the things that endure. The process is helped when the people in your community come around you and confirm that your loss is significant

and your sadness is normal. This is some of the most important work that churches will do in these times.

5. Our souls' true home is not "normalcy," but God. The peace that passes understanding is not grounded in a return to the old ways or even the establishment of new ways. It is grounded in God's presence with us through Christ, and churches are places to name that truth over and over for one another.

Someday we'll add "after COVID" pictures to the "before COVID" pictures in our phones. And hopefully we'll remember what we've learned along the way: to cherish community, to savor life, and to engage change with confidence, knowing we have a true home in God. 

—Rev. Dave Den Haan,
Pastor Church Resources

The View from Here

A Season of Change

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." —John 16:33

EVERY YEAR, those of us who live in climates with a winter season look forward to seeing the new growth and new possibilities that spring brings. As seasons change, not only do we see evidence of that change in our surroundings; we often see changes in the attitudes and behavior of individuals as well. And now, as spring gives way to summer, we look forward to the sun and warmth and feel filled with the possibility of vacations and new beginnings.

God provides seasons of life as well. "Winters" might include grief, loneliness, and hardship. But as these times end, we find hope for the future. This June, many of us still are emerging from the winter that was 2020. We have endured pandemic, racial unrest, economic uncertainty, polarizing politics, and church divisions. We look forward to the "spring" that is before us.

Though COVID-19 is not yet behind us, we see signs of hope: vaccines are being rolled out, and small gatherings are beginning to increase. Best of all, plans are being made for in-person gatherings in our local congregations.

In the midst of our hardship, we recognize that we serve the same God as the disciples of old.

Similarly, many churches are making use of the "Challenging Conversations" toolkit to learn better ways to talk about difficult topics even when we disagree. The efforts of the Christian Reformed Church's Race Relations office have helped many of us recognize the importance of—and to begin doing—the difficult work of racial reconciliation. We thank God for all of this.

I am reminded of Good Friday and the fact that for Jesus' disciples, the world was about to change drastically—but they didn't know it. Their Lord was going to be crucified, and all they held dear was about to be crushed. For two days, they lived in the darkness of this devastating event. But then Easter happened, and the darkness was turned to the epitome of light by God's grace.

We too are living through a time of darkness. In the midst of our hardship, we recognize that we serve the same God as the disciples of old. He is more than able to use the negatives we experience and turn them into positives for his glory. COVID-19 was not a surprise to God. He knew how he was planning to use this experience in our lives whether or not we were surprised by it.

Yes, there is pain—but God is with us in the midst of the pain. Yes, there is dislocation—but God is with us in the midst of the dislocation.

Synod 2021 has been canceled. Our denominational gathering, Inspire 2021, has been postponed for a year. Weddings, funerals, and other celebrations have been delayed or commemorated in ways different from what we wanted. But as we begin to transition out of this time of pandemic, we remember that through it all, there has been one constant: God has been with us.

He will never leave us or forsake us. He was crucified for our transgressions. He was laid in a tomb, but we can rejoice today because the tomb is empty. He is risen: Hallelujah!

We embrace change knowing that we are embracing the One who allows the change. May we continue to thank God hour by hour, day by day, as we pray continually for God to give us comfort and strength as we do the work that he has prepared in advance for us to do.



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.

Groundwork Brings a New Voice to Biblical Conversations

REFRAME, THE MEDIA MINISTRY

for the Christian Reformed Church, recently appointed Rev. Darrell Delaney as co-host of its half-hour audio program *Groundwork*. Beginning in May 2021, Delaney joined Rev. Scott Hoezee on the program to unpack the richness of the Bible and apply it with insight for today's world.

Delaney also serves as the pastor of Madison Church's Square Campus in Grand Rapids, Mich.

"Darrell exudes a profound love for studying and living God's Word," said Courtney Jacob, *Groundwork's* producer. "He's deeply gifted at applying Scripture and making connections to help us live and grow as disciples of Christ."

Big Shoes to Fill

The new appointment comes after the retirement of Dave Bast, who recorded more than 450 episodes of the program. Bast's long history on *Groundwork* meant that even before Delaney applied to be the co-host, many of the program's listeners were already praying for him.

"Dave will be sorely missed," wrote Cherie, one of *Groundwork's* listeners. "He has a lovely recording voice, but more than that, his insights have been invaluable to me in my own walk over the years. I will be praying for the Almighty to send just the right person your way."

Groundwork began airing in 2010 as a reformatted version of ReFrame's flagship program, *The Back to God Hour*.



Rev. Darrell Delaney began co-hosting ReFrame's *Groundwork* audio program in May.

"People listen because they want to know more about the Lord, they want to grow, and they want to improve in their relationship with God," said Delaney. "When you're able to discuss Scripture over the table with a couple of friends, it's really powerful to break open and have fun with."

Delaney is excited to bring his own perspective and interests to the program.

"There is a demographic of listeners that may not know how wonderful a program *Groundwork* is," he said. "Keeping a pulse on popular culture and seeing God's hand working in and through it ... is one of the many things I'm excited about bringing to *Groundwork*."

Upcoming episodes of *Groundwork* will include discussions on 1 Corinthians, God's abiding presence, and a series on the Ten Commandments.

You can find all of *Groundwork's* listening options at groundworkonline.com/listen.

—Brian Clark, *ReFrame Ministries*

Edmonton Native Healing Centre Marks Three Decades of Ministry

THIS YEAR THE EDMONTON Native Healing Centre in Edmonton, Alta., celebrates its 30th anniversary.

Director Harold Roscher described the center as “simply a community for people of all cultures, faiths, (and) financial standings, ... a place where we can meet and grow together.”

The Centre addresses emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual needs as represented in an Indigenous medicine wheel.



The ministry that began in the basement of a home has grown to have its own building to share with local community groups.

Photo provided by Edmonton Native Healing Centre.



Director Harold Roscher drums with children at the Edmonton Native Healing Centre.

Originally launched from the basement of the home of founding director John Stellingwerff, the Centre now has its own building.

“We have now grown to a place where we can help people in all four of those (medicine wheel) quadrants,” Roscher said.

There have been opportunities to grow the ministry in all directions. The Centre now offers space to the Boyle McCauley Health Centre. This meets a practical community need and offers a safe, comfortable, and accessible location for clients.

Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, Wellness Wednesdays is

a free exercise class run by the Centre. Each week the class is livestreamed on the center’s Facebook page.

These types of activities help the center to connect with the community and meet

some of its needs, Roscher said.

Celebrations for the milestone anniversary are being planned within COVID constraints.

Ideally, Roscher said, they would be able to serve a soup and bannock meal as the Centre did regularly before closing the kitchen because of COVID. Relaunching this popular gathering would be another cause for celebration.

Ongoing support from the Christian Reformed Church allows these programs to serve the community. “It’s wonderful to have the strong Christian Reformed backing, because without it the lights don’t go on and the doors

don’t open,” Roscher said. “That faithful support has been so crucial to allowing us to be a ministry.”

The growing financial support for the ministry shows how needed and appreciated the ministry is in the broader community.

Not only does Roscher want to see the ministry continue for another 30 years, but he also hopes to see the fruit of stronger bridges being formed between Indigenous communities and the CRC.

“We see historically the journey between the church and the Indigenous community has not been a good one,” he said. “I think we’re poised in the next 30 years to make some meaningful inroads into reconciliation and recognizing each other’s gifts.”

—Victoria Veenstra,
Justice Communications
Team Coordinator

Raising Up Leaders in the Central African Republic

NIAMAZIME FERDINAND'S father died when Ferdinand was 6 years old.

In his early years, Ferdinand struggled; he was aimless.

Growing up in Bangassou, in southeastern Central African Republic, he went to the local Roman Catholic church. But it didn't give him what he needed.

