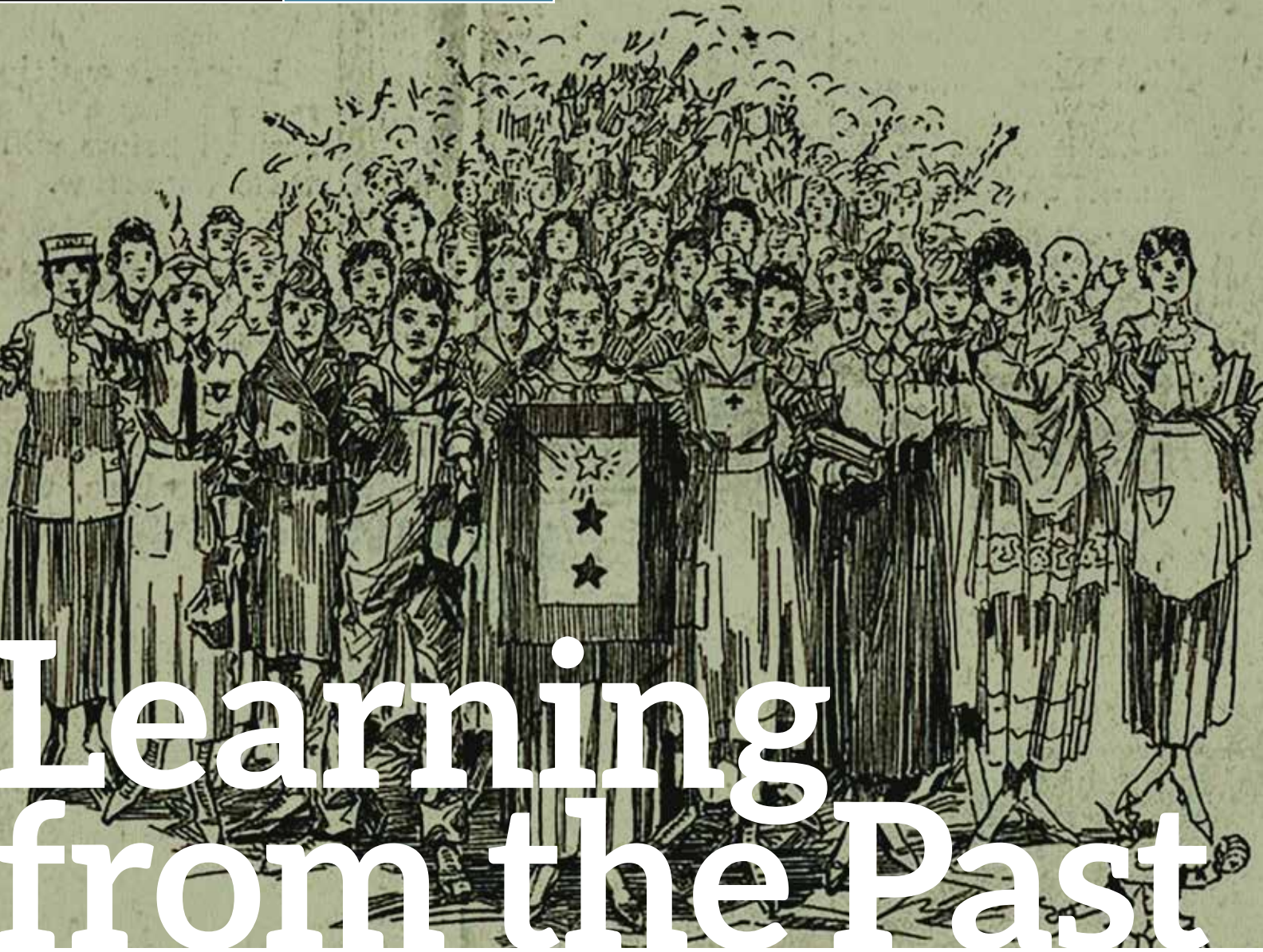


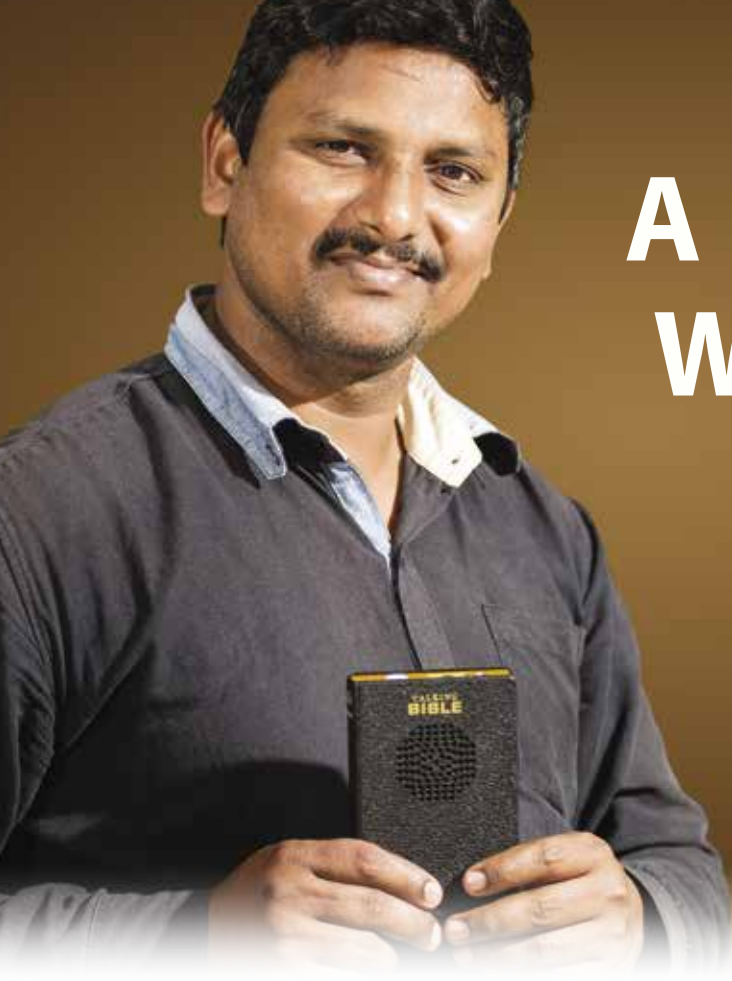
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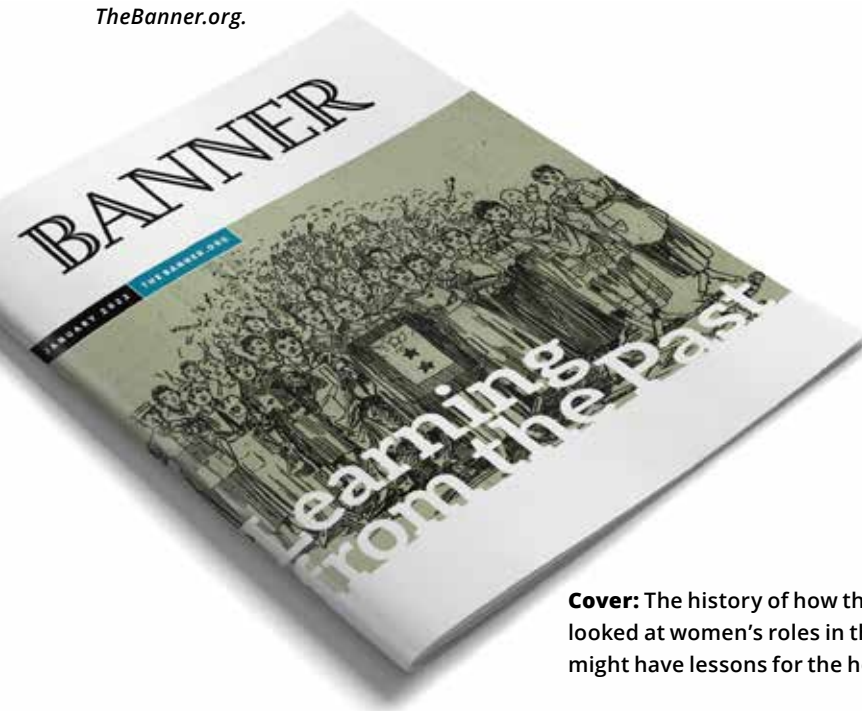
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BY THE NUMBERS

Timeline of the CRC in Canada

- » 1926 Synod designates Canada a foreign mission field for the CRC.
- » 1934 Synod assigns the few Canadian congregations to U.S. classes.
- » 1950 Classis Ontario becomes the first Canadian classis in the CRC.
- » 1966/67 Synod approves establishing the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada.
- » 1980 Canadian ministry office opens.
- » 1997 Canadian Ministries Board replaces CCRCC.
- » 2000 Binational board of trustees created.
- » 2011 A task force is appointed to study structure and culture in the CRC.
- » 2017 Council of Delegates replaces the Board of Trustees.
- » 2020 Concerns about Canadian tax compliance prompt a structure reboot
- » 2021 Evolving plan recommended: unified structure, with distinct Canadian Office and expanded joint ministry agreements.

For a more in-depth timeline and look at the history of the CRC in Canada, read "The CRC in Canada: A Field Guide," at TheBanner.org.



Cover: The history of how the CRCNA has looked at women's roles in the church might have lessons for the here and now.

WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: Minnesota Church Grateful for a Kitchen Reno That Impacts the Community
- » Book: *You Are Enough: A Book About Inclusion*, by Margaret O'Hair and Sofia Sanchez
- » Movie: *Dune*
- » Music: *Recognition*, by Carolyn Arends

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BANNER

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Sin No More

We as fellow sinners are not entitled to tell other sinners to stop sinning without first demonstrating genuine love and compassion for them.



