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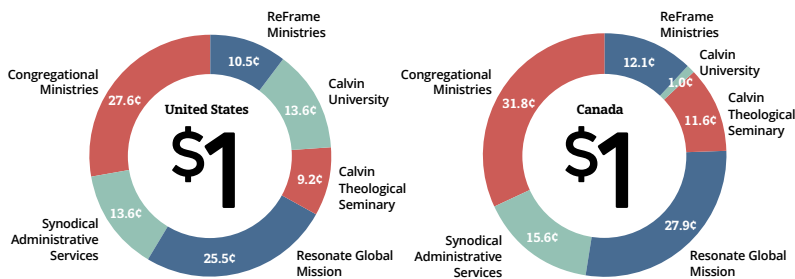
# BANNER

## BY THE NUMBERS

In case you didn't hear, the way ministry shares figure into the denomination budget has changed. Instead of denominational ministries preparing their budgets for synod to approve and then wait to see what comes in, Synod 2019 decided that churches would first pledge how much they would contribute, and then denominational ministries would build their budgets accordingly. This first year, about 80% of churches responded, and of those that pledged, the average amount per church was \$29,460 USD.

For every dollar received, this is how it breaks down across the ministries.\*

### Ministry Shares Distribution



\*World Renew and Raise Up Global Ministries are not shown, as they don't directly receive ministry shares.

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: Canadian Churches Remembering with Indigenous Community
- » News: Back to School in 2021 Means Grappling with Pandemic Policies
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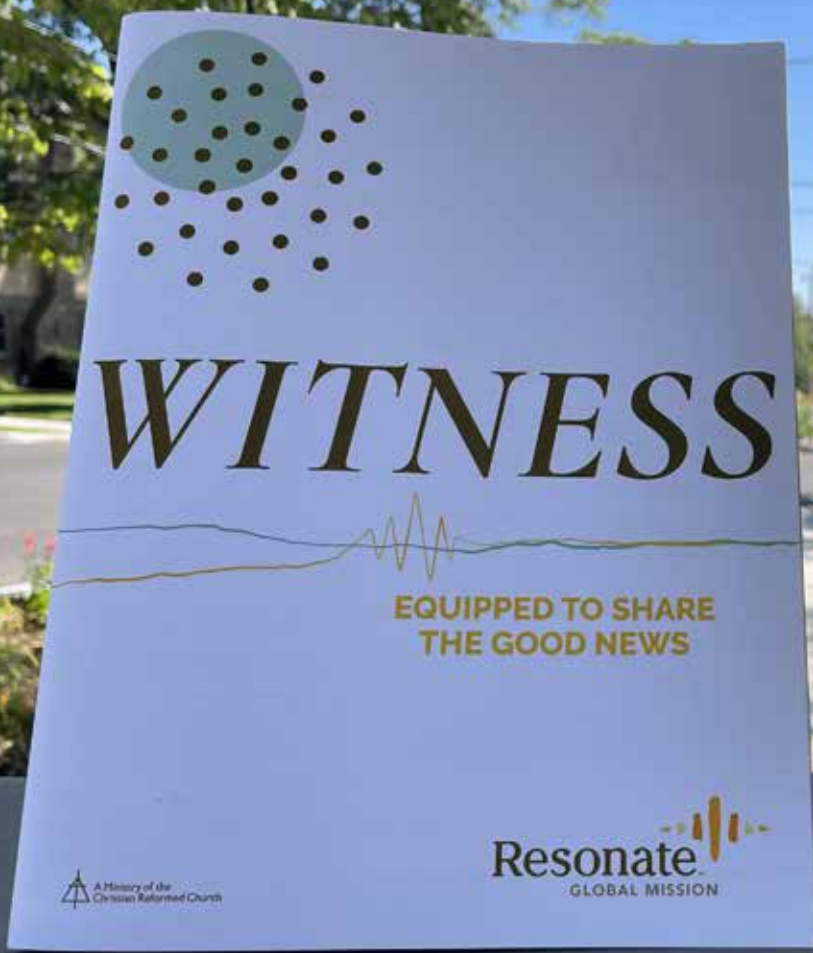
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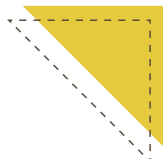
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**Being a witness for Christ isn't always easy.** It can be intimidating, nerve-wracking, and even frustrating when we don't see the changes we're looking or hoping for. Sometimes, we just don't know what to say or do. *WITNESS: Equipped to Share the Good News* is a self-guided course designed to equip you for sharing Christ's love with your neighbors. Developed by Amy Schenkel, a Resonate Regional Mission Leader, Witness includes videos, a small group discussion guide, and a personal journal that will help you reflect on what it means to be a witness for Christ-and then to take practical steps to join God at work in your neighborhood.



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## Signs of Domesticating Scripture

There are ways of reading Scripture that only feed our spiritual pride.



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

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

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### I WROTE IN AN EARLIER EDITORIAL

("Revival and Spiritual Pride," June 2021) that we need to repent from our collective spiritual pride, ask God to fill us with his Holy Spirit, and "immerse ourselves in Scripture with humble hearts and eyes, without agendas." But a reader wisely asked whether parsing Scripture more intensely will only feed that spiritual pride, as our denomination has often prided itself on theological precision. I agree that there are ways of reading Scripture that only feed our spiritual pride. I want to point out the dangers of domesticating Scripture to fit our ideological beliefs and agendas rather than humbly approaching Scripture to be transformed in our minds and hearts.

The authors of *Redeeming How We Talk* distinguish between sacred and demonic theologies: "With one, knowledge of Scripture and theology ... is a gift from God as a way to serve and love others. For the other, knowledge becomes about control, power, and authority. The first is sacred theology. The second is demonic theology" (p. 131). I've quoted this passage before, but it is worth repeating. Instead of humbling us to our knees in prayer as a proper reading of Scripture would, domesticating Scripture becomes a stepping stool for spiritually and intellectually elevating ourselves over others.

How do we know if we have domesticated Scripture to feed our spiritual pride? There are at least three major signs that you may be in danger of it.

*First, if you know many biblical parts better than you know the whole biblical narrative.* Without knowing the entire biblical narrative and its trajectory, it is easy to manipulate bits and pieces (verses and passages) of Scripture, especially out of context, to fit whatever ideology or agenda you

have. If you are always proof-texting your progressive social justice causes or your conservative traditional positions but could not equally justify them from the Bible's overall narrative, then you might be in danger of domesticating Scripture.

*Second, if Scripture never seems to disagree with your views.* Because all of humanity is sinful, no individual, group, or tradition has gotten everything right. Therefore it should not be surprising, if we read all of Scripture and not just our favorite bits, that we would come across passages and teachings that push our intellectual and emotional comfort zones. Be careful if Scripture never makes you angry, confused, or uncomfortable. If you always feel right and smug from reading Scripture, you are in danger.

*Last, if Scripture hasn't surprised you in a long time.* No sinful human being can exhaust all of the Bible's truths and insights. If you haven't learned anything new from the Bible in a long time, you might want to examine yourself. Are you reading the entirety of Scripture? Are you reading Scripture honestly, or simply explaining away anything that disrupts your status quo? Are you reading it through a theological or ideological lens? Have you ever experienced culture shock from reading Scripture? If you only read Scripture as if it's written primarily to you, your culture, and your time, then you will almost certainly misread Scripture at some point. You will domesticate it into a modern, Western book.

Remember that Satan memorized and used Scripture, too, when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). We need a proper approach to Scripture to foster spiritual revival. B



## REPLY ALL

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

### Prison Reform

Thank you for this article ("Mistakes Can Be Corrected," October 2021). Common-sense reforms to our laws, to law enforcement, to training of police officers, and to mental health services would not only improve life for people with serious mental illnesses and those who love them, but would bring greater justice in society and would be better for society. My only hesitation with your article is the implication that people with serious mental illness tend to be violent, when the truth is that they are no more likely to engage in violence than the general population. In addition, they are more likely to be victims of violence than the general population.

» Mark Stephenson // online comment

### Trauma

Arielle Wellons in her "Mental Health, Trauma, and 2020" article (September 2021) spoke to the heart of the issue by saying that "trauma healing must rest on the foundation of the gospel." Modern psychology and therapy too often ignore or deny the fact that God's Word is the only real foundation with which to help people in need. The key, as she said, is that "(t)rue spiritual healing of trauma and sin is found through the presence and unconditional love of God."

» Michael DuMez // Oostburg, Wis.

### Neland Avenue CRC

I'm not sure what Synod will do next year about Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church choosing a married lesbian to be a deacon ("Council of Delegates Discusses Neland Avenue CRC," October 2021). ... Love is the foundation of Christianity, which includes compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness. I know God can love when mere mortals cannot, but we can at least try. Is wanting schism an answer? I have heard there are 108 kinds of Reformed churches already. Do we need another one? I don't think so. Conditional love is not biblical, so it is time now to show unconditional love, which Jesus showed with the prodigal son story, the thief on the cross, and the woman caught in adultery. Anything less than unconditional love is unacceptable.

» Joel Veldheer // Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Pride

I agree: pride of knowledge is rampant throughout the CRC and among North American Christians ("Intellectual Pride," June 2021). I'm on my face before the Lord. Thank you for sharing your discernment. I'm praying too. God bless you deeply.

» Eileen Christofferson // Boulder, Colo.

### Creation Care

Thank you, Chaplain Kuipers, for providing examples of the CRC taking the lead in caring for God's creation ("Christian Hope in Response to the UN Climate Change Report," online). Perhaps no religion has such a pointed emphasis on God creating the world for us to take care of as exists in Genesis 1 in our Bible. We cannot dissociate bringing the cross to the world from our other behaviors. Increasingly that means caring about the air and the water of those we want to reach with Jesus' message of salvation. The church or individual Christians stuck in ignoring where we care poorly for creation also shows a lack of care for its audience. We will have a harder time being meaningful to hope-seekers with the wonderful message of Christ's salvation. I hope to see more examples of our church leading in this area.

» Scott Wagner // Kentwood, Mich.

### Thoughts on Binationality

The editorial ("Thoughts on Binationality," September 2021) speaks to the proverbial elephant in the room: the cultural differences between American and Canadian churches. The binational nature of our denomination is felt much more strongly among Canadians than among Americans. There is a noticeable cultural difference that shaped both halves of the denomination a century or two ago. Those cultural differences have shaped the way our denomination approaches missions, both domestically and internationally. It shapes the way we view citizenship and politics and caring for the poor. The issue, therefore, isn't really about binationality and equal representation at the table. The issue is about biculturalism. Can two different cultures continue to live together, or is it time to live in separate houses?

» Keith Knight // online comment



## Legalization of Abortion and Anger in the Church

### Two Brief Interactions

Thank you, Jisoo Vis, for sharing your story and your true feelings (“Two Brief Interactions,” July/August 2021). Your story invites me to be humbly aware of my brokenness. Thank you for inviting me to seek to build relationships with others in a way I can honor them with love and see each person as Jesus did. 1 Corinthians 12:26 says, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” How would we know if our body is suffering if we are not willing to pay attention and listen?

» Yoori Shen // online comment

### Never Forget

Your account brings me to tears (“How Sept. 11 Changed Me,” September 2021). Thank you for sharing. We will never forget.

» Scott DeVries // online comment

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- » Recovering from Pandemic Despair
- » Are Synodical Positions Settled and Binding?
- » Christian Hope in Response to the UN Climate Change Report

**ANGER OVER ISSUES** is always present in our churches. That doesn't make it right; in fact, it is wrong. One of the great blessings in reading the Bible from creation to Revelation several times a year is to see predominant themes. One theme above all else is that God is love. Another is that we need to imitate Christ.

Let's take the issue of abortion as an example. I have given a large part of my life to promoting saving the lives of unborn children. I carried many pieces of pro-life legislation while serving in public office. I've often taken time to speak out on this issue across the country. I worked with mission teams to establish Christian crisis pregnancy centers in Romania. I supported and encouraged my friend to establish the worldwide ministry of Life International.

Yet for many years, I showed unrighteous anger and forcefulness in my writing and speaking. I took this approach as a state representative, a state senator, and even as a pastor in a Christian Reformed Church. I thought it was part of making a powerful presentation. Looking back, I should have presented my views with Christ-like love.

Now, at age 76, I see more and more anger among Christians in the church. Angry Christians, in the name of Jesus, go after fellow Christians over politics, legalization of abortion, homosexuality, and more. This expression of anger is dividing churches, families, and friends. It is giving evil a foothold in the church. I believe we must be more Christ-like in our discussions, no matter the issue. But let's focus on abortion.

I've always seen human life as sacred, born or unborn, people with disabilities or able-bodied, the aged, the young, and everyone in between. From the opening chapters of Genesis, throughout the Old Testament and

This expression of anger is dividing churches, families, and friends. It is giving evil a foothold in the church.

New, it is very clear that we are image-bearers of God.

Furthermore, we need to recognize that at the very root of abortion is Satan's goal of destroying the image of God. Is the legalization of the killing of babies different from the Old Testament's worship of Molech by offering their children to their heathen god? Abortion, a spiritual issue, is flatly wrong. In fact, the CRC's position is “that an induced abortion is an allowable option only when the life of the mother-to-be is genuinely threatened.” Satan delights in destroying the image of God.

We must in a Christ-like way share this insight with fellow believers with righteous anger tempered with Christ-like compassion. I know that many in the church today believe in what they call a woman's right to choose, but don't fall for Satan's schemes. We as fellow believers must share the truth of the gospel on this spiritual issue. Most importantly, we must present our case in Christ-like love and compassion. **B**



Marion “Mike” Menning lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. He is pastor of Mountain Springs Community Christian Reformed Church and an evangelist to polygamists. His book *Ambassador for Jesus* will be available late this year.