"At the age of 12, I was trained in drugs and banditry by street child comrades," he said in a document translated from French.

But at the age of 14, Ferdinand said, "The Lord led me to a Coopération Evangélique Church of my city, Bangassou."

That Sunday the pastor preached about the dangers of drugs and people's separation from God.

"The Holy Spirit touched me, and I abandoned all and accepted Jesus to serve him as my Savior," said Ferdinand, now pastor of Coopération Evangélique Church in the town of Bangui and a Timothy Leadership Training facilitator.

But his challenges were far from over. After being baptized through immersion in water, his family shunned him because he had left the Catholic church.

"I went to inform my pastor and asked to stay at his home like his child," Ferdinand said. "He accepted me and began to train me in the way of the Lord."

One night he had a dream in which God was directing him toward a crowd of people as their pastor.

"I explained to my pastor, and he told me that God called me for his work," he said. "Subsequently, I spent several years with the pastor, and he saw my determination and vocation to serve God."



Pastor Niamazime Ferdinand works with ministry leaders and communities around his home country of Central African Republic.

His pastor established a church in Bangui and placed Ferdinand there as its pastor in 1989. From there, Ferdinand did his theological training at two schools.

Since 2016, he has been connected with the Timothy Leadership Training program, a ministry of Raise Up Global Ministries based in Grand Rapids, Mich.

TLT works with ministry leaders around the world, especially those in rural or remote locations. TLT is centered around interactive learning in which participants study Scripture and develop action plans that result in visible transformation in individual lives and communities.

"What I have learned from TLT in leadership is great," said Ferdinand, who has used his training to teach other ministry leaders in his country the skills they need to serve their churches.

Ferdinand said he has learned to "take care of God's people, ... overcome violence and harm in the family, and to honor God through work and worship."

In addition, as a training leader, he has been able to teach these ministry skills to other pastors in the Central African Republic.

"I have already trained more than 50 pastors and Christian leaders with TLT," he said. "I have made efforts to have TLT courses translated into the national language spoken throughout the Central African Republic."

Even though he lacks enough Bibles to distribute and can find it difficult to travel to teach TLT in his country, which faces a range of armed conflicts, he remains committed to the process.

"In spite of the wars in my country, the Christian church is alive in some places," Ferdinand said. "But in most cities in the country, the church is still struggling to grow up following the multiple wars in the country. There is a need to multiply TLT to churches and leaders of all Christian churches."

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications



Commemorate Celebrate Support

25 years ago, Synod opened the path to ordination for women in the offices of Minister of the Word, Commissioned Pastor, and Elder. The journey of women in the CRCNA entails a long history and legacy of women using their God-given gifts and callings in local and global missions.

Celebrate this history and read more about the milestones and of the courageous women who have helped to shape this journey at crcna.org/WomensLeadership.

25 

joined and held together —Eph 4:16

WOMEN IN ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

The Women's Leadership Ministry affirms and supports women in all levels of leadership. We help Christian Reformed churches and ministries create a culture in which, together, men and women thrive in pursuit of God's mission in the world.

We want to hear your story. Please share and connect with us: womensleadership@crcna.org



crcna.org/WomensLeadership

Support
the work of
this ministry by
giving online today!

Give a gift by July 31st
and we'll send you a
commemorative lapel pin to
wear celebrating this
25th anniversary!

crcna.org/WomensLeadership/donate

Cool Summer Animals

HOW DO YOU STAY COOL on a hot summer day? Do you run through the sprinkler or take a dip in a pool? Maybe you have a water balloon fight with friends in your neighborhood. There are lots of fun ways to stay cool in the summer. But have you ever wondered how animals cool off on sizzling summer days?

Take a look at the clever and funny ways these animals stay cool in the summer!

Pigs

Want to know why pigs like to roll around in mud? Because pigs can't sweat, they like to cover themselves in mud to keep cool during hot summer months. The water in mud keeps pigs cool as it slowly evaporates into the air. Mud also acts as a special piggy sunscreen because it protects their skin from getting sunburned.

Horses

Did you know that horses sweat? Just like people, horses sweat on hot days or when they are doing exercises like running. As the sweat evaporates, it cools them off so they don't get too hot.

Bees

Bees have the best indoor fan for hot summer days. Bees collect water to bring into the hive, and they use their wings to blow in cooler air. The water inside the hive makes the air cooler, creating a homemade air conditioner. Bees also try to keep their queen and their babies cool on hot days by spending time outside. Then more air can flow inside the hive where the queen is. You might see a large group of bees hanging on the outside of the hive, a gathering called "bearding" because it looks like a big, bushy beard.

Prairie Dogs

Prairie dogs enjoy spending time searching for food in the early mornings, but on hot days they spend most of their time out of the sun in the cool burrows and tunnels they dig underground.


Lizards

Because lizards are cold-blooded animals, their body temperatures change based on the temperatures around them. On really hot days, lizards like to find shade under rocks to stay cool.

Elephants

Who would have thought that ears could keep animals cool? It's true! Elephants use their large ears to flap themselves to stay cool on hot days. They also keep cool by using their trunks to spray themselves with water. Not only do they have their own fans, but they also have a personal sprinkler!

Stay Cool!

What are your favorite ways to stay cool in the summer? Whether you enjoy swimming or tasting a sweet ice cream treat, remember to thank God for summer and for the cool ways he takes care of his creation! 



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.





Photo by Alvin Engler/Unsplash

5 Reasons to Embrace Hospitality

By Peter Jonker

Back in January, I was walking the dog a couple of blocks from my home when I overheard a conversation between two neighbors.

One neighbor was yelling to another over the noise of a snowblower, “Hey, guess what! I bought 800 more rounds of ammunition yesterday!”

“No kidding!” the other replied. “Where do you pick that up?” I didn’t hear any more after that. The snowblower turned off, and the conversation got quieter.

I’m no expert, but I’m pretty sure you don’t need that much ammunition simply for hunting. I’m guessing it was purchased for protection. My neighbor’s purchase is part of a larger societal trend that has seen gun and ammunition sales increase to record

levels in 2020. According to data from the National Shooting Sports Foundation, background checks tied to the sale of firearms increased 60% over 2019 levels. People are stocking up.

In writing this, I’m not making a judgment on my neighbor’s right to own a gun and buy ammunition. I’m more interested in what his purchase says about the spirit of our communities. I’m more interested in what these statistics say about the state of neighborly relations. Walls of mistrust seem to be thickening.

Over the past few years, Western societies also have been plagued by increasing loneliness. Institutions that used to bring people together (such as churches and community sports leagues) are in decline, leaving people increasingly isolated. A recent article

published through the University of British Columbia called loneliness an “epidemic” and a “silent killer.” Things are so bad in the United Kingdom that in 2018 they created a new cabinet position within the government: the minister of loneliness.

All that was before the pandemic. Since then, not only has loneliness increased, but it seems to have developed a sharp edge. In the grind of social and political unrest, loneliness has been sharpened by fear. Now we’re not just lonely. We’re looking at our neighbor with suspicion. We’re locking our doors and buying ammo.

This is not the way it is supposed to be. “It is not good for the man to be alone,” God said in Genesis 2:18. We human beings are made in the image of the triune God. We are made for connection, for fellowship, for shalom. We are

meant for lives of love, lives of trust, lives of joy.

What do we do about the loneliness and mistrust? How do we find our way back to connection? The church can lead the way. Jesus calls us to love one another, and stories such as the parable of the Good Samaritan teach us that our love is meant to overflow the boundaries of the church and water the lives of all our neighbors. Loneliness is an enemy of the gospel. How do we fight this enemy?

There are multiple scriptural practices that can help us here, but one of the best is the practice of hospitality. As we emerge from this pandemic and venture out into a sharp-edged world, may I suggest that we arm ourselves with hospitality? This small, intimate, deeply personal practice might be just what the world needs. Let me offer five reasons why this practice suggests itself to us.