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

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

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

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

“GO SIN NO MORE.” Jesus’ parting words to the woman caught in adultery in John 8:11 are often quoted. Whenever the topic of homosexuality comes up, *The Banner’s* Facebook page lights up with comments as readers debate one another. The arguments tend to fall into well-worn patterns. One side will argue for compassion and justice for Christians who are LGBTQ+, but it can feel as if they don’t want to discuss sin. The other side will often counter with Jesus’ words—“sin no more”—to show that Christian love cannot tolerate sin. I find that Scripture holds both points together in tension.

Our denomination’s official position is that homosexual orientation itself is not sinful, but “explicit homosexual practices” are. Hence Christians who identify as LGBTQ+ are welcome and may even become officebearers in the church. However, engaging in homosexual activity, as is acting on any temptation, is off limits. This editorial is about our pastoral posture, not our theological position.

It disturbs me that many quote Jesus’ “sin no more” as the first and final word on the matter. In the story being referenced, before asking the woman to stop sinning, Jesus first told her, “Neither do I condemn you.” We cannot cherry-pick one half of that verse and ignore the other half. We need both non-condemnation and encouragement to sin no more.

Furthermore, Jesus’ actions spoke even louder. Jesus first saved the woman’s life. The Pharisees wanted to uphold Scripture’s command to discipline sin—the adulteress was to be stoned to death. It would have been easy for Jesus to protect his spiritual reputation and simply obey Scripture and stone the woman, a stranger to him. Instead, Jesus chose the harder path. Risking the mob’s anger, he

chose to point out their hypocrisy: “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). Then, when everyone has left them alone, Jesus still chose not to condemn her. Now, nowhere does it say that she was innocent. She was guilty of adultery, but Jesus still chose not to condemn her and showed her grace. Jesus’ non-condemnation was not mere lip service. He demonstrated his compassion and grace by saving her life. In this context of genuine love, the woman received Jesus’ words of “sin no more” as words of grace to her.

When the first words used against sinners are “sin no more,” they become words of judgment and condemnation, not grace. We as fellow sinners are not entitled to tell other sinners to stop sinning without first demonstrating genuine love and compassion for them. To do so would be imitating the Pharisees’ spiritual hypocrisy. Only in the context of genuine mercy and love, demonstrated in acts of kindness, will the conversation of repenting from sin become words of grace and not self-righteous condemnation. Not talking about sin at all, as it seems of the affirming side, also distorts Christian discipleship.

I admit I struggle with the homosexuality debate, not least due to its polarizing tone. But I do know, theological positions aside, how we should pastorally walk with people in their faith journeys. It’s not easy, but it’s necessary. **B**



REPLY ALL

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

Domesticating Scripture

Spot on! Chong's November editorial ("Signs of Domesticating Scripture," November 2021) describes a very real danger today. I've seen too much of it these past pandemic months. Too many well-meaning Christians are hijacking Scripture texts for their own rationale. The three indicators were very helpful, and I will be sharing these thoughts inside and outside the church. I once heard from John Piper that the sword is our one offensive weapon (Eph. 6:17), but we can't draw that sword from someone else's scabbard.

» Pete Byma // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Support for OSJ

How encouraging and moving to read of the support that streamed into the CRCNA's Office of Social Justice in response to the reports of bullying and harassment the staff had experienced. It was light in what can be dark times lately, and redemptive after the sadness of learning of this behavior, which is heart-breaking in society and heart-wrenching within the body of Christ. Thank you to all who acted, showing their loving support, and to *The Banner* for sharing that good news.

» Beth Buteyn Van Hoever //
Minneapolis, Minn.

Interfaith Dialogue

Melissa, thank you for being vulnerable ("What I Learned from Hosting Interfaith Dialogue," November 2021)! It's a risky thing to raise the idea that maybe we don't really know what we believe, at least in 2021 language and concepts. Having a bunch of religious data and spiritual clichés in our heads is more comfortable than stretching ourselves to find the language to speak with others about the life-giving and transforming grace of Jesus that has grabbed us by the scruff of the neck. I hope and pray we as a community learn to do this better together!

» Michael Wagenman // online comment

Mixed Media

I have never commented on articles I have read in *The Banner*, but one book review in the Mixed Media section of the November 2021 magazine left me feeling uncomfortable. In the review for *Jump at the Sun*, a book by Alicia D. Williams, the reviewer noted that the main character was a young Black girl. As I continued to read the review, I found nothing about the character's experiences hinged on her skin color. I checked the other books that were reviewed, and none of them mentioned the skin color of the characters. I'm left wondering if the white skin is viewed as normative. I hope that in the future, racial differences will not be called out without a good reason, and we can just enjoy reading a book about a jubilant little girl.

» Kristi Schaaf Zhou // Holland, Mich.

The CRC in Canada

This is an interesting and well-done summary ("The CRC in Canada: A Field Guide," online). I served with pleasure on the Back to God Ministries International board from 2006 to 2013. Canadians and Americans were close to equally represented. I do not remember one negative issue arising from what we were doing. I was overall board treasurer and on the Canadian board as well. The director reported to the executive director, who reported to a 10-member board of trustees. The five other major boards had the same setup, with Canadians in their ranks. (The summary makes no mention of Canadians in that context.)