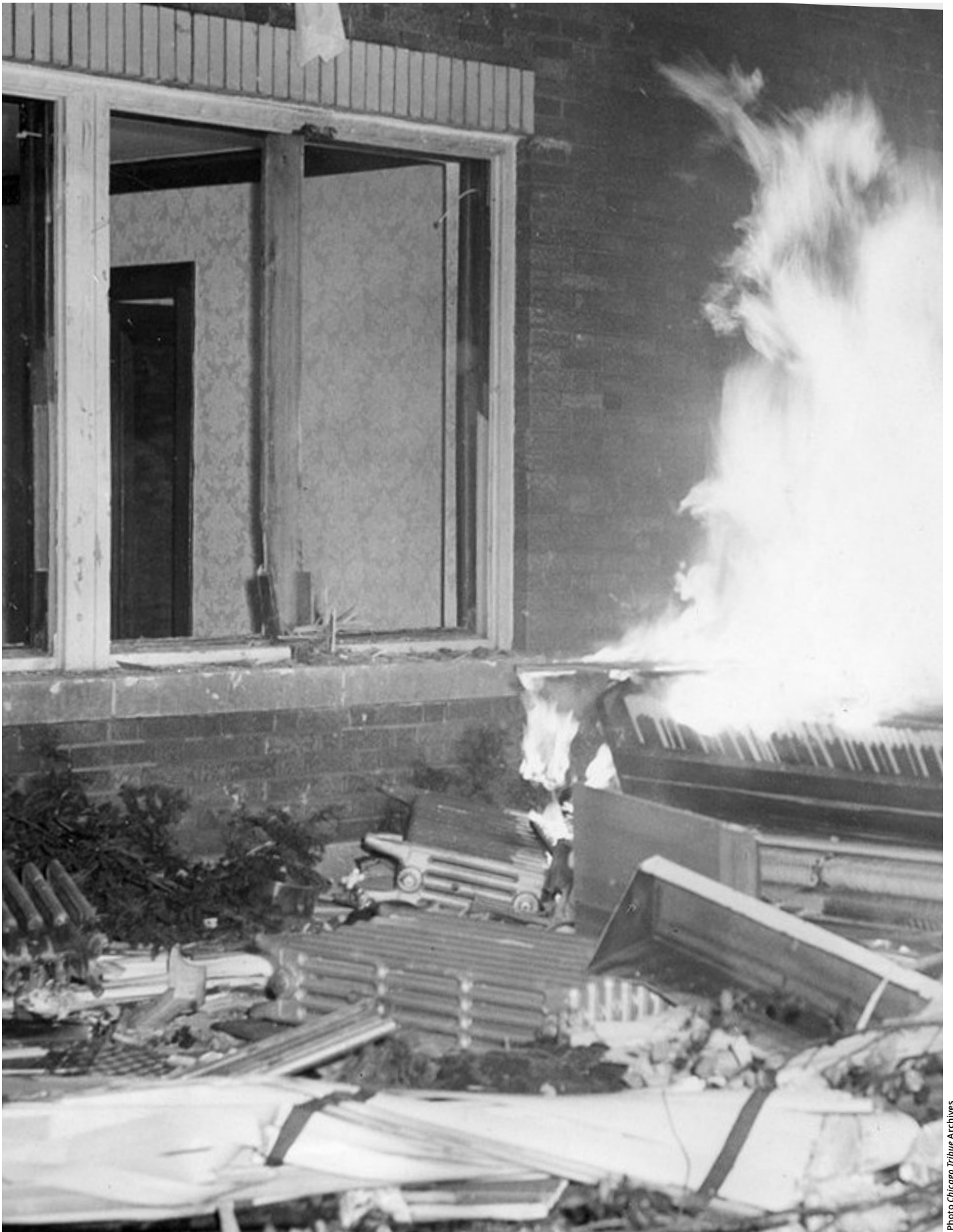


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# No One Ever Talked About It

By John Bernbaum

I'm a Cicero kid. I was born and raised on the west side of Chicago, and our family moved to Cicero in 1951. I was 8 years old when my father told us that he was selling our house in Chicago. When my dad visited First Christian Reformed Church of Cicero, he heard a sermon on Calvin's doctrine of grace and then learned how the Dutch immigrants valued Christian education, so he decided Cicero would be our new home.

We moved into a community that was roughly divided between Dutch families and Czechs, who were mostly Catholic. In the early 1950s, Cicero became home to hundreds of Dutch families, many of whom had moved to the suburb from Chicago after World War II. Timothy Christian School's junior high and high school were located in the building across from the church. My years at Timothy and at two Christian colleges were good years.

But now, many years later, I have learned some shocking news that I had never known before. Our local book group recently decided to read Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. Wilkerson tells a tragic story of how Southern Blacks fled the South during Jim Crow, heading north for jobs and a hopeful future between 1915 and 1970.

I was totally caught off guard when I read Wilkerson's four-page description of the plight of Harvey Clark, his wife, and two children, who rented an apartment in Cicero in May 1951.

That's how racism is allowed to deepen its roots. We put on blinders and simply choose to ignore what we don't want to see.

When they arrived at their apartment building, there was a group of demonstrators who shouted at them, "Get out of Cicero and don't come back!" The Cicero police took the side of the protestors and wouldn't let the Clarks unload their furniture. The police chief told the Clarks, "Get out of here fast. There will be no moving into that building."

A few days later, the moving company was able to unload the Clarks' possessions, but when the family arrived and tried to enter again, hundreds of protestors kept them out. The protestors stormed the apartment and threw the Clarks' furniture out of their third-story window, ripped out the stove, smashed the plumbing, and tore up the carpet. Then they lit the pile of furniture on fire as Cicero police and firefighters stood by and watched. The next day the mob grew to more

than 4,000 people. They hurled bricks at the apartment building and eventually threw firebombs, forcing the twenty white families living there to flee as well.

Part of my shock came from my realization that this apartment building was three blocks from my house on the same street. It was about one mile from our school and church. What surprised and angered me was how my family never talked about this incident. Neither was it ever talked about in church, in Sunday school, or in any of my classes during my nine years at Timothy Christian Schools.

No one ever talked about it! That's how racism is allowed to deepen its roots. We put on blinders and simply choose to ignore what we don't want to see. God's commandments given through the Old Testament prophets and through Jesus teach us that biblical justice requires a wide-angle lens. Faithful followers of the gospel don't have the option to focus only on their family and immediate friends. Caring for the "Clark families" in our communities—obvious victims of injustice and racial prejudice—is the absolute least we can do!

We must talk about it. **B**



John Bernbaum lives in Rockville, Md. He attends National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. Read more of his writing at [johnabernbaum.org](http://johnabernbaum.org).

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Relationships

**My next-door neighbor and I are both moms in our 30s with kids close in age. I've tried to form a friendship with her, but she is not even interested in chatting. I am disappointed. What should I do?**

I can understand that you are disappointed that your neighbor seems to have put up a wall between the two of you that shuts you out, but it might be a mistake to conclude that her actions are personal and against you. Instead of specifically rejecting you, consider that her off-putting behaviors might be expressive of her own life's circumstances. For instance, it is entirely possible that, for reasons known only to herself, your neighbor keeps her distance from everyone who makes overtures of friendship. This could be rooted in a deep distrust of people based on past experiences. Or her present circumstances might make it unsafe for her to let others into her world. This could be the case if she experiences shame or fear because of abuse in the past or present.

Instead of focusing on your neighbor, be welcoming to her children and include her spouse, if she has one. Perhaps inviting your neighbors to a backyard barbecue or a family movie night would be appreciated. However, if over time nothing changes, resolve to accept your neighbor for who she is without judgment about the meaning of her cool behavior toward you. Resolve to let it go.



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

Resolve also to pray for your neighbors. There is really nothing more you can do to create a friendship, but our faithful Savior can turn hearts and minds toward new and better directions—not only yours, but also hers.

Judy Cook is a family therapist and a member of Meadowlands Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Ancaster, Ontario.

### Faith Formation

**Why does the CRC talk about “faith formation” and not “discipleship”? Doesn't God grant us faith by grace? Why do we need to “form” faith?**

Faith does indeed come from God. It is a gift. But God gives Christians an important role in forming the faith of others. Many of us can point to people whose presence in our lives helped our faith to grow. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul writes, “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” It is not hard to draw a line from Lois to Eunice to Timothy. Paul himself also served as a mentor to Timothy. These people helped form Timothy's faith even though that faith was given to Timothy by God.

But describing this formation can be tricky. Synonyms—words with the same meaning—are not usually *exactly* the same. They have shades

of meaning that can be important. For example, the words “frugal” and “cheap” have similar meanings, but they're not really interchangeable. If someone tells you you're frugal, you likely will take that to mean you're careful with money. But if someone calls you “cheap,” you might feel insulted because it communicates that you are to that person *unnecessarily* frugal.

The terms “discipleship” and “faith formation” are almost synonymous, and many people use them interchangeably. But we have found that the word “discipleship” evokes programs for adults, while “faith formation” is less likely to be pinned to a particular age and does not point to a particular method of formation. So talking about “faith formation” allows us to have a broader conversation about different programs or practices.

Some of how we use these terms comes down to personal preference. The point is that we want to communicate well and, at least for now, the term “faith formation” communicates well the full nature of the work we do.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children's ministries at 14th Street CRC in Holland, Mich. Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.

**Ethics****Is it right for Christians to be cremated after they die?**

We must first remember that what is done with the bodies of Christians doesn't decide their everlasting destiny. Rather, it is the power and faithfulness of God through the cross and resurrection of Christ. But our choices about what to do with our bodies can shape the witness we offer to the gospel.

The widespread acceptance of cremation among Christians is a rather new development. We might glimpse a rationale for it in the well-known line from the *Book of Common Prayer* (with biblical roots—see Gen. 3:19, Gen. 18:27, and Eccles. 3:20): “ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

Historically, however, Christians practiced the burial of the body accompanied by liturgical words and actions that link death to Christian hope and assurance. There is concern that cremation loses sight of important Christian meaning. Of course, even with cremation, a memorial service offers an opportunity to place the pain of death into Christian context. As with so much in the Christian life, much depends upon our reasoning—and also upon the witness we make through our choices.

If a Christian chooses cremation based on the view that, because we're going to heaven, the body doesn't matter, then we're on dangerous ground. The body does matter, as seen in the biblical and creedal declaration of the “resurrection of the body.” Burial of the deceased body can be a powerful way of proclaiming our resurrection hope. But it is also possible to surround cremation with that same public affirmation of the resurrection.

If a Christian chooses cremation for principled, practical reasons—perhaps

ecological or even financial factors—we're on more solid ground. In contrast to earlier Christian eras, we're more aware today of the importance of careful land use to sustain more than 7 billion people. Similarly, costs involved in bodily burial can be a huge burden for some families.

For the Christian, however, principles of stewardship don't stand alone. Whatever decisions we choose in the face of death need to announce that Christian hope for everlasting life hangs on the promise of the resurrection of the body.

Matt Lundberg is the director of the de Vries Institute for Global Faculty Development at Calvin University. He and his family are members of Boston Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

**Missional Living****How might participating in our neighborhoods be part of God's mission?**

COVID-19 has made many of us more attentive to our neighborhoods. Where else could we be? Could the Spirit be up to something? Numerous studies reveal that neighborhood community is the most effective means of addressing at least seven essentials that lead to personal and communal well-being and, thus, an abundant community—an abundant community that from the perspective of the Christian faith reflects God's kingdom of shalom.

Our society's growing understanding of the significance of community seems to resonate with Scripture and God's desire for God's world. Perhaps an abundant community is exactly what God had in mind when the Lord instructed the exiles to seek the peace and well-being of the city where God had sent them (Jer. 29:4-7).

What if we too are sent to nurture abundant communities—to pay attention to our neighborhoods, care for generations of families, plant gardens, and do life together with our neighbors?

We all yearn—creation groans!—for this kind of place, one where we all belong, where all feel safe, secure, welcomed, and cared for, where all can grow, flourish, and contribute to the common good: an abundant community.

Perhaps the church, struggling to discern her role in this great unraveling, might begin to discern what God is up to by seeking the peace and well-being of the neighborhoods where she has been sent to remain. Perhaps this is the place for followers of Jesus to start in a disillusioned, broken, and divided world. What if we all just loved our neighbors? What if we began to notice God at work by Samaritan wells, Gentile homes (Cornelius), and the rivers where women gather (Lydia)? Where might God already be at work in your neighborhood? Through the gifted people next door, the wise seniors a few houses down, the carpenter one block over, the gardener, or the teen shoveling snow? How might you join in? Perhaps God's kingdom has come near! Perhaps every square inch is the Lord's, and God's dream is for the redemption of all things, including your neighborhood!

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



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

# Grief Support Ministry Hosts Butterfly Release

## NEWS

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Photo by Debbie Smit

Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Brighton, Ont., welcomed its community to honor the deaths of loved ones in a shared experience of releasing monarch butterflies on their southern migration Sept. 1.

“There has been so much death that our community has faced and the world has faced,” said Darlene Bunn, one of the peer leaders of a Fellowship CRC grief group. “Our rituals that we usually lean on to help us through these things have not been available to the same extent as they used to be because of the restrictions that COVID has brought, and I just felt it was a good opportunity for people to come together and just share.” Bunn’s mother died from COVID-19.

The release of the tagged insects is a yearly undertaking by local researcher Don Davis. This is the second year that it has also served as a symbol of letting go for members of Fellowship CRC’s Good Grief groups.

Bunn said about 90 people attended the event, including the town’s mayor. The program lasted just over an hour and included a prayer by the church’s pastor, Ryan Braam; words from Bunn, who spoke about the particular losses

In Brighton, Ont., Jody TerHaar of Fellowship CRC released a butterfly on behalf of Indigenous children who died in residential schools.

of COVID; and words recognizing the renewed griefs of this summer when unmarked graves of Indigenous children were found near grounds of former residential schools.

Winnie Visser, the church’s part-time director of congregational life, said five people from the community had registered for the next eight-week session of Good Grief support. The groups began about seven years ago, with the first leaders being mentored by a pastor from a neighboring town who had experience in bereavement counseling. Soon the church began running new groups twice a year.

“When we’re grieving,” Visser said, “we’re all sad and we’re all hurting. Some people learn about faith in these grief groups because they hear other people talk about faith, and I think sometimes that people with faith learn about different ways in which the community expresses their grief. ... It’s a sacred place to be able to walk alongside people.”

—Alissa Vernon

## Florida Church Honors First Responders



After the partial collapse of a condominium building in Surfside, Fla., in June, search and rescue and then recovery efforts went on for many weeks with community responders working long, difficult hours. On Sept. 12, South Kendall Community Church in Miami, Fla., acknowledged five people from the congregation who worked at the scene.

Pastor Felix Fernandez said the collapse had a huge effect on the community and the church.

The congregation honored two firefighters, two police officers, and a photojournalist who covered the story of the Surfside collapse for a local news outlet. "It was an incredible collaboration," Fernandez said. "When you look at the group, you see the impact our church was having on the city."

Michael Knott, a firefighter medic who attends South Kendall, has been in the profession for 21 years. At the Surfside site he operated search cameras, listening devices, and map plotting and GPS tools to help locate people in the search area. Though he's not usually one to want to be in the spotlight, he said he appreciated his congregation's gesture.

Knott, Sebastien Colimon, Sean Carper, and Tom Carper were presented with personalized plaques that said "Rescue and Recovery Mission at Surfside, Florida, June 24, 2021. 'Jesus Christ Our Cornerstone.'—Ephesians 2:20."

Pastor Felix Fernandez (left) and an elder of South Kendall Community Church present plaques to honor some congregation members who worked at the Surfside condo collapse.

Dylan Carper, a firefighter, was on duty Sept. 12 and unable to attend, so his mother, Sharon, accepted his plaque.

The church's worship committee planned the presentation because "it was a great opportunity for our church community to know the impact that we as a church are having in our city," Fernandez said. "It felt like it would only be appropriate to recognize those individuals because they were there 24/7 for weeks on end, and a lot of them didn't get to come home and sleep in their homes and in their beds, so it was a great sacrifice on the part of these individuals to be able to do this for our community and the families that were impacted by this great tragedy."

Connecting with other believers helped Knott through the work. "What kept me from breaking down at the (Surfside) site was my fellow Christians," he said. "We would get together before our shift and have a prayer, and we even started a Surfside prayer chat that we still use today to keep in touch with each other."

—Kristen Parker

## Michigan Church Celebrates 100 Years

East Martin Christian Reformed Church in Martin, Mich., celebrated 100 years of ministry this summer, starting with 100 tolls of the church bell Sunday, June 27. Larry Tuinstra, 83, and Boaz Katje, 4, served as the bell ringers. Both are current members of the congregation, and they are the oldest and youngest living descendants of charter (founding) members. The two stood on ladders and used hand-held hammers to ring the 1,000-pound bell, which now is usually rung electronically. The bell survived a windstorm in 1923 that brought the original church structure down. Since 1985, it has been suspended above the lawn next to the church sign.