1. Hospitality Is a Deeply Biblical Practice

The Old and New Testaments call us to hospitality.

In Leviticus 19:9-10, God tells Israel that when its farmers bring in the harvest, they are to leave the edges of their fields untouched and not go over the middle of their fields more than once. God reserves the margins of the field and the gleanings in the center for the poor and foreigners to gather food. In effect, this command opens up hospitable space in the backyard of every Israelite. This harvest hospitality shows its fruitfulness in the story of Ruth. Boaz allows Ruth to glean in his field. That hospitality doesn't just save her life; Boaz, too, is blessed. Ruth becomes his wife and gives him a child. If you look at the big picture, God uses the hospitality of Boaz to preserve God's covenant. Ruth and Boaz's child is an ancestor of Jesus.

The New Testament also exhorts God's people to welcome others. "Practice hospitality," Paul says in Romans 12:13. That call is echoed in 1 Peter 4:9 and

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3 John 1:8. Jesus himself practiced hospitality when he ate with sinners and made time for children in the middle of his busy schedule.

2. Hospitality Builds a Hospital

In Luke 14, a prominent Pharisee invites Jesus to an exclusive dinner. It turns out to be a high-stakes game of musical chairs—the guests compete with one another for the places of honor at the table. Jesus calls out their selfish spirits and then says to the host, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives or your rich neighbors; if you do they may invite you back and so you will be repaid." Instead, "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" (Luke 14:12-14). He goes on to tell them the familiar parable of the wedding banquet.

Christian hospitality is not a networking strategy. Christian hospitality builds a hospital, a place of healing,

for wounded neighbors. True hospitality opens up space in your home, in your time, in your life where your neighbor can heal. When Jesus sat at the Pharisee's table, he encountered a power struggle. When a person comes into the circle of Christian hospitality, they discover a place of acceptance and grace. At a table like the Pharisee's, you feel pressure to show your strength and your worth. At a truly hospitable table, you feel safe enough to show your wounds and your needs. That means hospitality does not need filet mignon and good silver; a take-out pizza can do the trick. In fact, the formal dining room with the good silver often feels less hospitable than the kitchen table with the dishes in the sink. If you are willing to show your messy side to your guest, she'll probably feel free to open up about the messes in her life, which will create real intimacy.

3. Hospitality Breaks Barriers with Kindness

Much biblical hospitality aims at people who are different from us. It's fine to have dinner with friends and family, but the hospitality modeled by Jesus and pushed by Paul moves us toward people outside our usual circles. That's a truth hidden in the word itself. The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia*. It literally means "love of strangers." The etymology of the word signals the true intention of the practice. Hospitality doesn't just aim at what is broken in other people; it wants to connect with people who are outside our usual spheres.

Let's go back to Boaz's welcome of Ruth. Ruth isn't just poor. She's also an outsider. She is a Moabite, from one of Israel's most-hated enemies. But Boaz welcomes Ruth into his field, lets her drink from the workers' water jar, and tells his men not to harass her. It's classic hospitality. Not only does he make her feel safe and welcome, but his welcome is a healing balm applied to an ancient hatred. How well does the healing balm work? It works so well that they end up married!

Scripture is full of hospitable welcomes specifically aimed at breaking down barriers: The party the father throws when he welcomes home the prodigal son. The welcome Jesus gives to the sinful woman who washes his feet in Luke 7. The evening Jesus spends with Zacchaeus, the head tax collector. The money paid to the innkeeper by the Good Samaritan for the care of the man he rescued on the way to Jerusalem. These hospitable acts all break barriers.

4. Hospitality Has Grit

Real hospitality is not easy or convenient. Real hospitality is not safe. Real hospitality invites complications. Of course, relationships are always somewhat inconvenient, but when you practice hospitality, when you get involved with people's weariness and hurt, you are taking inconvenience to a whole new level.

This plays out in the most ordinary places. Imagine it's 5:30 p.m. and you are stopping at the grocery store after work to pick up a couple of things. It's been a long day, and you are in a hurry. As you zip up and down the aisles, you spot someone from your neighborhood. You know she's just been through a divorce, you know she's hurting, and you know that she likes to talk. What do you do?

You have three options: 1. You could pretend you didn't see her and spend the rest of the trip sneaking around the store, making sure you don't encounter her. 2. You could put on your "don't talk to me; I'm very busy and important" face and blow by her in the aisle with a brisk "hello." 3. You could open up space in your time and in your heart. You could come up to her, stop, greet her warmly, and ask her how she's doing. The third way is the most inconvenient. It's also the best picture of Christian hospitality.

Here is where modern social media apps don't help much with our loneliness. A lot of the time, we use social media to take the grit out of our relationships. But when we lose the grit, we lose the connection!

Here's just one example of how that can happen: 20 years ago, if a group of your child's friends came over to pick up your kid to go to a football game, how did that pickup go? The friends would come up to the door and knock. "Hi, Mr. Jonker! Is Patrick here? We're ready to go!" You'd call your son, and he'd come down, but in the meantime you'd have a short conversation with these teenage boys. You'd connect. "Hi, Jacob, how are you doing? Have you made your college decision yet? How are your parents?" These conversations could be awkward, but they made for real connection.

That was 20 years ago. How do young people pick each other up today? They text from the driveway. Is it more convenient to text from the driveway? Sure. When you text, you avoid Patrick's dad and his awkward questions. But something important is lost. You've lost one more small way we build community.


5. Hospitality Points to the Heart of God

Our God does not text from the driveway. Our God wants personal connection.

When Adam and Eve hide from God in the garden, God does not leave them alone. He moves toward them. He seeks them out. When God's Old Testament people turned away from him, God did not leave them alone. He sent them prophets. And, most striking of all, when we continue to move away from him, when we push him away, God is so determined to reconnect with us that he sends his son, Jesus. When Jesus moves toward us, he doesn't just move close in general.

He gets close to our weakness, he gets close to our sin, and he comes near to the most broken parts of us.

Is that inconvenient for Jesus? Is it gritty? Does it prove to be dangerous? Yes. It costs him his life.

But Jesus is willing to endure all these things so that he can make room for us in the heart of God. Jesus is willing to do these things so that our sins and miseries can be overcome and we can be reunited with the Father. Jesus is willing to do all these things so that we can enjoy the hospitality of his house and find a seat at his table, where he feeds us with his body and his blood. No more are we strangers or guests, but like children at home. 



Peter Jonker was born and raised in Kingston, Ont., and now lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. He serves as the minister of preaching at LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

1. Do you agree that loneliness has become an epidemic in our societies? Why or why not?
2. How have you understood the biblical practice of hospitality prior to now?
3. "Christian hospitality builds a hospital, a place of healing, for wounded neighbors." How does this reinforce or change your current view and practice of hospitality?

READ MORE ONLINE

Adam Was Designed to Be a Gardener

Adam's original creation covenant mandate from God to subdue or have dominion over the earth was for God's glory, not man's.

MY WIFE HAD AN UNCLE who was an avid gardener. In fact, his entire family are avid gardeners. He recently died, and I was asked to speak at his funeral. In respect to his main hobby, I spoke about the Garden of Eden. I quoted Genesis 2:15, where God says, "The Lord God took the man ('Adam' in Hebrew) and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." The thing I noted was that even in paradise, man had a job. The job he had was a gardening job, for which Adam was intentionally designed by God's own self to enjoy and find fulfillment in.

But what is even more interesting about Adam's gardening job is it meant he was supposed to be a caretaker of the garden. The original Hebrew word used here for "take care" is *shomar*, which also means "to protect." In the Talmud, the ancient Jewish commentaries on God's law, rabbis debate why Adam would need to protect and take care of a perfect paradise like Eden.