» Harry Boessenkool // online comment

What an incredible waste of time, energy, and money this has been over many years. It's simply time we go it alone in Canada. Then we can make our own decisions and decide what we can or cannot participate in with our American brothers and sisters. I am not suggesting throwing the baby out with the bathwater, just deciding our own administrative direction and ministry. Many Christian charities have had to go their own way in the last number of decades. Nothing new here. Enough of the immense struggle to be heard and understood. Our binational structure does not work. That should be crystal clear to any reader by now. ... Thank you, Gayla (Postma), for your work on the timeline.

» Henry Lunshof // online comment

Prisoners' Mental Health

I'd like to respond to Jake Terpstra's article, "Mistakes Can Be Corrected," in the October 2021 issue of *The Banner*. First of all, Mr. Terpstra is spot on in his assessment of mental illness in the prison system, especially in the state of Michigan, but the article needs more context. ... Deinstitutionalization was done in the early 1970s for financial savings. It was not about the people but about the money. But it was not properly vetted as to the long-range consequences. So here we are today, and more psych beds can help to "correct the mistake."

» Carol Vandelin // Grandville, Mich.

READ MORE ONLINE



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

- » At the Feet of Jesus: "There is something about our nature that hinders us from understanding."
- » What Will Our Legacies Be?: "One of my friends reflected: at the end of our lives, what relationship will we have with our kids and others?"
- » Can Somebody Please Turn On the Light?: "I want this article to focus on the positive, since focusing on the positive can improve a person's perspective."

Dwelling on the Suffering of Jesus

I SPENT THE FIRST 12 YEARS of my life in the Netherlands. It was the custom in the *Gereformeerde* (Reformed) churches that six weeks before Good Friday, ministers would preach about the passages dealing with Jesus' suffering. Coming to Canada I experienced the same practice. It brought the suffering of Jesus more prominently into our awareness.

During my entire ministry, I have followed the same practice. There is so much in the gospels about Christ's suffering. One of the books that I got a hold of early in my ministry was by the late Klaas Schilder. It is a sizable trilogy (translated from the Dutch) on Christ's suffering, titled "Christ in His Suffering," "Christ on Trial," and "Christ Crucified." It has an incredible wealth of material. These volumes are written in the solidly and historically Reformed redemptive form of which Schilder was a great proponent. It is also very exegetical, dealing with the terminology of the immediate text.

I still preach a fair bit. During Passion weeks I might speak about the title given to Jesus on the cross, or Christ's disrobement, or Pilate's wife's dream, or Pilate's "What is truth?" question, or Christ evaluated, or Christ before Herod, Israel before Esau, or Judas buying the potter's field. This is all incredibly rich in terms of the gospel of Golgotha or Calvary leading up to Easter.


For years I have found an impoverishment of this kind of preaching on Jesus' suffering. Interestingly, we often talk of Lent, the 40 days of fasting and penitence from Ash Wednesday until Easter, in terms of our own behavior. The word "Passion" makes more sense, as it refers to the sufferings of Jesus. Whatever I give up does not compare to what Christ gave up.

In the early New Testament church there was an emphasis on confession, self-examination, and later on fasting prior

Whatever I give up
does not compare to
what Christ gave up.

to Good Friday and Easter. Penitence is always necessary in the Christian life.

At the time of the Reformation the focus of the weeks before Easter shifted to preaching about Jesus' suffering and death, the dying of Jesus leading up to the resurrection. Among the various characters in the Passion story, Jesus, the Lamb of God, must always be central. His substitutionary suffering is such a comfort and encouragement for Christians. Every detail of the Passion story has meaning and has to come out, whether in the Palm Sunday donkey, the crowing rooster, or the stranger from Cyrene. Trying to live into the immense suffering of Jesus for six Sundays can only deepen our love for our Lords' unimaginable sacrifice.

Thousand, thousand thanks are due,
dearest Jesus, unto you. 



Ralph Koops is a retired Christian Reformed minister who still preaches quite regularly. He and his wife are members of Hope CRC in Brantford, Ont.



Let's Get Serious About Forgiveness

By Amanda W. Benckhuysen

Sylvia had been working as the administrative assistant at the church for three years when the new pastor came up behind her, pressed his body against hers, and began groping her breast. She was horrified, ashamed, and embarrassed. Still, she decided to report the incident to the chair of council, who said he would handle it. Sylvia started to hate going to work—it didn't feel safe anymore—and she did everything she could to avoid being alone with the new pastor. A month later, she still hadn't heard anything from the chair of council. When she approached him again, he said he had talked to the pastor, who had assured him that it was no big deal, that he had accidentally brushed up against her, and that Sylvia was overreacting. The chair of council indicated that he didn't think it would be a problem again and that she should let it go. Forgive and forget.