Larry Tuinstra, 83, and Boaz Katje, 4, used hammers to ring the former church bell 100 times.

Following the bell ringing, former pastor Jake Weeda led a service of praise and worship. Randall Bouman, a member of the anniversary planning committee, said, "It was great to celebrate and worship our great God for 100 years of his blessing and guidance and love."

The congregation was first organized as the Christian Reformed Church of Gun River under the leadership of home missionary J. R. Brink and Rev. M. Schans on June 23, 1921. Following the windstorm, the building was rebuilt and dedicated as East Martin CRC.

Woodworkers Doug VanDerMeulen and Jim Mejeur crafted a new lectern and sanctuary artwork to commemorate the anniversary. Local artist Naomi Martin used glass from the original 1920 windows of an earlier church building to create new stained glass art. Celebrations concluded with a pig roast Sept. 11.

—Anita Ensing Beem

## Seafarer Ministries Connect Crews to Clinics, Support

Seafarer centers across North America are liaising between ships and government clinics to provide seafarers with access to COVID-19 vaccines. “Some of the first seafarers we helped vaccinate in Montreal had huge smiles after it was done. They were so happy,” said Michelle DePooter-Francis, lead chaplain of Ministry to Seafarers (M2S) Montreal.

DePooter-Francis was on the Canada Seafarers Welfare Board’s vaccination committee. Though it met weekly throughout the spring of 2021, the first opportunity to offer concrete help happened because crew members shared their personal experiences.



Pastor Gary Roosma (in safety vest) visits with crew members aboard a ship in Vancouver during the summer of 2021.

In early July some crew members were able to enter a Montreal walk-in clinic and receive shots without proof of residency. They told the Ministry to Seafarers, and M2S immediately alerted other ships about the opportunity and began transporting seafarers to and from the clinic. “After a couple of weeks of doing this unofficially, I received a call from



Seafaring crew members line up for a mobile vaccination clinic Aug. 24 in Montreal..

the head nurse of the clinic and from the person from public health in charge of the Montreal vaccination campaign giving us their support and formalizing the process,” said DePooter-Francis. The clinic now offers mobile clinics at the port. As of early September, M2M had helped the crews of 33 ships to access vaccines—some of them for both of the two requisite shots, given several weeks apart.

What does it take to make this happen? “A lot of communication!” said DePooter-Francis, including by email, phone apps, and in-person visits with agents, captains, and seafarers. It’s all coordinated by the M2S staff, a small team of two chaplains, an administrator, volunteers, and interns.

### Caring for Mental Well-being

Christian Reformed pastor Gary Roosma, working with Ministry to Seafarers Vancouver, has shown care in Canada’s largest port by advocating for ship crews’ shore leave. Before the British Columbia government set up harbor clinics, crew members wanting to be vaccinated had to go further inland. “Initially it was just ‘You

have to bring the seafarers to our clinics,’” Roosma said. Without shore leave—or with only a few hours in a port—a trip to a downtown clinic wasn’t feasible.

In a July 2020 story for *The Banner*, Depooter-Francis spoke of the mental toll isolation has on seafarers. That’s still a concern, Roosma said. This summer he was aboard a ship when a seafarer “had a complete mental breakdown,” he said. “We had to do intervention. He hadn’t been off the ship in nine months and hadn’t slept in three days.” He was finally given shore leave, and Roosma kept in touch. “He’s back home and doing much better,” Roosma said. Roosma is moved by how seafarers describe their resolve. “The seafarers say, ‘I have to steel myself to be on board this ship and not get off for months.’ That’s hard.”

### ‘Passing On God’s Love’

Port Alberni, B.C., is a logging port that sees fewer ships as the industry declines. Matthew Gregory, a member of Alberni Valley Christian Reformed Church and a volunteer with the Upper Room Seafarers’



## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. John George  
Aupperlee*

1947-2021

"Child of God" was the most important role John Aupperlee had, shaping everything he did and who he became throughout his 74 years. Aupperlee died Aug. 31 after several years of living with cardiac amyloidosis.

He graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and was ordained in 1974. He pastored Midland Park (N.J.) Christian Reformed Church; Grace CRC, Indian Harbour Beach, Fla.; Northern Heights CRC, Kalamazoo, Mich.; and Fairlawn CRC, Whitinsville, Mass. In Florida he became a chaplain in the Air Force Reserve and served in that role for 22 years. In Massachusetts he was chaplain for the Northbridge Fire Department. At his last service at Fairlawn, the entire department attended church to honor him. As a chaplain, Aupperlee also traveled to New York during recovery efforts following the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

For his last 13 years in ministry Aupperlee was chaplain at Holland Home in Grand Rapids, Mich. He retired in 2016.

A good storyteller, Aupperlee loved sports, bird watching, history, Handel's *Messiah*, and spending time with grandchildren, reveling in seeing who they were becoming as they grew up.

He is survived by Connie, his wife of 52 years, five children and their spouses, and 12 grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Paul Lowell Bremer*

1942-2021

Pastor and professor Paul Bremer was caring, compassionate, and humble. His love of storytelling was reflected in his family interactions, his teaching, his preaching, and his hobbies. "He had a way of anchoring heady concepts of translation, interpretation, and philosophy to everyday life through his stories and anecdotes," said a former student who became a colleague. Bremer died Aug. 2.

Bremer taught Greek, first at Calvin University while he was attending Calvin Theological Seminary, and then at Princeton Theological Seminary while completing his Ph.D. He joined the faculty at Kuyper College (formerly Reformed Bible College) in 1975, was ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 1976, and remained at Kuyper until his retirement in 2006.

The Bremers opened their home to many students and families. A number of pastors, especially people of color, women, and those who pursued ministry later in life, say they would not be in the ministry today without Bremer's support and encouragement.

Bremer loved exploring national parks, Civil War sites, and his favorite city, Washington, D.C. He enjoyed researching Abraham Lincoln and the Navajo code talkers.

He is survived by his wife, Jacquelyn, three children and their spouses, 11 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Center, estimates only 20 ships have entered the port this year. Upper Room canceled the lease on its center during the pandemic but continues to connect with seafarers via its Facebook page and aboard ships. It also provides transport to clinics.

"Ship owners, management companies, agents and crews, and seafarers' welfare organizations are all working as well as they can to get their crews vaccinated and relieved from duty and sent home in a timely fashion," Gregory said.

DePooter-Francis, citing statistics from the Global Maritime Forum crew change indicator, said that as of early September, 22% of seafarers worldwide had been vaccinated. "It's a start," she said, "but there's a long way to go."

Gregory, who also occasionally does grocery runs or other shopping for ship-stayed crew, said, "They ask me on occasion, 'Why are you doing this?' 'Just passing on God's love for you' is my standard reply. They tell me that they never get this much comfort from any other port in the world. They are special in God's eyes and our eyes as well."

Christian Reformed congregations also support ministries to seafarers at several U.S. ports, including the Seafarers Mission in the Port of Palm Beach, Fla., an agency started by chaplain John Van Hemert in 2001. Van Hemert is still active in that mission during the fall and winter, and in the spring and summer he is a volunteer chaplain with the port in Cherry Point, Wash.

—Maia VanderMeer

# Ontario Churches Feed Community

Sparked by concern for their neighbors, particularly under the strain of pandemic restrictions, two Christian Reformed congregations in different parts of Ontario launched new projects to help feed their communities this year.

## Community Fridge

On Aug. 1, Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ont., opened a community refrigerator and pantry in front of a ministry building adjacent to the church. It was meant to provide easy access to fresh food, but the connections growing between neighbors are what the church's pastor of community, Janet Ryzebol, is cherishing most.

"So many people from our congregation are having conversations with people in our neighborhood, whether they are volunteers or whether they are just dropping off food and meeting neighbors in the parking lot who are also dropping off or picking up," Ryzebol said.

Visitors to the refrigerator are encouraged to take what they need and donate what they can. A sign on the glass doors lists accepted goods—everything from fruit and vegetables to baby food and formula.

The idea is to offer mainly items that the food bank doesn't have readily available, so two volunteers shop for high-turn-over items—especially dairy and fresh produce—with donated funds.

The refrigerator and an accompanying pantry for shelf-stable and personal care items are open all day every day. Volunteers monitor them daily to check inventory, maintain temperatures, and keep the spaces clean.

The team is preparing to move the community fridge and pantry into a newly renovated indoor space to keep it going through the winter.

## Food Hampers

In Thunder Bay, Ont., deacons at Bethlehem CRC have been operating a



The community refrigerator at Covenant CRC is a simple way for neighbors to take what they need and share what they have—and to meet each other along the way.

24/7 "Blessing Box" cupboard for two years. The city asked the church to erect the small stand-alone cupboard that serves as a mini pantry. There are others across the city, too, where people can take what they need and leave what they can, said Pastor Marg Rekman. Eight volunteers from the church stock it daily with food items and toiletries.

Jennifer Drost, a church member and volunteer, said that because of the Blessing Box, when COVID-19 restrictions shut everything down, "we felt like our church still had a presence in the community without having the church doors open."

In April, Bethlehem CRC added another neighbor-focused project, joining the Bread Box, a biweekly distribution of food hampers supplied by the community's Regional Food Distribution Association.

Rekman said the congregation began participating "because the church is in an area of high need, and all other food banks would require families to take a cab or bus to access food."

Every other Tuesday a delivery truck from the association drops off boxes of food to the church. Volunteers then sort and organize the food into family-sized portions. The next day people line up at the church to retrieve the packed boxes and volunteers deliver to those with



The Blessing Box at Bethlehem CRC is an open cupboard for food items and toiletries.

mobility concerns. The whole operation takes about 25 volunteers—some from Bethlehem, some from other churches, and some from the community.

"The Bread Box is also a place where community is being built," said Fred Rekman, another church member and volunteer. "We as volunteers are meeting new people from the community and hearing some of their stories. We pray that they see the church as a welcoming and safe place."

—Kristen Parker

## New Mexico Church Slow to Recover from Break-in

Ten months after their church building was burglarized, members of Crownpoint (N. Mex.) Christian Reformed Church on the Navajo Reservation replaced doors and reinforced windows at the front entrance. The repairs were delayed because of pandemic lockdowns on the reservation to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Mary Rose Davis, an elder of the church who lives nearby, discovered the break-in in November 2020 and contacted Betty Bennett, a deacon. They left things as they were and called the police. The police investigation concluded without leads on suspects. "The church members were devastated," said Darlene Silversmith, a member who is licensed to exhort within Classis Red Mesa.

A sound system and a 60-inch TV were among the stolen items. The thieves also damaged the front door. The estimated cost of the damage and stolen items was \$6,000, which the church was not able to recover. Classis Red Mesa (regional group of churches) supported Crownpoint CRC with a \$2,500 grant for church renovations.

Bennett said a couple from the church purchased and installed motion-sensitive lights as a precaution.



Photo by Darlene Silversmith

The front entrance of Crownpoint (N. Mex.) CRC, now repaired, was damaged in a break-in.

The sound equipment has not been replaced, but Crownpoint CRC is borrowing a small sound system to use during services.

"The church intends to carry on by not allowing the burglary to prevent them from attending," Silversmith said.

The Navajo Nation has been in lockdown for much of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of July 18 Crownpoint CRC was able to resume in-person worship services, with 15 people able to gather indoors at a time.

—DeAndra Valdez

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Albert Arthur Hamstra*

1949-2021

Albert Hamstra was kind, gentle, wise, principled, and courageous. He worked passionately for social justice, especially around issues of race. He truly lived his faith. "Imagine what the world would be like if everyone lived their life the way Dad did," reflected his daughter, Rena. Albert died suddenly July 13 from a heart attack.

Following graduation from Calvin Seminary and ordination in 1979, Albert and his wife served with Christian Reformed World Missions (now Resonate Global Mission) in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Hong Kong before moving to Grand Rapids, where he was Asia regional director and director of special projects for World Missions. He retired in 2017.

In the past several years, Albert was involved in Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation and helped to guide the justice work of the Micah Center in Grand Rapids. Albert was a prodigious reader who also loved gardening with his wife, doing puzzles, and yoga. Until the day he died, he practiced yoga for more than an hour each day.

He is survived by Mindy, his wife of 46 years; six children and their spouses; eight grandchildren; and two great-granddaughters.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Noteworthy

**Two Christian Reformed writers received awards from The Word Guild**, a Canadian association for Christian writers and enthusiasts of the written word, **in an online ceremony Sept. 25. Meghan Kort from Terrace (B.C.) CRC received awards** in the personal experience and profile/human interest categories for articles in the *Christian Courier*, and **Parry Stelter, founder of Word of Hope Ministries and a member of Hope CRC in Stony Plain, Alta., also received two awards**, one for his book *Indigenous People and Jesus* (culture category) and one for his column "Canadian Thanksgiving and the Indigenous Tension" in *The Banner* (online, October 2020).



Parry Stelter



Meghan Kort

## Former RCA Churches Launch 'Kingdom Network'

Five churches that had been part of the Reformed Church in America's New Thing classis in Indiana and Illinois launched a new collective Sept. 9. The founders say the Kingdom Network is focused on multiplying disciples, training leaders, and planting churches.

Calvary Church of Oak Lawn, Ill., and Faith Church-Highland, Ind., are campus congregations of two of the founding churches. Each had dual affiliation with the RCA and the Christian Reformed Church before the dissolution of New Thing classis in early September. They have petitioned the Christian Reformed classes to which they belong (Chicago South and Illiana) to be recognized as union churches with the new Network.

Ron Citlau, pastor of Calvary Church of Orland Park, Ill., said the Kingdom Network fits the definition of a denomination—"a collection of churches that have shared values and beliefs, a polity that holds them together, and an authority structure of some kind"—but "we decided to call it a network because, in the same way that some Christians are burnt out by church, there are some churches that are burnt out by denominations." Citlau serves on the Network's executive team.

### Looking for Orthodoxy

Citlau said the pastors and elders now part of the Kingdom Network have been thoroughly involved in RCA polity for a decade. "We made a commitment with other large churches in the RCA about 7-10 years ago that we were going to do all that we could to help the RCA stay orthodox" in its "view of homosexuality, but more importantly hermeneutics, the gospel, and church planting and discipleship."

Tim Huizenga, campus pastor at Faith Church-Highland, said, "We desired to move forward with the hopes of



Kingdom Network participants at its inaugural gathering Sept. 9, 2021.

continuing our existing partnerships."

The conclusion, though, was that the RCA was moving in a different direction. "We see what is happening in the RCA as unsolvable, and that's after a real commitment on our part to see what could be solved," Citlau said.

The RCA's Vision 2020 report released last June acknowledged that some RCA congregations would inevitably separate from the denomination because of diverse opinions about biblical interpretation and practices. The RCA's General Synod was to discuss the report Oct. 14-19.

But the creation of the Network was not reactionary, Citlau said. "We sought to do all that we could that was good (in the RCA), and we want to leave in ways that are good." He said the dissolution of the classis was about a 12-month process.

"First and foremost," Huizenga said, "the Network is about the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost and broken world. We are also about growing and multiplying ministries and movements which do that well. This happens through relationships in the network where churches and pastors are challenged, held accountable, and supported in these efforts."