Reformed theologian O. Palmer Robertson gives an interesting answer: "Adam's requirement to labor (in the garden) echoes the original cultural mandate of the covenant of creation, with its charge to bring the whole earth into subjection to the glory of God" (The Christ of the Covenants, p. 107). It's a very Kuyperian idea.

What Robertson is saying is that Adam's original creation covenant mandate from God to subdue or have dominion over the earth was for God's glory, not man's. In other words, the Genesis statement of subduing or having dominion (Gen. 1:28) was not meant to be a green light for Adam to plunder or exploit the planet for his own selfish reasons. God made Adam the earth's custodian and steward.

As I pointed out in my sermon, my wife's uncle would have understood this mandate of serving God's glory

as a caretaker and gardener perfectly. His garden was his sanctuary. It was there he found peace with God. He expertly understood and respected the nature of the plants he worked with. If he wanted them to be fruitful, he knew he had to take care of the soil and not overuse it so his plants could continue to find proper nourishment.

I don't know a single farmer who would disagree with the idea of taking care of their soil and not intentionally destroying it. After all, it is their livelihood! Yet somehow when we translate our caretaking role to the broader idea of the entire planet, we run afoul of political ideologies. I have never understood as a Christian why this should be.

As believers, being environmentally conscientious is not contrary to biblical teaching or in some strange way being anti-Christian. Our job as God's caretakers here on earth is a biblical decree straight out of the Garden of Eden.

So every time I drive by a landfill near my home and see the mountains of trash piling up day after day, week after week, year after year, this thought of our being caretakers here on earth hits me hard. I often think, can't we do better than this? Shouldn't we, the church, be the loudest voices for stewardship of the planet? **B**



Rob Braun is a former commissioned pastor at Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Princeton, Minn. He currently is a licensed exhorter in Classis Lake Superior and a freelance writer.

1. What ideas or feelings do you have from reading that Adam was a gardener?
2. How has the mandate to "subdue or have dominion" over creation been portrayed in what you've heard or read?
3. Why do you think it is so controversial when it comes to applying . . .

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Tell a Better Story

Until the church recognizes the inherent, image-bearing value of individuals with disabilities... messages like these will continue to be spread as benign, sweet, sentimental, and even true.



Sara Korber-DeWeerd is a freelance writer and teacher based in Massachusetts. She and her family are members of Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church. Visit her blog at morethanshelter.blogspot.com.

IT'S A WARM SEPTEMBER MORNING, and a group of friends and I are gathered at a local 5K run. Our daughters have just completed the race, and we're enjoying one another's company. My phone vibrates in my coat pocket, and a text message appears. It's from my friend Maggie. "Is it just me, or do things like this make you feel terribly uncomfortable?" she writes under an image of a public sign outside a church. The sign reads, "Sometimes angels are disguised as kids with special needs to teach us how to be better people." The message isn't just outside that small-town church; it's circulating on Facebook.

I pass my phone around to my friends. "Am I crazy for being really put off by this?" Unanimously, the answer is no. I am not crazy. I respond to Maggie, "That's awful." But a question nags at me: why is it awful? Maggie and I have sons with Down syndrome, and we often find ourselves in conversations like this one. I confess that before my son was born, I probably would have driven past a sign like that and thought nothing of it. I wonder: am I being too fussy? Does a message like this really do any harm?

This isn't the first time our families have encountered seemingly sweet messages about individuals with disabilities. There's the oft-repeated phrase "God gives special children to special parents." Then there was the time a pastor-friend asked us if we thought people with Down syndrome are more like Adam and Eve before the fall. There was the article we once read by a theologian who argued that people with disabilities make us feel uncomfortable and teach us because their visible vulnerability makes us confront our own hidden vulnerabilities.

After the kids go to bed that night, my husband and I talk about the sign.

"We need an articulate response to why these messages are so damaging," I insist. "How do we explain it in a loving way to people who don't see the problem?"

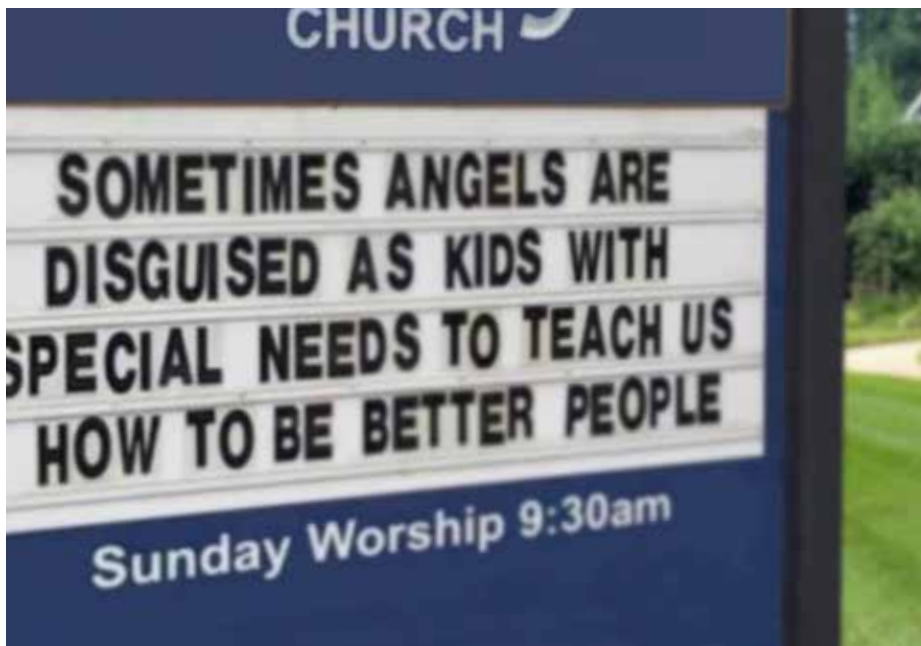
And so I start writing. I write a letter to the church that posted the sign. Imagining all the social media "likes" the image will get fuels my drive to share why that message and sentiments like it continue to marginalize my son.

First, there's the theology of the statement. Children with special needs are, in fact, children—not "angels." They are born into sin just as the rest of us are. They need forgiveness just as often as anyone else. Yet the sign's message suggests that someone who lives with a disability is somehow more innocent than other human beings. Unfortunately, this message joins a mainstream (and not necessarily Christian) narrative that suggests individuals with disabilities are innocent, simple, quaint, and less developed than neurotypical people. This is simply not true from either a scientific or a theological standpoint.

To counter this type of othering, we often use the phrase "more alike than different" when explaining Down syndrome to others. It emphasizes the common humanity we all share, and that having Down syndrome is just one part of who our son is.

Second, likely without meaning to, the sign and messages like it suggest God created some people to serve others. That argument was often used to justify slavery. We must stop making that claim about any people group, whether overtly or subtly, for it only leads to injustice.

Third, statements like that on the church sign position people with disabilities as individuals whose value is dependent on others. It is true that



many differently abled people are more physically vulnerable than those who are neurotypical; however, we must not confuse physical dependence on others with value dependence.

Our son was not born just to teach others how to be better human beings. His personhood is not dependent on what the rest of us learn from him. His value comes as an equal image bearer of his Creator God. As a baptized member of the body of Christ, he has the obligation, privilege, and ability to contribute to our congregation and to the larger work of God's kingdom. As a brother and son, he holds an essential place in our family. As a young boy, he has the opportunity to have friends and to be a friend. As a student, he is fully included in a general education classroom where he learns alongside same-age peers. In short, he belongs in his community as a full, participating member.


Until the church recognizes the inherent, image-bearing value of individuals with disabilities, until differently abled people are called to serve the

body of Christ in more meaningful ways (think ministry, leadership, and hospitality), messages like these will continue to be spread as benign, sweet, sentimental, and even true. But take out the phrase "kids with special needs" and replace it with just about any other historically marginalized people group and the sentiment becomes vapid at best, offensive at worst.