Roland grew up in an emotionally abusive home. His father was frequently gone and his mother was overwhelmed and stressed by the challenge of raising three boys almost single-handedly. Unfortunately, as the oldest, Roland bore the brunt of much

of his mother's stress. She frequently belittled him, making him feel like he wasn't good enough, that she was ashamed of him, that he was the son she never wanted. The scars of his childhood continued to affect him long into his adult life. He struggled with low self-esteem, depression, anger management, and self-destructive tendencies. His siblings told him he needed to forgive their mom for the sake of the family and for his own sake. Mom was never going to acknowledge her wrongdoing, so it was up to him to make peace in the family.

In some ways, the impulse seems so right. After all, forgiveness is an integral part of Christian discipleship. Just as God in Christ freely forgave us, so we are to forgive others. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he was to forgive someone who had sinned against him, Jesus said, "Not seven times, but 77 times" (Matt. 18:21-22). If we take Jesus' comment about forgiveness seriously, we will readily forgive those who have wronged us.

But while this is true, I wonder if to forgive and forget, to keep the peace, or to put up with wrongdoing are really what Jesus had in mind when he talked about forgiveness. Have we

traded in the rich, biblical concept of forgiveness for an impoverished imitation, one that relieves the wrongdoer of responsibility for their actions and increases the harm and injustice to the one wronged?

The Process

A brief look at Matthew 18 and the larger context of Jesus' response to Peter might provide some help here. Immediately preceding this conversation about forgiveness is the well-known passage about how to deal with someone in the community who sins against you. The person who has been wronged is to go to the wrongdoer and point out their sin. If the wrongdoer will not listen, the wronged person brings several others to be witnesses. If the wrongdoer still refuses to listen, the wronged person tells the church leaders, who are then responsible for looking into the matter and calling the wrongdoer to repentance. If the wrongdoer still isn't repentant, the church is to treat them like someone who does not know Jesus and who needs to be called to faith.

The conversation between Jesus and Peter about forgiveness follows these instructions about confronting a

wrongdoer. The assumption is that the above-mentioned process has been followed, that the wrongdoer has been called to repentance by various persons and leaders within the larger community who stand in solidarity with the person who was wronged, and that the wrongdoer has repented.

Throughout Scripture, but especially here, forgiveness is depicted not as a response to sin, but as a response to repentance (Luke 17:3-4). When sin has ripped apart a relationship, repentance and taking responsibility for the harm done is the mechanism for repairing the breach. Forgiveness follows, signaling that the person who has been wronged accepts the wrongdoer's contrition and determines that the offense will no longer control the nature of the relationship. The aim of repentance and forgiveness is to set the wrongdoer on a journey toward reconciliation with the person who has been wronged and with the community as a whole.

Forgiving Is Not Forgetting

While this mutual work of repenting and forgiving goes a long way to bring healing to broken relationships, it is important to note that even with repentance, forgiveness is not a cure-all that erases the impact of the wrongdoing. Forgiveness, for instance, does not undo the wounds or scars caused by the wrongdoing. Forgiving is not forgetting. In fact, depending on the level of trauma and harm experienced, the wrongdoing might continue to impact a person's physical, emotional, and mental well-being in profound and unpredictable ways. Healing takes time—sometimes a lifetime. And while holding the wrongdoer accountable for their actions goes a long way to contributing to the healing of the one wronged, the ongoing effects of the harm might remain.

Furthermore, forgiveness does not restore trust between the two parties. For trust to be restored, the person who has been wronged must have a reasonable belief that they won't

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he talked about
forgiveness.


be harmed again. This is a journey that will take time and evidence of changed behavior on the part of the wrongdoer.

Repentance and Reconciliation

And finally, forgiveness without repentance cannot bring reconciliation. When the wrongdoer refuses to acknowledge the harm they have done, the person who has been wronged might work to let go of their bitterness and anger by giving up to God the right to justice and/or the desire for vengeance. This can be a way for the person who has been wronged to release the negative emotions that simmer in their heart and mind and bring further harm. But this isn't the same as reconciliation. For true reconciliation to happen, repentance is required.

Forgiveness is an important spiritual discipline of the Christian faith. As people who have received forgiveness in Jesus Christ, forgiving and reconciling with others is an expression of our reconciliation with God and a tangible manifestation of the healing that comes as we die to our broken selves and rise to new life in Christ.

But taking responsibility and seeking forgiveness when we have wronged someone is also an important spiritual discipline and a reflection of our reconciliation with God. As we experience peace with God, we desire to be forgiven by those we have wronged or hurt and seek to take responsibility to restore peace with them, to be bearers of shalom.

Perhaps as a Christian community, the issue is not that we take forgiveness too seriously, but that we haven't taken it seriously enough. Getting serious about forgiveness means not only encouraging people to forgive those who have brought them harm, but urging all of us to desire forgiveness more deeply, to long for reconciliation with others, to actively pursue a right relationship with those whom we have wronged. For through our desire for forgiveness, we open ourselves up more fully to the redemptive and reconciling work of Jesus Christ. 



Amanda W. Benckhuysen serves as the director of Safe Church Ministry for the Christian Reformed Church and attends Kelloggsville Church in Kentwood, Michigan. She is the author of *The Gospel According to Eve* (IVP, 2019) and *Immigrants, the Bible, and You* (Calvin Press, 2020).