### New Affiliation?

At its Sept. 21 meeting, Classis Illiana approved the intent of Faith Church-Highland's request to be recognized as a union church with the new network. Classis is consulting with the CRC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee and will come back to the matter at its spring meeting. Classis Chicago South at its Sept. 21 meeting determined that Calvary Church-Oak Lawn still will be delegated to and welcome at classis through next year. Classis also tasked its interim committee with "charting a way forward with establishing ecumenical relations with the Kingdom Network."

Pastor Laryn Zoerhof, stated clerk for Classis Illiana, said approving the concept of the request in the meantime "will encourage Faith Church-Highland Campus to remain an active part of Classis Illiana and the CRC."

First CRC of Highland, which became Faith Church-Highland in 2013, has been in the Illiana Classis and CRC since its inception in 1908. Huizenga said he hopes the congregation will continue that long relationship of trust.

—Callie Feyen



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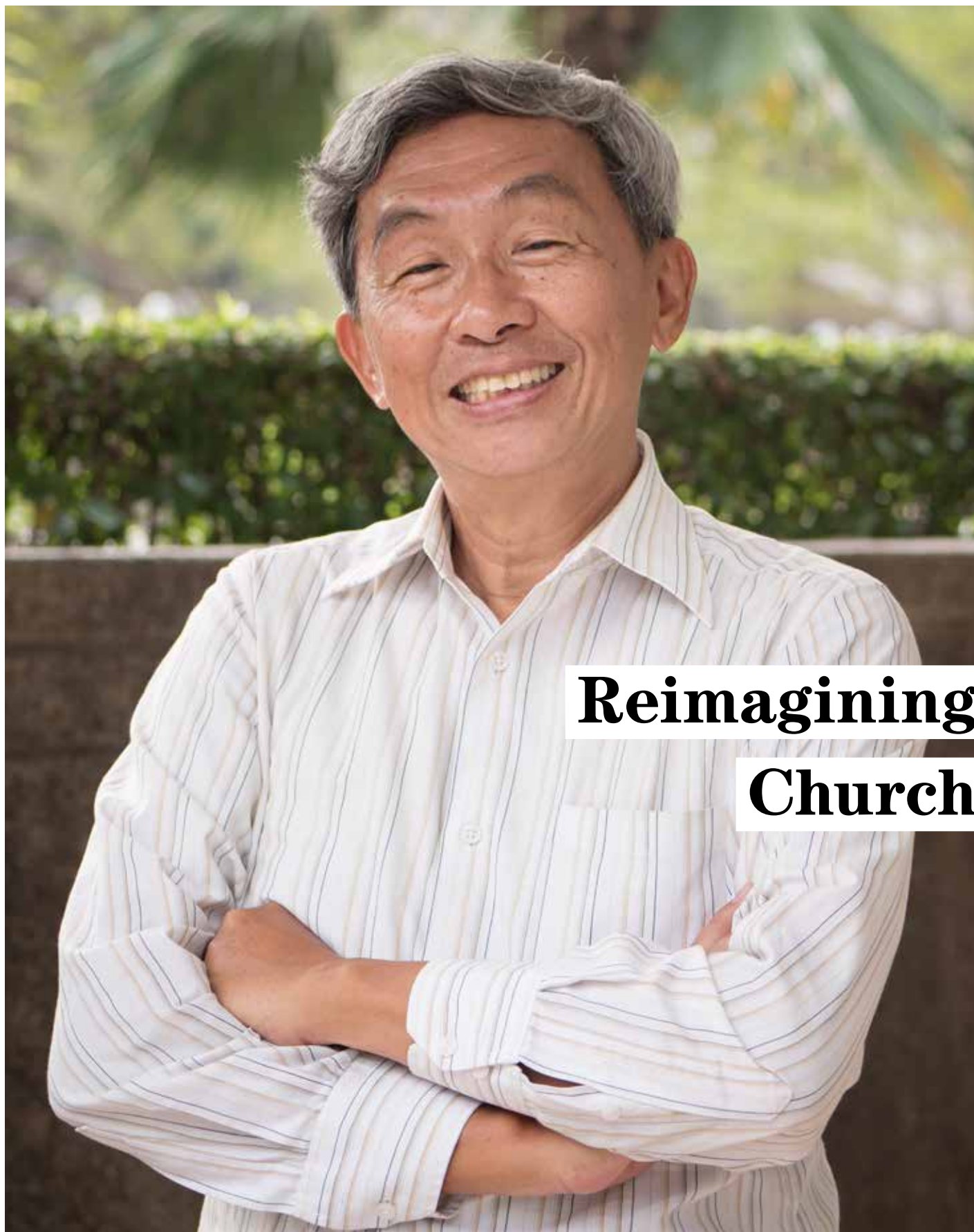
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# Reimagining Church

By Brian Clark, Cassie Westrate, and Victoria Veenstra

“**A** church is not a building but its people.” You’ve likely heard some version of this statement, perhaps more often in the last year and a half as most congregations closed their buildings’ doors due to COVID restrictions. At the same time, the global church began to ask deeper questions, like “What does ‘church’ mean?” or “What do I most value about my church and how can we keep that going?”

Even before the pandemic, the Christian Reformed Church and its global partners had been asking these important questions.

The next few pages will explore examples of people in different areas of the world reimagining church for a variety of reasons.

### Reimagining in China

In 2015, Jerry An received a curious message: “I think I know who you are.”

The message included a link to an account on the popular Chinese social media platform WeChat, and it used many of the same tools and applications for sharing God’s Word that An, who serves as the Chinese ministry leader of ReFrame Ministries, presents to Chinese-speaking leaders.

The sender was mistaken, but the account was clearly the work of a technically skilled Christian who was forward-thinking about the role of apps and social media in the Chinese church. An’s curiosity was piqued.

### Meeting Wang

An learned the account was run by Wang, an IT professional living in China. Before the end of their first conversation, An knew he wanted Wang to partner with ReFrame (then Back to God Ministries International).

But this partnership would come at a cost.

Because Wang was in China, all of ReFrame’s WeChat accounts would have to be registered under his name. This meant the Chinese government could hold Wang accountable if they found out what he was doing.

“Wang was aware of the risk, but he saw it as necessary,” An said.

As part of ReFrame’s team, Wang began developing new WeChat accounts and a website to support them. The accounts provided audio Bible messages and devotional resources to Chinese users despite the government restrictions placed on most Christian content.

Wang helped grow ReFrame’s outreach in China before his death earlier this year.

By mid-2021, more than 200,000 people were reading and responding to the gospel messages through the channels that Wang built.

### Heartbreaking News

In 2018, Wang was diagnosed with a rare bone marrow disease. Soon his entire immune system began to break down, and in the summer of 2021, Wang died.

Even as Wang battled this disease, he never gave up trying to share his gifts for God’s kingdom.

“My symptoms have made it hard to work over the past year,” he wrote in a message to An. “I should have done more despite those things. I’m ashamed of my shortcomings.”

In the same week that Wang died, the Chinese government shut down the largest WeChat account he managed, leaving 200,000 people without their regular flow of Bible passages, reflections, and audio guides.

Just a few weeks later, the government also shut down ReFrame’s devotional page, which had an additional 40,000 followers.

### Next Steps

Though losing Wang has been devastating, ReFrame’s Chinese ministry team is moving forward with sharing the gospel.

In the short term, An plans to focus on publishing books for Chinese Christian leaders and seekers. Still, he and his team are constantly monitoring the Chinese government’s next moves as they seek to continue using the accounts that haven’t been shut down and build new web tools.

“We see new media as the future of the church in China,” An added. “New media has no boundaries and offers us important ways of reaching out.”

### Equipping New Leaders for a New Model of Church

Every year, Christian Reformed campus ministries send out hundreds of students who graduate with leadership skills. What if they were trained to start and lead new models of churches?

That’s exactly what Campus Ministry at Grand Valley State University, Calvin Theological Seminary, Resonate Global Mission, and local CRC congregations in West Michigan are working together to accomplish.

“Campus ministry students are trained leaders,” said Mark Wallace, Resonate’s campus ministry leader. “They’re often trained at leading large groups. They’re good at ... having conversations about God with friends who don’t believe.”



With denominational support, Campus Ministry at Grand Valley State University will equip student leaders to plant microchurches.

The churches that graduates of campus ministry will be starting won't look like traditional CRC congregations. These student leaders are going to plant microchurches—small missional communities designed for people who have never been part of a church or people who have left the church.

"The way campus ministry functions is pretty similar to what we're asking microchurch pastors to do," said Cody Zuiderveen, a campus minister at Grand Valley who has been leading the training project.

### **Bivocational Leaders**

It's important to note that these graduates will be bivocational: they will work while also leading a church. It's exactly how student leaders work while part of campus ministry.

"They are full-time students while giving significant time and attention to leading ministry in a missional way," said Scott Stark, Grand Valley's campus minister. "That would continue as they graduate. (They would) start their new job ... while growing and learning and developing this microchurch."

Stark and Zuiderveen will identify and recruit students this year for a cohort starting in the fall of 2022. Throughout the two-year program campus ministers will coach students, and Calvin Theological Seminary will provide support for theological training.

"Our hope is to make ministry training more accessible to a wider range of emerging ministry leaders, ... not just those attending seminary for a full-degree program," said Aaron Einfeld, director of admissions at the seminary.

### **Mentors from Congregations**

Local churches will play an important role too. As students graduate, pastors and churches will take over mentorship roles.

"They need a context in which they can flourish in ministry after graduating—a congregation, a pastor, that affirms their call to ministry and is willing to walk alongside them to continue encouraging them," Zuiderveen said.

Jim Boer, pastor of Monroe Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., is the first local pastor on board with this project.

"I get excited when I see the church find new ways to reach people with the message of Jesus," he said. "I also get excited when our young and emerging leaders are given the opportunity to grow and sharpen their ministry skills. This is what being the church is all about."

As people like Boer around the world step into new roles to address new challenges in the church, pray for God's guidance to reimagine his congregations. **B**

### *Reimagining Coffee Hour*

What areas of your church do you take for granted that you can start dreaming about today?

If you visit the CRC offices in Burlington, Ont., you'll find Carpenteros and Friends coffee perking in the lunchroom. The coffee is grown in Honduras, and because it is a direct trade partnership, growers are paid a premium for the coffee, allowing them to pay fair wages to their workers.

The partnership began when a group of mostly CRC volunteers from the Hamilton, Ont., area were volunteering long term in Honduras.

The Office of Social Justice has partnered with a different fair-trade organization, La Terza Coffee, to offer the Blessing Not Burden Blend in the United States. Not only is it fair trade, but every time people buy a bag they support the message that immigrants are worthy of the same dignity offered to non-immigrants, support the Office of Social Justice, and avoid adding unnecessary plastic promotional materials to a landfill.

Could one of these coffee sources be a way to reimagine church coffee hour?



## ‘Mom, You Have a New Best Friend’

### Tim Rietkerk

As Tim Rietkerk, director of the Christian Reformed Church’s Chaplaincy and Care Ministry, took his aisle seat on the plane flying from San Diego to Seattle to attend a niece’s wedding, he breathed a sigh of relief. The check-in had gone smoothly, and the anticipation of reconnecting with family brought joy.



Tim Rietkerk is the director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry for the Christian Reformed Church.

After buckling in, he glanced over at the two passengers next to him: a woman and a young child. He caught a snippet of their conversation and heard the words “Grand Rapids.”

He thought to himself, “What are the odds that I am sitting next to someone from Grand Rapids?”

After briefly weighing whether to strike up a conversation, he leaned over and said, “Pardon me. I heard you say ‘Grand Rapids.’ I lived there for eight years.”

The woman looked startled and replied, “I grew up there. I graduated from Creston High School and then went to Hope College (in Holland, Mich.).”

Rietkerk’s mouth dropped open. “That is amazing. I went to Calvin College and Calvin Seminary. What are the odds that we end up on this flight together to Seattle?”

The woman smiled. “I went to Princeton Seminary,” she said. “My name is

Cathleen Wolff. I’m a hospital chaplain for the Reformed Church in America. We came out from Yuma for some vacation here in San Diego, and now we’re flying up to Seattle for a week.”

“You are not going to believe this,” Rietkerk replied, “but I’m the director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry of the Christian Reformed Church. I literally spent some time yesterday communicating with your endorser about how we could partner together on some chaplain training.”

The next two hours flew by as the two chaplains shared the incredible challenges of working in the healthcare setting with the COVID pandemic evolving in the past year. Wolff supervised chaplain residents at her hospital and helped them process the numerous deaths as they ministered to patients and families. Rietkerk shared about working in a hospice and the challenge of not being able to see many patients in person.

As the captain’s voice announced the approach to Seattle, the child turned toward her mother and said, “Mom, you have a new best friend.” After exiting the aircraft, Rietkerk and Wolff introduced their families to each other and recognized how God had put them together on the plane to Seattle.

### Cathleen Wolff

“Who knew one Alaska Airlines flight from San Diego to Seattle could bring about a ‘new best friend’?” Wolff said.

Wolff had been excited for her first visit to Seattle, but also anxious. “I do not like flying,” she said. “It was a rough morning filled with strong emotions. (But) I made it onto the plane and gave my youngest daughter the window seat.”

As she was trying to settle herself into the middle seat, a man sat down next to her. They exchanged the usual




Cathleen Wolff is a chaplain for the Reformed Church in America at Yuma (Ariz.) Regional Medical Center.

pleasantries, but because Wolff’s energy was depleted, she did not think much more conversation would happen between herself and the total stranger seated next to her.

“God clearly had other plans,” Wolff said. “I do not remember who first said what to whom, but I quickly came to find out this guy sitting next to me is the director of Chaplaincy and Care Ministry for the Christian Reformed Church. Little did he know that the gal sitting next to him is the supervisor of spiritual care in a rural community-based hospital.”

The two-and-a-half-hour journey flew by. The two chaplains conversed non-stop with more connections than are imaginable. Wolff’s daughter would casually interrupt, checking in on her mom. The guy promised he’d “give her mom back” after the flight was over.

“There were no denominational lines here,” Wolff said. “What was present was a strong, foreordained connection that I can only describe as a gift of God. To God be the glory!”

Rietkerk and Wolff saw each other again when 107 Christian Reformed chaplains and 37 Reformed chaplains met virtually Sept. 23-25 to worship, encourage, and train together. 

—Chris Meehan

**The View from Here**

## We Are the Church

**NOT ONLY HAS OUR WORLD CHANGED**

over the past two years, but for many of us, our concept of church has been shaken.

In Matthew 16:16-18, Jesus and Simon Peter are engaged in a conversation about who the world says Jesus is. Peter says that some claim Jesus is John the Baptist, others say he's Elijah, and still others say he's Jeremiah or another prophet. But in response to the direct question from Jesus, Simon Peter responds, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus goes on to say that this bedrock truth—that Jesus is Lord of all—will be the foundation on which Jesus will build his church.

We know this intellectually and biblically. Though we erect buildings, sanctuaries, ministry centers, and the like, none of these edifices are the church. Many of us have understood from an early age that the church is not a building. It is the grouping of people held together by the unshakable bond of the Holy Spirit. The church is the living, breathing body of Christ bound together by the new life given to those who surrender to him.