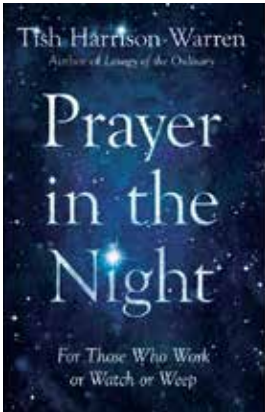
As I close the letter to the church, I wonder if I can turn to something more concrete than a personal theology. Isn't there something in our shared theology that corroborates what I have attempted to articulate? There is. Suddenly I am young again, sitting in my Sunday school class, memorizing the first question and answer of the Westminster Catechism. It has informed so much of how I see and understand my place in God's world. So I write to the little congregation:

I leave you with this final question and answer that has guided the way we have loved and raised

each of our three children. The first question of the Westminster Catechism asks: "What is the chief end of man[kind]?" The answer: "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." What a complex and joyful commission God gives to each and every one of his children in equal measure. In it, we are invited to live given lives. In it, there is possibility and promise. The scope of that time-tested question and answer is so much greater than the scope of a simple sign or a Christian cliché. Look around at all the richness of God's world, all the beauty, diversity, and even brokenness. See the beauty difference makes. Affirm it. Celebrate it. But please—do it in a way that preserves the dignity of each and every image bearer of our incredible God. Do it in a way that preserves the dignity of our family and families like ours.

I lower my computer screen. I pray over the words. Lord, let them ring true. I will keep telling these better stories. I will keep at it, because whether or not our differently abled sisters and brothers find room at the table depends on it. What's more, we are all better when we understand that God created our differences as a gift to his people, not as a burden to bear for the strong, not as a lesson to teach. The stories will start with words like equality, dignity, belonging, and reciprocity. And they will always end with love. These are the words we must share as we communally seek to glorify God and enjoy him forever. These are the signposts that tell us all are welcome here. 

Turning the Pages on a Summer's Day



Prayer in the Night: For Those Who Work or Watch or Weep

By *Tish
Harrison Warren*

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

"In the middle of the night, covered in blood in an emergency room, I was praying." Tish Harrison Warren got my attention right away with the opening sentence of her new book.

Warren uses the Compline, the Anglican prayer at the close of day, as a framework for musing about those who weep, those who watch, and those who work in the night. She works her way through the prayer one phrase at a time, drawing our attention to those who need prayer and to those who work in God's kingdom on our behalf. Her winsome writing style is a wonderful combination of the practical and the mystical. This is a book to be savored. (InterVarsity Press)



The Sound the Sun Makes

By *Buck Storm*

Reviewed by Trevor Denning

Suspended from his job, the usually happy-go-lucky Early Pines is depressed. Since his old friend Gomez Gomez died, Pines hasn't been the same. Now Pines, the best police detective in Paradise, Arizona, is just sitting on his back porch listening to the sound the sun makes as it scrapes across the sky. While Buck Storm's yarn-spinning skills are as delightful as ever in this sequel to *The Beautiful Ashes of Gomez Gomez*, one can't help missing the cast of characters in the previous novel. *The Sound the Sun Makes* rolls along at the same easy pace fans expect, even with the change of location, before building to a crazy crescendo of biblical proportions. Never harsh and never preachy, this sequel is laugh-out-loud funny and encouraging in all the right ways. (Kregel)



The Sum of Us

by *Heather McGhee*

Reviewed by Andrew Zwart

Racism has a cost for everyone, not just people of color. Heather McGhee's *The Sum of Us* examines the problem of why Americans can't seem to have "nice stuff," the "stuff" here ranging from universal health care to affordable college tuition. She shows how, over and over, we buy into a "zero-sum" story, the false narrative that any program that might help African Americans must by definition come at a cost to white people. But in truth these same programs would provide just as much (or more) benefit for white people. For me, the best parts of this book offer a vision of hope made concrete—a vision in which reckoning with injustice leads not to mutual distrust, but to mutual flourishing. (Penguin Random House)

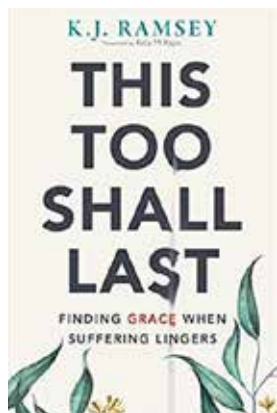


See No Stranger: A Memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love

By *Valarie Kaur*

Reviewed by Jenny deGroot

As a Sikh child, Valarie Kaur experienced racism, but nothing that prepared her for the hatred that intensified overnight after 9/11. She and her community became targets, alongside Muslims, of hate crimes. When her uncle was shot dead as he was watering flowers outside of his small business, Kaur knew she had to turn her grief to good or it would destroy her. Both a memoir and a manifesto, *See No Stranger* tells vivid stories and presents the urgent challenge to love the "other." Kaur reaches out to leaders of all kinds of faith communities, including Christian ones, believing that much of our fear of the "other" is rooted in our fear of each other's religious convictions. A must-read in this time of great need for understanding and love for the "other." (One World)

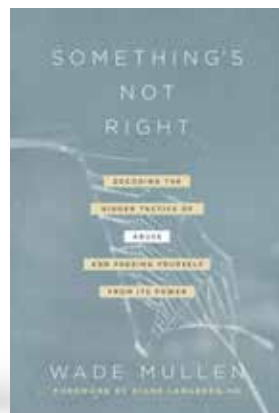


This Too Shall Last: Finding Grace When Suffering Lingers

*Written by
K.J. Ramsey*

Reviewed by
Kristyn DeNooyer

Sometimes hope does not mean healing. For those who navigate chronic pain, persistent grief, ongoing mental illness, or other forms of suffering that stay, K.J. Ramsey details a gentle, acutely honest conviction: where sorrow lives, grace makes a home. Ramsey knows suffering—deeply. But being acquainted with suffering does not mean she is unacquainted with grace. Suffering might stay, but so does Jesus. Drawing on her experience as a professional therapist, Ramsey explores neuroscience alongside contemplative practices, highlights the creative, intricate complexities of our minds and bodies, and speaks to wholeness, belovedness, and belonging with a God who also knows deep suffering. (Zondervan)



Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse and Freeing Yourself from Its Power

By Wade Mullen

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

Why do churches often mishandle clergy abuse? Why does it always take so long for victims of such abuse to recover? How can survivors of clergy abuse gain more clarity on what they have been through and then reclaim their voices against abuse? Based on his own experience as a pastor and his research of numerous case studies of clergy abuse, Wade Mullen offers a deeply personal and pastoral book on how to detect abusive systems. Understanding what happened is the first step toward true healing. This book includes 20 pages of key resources for survivors coming out of all kinds of situations. It can serve as a resource guide for individuals and for trauma healing groups. (Tyndale)

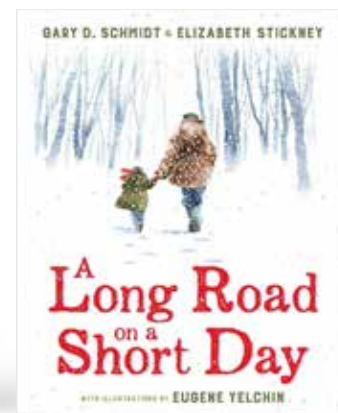


Under the Magnolias

By T.I. Lowe

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Austin Foster is still a child herself when her mother dies giving birth to a second set of twins. As the oldest daughter, Austin must keep the family together and care for her father, a man devastated by his wife's death and swaying on the precipice of mental collapse. Enter Vance Cumberland, son of the town scion and destined for greatness, who falls for Austin and doggedly pursues her via friendship and love. Austin, however, keeps him at arm's length as the years pass and her father worsens. When life finally becomes too hard for Austin to go it alone any longer, she comes to realize that love takes many forms, and those who are thought of as outcasts have beautiful souls and truly know the meaning of love. (Tyndale)