1. What stories of forgiveness, real or fictional, do you cherish as being profound?
2. How have you understood Matthew 18:15-20, the passage concerning one who "sins against you"? How does the article's treatment of this passage with the context of Peter's conversation with Jesus (vs. 21-35) shed new light on both of these passages?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

BIG QUESTIONS

Missional Living

What is a microchurch, and is it a good or bad development?

A microchurch is a local community of God's people seeking to love God and its neighbors by participating in God's mission in a simple and relational way in its context. In other words, it's the church in micro form! Microchurches find their purpose and identity in being God's sent ones. That missional grounding shapes their worship, discipleship, and life together in their neighborhoods. They usually meet in one another's homes, often sharing a meal in the context of their worship gathering (though during COVID, many have had to adapt to online gatherings). Leadership is circular rather than triangular, and the integrity, posture, and accountability of the primary facilitators is critical for the healthy formation of the community.

As a missional community, microchurch members commit to postures and practices in their ordinary, everyday lives that help them discern and participate in God's mission right where they live. This more intimate and informal context creates space for authentic relationships, personal and communal spiritual growth, organic contextual engagement, and intentional daily missional living, all of which—especially during COVID—are often more difficult in larger congregational settings.

So is this a good or bad development, you ask? In a culture that is increasingly disillusioned with and suspicious of institutional systems and structures (including the church), microchurches seem to be a safe and inviting alternative for those who are curious about the Christian faith. They also address the deep longing for community and



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

connection that is so prevalent today, particularly in our Western contexts. The truth is, we don't want to be socially isolated! Of course, as in all communities, the integrity and posture of the leaders is critical.

While recent studies reveal that some people won't come back to church post-pandemic, and that the consequences of this decline in congregational life might be fatal, initiatives like microchurches remind and reassure us that God is still at work in the world and in us, his people. Microchurches and other ancient/modern expressions of God's people on God's mission invite us to trust the Spirit, recognize signs of God at work in unexpected ways and places, and discover how we might also participate in the "new thing" the Spirit is doing (Isa. 43:19).

What might it look like for you to initiate, become involved in, or support a microchurch in 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.

Relationships

How do we safeguard the children in our churches from sexual predators?

There are several layers inherent in your question. The first layer has to

do with sexual predators themselves. It is important to realize that predators do not have a mental illness or an innate "condition" they cannot address adequately. Sexual predators are struggling with (or indulging) an addictive need to fulfill sexual urges toward children or teens. Like any other addiction, the only "cure" is for the addicted person to acknowledge they have a problem, seek help in order to counteract the damage caused by the addiction, and resolve to practice strict abstinence with the help of counselors and/or by joining a sexual addiction support group similar to Alcoholics Anonymous.

A sexual predator has much to lose if found to be indulging their addiction, so predators outwardly act and look the same as anyone else. They can be successful, charming neighbors and friends with successful careers. However, predators will seek volunteer or job opportunities that will allow for access to children or teens for self-gratification.

Because predators are able to blend in successfully as part of church communities, churches must do everything in their power to minimize the danger to children and teens. Therefore the second layer of your question is the responsibility of each church to achieve as much safety as possible through well-crafted sexual abuse prevention and response policies.

For help with their part, churches can contact the Christian Reformed denomination's Safe Church Ministry.

Ideally, both the sexually addicted person and the church will take responsibility for each layer that together will ensure maximum safety of the church's children and teens.

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

Ethics

What is a Reformed perspective on whether or not to wear a face mask or receive the COVID-19 vaccine?

There's no single Reformed perspective on these COVID-19 questions, which have become quite polarizing. There are, however, some important guiding Reformed principles that could lead us to more convergence.

Deeply embedded in Reformed thinking is the importance of the common good. We see this in the way John Calvin begins his interpretation of the sixth commandment ("You shall not kill"). Calvin proclaims that God has bound all humanity together in unity such that each person ought to be concerned with the "safety of all." The positive concern for the well-being of all is the reason for the negative command against killing. And that positive concern is the deeper meaning and force of the commandment: we as individuals are called to contribute to the well-being of the broader community, including our shared cultural and economic life together.

How does this bear on masks and vaccines? I'll be the first to say that wearing a mask isn't particularly fun, especially in school. But unless someone has a specific health condition that makes mask-wearing actually hazardous, it is a minimal price to

pay to contribute to the well-being of all and to the possibility of a vibrant cultural and economic life together, including education.

Similar reasoning supports the choice to receive a COVID-19 vaccine. It gives the individual significantly elevated protection against the disease. But just as important is the way in which vaccination contributes to public health—the common good. It protects others and contributes to the safety of all.

Jesus summarized the core of the biblical law as the obligation to love God and to love our neighbors (including our enemy). In the midst of a pandemic that has killed millions of people worldwide and could continue to mutate the longer opportunity it has to spread, wearing a mask and receiving a vaccine are concrete ways to show love for our neighbors.

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 CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Faith Formation

A family with a son with special needs has begun attending our church. How do we help make our programs good for this family?