Despite this, when COVID-19 forced us to close the doors on our church buildings beginning in March 2020,

The church is not a building. It is the grouping of people held together by the unshakable bond of the Holy Spirit.

when we had to leave our comfortable edifices and lean into a lonely world connected only through technology, many of us found ourselves asking, "Are we still the church?"

Can we be bound together by the power of the Holy Spirit as one body even though our physical bodies are forced to be separate? What does it look like to worship together, pray together, and engage God's Word together when we are often not proximate or physically together?

I praise God for what he has done in the church during this difficult time. Though there are many reasons to lament, there are also many reasons to praise God. Though the doors of many church buildings were closed for a long time, we celebrate that for most people, access to the church could not be more open.

Congregations who have historically viewed themselves as neighborhood churches have recognized the fact that there is a hunger for the Word of God that extends beyond their communities—and that individuals from far and wide now have the opportunity to visit and hear God's Word through their online services. Church leaders now find themselves trying to navigate how to cater to two groups of congregants: the in-person crowd and those listening and engaging online.

This and many other changes have become our new reality, and I believe God will be able to use it for good and for the further spread of the gospel. Our expression of what church is has changed, and it may never be the same, but by God's grace, the new configuration can be even more powerfully used by God for God's glory.

One need only read a few of the stories in this section of *The Banner* to see that truth unfold. Whether it is micro-churches in Michigan or using smartphone apps in China, the church is adapting, and the gospel is being shared as a result.

Though we are all walking through difficult times, may we embrace the new reality that God is allowing us to experience. May we live day by day with the expectation that with each new day, with each new breath, God is revealing God's will through a new opportunity to connect to another member of God's church.

To God be the glory!



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

## Stanley Jim Builds Relationships

**IN EARLY MAY** of 2020 the Navajo Nation, located in portions of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, reported a per-capita rate of COVID-19 infection exceeded only by New York and Louisiana. Many died. Poverty and lack of infrastructure made the area especially vulnerable.

Stanley Jim, pastor of Window Rock Christian Reformed Church on reservation land in Arizona, helps people deal with the trauma.

"It's gone down dramatically, but it had spiked pretty high," Jim said.

Last year, Jim was named a distinguished alumnus of Calvin Theological Seminary. He couldn't receive the award then because of the pandemic, but accepted the honor in person earlier this year.

Like many pastors in the CRC, Jim and members of his church had to be creative when COVID-19 showed up.

"We gather outside for drive-up services, in vehicles parked six feet apart," Jim said. The church also offers the service online.

The pandemic has been Jim's greatest challenge since he came to Window Rock in 2016 after 17 years working for Christian Reformed Home Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission). At CRHM he was the driving force behind the Red Mesa Indigenous Leadership Development Program, which cultivates Native pastors and leaders in Navajo and Zuni churches. He also helped move Native churches to self-sufficiency and phase out subsidies from Home Missions.

Then, Jim said, his calling was to return to pastoring a church.

"My passion was really being a pastor," he said. "I wanted to get back to that." Jim had served First Navajo CRC in Tohatchi, N. Mex., after his ordination in 1996.



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

Today it is clear that people are listening to and moved by his preaching in Navajo and English, whether online, in the parking lot, or now again in the church building.

"People are drawn to that," Jim said. "The elderly are drawn to it, and the young people have learned some of the Navajo language that way. I often hear from them that the message is clearer to understand when you hear it in both languages."

As he walks the streets of Window Rock, Jim talks with people experiencing poverty, drug addiction, or alcoholism.

"I have conversations with them, listen to them, get to know them, and some lives are changed," Jim said. "People come to me, non-churchgoers, and they tell me, 'You are our pastor.' They come to me asking for prayers."

His ministry is about building those relationships—a key element of Native American spirituality.

Unlike the dominant white culture, with its emphasis on results even in church, Native culture looks at creating and maintaining that circle of friendships.

"When Jesus ministered here," Jim said, "his work was about building relationships. One of the things I think Western culture needs to learn is that it's not so much about results. We as Christians should be more relational."

—Nathan Bierma,  
Calvin Seminary

## The Hill to Connection

**COVID-19 MIGHT HAVE LIMITED** our ability to connect in person, but technology has allowed us to continue to build meaningful relationships.

World Renew's Global Partnership Program (GPP) facilitates the formation of relationships between a church or group in North America and a community elsewhere, usually outside North America. These relationships allow for the deepening of connections as Christians, as well as fellowship on the journey to get closer to the vision God has for us.

Partnerships are usually strengthened through annual visits, but COVID-19 travel restrictions put these visits on hold.

Through the GPP, New Westminster Christian Reformed Church in British Columbia has partnered with El Coyolar, a rural community in Honduras.

Hank, an active member in the New Westminster community, had been traveling to El Coyolar for more than 20 years, and looked forward to the annual trips. But for 2021, the visit was virtual.

Hank and New Westminster's Pastor Andrew Beunk were expecting only two El Coyolar church leaders to attend the Zoom meeting.

Internet connection in El Coyolar isn't reliable. Dulce, the pastor of the local CRC in El Coyolar, said, "We climbed a hill for a better signal." And Hank and Pastor Andrew saw not two, but many familiar faces.



Pastor Dulce and her husband are excited for another virtual visit with El Coyolar's New Westminster CRC family.

"It was a great emotion to know that we'd see them again," Dulce said. "It's always exciting to hear from our brothers and sisters because they're very special to us."

"Goodness, how big you've grown," Hank noted with the affection of a favorite uncle when he saw one of the children in the huddle of faces. Roland Pinzon, World Renew's bridger in Honduras, said the relationship formed between the North American church and the local community goes beyond partnership. "It's more like family."

New Westminster shares God's love with El Coyolar through support in community development programs and emergency response efforts, and while El Coyolar appreciates this

support, it's the meaningful bonds that have developed that make it worth climbing hills to maintain connection.

If your church or group is interested in partnership, a World Renew Global Partnership coach will be happy to meet with your team to determine if a partnership is right for you and to identify the unique skills and assets that God has given your church to further the kingdom. If it is determined that a partnership is a good fit, then the real work will soon begin as you explore the process of preparing your church for this partnership—this extended family.

—Laurisa O'Brien,  
World Renew

## ‘God Was Here in a Mighty Way’

**THE IDEA FOR THE** “Encourage, Equip & Inspire” event at Delavan Christian Reformed Church in Delavan, Wisc., started when Jessica Viss, chair of the church’s outreach team, talked to Trudy Ash, regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries, about an invigorating way to kick off the ministry year.

“They were looking for a way to encourage their volunteers, breathe a little life into their programs, ... (and) learn what they could do to help enhance existing ministries and programs,” Ash said.

As ideas for an event at the church came together, FFM extended an invitation to other CRC ministries to join based on the topics folks at Delavan CRC wanted to explore. Some of the workshops were:

- » How to Engage in Spiritual Conversations
- » Supporting Parents in Nurturing the Faith of Their Children
- » A Strengths Approach to Community: Transformation of People and Places
- » Best Practices for Using Technology in Worship

These workshops were led by 13 speakers from six different denominational ministries and organizations, including World Renew, Raise Up Global Ministries and Coffee Break, Worship Ministries, and Calvin Seminary. A few were in person, and the rest were brought in via Zoom.

Delavan CRC welcomed ministry leaders in neighboring communities to participate as well. About 35 people engaged in the workshop day.

Excitement for an in-person event kicking off the ministry year ran high. Participants in lunch discussions



Members of Delevan CRC (Wisc.) gathered in person and via zoom to be re-energized for ministry.

around one of four different topics—worship, children and youth, leadership, and evangelism—were so invested in conversation they had to be prompted to go back to the scheduled workshops.

“There were lots of good, practical questions of how we do things, but also good, reflective space to talk about why we do it. And I think that, to me, was one of the more encouraging questions,” said Chris Schoon, director of Faith Formation Ministries.

At the end of the day, participants were invited to list three takeaways on a sticky note and share about one of them. One member of Delavan CRC said that although he didn’t currently know the names of many of the children and young adults at his church, he was going to commit to learning their names and getting to know them.

“That type of intergenerational relationship encourages the faith of older people as well as the willingness and sense of belonging of younger people,” Schoon said. “Taking that step will transform the church.”

Inviting collaboration between denominational organizations and ministries for a daylong event was an experiment for both FFM and Delavan CRC. Working alongside ministry partners met the needs of the church and best used the collective strengths of different ministries.

As one participant shared, “The group of congregation members that showed up today and the group of speakers and workshops you offered fit together like a puzzle. Thank you for helping us fit these pieces together.”

Another participant said, “God was here in a mighty way.”

—Megan Herrema,  
Faith Formation Ministries

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**Christian  
Reformed  
Church**

# Seeds Galore!



Illustration for The Banner by Anita Barghigiani



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.

**DID YOU KNOW** that seeds are all around us? If you take a quick stroll outside, it won't be long before you come across a seed that will grow into something great!

## How Do Seeds Grow?

Once a dry seed is planted in soil and watered, the seed starts to grow tiny roots. Next, a green shoot begins to grow upward until it peeks through the soil. Over time, tiny seeds grow into plants like apple trees and pumpkin vines!

## How Do Seeds Scatter?

Seeds not only grow into plants for us to enjoy, but those plants make even more seeds! These seeds get scattered across the ground to make even more plants grow. Here are some of the cool ways seeds travel:

- » Wind: The wind blows seeds around, carrying them from place to place.
- » Animals: When animals eat fruit, they often spread the seeds in their droppings.
- » People: If you have ever blown the fuzz off a dandelion, then you've helped scatter dandelion seeds.
- » Explosion: Some plants, such as peas, have seeds that grow in pods. When the seeds are ready to come out, the pod "explodes," splitting open and releasing the seeds. Seeds from gorse bushes even make a popping sound when they come out of their pods.

## Really Cool Seeds!

Have you seen these seeds in your neighborhood?

- » Burrs: Ragweed and burdock plants have seeds called burrs that have spines or hooks. These spiky seeds can easily attach themselves to animal fur—or to your favorite sweater.
- » Helicopter seeds: Have you ever seen helicopter seeds twirling in the

air? These seeds are called samaras but are sometimes called "helicopters," "twisters," or "whirligigs" because they spin as they fall from the sky. These cool little seeds grow into huge maple trees!

- » Acorns: Did you know that acorns are the fruit (a nut) of an oak tree? Animals such as birds and squirrels enjoy feasting on them. Inside each acorn is a tiny seed that can grow into a big oak tree.

## Tasty Seeds

Some seeds make a delicious afternoon snack!

- » Pumpkin seeds: During the fall, many people enjoy roasted pumpkin seeds. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of fiber and zinc. Zinc helps your body fight off sickness.
- » Sunflower seeds: Sunflower seeds also taste great anytime of the year. Sunflower seeds have vitamin E, which helps keep your body strong.
- » Sesame seeds: Sesame seeds are also fun to eat and taste great on bread. Sesame seeds are a good source of fiber, which is good for your digestive system.
- » Popcorn: A popcorn kernel is a corn seed with a mixture of starch and water inside. When a popcorn kernel is heated, the pressure from the hot water inside causes the kernel to pop, turning the kernel inside out!

## Mustard Seed Faith

Did you know that we can have "mustard seed faith"? In Matthew 13:31-32, Jesus tells a parable about how God's kingdom is like a mustard seed. A mustard seed is tiny but grows into a huge tree that gives shade and shelter to God's creatures. In the same way, when we put our faith in God, even a small amount of faith can make a big difference! **B**



# Through the Storm

Christians Around the World Face Deadly Persecution

By Jonathan Umran and Naji Umran

**Y**usuf was born in Gerewah, Sudan, to a Muslim family. Tensions between the government and a local political party were high, however, and

Yusuf's family was driven to relocate to the nearby village of Al Gazeera al Farhana (The Happy Island). When they moved, Yusuf's father had been missing for more than 10 years.

When he was 4 years old, Yusuf was taken into a khalwa. Khalawi are schools that especially use violence to force children to memorize parts of the Quran. School life was hard on Yusuf, and it only became harder as he grew older. He felt as if he was trapped, living in a prison with his future at the mercy of cruel authority.

One night he and some of his fellow students escaped from the khalwa. But they endured many of the struggles that come with running away, so they returned to their village, where

Yusuf enrolled in a public school. He remained there until his graduation.

By the time Yusuf had finished high school, the God he knew was one who brought suffering and terror, fear and cruelty. Despite this, there was a part of Yusuf that believed there was a loving side to this God, that there was more to God than the horrors of the khalwa or the pain of his people. But he didn't know if it was even possible to get to know this side of God, much less how. All Yusuf knew was that he wanted to.

Soon Yusuf was accepted into the University of Sudan. There he studied music, specializing in the trumpet. University was an entirely novel place for him, a platform for him to share his culture, ideas, and thoughts on religion with unique people. He thrived. Yusuf loved being able to learn about the world in this open environment.

One of his favorite classes during his time at university was harmonics,

for which he would go to a church to listen to the hymns and study their harmonies. He loved listening to these hymns, and he especially enjoyed spending time around those who sang them. He would marvel at the unity demonstrated by Christians in his church even though he did not believe in their God himself. Or did he?

## Oppression and Escape

He became eager to find the answer. But he could not reveal his curiosity. Islamic culture taught that if he tried to find the answer in the church—if he converted to Christianity—it could result in death.

His newfound curious excitement was to be short lived.

The Sudanese government quickly decided it did not approve of the political conversations taking place at the university. To set an example for the rest of the student body, government



officials targeted students coming from war zones who didn't have any connections to protect themselves. Yusuf knew this new strategic oppression would jeopardize his position at the school, so he began to participate less and less in meetings with his peers, but to no avail. He was imprisoned twice and suffered severe physical and psychological abuse, the effects of which still live with him today.

Yusuf's time in prison was tainted by doubt. He would constantly ask himself why any of this was happening. "Where is God—the real God?" he wondered. There couldn't possibly be a God who would allow this, he concluded. But a strong voice deep within him overpowered the doubt. "God is here," it said.

After some time, and with the help of friends, Yusuf was able to get a passport and escape to Egypt. His health was already poor, and the journey did his body no favors. Upon his arrival, however, a group of young Egyptian Christian men helped Yusuf find treatment. "How come there is so much love between Christians?" he asked them. "Because Christ came in love," they replied. Thus began Yusuf's search for Jesus.

### **A Path to Christ**

His search was not without challenges. He was alone in a new place, receiving treatment from a group of people who worshiped a God he'd always been taught against. Nevertheless, Yusuf continued asking questions and growing in his faith.

Slowly, life began to settle down for Yusuf. He found a job at a leather factory. He began studying the Bible with the Christian doctor who helped treat him. He began attending a church. For the first time, Yusuf was able to be a part of the Christian community that had always intrigued him. He decided to take the next step in his spiritual journey and be baptized.

The persecution  
Christians face  
around the  
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It is suffering  
on display all  
around.

One day soon after, one of Yusuf's Muslim flatmates learned of his baptism. He took photos of Yusuf and blackmailed him, threatening to report Yusuf for his faith and his involvement in the church. So Yusuf did what he'd been driven to do his whole life: he ran away.

Once again his world had collapsed all around him. Once again he was lost, starting anew, and living on the streets. Once again he found himself asking, "Where are you, Jesus?"