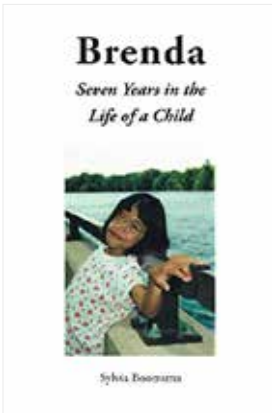


A Long Road on a Short Day

*By Gary D. Schmidt
& Elizabeth Stickney*

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

Newbery Honor-winning author Gary Schmidt finished what his late wife started: the winsome chapter book *A Long Road on a Short Day*. It's a family story from Elizabeth Stickney (Anne Schmidt), who belonged to an old family in New Portland Hill, Maine. She had sent this children's story to her agent before succumbing to cancer in 2013. Stickney's agent invited Gary Schmidt to revise it. *A Long Road* takes readers on a tour to bygone times of farm life and the give-and-take a community makes when folks depend on each other. Illustrations by Eugene Yelchin (*Breaking Stalin's Nose*) warm the snowy-white pages. Here is a quaint, quiet story for kids ages 8-10 (Clarion Books).

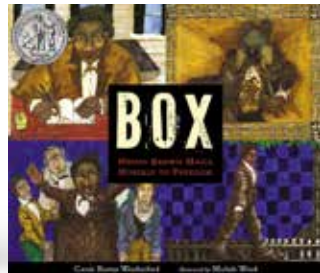


Brenda: Seven Years in the Life of a Child

By Sylvia Boomsma

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

On March 30, 1996, along a dusty road in Trujillo, Honduras, an energetic 5-year-old girl named Brenda ran into the path of an oncoming truck and suffered severe, disfiguring craniofacial injuries, but no brain damage. In February 1997, Sylvia Boomsma's family heard about Brenda from a doctor who had learned of her situation on a mission trip to Trujillo. Boomsma's inspiring, engaging memoir—one rooted in her Christian faith and by turns excruciatingly painful and laugh-out-loud funny—tells how Brenda arrived in the U.S. as a foster child, endured more than 50 surgeries, and was adopted into Boomsma's family at the request of Brenda's impoverished mother, who had no means to care for her daughter's medical needs. (Newman Springs Publishing)



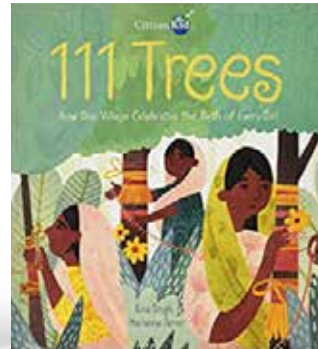
Henry Brown Mails Himself to Freedom

By Carole Boston Weatherford,

illustrated by Michele Wood

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

The extraordinary story of how enslaved Henry Brown, with the help of friends on the Underground Railroad, mailed himself in a large box from the South to freedom in the North has been told numerous times, but author Carole Boston Weatherford narrates the amazing tale in a unique way. In an author note, she writes, "Reflecting the cubic structure of a box, the number six figures prominently in this book's text. All but one of the book's poems are sixains, having six lines." Recommended for children 10 and older, this poignant collection of poems, which speak of Henry's faith in God and longing for justice, is immensely relevant today in a world where so many people face discrimination, oppression, and slavery and where God continues to call his people to set others free. (Penguin Random House)



111 Trees: How One Village Celebrates the Birth of Every Girl

by Rina Singh,
illustrated by Marianne Ferrer

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In many places of the world, the birth of a boy is celebrated but the birth of a girl is mourned because she will cost her parents a dowry and become the property of her husband when she marries. Such was the case in the small village of Piplantri, India, where Sundar Paliwal was born. When his daughter died of dehydration, Sundar mourned deeply, then decided to plant some trees in her memory, leading to an idea: "Every girl born in the village will be welcomed with the planting of 111 trees." Based on a true story, *111 Trees* is a testimony to how just one person seeking what is just and good can bring transformation and renewal. (Kids Can Press)



The Nature of Fragile Things

By Susan Meissner

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Sophie Whalen, a young woman who immigrated from 1900s Ireland to New York City, finds shelter in a tenement and ekes out a meager living. She is so desperate to leave her destitute circumstances that she answers an ad for a mail-order bride, which also mentions the need for a mother for a 5-year-old girl, Kat. Sophie travels by train to San Francisco and marries Martin Hocking the same day she arrives. The evening before an earthquake rocks San Francisco, Sophie answers a knock at her door and encounters a young, pregnant woman. When the earthquake shatters the city, Sophie, Kat, and the young stranger set out on a dangerous, demanding journey in search of new beginnings and create a most unlikely family. (Berkley)

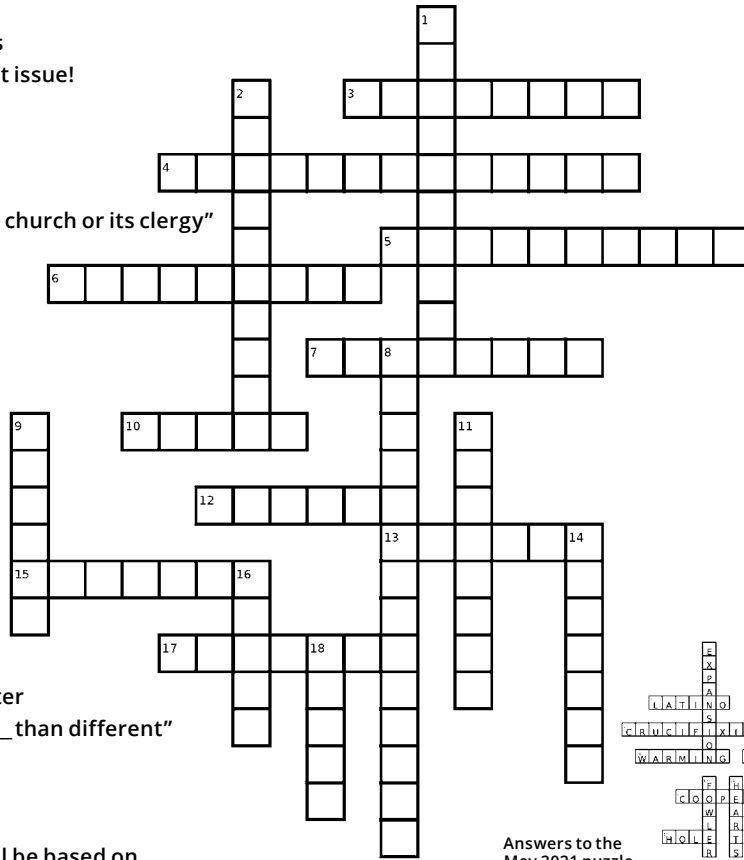
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

Down

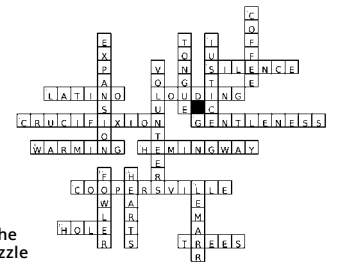
- 1. Greek word for hospitality
- 2. ReFrame’s half-hour audio program
- 8. A word that means “relating to the Christian church or its clergy”
- 9. Synod 2019 asked for a definition of this
- 11. Where the Native Healing Centre is
- 14. What the editor thinks the CRC needs
- 16. Pigs can’t do this
- 18. “Since his old friend _____ died ...”