We're very glad that you are thinking about this child and his family. According to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly 7 million children in the U.S. are identified in their schools as having a disability. There are lots of labels, though, to describe these disabilities, ranging from physical impairments to emotional challenges or cognitive disabilities. But every child is also a unique child of God, even if they share a common educational label.

Vanderbilt University educator Erik Carter points out that there are two things all these children have in common, though. They often experience significant barriers to meaningful participation in activities and relationships in a variety of settings, including in churches. And, like all of us, they have a need to belong. He urges churches to help move these children from being merely present to being welcomed, accepted, supported, cared for, and loved.

Talk to the parents about the best ways to make coming to church on Sundays a good experience for everyone in the family. Special accommodations such as having a helper with the child, offering special worship materials, or providing time for them to adjust to a new setting might be indicated.

Also, be aware that other members of the family might need support as well. Finding ways to allow the parents to have some time in worship while their children are receiving good care can be a real blessing to them.

Finally, the body of Christ and our churches are not complete without our brothers and sisters in Christ who have disabilities. Their presence with us blesses us in ways we might not be aware of in the short term. Rejoice that this family has found your church to be a welcoming place.

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



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

President of the CRC in Cuba Visits American Churches

NEWS

For more news and longer stories about the churches and ministries of the Christian Reformed Church, visit TheBanner.org. Or get the free app by searching for “CRCNA Banner” in your app store.

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The president of the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba, Pastor Yordanys Diaz, visited several Christian Reformed congregations in the United States in September 2021. He shared how the Cuban church has been able to not just survive, but grow in challenging circumstances.

Diaz visited congregations in Michigan and Minnesota, the denominational office in Grand Rapids, Mich., Calvin University, Calvin Theological Seminary, and several Christian schools in the Grand Rapids area.

Diaz oversees 35 congregations throughout Cuba with a total of about 1,500 members. He said the church reaches about 3,000 people overall throughout the country.

In addition to trying to build up the church in a country that has sought to control religious expression, Diaz has faced the additional challenge of trying to serve churches and their members

during the COVID-19 pandemic. But he and the pastors that serve those congregations have found ways to connect with the people they serve.

“The church work goes beyond our doors,” Diaz said during a Sept. 22 talk at Hillside Christian Reformed Church in Kentwood, Mich., speaking in Spanish with English interpretation.

Diaz became the president of the CRC in Cuba two years ago, and almost immediately the church and its members faced serious challenges.

“There was a huge lack of everything,” he said. “Food and supplies disappeared, and on top of that, they welcomed COVID. The big challenge was how to be the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba in the middle of everything that was going on.”

During the pandemic the government shut down churches for in-person worship; only recently were they allowed to reopen. But the congregations persevered.

“They developed a human network,” Diaz said. “They will print up a bulletin with readings, with liturgy. They print it out and send it to the churches, and then between pastors and leaders every week, they go to each home and they bring that bulletin (to the people). That’s how they keep working as a church.”

“Even in older houses where they brought the bulletin, members (would say), ‘Don’t forget my tithes and offerings.’ They went to the beginnings of the primitive church: churches in the house.”

As a result of outreach to members, neighbors of church members started asking for copies of the weekly bulletins.

“We think because of that, a lot of people (started) coming to the churches when they reopened,” Diaz said.

With the help of offerings from churches in the U.S. and Canada, the CRC in Cuba has been able to purchase food and medical supplies to serve people in need.

“The Christian Reformed Church in Cuba, in every area, is being marked and influenced by the prayers, by the encouragement, and by the offerings of the church here in North America,” Diaz said.

Even in the challenges he faces, Diaz remains steadfast and positive about the future of the CRC in Cuba. He will continue to advocate for increased religious freedom for the Cuban people.

“God has shown us that nothing against the church will prevail,” he said. “That’s one of the biggest challenges right now: to keep going as a church for the glory of God.”

—Greg Chandler

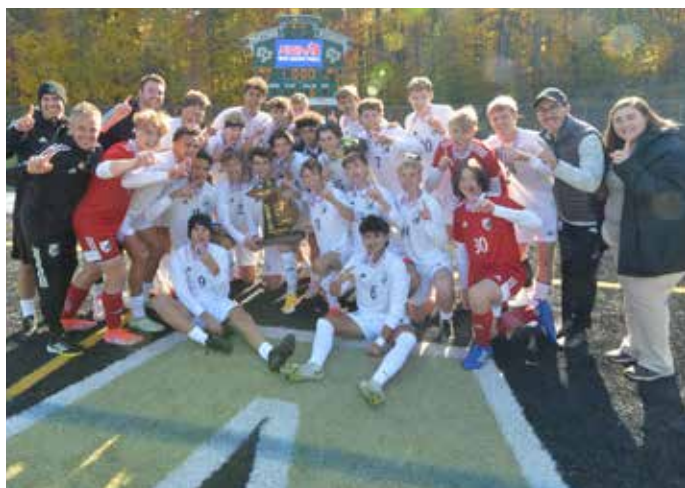


Photo by Greg Chandler

Pastor Yordanys Diaz (left) speaks at Hillside CRC in Kentwood, Mich. Jonathan Gonzalez translated for English speakers in the audience.