And once again, Jesus appeared, this time in the form of a group of Colombian saxophone players in Cairo who in turn introduced him to their friend, Rev. Mark. Mark took Yusuf in and treated him like a son, doing what he could to help stabilize Yusuf's life. As things settled down, Yusuf began to see Christ again, not just through the Bible, but through Mark, through his Colombian friends, and through the unity of Christians all around him.

### **Christians Around the World**

Yusuf's story is a common one. It might have a different cast, setting, and way of playing out in different places, but

its roots remain. It might look like the violent aggression in northern Nigeria or the harsh campaigns of the Chinese government. It might look like the atrocities done by ISIS in Syria or even the hardships of the early church. But it is persecution all the same.

The persecution Christians face around the world is a daily, sometimes tangible reality. It is suffering on display all around. It is planning travel routes around where the last shooting was. It is making sure your family wasn't in the church that was bombed earlier that morning. It is pillows damp with tears after long nights of mourning, barely holding it together after witnessing the injustices all around that feel suffocating. It is something you can observe and feel in the very air you breathe.

For others persecution is less apparent, but ever looming around the corner. Persecution is your neighbors, friends, and family monitoring your every move. It is conversations in which every phrase feels loaded. It is moving between gatherings with a hood up, your face concealed from security cameras. Each step is terrifying when every eye is on you. It is coming home at night and being too paranoid to turn the lights on. It is whispering worship songs in your living room with a church of five people as someone listens at the door, knowing that at any second this could all be over.

For others, persecution is crafty. It is silent. Judgment and punishment are all carried out in the darkness. It is being denied from every job you apply to because of your faith. It is living in constant fear of an attacker you have never known. It is accepting that every text sent will be read by several pairs of eyes. It is watching friends disappearing between coded prayer meetings and others being discouraged by a faith that has only brought them loss.

It is the conflict that comes with not being able to be as openly Christian as as you'd like, if at all. It is wondering how to be bold without being reckless,

how to live one's faith in an unsaved area. It is learning how to coexist peacefully with violence all around you. Can you be free while in chains? How can you proclaim Jesus' name in silence?

And how can you cope? How can you possibly cope when it so regularly feels like you are lost in the dark, and the light on the other side is all but hidden from you? How can you survive if all you find yourself asking is "Where are you, Jesus? Where?"

### **Hope in the Darkness**

It looks like a hopeless picture. And with the rise of technology, mission efforts, and the clash of civilizations, it is a picture we see with ever-increasing resolution. But it must not become one from which we turn away.

The effects these different shapes of persecution can have on our faith are determined by our perspective on them in the first place. It is already painfully easy to succumb to the world's influence, but it is even easier when you fail to recognize the severity of the situation. And the situation is severe.

Jesus prayed this for his followers: "I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:14-15). Persecuted Christians tend to distinguish themselves, in some way, from their surrounding culture because, ultimately, the culture is spiritually hostile to their faith. As Jesus had prayed, we will never totally escape spiritual conflict in this world.

When we realize this truth and gain the perspective that comes with it, prayers change from "God, please put an end to this struggle" to "God, give me the strength to fight through it." We set aside our desire to leave hard situations and learn to embrace and adapt to the places to which we've been called. Our focus shifts from

yearning for the light at the end of the tunnel to being that light, radiating the love of God to the people shrouded in shadows all around us.

And our God is here. Jesus is with us in the dark. He's been here every step of the way.

The story of the true and invisible church is a tale of many trials, of heart-break and pain. A story of persecutors and persecuted, of broken homes and families longing for reunion. A story of the draining exhaustion of obstacles constantly appearing. A story of suffering and all the scars it leaves behind.

More than that, though, it is a story of how God molds us through such trials. It is a reminder that our faith is not defined by the trials it faces, but by the ways we respond. It is a story of the pains and joys of our response, of finding any small glimmers of light in the darkness, of perseverance and preservation and praise, of victory promised and obstacles overcome. It is a story of revival born of tragedy, life born from death, reminding us that faith forged in the fire burns all the brighter.

Our story—the church's story—is one of seeds of hope planted in the scars by the Almighty Healer, who takes our blemishes and makes them beautiful. God makes us new.

It is the story of the helping hand extended and the quavering arm reaching out, desperate for a savior, a redeemer who assures us that we are not alone in the den of lions.

It is the same story we find in Acts, in Hebrews' great cloud of witnesses, and in the pages of John's Revelation. Tucked among all these stories, Yusuf's continues to unfold.


Today, under God's healing wings, Yusuf has begun to spread his own wings, to feel his call, to express his gifts, and to find redemption for his scars. Today he speaks freely to his friends and his adopted family of his hope to return to Sudan with the gospel. Today Yusuf's first love for church music resonates beyond his

pain as he practices trumpet in the hot upper-floor apartment where he stays. Today, as has happened somewhere every day for eons, Yusuf's own neighbors—and the unbelieving neighbors of people like him—will wonder, and perhaps ask why, as they hear the unbroken melodies of those who have endured pain for Jesus' name.

God works within, and he works constantly. Jesus does not waste a single note.

Because this is his song. This is the story of his church. Of his people. Of his battle. Of the unity and victory only possible in and through him.

He is with us. He is sure to vindicate. His story will not just be told, but shouted from the rooftops in a joyful chorus. And it will be heard across the nations.

And so we sing: Through the storm, you are Lord. Be Lord of all. 



Jonathan Umran is a Canadian-Egyptian student currently studying English at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. He grew up in the Christian Reformed Church.



Rev. Naji Umran is the Middle East regional leader for Resonate and served on synod's Committee Studying Religious Persecution and Liberty. He and his wife, Anne Zaki, have lived in Cairo for most of the past 22 years.

1. Share a story of persecuted Christians you have heard, read, or even witnessed. What insights did you gain from it?

2. Do you think that Christians in North America are facing persecution? Why or why not?

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## What I Learned from Hosting Interfaith Dialogue

I found that when students spoke about Christianity with people of other belief systems, they often reduced their faith to actions.



Melissa Kuipers is a writer and the Christian Reformed chaplain to Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ont.

**WHEN I WAS WORKING** in campus ministry, my student leaders wanted to host an interfaith dialogue series. They wanted to learn about some of the other faiths represented at our secular university while also growing in their own. So we invited people into our chaplain's office to discuss themes relating to worldview and religion.

I tried to do all the necessary prep work. I advertised the event, chose topics that would relate to all faith groups, crafted questions to start the conversation, and set up guidelines for discussing our differences respectfully. But when the time came and we began to chat with our guests (some atheists, some Muslims, some Seventh-day Adventist), I realized one major oversight: I had not prepared the students in our ministry to explain the basics of their faith.


I found that when students spoke about Christianity with people of other belief systems, they often reduced their faith to actions: "Because we're Christians, we don't do \_\_\_\_\_." Perhaps it's easier to talk about concrete behaviors than complex theological concepts. It makes you vulnerable to say you believe in a man who rose from the dead. Maybe it's more comfortable to describe the way we live than the things we believe (even though our beliefs inform the way we live). Perhaps when we're nervous we revert to the technical aspects of our faith.

But our faith is not defined by the technical parts. Ours is not a religion of do's and don'ts. It's a faith defined by grace, love, and trust in an intimate, self-sacrificing, relational God who takes us as we are, who holds us as his children, who walks with us through life's ups and downs. Peter instructs us to "(a)lways be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and

respect, keeping a clear conscience" (1 Peter 3:15-16).

While I was raised in a Christian Reformed subculture, I attended Pentecostal mission trips during my teenage years. We learned the ABC's of evangelism, chanted phrases like "Repent, confess, believe, receive!" and memorized the sinner's prayer. Then we took to the streets, where we proselytized strangers. As an adult I became critical of many aspects of this type of ministry. But one of the gifts I gained in those formative years was practice in communicating the joys of my friendship with God.

I no longer reference the ABC's of Christianity when I talk about my faith. Each conversation looks quite different. I share why I still love Jesus. I describe faith as a mystery and yet a belief system that can handle our questions. I express my trust in a God who is love.

The Christian Reformed Church has a great resource for these types of conversations in *Our World Belongs to God*. This document can be used not only as a Sunday-morning reminder of the basics of our faith, but also as an effective resource for sharing our faith with others. I wish that, in preparation for our interfaith dialogue series, I had taken my students through *Our World Belongs to God* to remind us of the basics. I wish I had provided them with opportunities to practice discussing their faith with people who know little about it—not to provide canned and recitable answers, but rather so that when nervousness sets in they feel ready to authentically speak about the core of the faith that defines them. 

1. How would you explain the basics of your Christian faith to someone who has never heard it?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

# Our Rock City

A place of beauty  
and wonder. Stark  
contrasts and high  
drama. Secrets  
and mystery.

**PANAMA ROCKS** in southwestern New York are a fascinating geological “rock city” made up of large, glacier-cut rock formations. I’m there today.

According to my map, I’ll descend to follow the base of the rocks and then return via a hairpin turn to ascend along the top of the boulders.

I enter a world of contrasts: rugged stone and tender ferns, pitch-dark tunnels and sun-dappled surfaces, heady heights and plunging depths. I’m awed by massive boulders said to be millions of years old, by vivid greens of moss and leaf, by ropy tree roots splaying down huge rock faces.

There’s a wild history here. “During the mid-1800s,” according to the rock city’s website, “a gang of counterfeiters used the rock area to mint and conceal their spurious coin.” A historical note on site informs hikers that “in the 1800s a bank carriage was robbed in Panama, and local folklore says that the stolen gold was hidden in Panama Rocks.” Since then, many have combed this place for the abandoned loot.

Yes, a place of beauty and wonder.  
Stark contrasts and high drama.  
Secrets and mystery.

Just like the Word of God.

## **Another Rock City**

When we trust Jesus for salvation, we are given a guide better than a map: the Holy Spirit.

With the Holy Spirit we enter the monumental Pentateuch with its five towering books, its rich history, its wild stories. We plunge into the darkness of Eden lost, weather the great flood, and trek Israel’s wilderness wanderings. Then we “amen” the psalmist’s alleluias, gaze up at the lofty prophecies of Isaiah, and scramble around the rocks of the minor

prophets, often discovering long-forgotten treasure.

Suddenly we’re climbing a hairpin curve to the New Testament, winding up through the four gigantic boulders of the gospels. A fresh wind stirs. We hear Emmanuel coo and the Messiah call. We breathe in the perfume from an alabaster jar and the essence of self-sacrifice in Gethsemane.

We witness a death—and a resurrection. And we have our treasure, our Savior.

But there is more!

There comes an ascension, and then a Pentecost—God in us!

We stand now on high ground indeed. God’s own self has drawn very near. The air is rare, the view heady. The Spirit, through apostles and epistles, offers lively hope pushing up through the drought of despair, perseverance splaying thick roots down the rock face of trial, promises looming solid and massive.

On we go until we’re atop Revelation with its triumph over darkness and death. Here, pure joy is set before us—forever life with our God.

We’re at the end of the book (though it doesn’t really end). With the Holy Spirit’s help, we’ve delved into deep truths. We’ve discovered Jesus, our treasure. And we’ve fallen in love with the beautiful and intriguing Word of God.

So we’ll keep coming back, ever clamoring with fresh enthusiasm around and over and through the Word, rejoicing in it “as one who finds great treasure” (Ps. 119:162, NKJV), as one who seeks for gold and strikes it rich in our Rock City. **B**



Sandy Mayle is a freelance writer. She has written for *Discipleship Journal*, *Christian Courier*, *Just Between Us*, and many other publications. She and her husband, Dave, attend First Alliance Church in Erie, Penn.

## Holiday Reading: Turning the Pages from Harvest's Bounty to the 'Hallelujah Chorus'



### The Sound the Sun Makes

*By Buck Storm*

Reviewed by Trevor Denning

Suspended for punching a man who wouldn't cross the street when he saw him coming, the usually happy-go-lucky Early Pines is depressed. Since his old friend Gomez died, Pines hasn't been the same. Now the best detective in Paradise, Ariz., 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 and slice of small-town life provided in the previous novel. Even so, this novel is laugh-out-loud funny and encouraging in all the right ways. (Kregel)



### Chasing Shadows

*By Lynn Austin*

Reviewed by Ann Byle

Lena de Vries is content to be a farmer's wife, but her faith is tested when the Nazis threaten her family and her way of life.

Lena's daughter Ans must juggle her resistance work with her feelings for a Dutch policeman working with the Nazis.

Miriam Jacobs flees Cologne, Germany, with her father to escape Nazi persecution and makes her way to Leiden, where she meets Ans.

Lynn Austin weaves a thought-provoking tale of heroism, fearlessness, and faith in the face of great evil. Her many fans will love this new book, and she's sure to draw new readers with her latest historical fiction set in her beloved Netherlands. (Tyndale)



### Kindness Is My Superpower: A Children's Book About Empathy, Kindness and Compassion

*By Alicia Ortego*

Reviewed by Li Ma

Kindness and care for others is perhaps the most important social skill a child can learn. This rhyming story book, a No. 1 bestseller in Amazon's Children's Christian Social Issues Fiction category, is packed with engaging details and inspiring insights into a child's emotional life.

A boy named Lucas teases his classmate Lisa for wearing glasses but later is haunted with regrets. The author uses Lucas as a model to show how an ordinary boy who sometimes makes mistakes can spread kindness. Included are simple exercises for practicing kindness. The author stresses intentionality: "Any act of kindness, no matter how big or small, can make a difference—especially when done intentionally." (Independently published)



### Tomatoes for Neela

*By Padma Lakshmi, illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Young Neela loves to cook with her amma—her mother. On Saturday, Neela and Amma go to the farmers market and buy tomatoes. They return home and set to work making tomato sauce. As Neela works with Amma, she thinks about Paati, her grandmother, and feels close to her. Neela sees the fruit of their labor and knows that "cooking tomatoes in summer would make her happy in the winter, too." She prepares for Paati's next visit from India by placing a special jar of tomato sauce at the back of the cupboard so they can share the lovely flavors together when she arrives.

Illustrator Juana Martinez-Neal's gentle, peaceful illustrations bring to life author Padma Lakshmi's celebration of food, family, love, and meaningful labor. (Viking Books for Young Readers)



## War and Millie McGonigle

*By Karen Cushman*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In the fall of 1941, 12-year-old Millie McGonigle struggles to adapt to change and longs for a world she can count on. But her beloved grandmother has recently died, her younger sister is ill and receives the bulk of her parents' attention, and, most scary of all, the world is at war, and Millie fears that the conflict will erupt along the California coast where she lives.

Partially based on the experiences of author Karen Cushman's husband growing up on the beach in San Diego, Calif., in the years after World War II, this sensitive novel for middle school readers explores the troubles brought by the war to American children. The book contains a few instances of profanity and briefly grapples with reincarnation. (Knopf Books for Young Readers)



## The Arctic Fury

*By Greer Macallister*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Virginia Reeve is summoned by Lady Jane Franklin to lead a dozen women to the Arctic to find her husband, Lord Franklin, and his lost expedition. If the women are successful, they will receive a reward. If not, Lady Franklin will deny any association with them.

Narrated in alternating chapters depicting courtroom scenes and what transpired among the women in the Arctic, this riveting novel for adults portrays women whose voices have been discredited and gifts denied who are yet given a chance to prove themselves.