Across

- 3. Last name of the co-author of *A Long Road on a Short Day*
- 4. Going through social media feeds looking for negative material
- 5. Equates faithfulness to God with relationship rewards
- 6. Committee that guides the process of preparing candidates for ministry
- 7. _____ Barriers, an award-winning newsletter
- 10. People with special needs are “more _____ than different”
- 12. The pandemic has brought a lot of this
- 13. Original Hebrew for “take care”
- 15. Poems with six lines
- 17. What this year’s denominational budget will be based on



Answers to the May 2021 puzzle



Los Angeles, California • Wyoming, Michigan
 Bellingham, Washington • Toronto, Ontario
 New York City, New York • Surrey, British Columbia
 Edmonton, Alberta • Jacksonville, Florida
 Winnipeg, Manitoba • Houston, Texas
 Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Church Anniversary 150 Years

CHURCH 150TH ANNIVERSARY Lord willing, First CRC in Orange City, IA will be celebrating its 150th anniversary in July! Our church was organized on July 14, 1871. We are thankful for the many years of God's faithfulness shown to our congregation! We would like to extend an invitation to join us during our upcoming celebrations. Our hope is to have a special celebration worship on August 8. There are other activities planned for the upcoming spring and summer, so watch for details on events on the church Facebook page and website. <https://www.firstcrcoc.org/>

Church Positions Available

FULL-TIME TEACHING PASTOR Hope Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Courtice, Ontario, is actively seeking a full-time Teaching Pastor passionate about preaching God's word within dynamic worship, with a focus on cross-generational shepherding and discipleship and a passion for engaging the next generation. Hope Fellowship embraces and lives out God's redemptive plan by inviting people to believe in Jesus, belong to God's family and bless every neighbour. Send questions and resumes to Search@hopefellowship.ca

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.

PASTOR - Maitland River Community Church in Wingham, Ontario is seeking a full time pastor. We are an active growing church that is passionate about reaching the lost and serving those in need. For more information write to pastorsearch@mrcc.ca

SOLE PASTOR POSITION AT MOLINE CRC, MOLINE MI For more information go to molinecrrc.org, under announcements, Pastor Position Information.

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 80 YEARS

REV. CALVIN VANDER MEYDEN will be celebrating his 80th birthday on May 23. He has

served churches in New York, New Jersey and 6 churches in Michigan where he is now enjoying retirement with his wife Marge. We praise God for you and love you Dad!

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS



DELORES STOB has been blessed to celebrate her 90th birthday on May 14th. She and her husband Bill celebrated with their three daughters and their husbands Deanne Dyk-Dean Dyk; Tammy Kooy-John Kooy Sr; Carlin Rykse-Russ Rykse. Her nine grandchildren and many of her sixteen great grandchildren have visited her from distant places prior to May 14. The entire family praises God for His boundless providential care. Greetings can be mailed to 8378 S E Sanctuary Dr., Hobe Sound, FL 33455.

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 75 YEARS

VANDEN HEUVEL, Dennis and Angeline plan to celebrate 75 years of marriage on June 27, 2021. Their children Jack and Karen Vanden Heuvel, Doug and Dawn Terpstra, and Doug and Nancy Einfeld, 11 grandchildren plus spouses, and 21 great grandchildren, rejoice with them and thank God for many blessings and happy years together. May their Savior continue to bless them with His tender care. They reside at 121 Parkside Drive, Zeeland, MI 49464

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

KUIPER, Dr. Julius & Arlene (Snoeyink) hope to celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on June 19, 2021. They were married when Julius was on furlough from the Air Force in 1951. They have had the privilege to work together in Christian education, World Missions, and a Chaplaincy for the mentally disturbed. They were blessed with three daughters: Gwynn (Russ) Bult; Gayle (Kin) Vander Ark; Julie (Jim. deceased) Schellenberg. Also six grandsons: Jeffrey, Matthew (deceased) Todd, Joseph, Grant, & Kevin, as well as eight great-grandchildren. They reside at 2850 Valley Spring Dr, SE Caledonia, MI 49316. Great is God's faithfulness!

LUBBEN, Vernon and Wilvina of 3853 Pemberton Dr. S.E. Grand Rapids, MI 49508 will celebrate 70 years of marriage on June 12, 2021. They were blessed with 4 children, 8 grandchildren and 2 great grandchildren, Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS



FISHER, Ronald and Gerry. With grateful hearts, we celebrate the 60th Anniversary of our parents, Ronald & Gerry Fisher on June 15, 2021. With love from Melanie, Tim & Jeanne, Mike & Amy, Christine & Brad, Joel, Eric & Erin, Trent & Kristen, Morgan, Owen & Caitlin, Mikayla, and Isabel. ronandgerry60th@gmail.com

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS



KOOIKER June 26, 1971. Cards to John & Sherry Kooiker, 1613 Morgan Court, Hull, IA 51239. With love from Sam, Holly, Ben, Bonnie, 10 grandchildren, 1 great-grandchild.

WYNSTRA, David and Carol (Vis) of Kenosha, WI (recently relocated to Tinley Park, IL) will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on June 5. They were blessed with two daughters, Shannon (Eric) Olson and Kimberly (Rev. Christian) Pedersen and three grandchildren: Madeline, Duncan and Anya. Great is Thy Faithfulness.

Obituaries



BEEKSMA, Alice (Bakker) died peacefully, confident in her future with Jesus, on April 16, 2021. Alice was predeceased by her husband Arie Beeksma, and her son Harry. Her children: Jack (Mary), Clarence (Diane), Richard, (Judy),

Glenda (Bert), daughter in law Jill, as well as her grandchildren (11) and great-grandchildren (14), praise God for her devotion to Him, for her gentle spirit and for her loving kindness for all her family, friends and neighbours far and wide. Alice was known for her many years of volunteer work in her church and community. "Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; his love endures forever!" Psalm 106: 1 Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the funeral service is delayed to an undetermined date. Memorial donations to Timothy Christian School (Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada), World Renew, or a charity of your choice would be appreciated.

BRUXVOORT, Ralph died at home in Bloomer Wisconsin on March 23. Family and friends celebrated his life at an outdoor burial, where we sang his favorite hymn, "I Love to Tell the Story" and reflected on his favorite scripture, "Rejoice in the Lord always." He was preceded in death by his wife of 55 years, Elaine (Vogel), his son Glenn, and infant son and granddaughter. He is survived by his children Rhonda (Dan) Berg, Kristen (Glenn) Bruxvoort, Ellen (Lonnie) Stephens, Joel (Barbara), Susan (Ben) Lipscomb, sixteen grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

BURGHGRAEF, Fredric "Fritz", age 87 of Grand Rapids, MI, entered his heavenly home on April 1, 2021. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Janet (Smits); children: Kent (Debra), Dale (Sheryl), Gary (Melanie), Kaye, Curtis (Wendy); 10 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren."



HOUSMA TEVELDE, Margaret E., age 81, of Syracuse, Kansas went home to Jesus on Monday, April 19, 2021. Margaret was born in Artesia, CA. She was the first of nine children born to Harm and Zwaantina te Velde. In 2002, Margaret wrote "The fingerprints of God put on me in my formative years by home, school and church have blossomed. It is a blessing and a comfort to know that where'er I do, where'er I be, still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me. Ps 23. May I always be His faithful follower. MH". Margaret will be remembered by her family as extraordinary. She is survived by her 6 children, 16 grandchildren, 2 great-grandchildren. Funeral services were held April 30, 2021. Memorials to The Artevel Foundation sent in care of Fellers Funeral Home PO Box 1253, Syracuse, KS 67878 are appreciated.

HOVING, Arnold, age 84, formerly of La-Grange Highlands, IL, went home to be with the Lord, April 7, 2021. 106 East Traube Ave, Westmont IL 60559. Beloved husband of the late Lois Ruth Hoving, nee DeVries; loving father of Howard (Marla) Hoving, Jane (Kenneth) Meulink and June (Doug) Evenhouse; cherished grandfather of Kristin (Pete) Hassett, Tim (Ruthie) Hoving, Heidi (Chris) Hofstra, Bethany (Josh) Chavez; Karen (Chris) Neumair, Jana (Aaron) Eding, Susan (Nick) Vera; Angela Evenhouse (Amanda Joynt), Ryan (Emily) Evenhouse and Sara Evenhouse; dearest great-grandfather of 16. Survived by sister Janet Huisenga, and sisters-in-laws Clara DeVries and Marilyn DeVries. Memorials to Timothy Christian School are appreciated.

LANSER, John W. was born in Sully, Iowa May 6, 1927. He was called to his eternal home March 14, 2021 at the age of 93 years. He is survived by his wife Lois (Blom Jansen) of 63

years. Also children Jerry (Ruby) Lanser, Virgil (Deb) Jansen, Milton (Mary) Lanser, Brent (Cheryl) Lanser. He is also survived by one brother, Marvin Lanser. They were of a family of 12 children. There are 12 living grandchildren, and 28 great-grandchildren.

RISPENS, Alfred, 91, of Berwyn, Army Veteran of Korean War, went to be with his LORD on April 3rd, 2021. 1339 S. Gunderson Ave, Berwyn, IL 60402. Beloved husband of the late Judith nee Schilstra; loving father of Betty Jo Rispens, Dirk (Kristy) Rispens, Larry (Cindy) Rispens, and Laurajean (Shane Wells) Rispens; devoted grandfather of seven; great-grandfather of nine; fond brother of Phyllis (Dorn) Jabaay, and the late Elaine (the late Herb) Matthews, and the late Evelyn (the late Charles) Ridder; uncle of many nieces and nephews. Owner of D. Rispens Insurance Agency from 1955 until his retirement in 2001. Alfred was also a former 8th Ward Alderman of Berwyn from 1963 until 1967 and a longtime active member of Faith Christian Reformed Church of Elmhurst, IL. Memorials to New To You, 1700 Roosevelt Rd, Broadview, IL 60155, are appreciated.



STERENBERG, Dorothy, age 89 of Holland, passed away on April 26, 2021 at The Inn at Freedom Village. Dorothy grew up in Chicago, and graduated from Chicago Christian High School. She worked at Marshall Fields for many years in Chicago.

She and her husband John enjoyed spending many summer vacations on the Michigan lakeshore and fell in love with Holland, where they would spend their retirement. She cherished her time with her family, especially her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Dorothy enjoyed her most recent years spent at Freedom Village, where she made a number of beloved friends. She was preceded in death by her husband John, daughter Susan Sterenberg, and sister Edith Ipema. She is survived by her sons: John Jr. and Jeannine Sterenberg, Mark Sterenberg; 5 grandchildren; 4 great-grandchildren. The family will be gathering privately to honor Dorothy. Memorials in lieu of flowers can be made to Reframe Ministries, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Please visit www.lakeshorememorial.com to leave a message or memory.

TRIEMSTRA, Dorothy J (Anema) 93 of Denver, CO peacefully joined her Lord and Savior on April 2, 2021. Celebrating her life are children Robert and Grace; brother Peter (Jan) Anema; and numerous nieces, nephews and friends. Dorothy was devoted to sharing the love of Jesus. She had a gift for teaching and was employed by Christian Schools in IL, MI, CO and CA. "Mrs. T" taught in many programs at 1st CRC Denver. Memorial contributions to Redlands Christian Schools, 1st CRC Denver, or Porter Hospice Foundation.

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VANDERWALL, June (De Jonge), age 94 of Lamont, Michigan passed into the arms of her Lord on December 16, 2020. She was preceded in death by her beloved husband Arnold (Art). Her memory is cherished by her 5 children: Albert (and Nyla), Phil (and Helen), Mark (and Dawn), Jamie (and Calvin Hofland) and Tom (and Kristy), 21 grandchildren, 19 great grandchildren, and brothers Vic (and Ruth) De Jonge and Vince (and Carol) De Young. June was born in Prospect Park, New Jersey on April 12, 1926 to the late Henry and Jemima De Jonge. She was a devoted Christian woman, loyal

wife, loving mother, grandmother, great grandmother, teacher, Bible study leader, friend and mentor. Please see <https://heritagelifestory.com/obituaries/june-vanderwall.134233> for more about June's life. A Memorial Service/Celebration of Life has been planned for July 10th, 2021 at 10:30 am, Lamont Christian Reformed Church, Lamont MI. A light luncheon will be provided after the service. Friends and family of June and of her family are cordially invited to attend.

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Gripped

I am a person
who prays my
words will be
used to help and
bless others.



Amie Spriensma lives in Allendale, Mich., where she is a member of Rusk CRC, a disability advocate in Classis Zeeland, and an online chaplain for Family Fire. She is an avid reader and coffee drinker who enjoys writing when the Spirit leads.

AS A PERSON WITH CEREBRAL PALSY, I struggle daily with keeping up, fitting in, and pressing on. I need help daily with routine activities, such as washing my hair, fixing my meals, and tying my shoes. I need to be reminded daily of treasures in jars of clay. The power to live my everyday life is from God and not from me. I'm so glad God's Word comes to his people primarily as a grace book and not a grade book.

I am a person who loves words. I am a person who prays my words will be used to help and bless others. Here is a prayer I first wrote in 2011. The words still apply now, a decade later.

Father God,

I praise you again today for your omniscience. I praise you for your omnipresence. I thank you for your Spirit, who enlivens, animates, and encourages. I praise you because even when I am hidden away from the human eye, you are with me. You sustain, comfort, guide, and direct. You have sustained me, comforted me, guided me, and directed me for many long years.

I am grateful your presence with me doesn't depend on my past or my current social status. You know me from the inside out. My human reputation waxes and wanes, soars and plummets. You are my solid rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.

I am secure in you.

I am supported by you.

I am equipped through your supreme power to endure and persist.

As your possession, formed by your hand, I cannot flee from you—no matter what.

I could travel the greatest distance to the remotest site on Earth and still be reachable to you.

You infuse me with hope in the midst of my despair.

You provide me peace in the midst of my wondering, questing, and probing, my wandering, adventure, and pilgrimage.


I can rest without knowing all the answers because you are near me.

I can have confidence because you have been faithful. You are faithful. You will be faithful.

You are the hope who doesn't disappoint me, even when my feelings fail, falter, and fall down flat.

I worship you, O Lord, for your continued grace and abiding love, even when things are far from lovely and put together and organized. The ongoing nature of your intimate presence is an attribute worthy of my praise.

To you be all glory.

You've got me in your grip. 

A Psalm on Time and Busyness

Today I am thankful and have to give praise
 for time and the timeless and the shortness of days
 and the fleetness of moments
 and the myriad ways
 I'm reminded to treasure this, now.
 And today I am restful
 but grateful for work
 and most gratified that I know how.
 Although leisure is lovely and always a perk,
 there's a joy in a job, one that pays
 in one way or another; and therefore I bow
 in gratitude, glad of reward
 for the work I'd have done anyways
 and for some I might not, feeling lazy
 or afraid that I won't do my best.
 I give thanks for work done and work still left to do
 and for chores that are daily
 and danger to shirk,
 and for tasks that compel or put me to the test
 and will not leave my head
 when I lie down to rest
 and the ones I can easily, cleanly set down
 at the ends of the busiest days
 with a feeling of fullness,
 more paid for than found,
 that can make it a pleasure to laze.
 And thank God for the way
 that my work fills the day
 and can keep pain away when I'm bleeding inside
 or I'm burning for someone
 or something I need
 and need something that changes
 the passage of time
 and the pull of its too-irresistible tide.



Jennifer Parker is a
 writer and teacher
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 in Guangdong
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