Author Greer Macallister refreshingly depicts a protagonist whose Christian faith alone "bears her up" and is portrayed in an earthy, ordinary walk with God. (Sourcebooks Landmark)



## Nothing but Life

*By Brent van Staalduinen*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

After surviving a school shooting, 15-year-old Dills moves with his mother to live with his grandmother and aunt. Starting over is an uphill battle as Dills struggles to adjust to his new high school while shattered daily by the knowledge of the shooter's identity: his stepfather, Jesse, a veteran haunted by "demons" carried back from his military tours. Dills meets unlikely friends Gal, a former Israeli soldier, and Mia, a Palestinian teen who immigrated to Canada with her family.

*Nothing but Life* offers young adult readers a deeply moving portrait of a teen and his family who have suffered from gun violence. The author presents well-developed, realistic characters who falter, fail, triumph, and experience grace. The book contains some profanity. (Dundurn Press)



## In a Far-Off Land

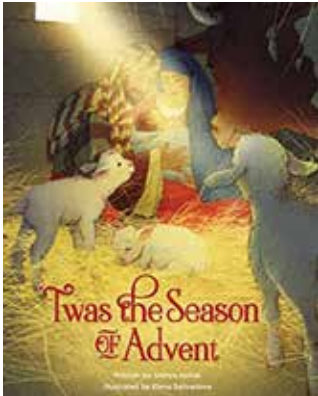
*By Stephanie Landsem*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Minerva Zimmerman has fled her home in the Midwest to make her way in Hollywood as the Great Depression wreaks havoc in people's lives. In the glamour of Hollywood's prospects and promises, Minerva—with her new name, Mina Sinclair—thinks she can outrun the past: her theft from Papa, her sister Penny's relentless criticisms, and the shame of what her boyfriend did to her.

Oscar, an American-born man of Mexican descent who doesn't have a birth certificate and is in danger of deportation, helps Mina, not realizing the web of danger, intrigue, and spiritual confusion and choices he is being drawn into.

Echoing Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, this complex, meaningful novel for adults probes the relationship between justice and mercy. (Tyndale House Publishers)



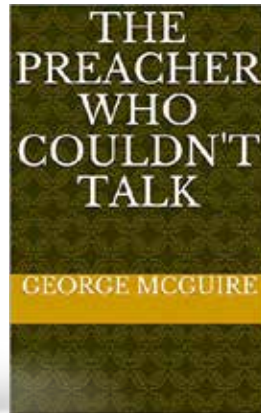
**'Twas the Season of Advent: Devotions and Stories for the Christmas Season**

*By Glenys Nellist, illustrated by Elena Selivanova*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In this children's Advent devotional, author Glenys Nellist replicates the familiar cadence of 'Twas the Night Before Christmas to relate the good news of Jesus Christ.

Each of the 25 devotions begins with a verse from Nellist's poem, setting the stage for the celebration of Advent. For Dec. 1: "'Twas the season of Advent, when all through the earth, / People were pausing to ponder Christ's birth. / The bright lights hung 'round the door frames with care / In hopes that Christmastime soon would be there." Scripture passages, an imaginative reflection on a participant in the biblical Christmas story, and a prayer round out each devotion. Illustrator Elena Selivanova's artwork masterfully contrasts light and darkness as she portrays the coming of Jesus, the light of the world. (ZonderKidz)



**The Preacher Who Couldn't Talk**

*By George McGuire*

Reviewed by Paul Delger

Pastor George McGuire writes about a lifetime illness as he encourages others who suffer from conditions that will not heal. He discusses his journey with epilepsy resulting from a childhood near-death experience with encephalitis. The epilepsy also caused stuttering, which caused one fellow pastor to deem McGuire unfit to preach. But throughout the bumps of his life, McGuire has admirably fulfilled his calling to preach. He served several Presbyterian Church in America congregations and finished his full-time ministry with a 12-year tenure at the Austinville (Iowa) Christian Reformed Church. He often mentions a bedrock verse: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). This 54-page book offers a look at a faithful man with a deep trust in the Lord. (CreativeSpace/Amazon)



**Jump at the Sun: The True Life Tale of Unstoppable Storycatcher Zora Neale Hurston**

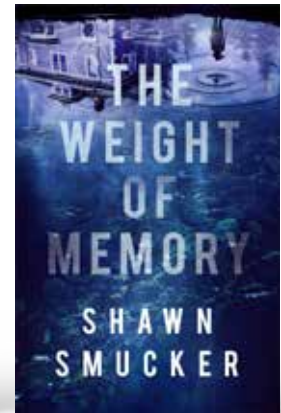
*By Alicia D. Williams, illustrated by Jacqueline Alcantara*

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Sprightly, jubilant, and "attracted to tales like mosquitoes to skin," a young Black girl named Zora grew up in Eatonville, "a place where magnolias smelled even prettier than they looked, oranges were as sweet as they were plump, and the people just plain ol' got along."

Author Alicia Williams's spirited, peppery narrative and illustrator Jacqueline Alcantara's playful, frisky artwork packed with the animal characters of many tall tales portray the ordinary—yet extraordinary—trajectory of Zora's life.

*Jump at the Sun* reveals the power a parent has to shape children's futures for their own good and the common good and rejoices in the life and work of classic author Zora Neale Hurston. (Atheneum Books for Young Readers)



**The Weight of Memory**

*By Shawn Smucker*

Reviewed by Cynthia Beach

Another of Shawn Smucker's fast-reading, throat-grabbing, genre-bending novels arrives, and it serves up Smucker's specialty: metaphysical fantasy. Beneath the natural thrums the supernatural. Shadows and forest seem alive.

Within this edgy universe, 58-year-old Paul Elias, a.k.a. "Grampy," has gotten bad news. The tumor bulging behind his ear will kill him. But what will become of Pearl, his precocious 11-year-old granddaughter? This question worries him, and it should. Paul has sole custody of Pearl.

The diagnosis funnels him to a decision: He'll return to Nysa, his hometown, and see if someone there, someone trusted, will take Pearl.

The faith conversation is implicit. The fantasy element lets Smucker suggest much indirectly, as light and dark symbolically do. I was hooked from the first line. (Revell)

## Are All People Children of God?

If those gospel stories show us anything about ourselves, it seems to be that we have a way of convincing ourselves that we deserve power, blessing, and a privileged identity.



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

**THE GOSPELS RECORD** several situations where “belonging” takes center stage.

Matthew tells how John the Baptist called out a group of Pharisees for their pride in being “children of Abraham.” It’s as if being Abraham’s descendants secured their sense of having a privileged identity that made them better than everyone (Matt. 3:8).

Mark, on the other hand, conveys a story about Jesus’ disciples reporting that they “saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us” (Mark 9:38). For those disciples, belonging to Jesus meant people outside their group shouldn’t have the same power they did.

In Luke 4, we hear how the people were in awe that Joseph’s son, one of their own, could preach so well. But then quickly they turned on Jesus when he suggested that people outside of Israel, such as the Syrian general, Naaman, in Elijah’s and Elisha’s times, could also receive God’s grace (Luke 4:14-29). They could not tolerate the suggestion that their enemies could deserve God’s blessings and provisions.

If those gospel stories show us anything about ourselves, it seems to be that we have a way of convincing ourselves that we deserve power, blessing, and a privileged identity because of our relationship with God. Even more so, we have a tendency to believe that those who don’t belong should not be permitted to have the same status we do.

The label of “children of God” can evoke a similar response today. The rationale goes something like this: If we are “children of God,” there must be other people who are not God’s children. But taking a closer look at the Bible’s use of this language shifts the conversation from status, power, and privilege to gift, calling, and responsibility.

According to Romans 9:8, our identity as God’s children is a result of God’s

promise, not our ethnic identity. John reinforces this perspective in his first letter when he writes, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:1). Over the next two chapters John draws connections between this lavish gift and our calling to love others because of God’s love for us.

Matthew’s telling of the Beatitudes includes Jesus’ assertion that peacemakers will be called “children of God,” an identity that reflects life lived in service of others rather than an identity that demands to be treated with privilege.

Moreover, Romans 8:14-21 ties our identity as God’s children to the Spirit’s leading and to our sharing in Christ’s sufferings on behalf of a creation that is in bondage to decay.

When we read the early confession of the church recorded in Philippians 2, we see how this vision for the life of God’s children is really an imitation of God’s one and only son, Jesus Christ,

who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil. 2:6-8).

While it is true that not all people are “children of God” in the way that Scripture uses that phrase, the light of these passages prompts us to ask additional questions. How will we guard against the temptation to use our identity as God’s children to our own advantage? How will we humble ourselves and become servants to others—even if it leads to our suffering—because of the love God has lavished on us in Jesus Christ? **B**



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

**Down**

- 2. 'Twas the Season of Advent presents 25 \_\_\_\_\_ for children
- 3. Our faith is not defined by the \_\_\_\_\_ parts
- 4. Where Window Rock CRC is
- 7. What Padma Lakshmi's character Neela likes to cook
- 9. The Kingdom \_\_\_\_\_ focuses on multiplying disciples and planting churches
- 10. An Ontario church's grief group released these
- 12. A boy from Gerewah, Sudan
- 14. A word almost, but not exactly, synonymous with "faith formation"

**Across**

- 1. The church is not this
- 4. Benjamin's \_\_\_\_\_ has an all-abilities church
- 5. A popular Chinese social media platform
- 8. In 1951, a family moving into this town was terrorized until they left
- 11. The official name for helicopter seeds
- 13. At a \_\_\_\_\_ refrigerator, people may take what they need and donate what they can
- 15. George McGuire writes about his journey with this
- 16. There are dangers to domesticating this
- 17. East Martin CRC's church bell was rung with these
- 18. Seafarer ministries are helping crews to access these

Answers to the October 2021 puzzle

# Great News!

A simple and tax-wise way to support CRC ministry.

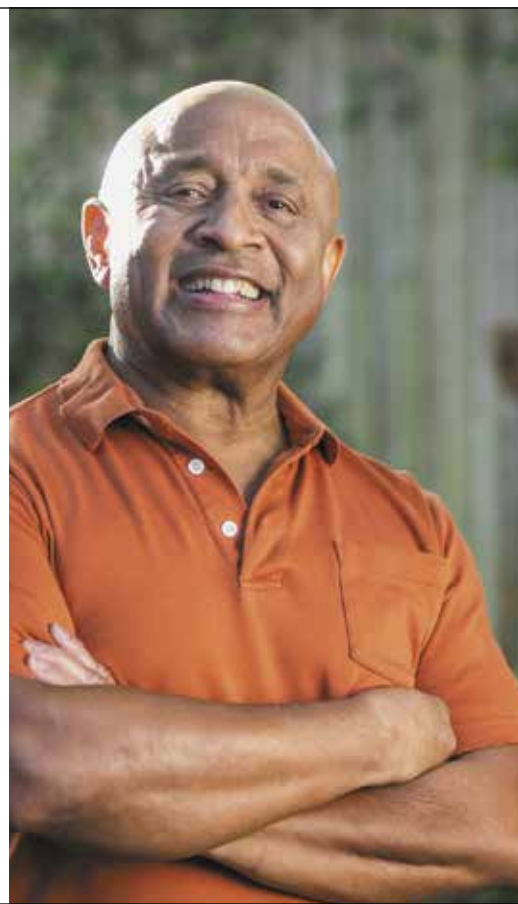
**Benefits to you . . .**

- It is an easy and tax-wise way to make a gift
- Charitable gifts from your IRA can fulfill your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)
- You benefit even if you don't itemize deductions on your tax returns since distributions made directly to the CRC and its ministries are not treated as taxable income
- IRA gifts can fulfill any charitable giving pledge you have already made

**IRA Charitable Gift conditions . . .**

- IRA holder must be age 70 1/2 or older
- Gifts must be made directly to a charity
- Gifts may be made from traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs
- You can give up to \$100,000 per year tax-free
- Your gift must be received before December 31 to qualify

Do you have questions about supporting the CRC ministries by giving from your IRA? We're here to help! Call 1-800-272-5125 or email [advancement@crcna.org](mailto:advancement@crcna.org)



**DEADLINES:** 11/1/21 December; 12/6/21 January. Subject to availability. Details online. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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**Announcement of Candidacy**

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

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

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

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

**Congregational Announcements**



**35TH ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION** was observed on October 10, 2021, of Pastor David A. Struyk who has served at Community CRC, Wyoming, MI all 35 years! His family and the church family thank God for his faithful years of ministry.

**WELCOME WINTER VISITORS** Maranatha church invites winter visitors to worship with us beginning Dec 5. We meet at 10 am in Farnsworth Hall, 6159 E University, Mesa, AZ 85205. Check us out on Facebook at Maranatha Community Church or call 206-595-9852 for more info.

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

**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](mailto:Search@hopefellowship.ca).

**IMMANUEL CRC WAPPINGERS FALLS, NY SEEKS LEAD PASTOR** to take our small dynamic congregation into the future. Please contact Mike Toth at [mi.toth@yahoo.com](mailto:mi.toth@yahoo.com) for our church profile and any further info.

**LEAD PASTOR** - Aylmer CRC is prayerfully seeking a Lead Pastor to join our ministry team. The Lead Pastor we are seeking would ideally be self-motivated, compassionate, devoted to providing engaging preaching, passionate about nurturing spiritual growth, and able to equip us for community outreach. If you would like to live and work in the beautiful, thriving town of Aylmer, Ontario, conveniently located near the shores of Lake Erie and close to larger urban centers, we would like to speak with you. Please contact Lisa at 519 520 1220 or email [bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com](mailto:bruceandlisavk@hotmail.com). Job description and church profile are available on the portal. Housing is available if needed.

**PASTOR** - Zuni CRC is seeking a pastor to lead us in worship, encourage us in our growth, and to be a part of our cross-cultural community. Contact: [tbecksvoort@zunichristianmission.org](mailto:tbecksvoort@zunichristianmission.org)

**SOLE PASTOR** Faith Presbyterian CRC of Guam is seeking a pastor for our multi-ethnic congregation. Desire a candidate with strong Bible-teaching skills and a heart for evangelism. Web: [www.faithchurchguam.org](http://www.faithchurchguam.org). Interested applicants may email [kvolsteadt@gmail.com](mailto:kvolsteadt@gmail.com) or [fprcguam@gmail.com](mailto:fprcguam@gmail.com) or call 1-671-734-7778.

**SENIOR PASTOR** Blythefield CRC in Rockford, MI is actively seeking a senior pastor. Please see our listing in the CRC Portal for details.

Seeking potential nominees for  
**General Secretary**  
of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

This is an opportunity to serve the church by

- shaping and embracing a culture of effective partnership and collaboration,
- encouraging shared mission within the CRCNA, and
- nurturing ecumenical relationships in keeping with synod's long-term vision for the denomination's mission in the world.

The nominee will exemplify a strong, vibrant Christian faith marked by humility and integrity. An ordained minister of the Word with deep respect for the polity, theology, history, and growing diversity of the CRCNA, he/she will draw from pastoral experience and advanced leadership training to guide the denomination forward, representing our mission both locally and globally.



For more information visit [crcna.org/GenSecSearch](http://crcna.org/GenSecSearch). Please direct all inquiries to the chair of the General Secretary Search Team, Rev. Meg Jenista, [GenSecSearch@crcna.org](mailto:GenSecSearch@crcna.org).

## Financial Aid

**CLASSIS HEARTLAND.** Students preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church from Classis Heartland may apply for aid to assist them in their study for the 2022-2023 academic year by contacting Rev. Loren Kotman; 1111 5th Street, Hull, IA 51239; (712) 439-1123; pastor@hull1stcr.com. The deadline is January 31, 2022.

## Birthday 90 Years

**LUKE SCHAAP** will celebrate his 90th birthday on November 11th. The family thanks God for blessing us with a wonderful father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Happy Birthday from children Paul and Lori Schaap, Ruth and Dave Dykstra, Jean and Rod Korthals, Mary and Brent Yurschak. "One generation will commend your works to another."

## Anniversary

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS

**VAN ESSEN,** The children of Rev Lester and Elaine (Last) Van Essen, David and Elena, Evonne and Rodney Ludema, John and Holly, Joel and Chris, Daryl and Anna, give thanks to God for the blessings and the love you have given to us as well as all those in Nigeria where you served for 20 years and all the congregation here at home. Give thanks to God with us. God has answered our many prayers. Greetings can be sent to 2829 Bridgeside Dr. Caledonia MI 49316 or 616-803-5221.

## Obituaries

**BRUMMEL,** Foster R, 91 of Big Rapids was called to his eternal home on Sept 14, 2021. A man of great faith, he loved his Bible studies and enjoyed teaching & preaching. Wife Clarine & oldest son preceded him in death. Survived by 3 children, 7 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, brother Corwin(Esther) & sister Donna(Marvin) Lemoore. We are thankful for his example of faith & service.

**OTTE,** Warren L. Otte went to rest in the loving arms of his Savior Jesus Christ on September 29, 2021. He will be dearly missed by his wife of 60 years, Marcia Otte; and his children, Cyndi and Tom Betts, Rick and Tammie Otte; his grandchildren, Josh Betts, Mitch and Brie Otte, Joel and Laura Betts, Tae and Justin Crow, Ryan and Alicia Betts, Jessa Otte, Dyllyn Otte, and Irvin (Bear) Burt; great grandchildren, Jayden, Juni, and two that will soon be born.

**STERENBERG,** Paul H., age 82, of Holland, MI, passed away Friday, September 3, 2021. Paul graduated from Holland Christian High School in 1957 and Calvin College in 1961. He was a former partner with Langeland-Sterenber and Yntema Funeral Homes and was a licensed funeral director for 58 years. He was a member of Bethany Christian Reformed Church in Holland. Paul is survived by his wife of 59 years, Connie (nee Gesink)

Sterenber; sons, John (Christy) Sterenberg, Paul C. (Amy) Sterenberg, Joel Sterenberg; grandchildren, Ellie (Josh) Von Borstel, Josh Sterenberg, Claire Sterenberg, Isaac Sterenberg, Levi Sterenberg, all of Holland; in-laws, Lois Tinklenberg of Zeeland, MI, Junior (Elinor) Gesink of Sheldon, IA. Funeral services were held on September 11, 2021. Burial was in Pilgrim Home Cemetery, Holland. Memorial contributions may be made to Holland Christian Schools and Hospice of Holland. Condolences may also be left online at [www.langeland-sterenberg.com](http://www.langeland-sterenberg.com).

## Calvin Symposium on Worship

January 31–February 4, 2022



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CALVIN INSTITUTE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN PREACHING

## STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

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

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13. Publication Name: The Banner; 14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: September 2021.

Each Issue During	Average No. Copies Single Issue Published Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Nearest to Filing Date
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation		
a. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	72,056	68,850
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation		
(1) Paid/Requested Outside-County Mail Subscriptions Stated on Form 3541	51,224	50,385
(2) Paid In-County Subscriptions	0	0
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution	15,817	15,961
(4) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	0	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation	67,041	66,346
d. Free Distribution by Mail		
(1) Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541	0	0
(2) In-County as Stated on Form 3541	0	0
(3) Other Classes Mailed Through the USPS	12	0
(4) Free Distribution Outside the Mail	0	0
e. Total Free Distribution	12	0
f. Total Distribution	67,053	66,346
g. Copies Not Distributed	5,004	2,504
h. Total	72,057	68,850
i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation	99.98%	100%

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

Jane E. Hilbrand, Operations Manager



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## FACULTY OPENINGS

We invite applications and nominations of qualified individuals for the following positions:

### History of Christianity

With duties in the PhD program  
Responsibilities to begin  
July 1, 2022

### Old Testament

Responsibilities to begin July 1, 2022

For more information and to submit applications or nominations, visit [calvinseminary.edu/about/employment](http://calvinseminary.edu/about/employment)

Applications submitted by **November 15, 2021** will receive preferred processing.

We also anticipate openings (full-time or adjunct or affiliate faculty) in the following areas or combinations: New Testament, Philosophical Theology, Preaching/Communication, Latino/na Ministry Program Leadership and would welcome applications and nominations for these positions as well.

We want faculty members who engage students, the church, and the wider culture through teaching, mentoring, preaching and scholarship.

We especially encourage applications from women and members of ethnic minority groups.

Tenure track faculty members are asked to be committed to the confessions and mission of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

**TOS**, Evelyn Helene (Dryfhout) went to be with our Lord on August 31, 2021. Lynn, as she liked to be called, graduated from Calvin College with a degree in elementary education. She was the widow of Tom Tos with whom she was married for 56 years and had three children. She is survived by her children Cheryl (Doug Elffers), Rod (Karen Jongsma), and Laura (Bastiaan DeJong), nine grandchildren, one great grandchild.

**VANDER KOOL**, Dr Ronald and Betty (Bemis) passed away in Denver, Colorado this year. Betty went to be with the Lord on May 17 and Ron followed on September 14. Throughout their 56 year marriage, they attended Grace CRC (Grand Rapids), Park Lane CRC (Evergreen Park, IL) and Hope Fellowship CRC (Denver, CO). Ron spent his career as a college professor (including at Calvin College) and social worker specializing in homelessness and alcoholism. Betty was a teacher and counselor. Ron and Betty dedicated their lives to helping the less fortunate. They are survived by their children Eric (Jennifer), Mark (Angie), and Lisa, as well as their five grandchildren. Memorial gifts can be made to Hope Fellowship CRC in Denver, CO.

**VELTMAN**, Paul Nelson, 76, of Grand Rapids MI died Sept. 21, 2021. He is survived by his wife Carol, son Scott (Deb) Veltman, daughter Christen Ridgeway; grandchildren Ashleigh (Jonathan) Tomlinson, Alex Veltman, Ciara Ridgeway, and Samantha Ridgeway along with sisters, Ruth Ruiter, Phyllis (Gerald) Wordhouse, and Mary (Mel) Rose.



**VIS**, Marvin A., age 97, WWII US Army Veteran. Beloved husband for 70 years to the late Pearl E. Vis, nee Bruinius (2017). Loving father of Sharon (Robert) Haas, Joan (William) Ooms and LuAnn Vis. Cherished grandfather of

Lisa Haas, Amy Rutledge, Marcia Ooms, Rachel (Jeremy) Oosterhouse and Laura (Kyle) Stewart. Dearest great-grandfather of Jonathan, Alex, Leah, Asher, and Madeline. Dear brother of the late Cornelia Vis and the late Annette (late Carl) Hulford. Fond brother-in-

law of Judith (late William) Meyer, LaVerne (John) Yff, Leonard (Patricia) Bruinius and the late William (late Ella) Bruinius. Dear uncle of many nieces and nephews and friend to many.

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## Finding a Place to Call My 'Church Home'

For many years,  
I've tried to  
fit into other  
congregations,  
looking to serve as  
well as be served.



CRC Regional Disability Advocate Elizabeth Schultz belongs to the Church of Benjamin's Hope in Holland, Mich. She is a Distinguished Toastmaster and teaches group home aides how to treat people with disabilities. Find her online at [tinyurl.com/5f65web6](http://tinyurl.com/5f65web6).

**AS SOMEONE** with a physical disability who's been in the church since college, I never thought I'd join an all-abilities church—one where, no matter one's disability, every person is included fully.

In Holland, Mich., that's the Church of Benjamin's Hope.

Until two years ago I was doing mental gymnastics. I was haughty; I placed myself above people with intellectual disabilities and emotional disabilities. Until recently I thought of Ben's Hope as for people whose outbursts are considered disruptive in other churches. I now understand those outbursts differently. I've grown to appreciate and understand and relish how my fellow congregants praise God, audibly and in physical activity, and I have heard God's voice in the men and women there.

My heart breaks for each one of them who couldn't find a place in any other church. I have had a taste of what they must go through.

For many years, I've tried to fit into other congregations, looking to serve as well as be served. I have cerebral palsy, which affects my movement and speech. That hasn't been a barrier to me having a part-time job teaching and being involved in Toastmasters International. But recently, in a typical congregation, my speech became a barrier. Some people find my speech difficult to understand. I was no longer allowed to read Scripture or lead prayer in front of the congregation.

This was a big letdown because in so many ways I have to be a taker because of the care I need to live. Every Christian is called to give of their talents, and mine are my writing, my teaching, and my voice.

I have found solace at Ben's Hope, a place where my speech is never an issue and I'm free to be me—disability and all! The fight is over. I have found my home. I wish the same for every person with a disability, whether in a mainstream church or an all-abilities one. It's a shame that for someone with a disability finding a church congregation is this hard. Jesus said, "Let the children come to me!" (Mark 10:14, CEV). If the church doesn't start accepting people with disabilities or founding more all-abilities congregations, we are lacking in our mission. This is why I'm excited that in October City Hope, another all-abilities congregation associated with the Christian Reformed Church, opened in Grand Rapids, Mich. All are welcome, all are served, and all serve. 

# (no) accidents

there are  
no accidents  
you said

compacted metal  
tilted glass  
life poured

a prism of leaves drift in cool air  
whirling dervishes on their way down

there are  
no accidents  
you repeat

guilty hands  
lightning lips  
clipped memory

driving rain stings bare backs  
innocent drops bring the flood

there are  
no accidents  
i wonder  
cells multiply  
scissors cut  
names elude

watery paint seeps beyond boundaries  
infected plans molt: a beauty unfamiliar

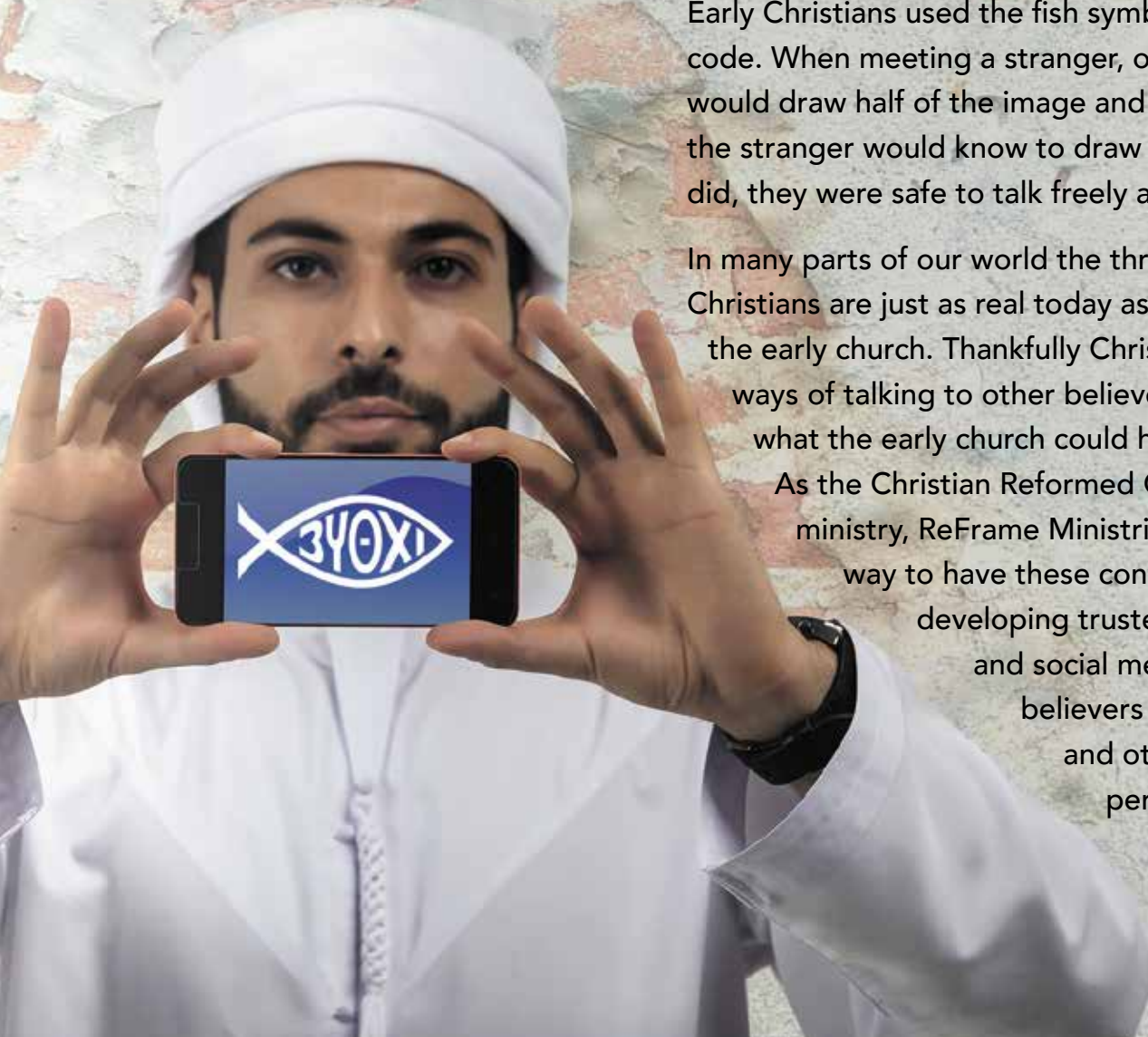
there will be  
no accidents  
i plead  
avarice will wilt  
blood will clean  
cracks will fill with gold

Ⓟ



Susan Van Geest is an artist and teacher living in the Twin Cities, Minn., where she moved after teaching studio art at Dordt University for eight years. She attends Faith Christian Reformed Church in New Brighton, Minn.

# Safe Gospel Conversations

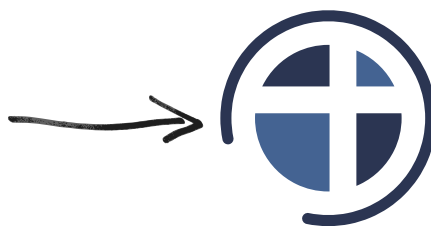


Early Christians used the fish symbol as a secret code. When meeting a stranger, one Christian would draw half of the image and wait to see if the stranger would know to draw the other. If they did, they were safe to talk freely about Jesus.

In many parts of our world the threats to Christians are just as real today as they were for the early church. Thankfully Christians today have ways of talking to other believers far beyond what the early church could have imagined.

As the Christian Reformed Church's media ministry, ReFrame Ministries offers a safe way to have these conversations—developing trusted websites and social media pages for believers in China, Egypt, and other places where persecution occurs.

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



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

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**GIFT**...

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...She gets to  
**CHANGE**  
the **WORLD**

**NOOR\***  
Rohingya Refugee  
Bangladesh

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