Noteworthy

Four Christian schools with connections to Christian Reformed communities in Ontario and Michigan celebrated provincial and state championship wins in 2021.



Michigan High School Athletic Association

Grand Rapids Christian High School won the Division 2 title in boys soccer, their first championship victory in 20 years.



OFSSA

Smithville (Ont.) Christian High School earned gold in the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations Girls A Basketball tournament in November.



Michigan High School Athletic Association

South Christian High School in Byron Center, Mich., won the Division 3 title in boys soccer, closing out an undefeated season.



Holland (Mich.) Christian High School's UnifiedSports soccer team won the Michigan Unified state tournament in October.

The team of student athletes with intellectual disabilities who play with typically developing partner athletes will play in the 2022 Special Olympics USA Games in Florida in June.

Indiana Youth Ministry Bridges Racial Divide with Local Church

When BJ Magley, cofounder of Heroes Camp in Mishawaka, Ind., was looking for a partner in a mentoring program for girls, she approached Church of the Savior Christian Reformed Church in South Bend, Ind.

Its pastor, Chris Rea, said the congregation is being led into “a listening and learning experience” of mentorship and relying on Magley’s leadership.

Magley and her husband, Pat, started Heroes Camp 31 years ago to give boys without involved fathers a place to play basketball, create music, get a good meal, and be challenged spiritually. Magley’s dream of a new kitchen and cooking school have recently been realized as well. Church of the Savior, less than a mile away, has provided prayer and financial support since 2009.

After years of building a trusting, open relationship, Magley approached Rea about extending Heroes Camp’s benefits to girls. Her vision for BJ Magley’s Modern School of Etiquette for Girls and Young Women is to reach at-risk girls from single-parent homes, whom she had seen fall into unhealthy and self-defeating lifestyles of hopelessness.

Rea recalls that when Magley approached her, it was due to “concern for at-risk girls, but also for racial reconciliation, ... for young women of color and white women to interact when they are too often segregated from one another.” Heroes Camp primarily serves minority populations, while Church of the Savior is predominantly white.

Magley’s request was an answer to prayer for Church of the Savior, whose leadership had been asking the Holy Spirit for community outreach opportunities.

For Julia Lincicum, a church member who is a Master of Divinity student at the University of Notre Dame, Magley’s proposal came at the perfect time. She had been looking for a yearlong volunteer



Photo by Linda L. Hanstra

BJ Magley, cofounder of Heroes Camp, initiated the girls mentorship program with Church of the Savior Christian Reformed Church. She is pictured at the facility’s Katie P. Simmons Dining Commons, named after Magley’s mother.

intern position in parish ministry and was thrilled to help Magley make her vision a reality. The program kicked off in December 2020.

Magley’s enthusiasm inspires volunteers, Lincicum said. In a training session for mentors, Magley explained the challenges these girls face, which are often far outside the mentors’ experiences.

“BJ has energy, vision, resolve, and joy in abundance,” Lincicum said. “I felt like we showed up and just soaked in the beautiful energy of Heroes Camp and rolled with it. ... The Holy Spirit in her is really beautiful, and the way she loves on kids catches on like fire.”

At least 11 church members have participated in three events since December 2020; five are direct mentors. Seven girls aged 11-13 were paired with mentors. They attended mini-retreats, heard inspiring speakers, and dined out together. Most importantly, according to

Magley, “they learned through the story of Esther that their lives are a treasure.”

The church was planning another mini-retreat for Christmas 2021.

Lincicum said she enjoyed conversations with her mentee between structured activities, noting that “in our lives of faith, doing those little things with as much love as possible is far more important than meets the eye.”

—Linda L. Hanstra

Centennial Celebrations in 2021

First Christian Reformed Church in Waupun, Wisc.

More than 250 current and former members, congregants, and pastors gathered to celebrate the centennial of First Christian Reformed Church of Waupun, Wisc., Aug. 14 and 15, 2021. With the theme "Remember, Renew, and Rejoice," Sunday worship included a contemporary music team, organ and piano, and a 100th-anniversary choir. Three former pastors and current minister Greg Schuringa participated in the service.



During the church's centennial celebration in August 2021, the congregation of First CRC in Waupun, Wisc., gathered for a photo.

The families who formed First CRC in Waupun worshiped with the congregation at the rural Alto (Wisc.) CRC, walking the five miles to services, until organizing a church of their own.

Today First CRC has an established prison ministry, partnerships with overseas organizations, and renewed commitment to serve in the local community to "honor God, serve others, and transform lives."

"We trust that this celebration of God's faithfulness to First CRC will propel us forward in our faithfulness to his mission for us," Schuringa said.

Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa

With dinner, worship services, and visits from past clergy, Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa, celebrated its 100th anniversary Oct. 2-3, 2021. The anniversary committee chose Psalm 100 as a focus with a theme of "Celebrating A Century of God's Faithfulness." Celebrations included a catered banquet, a game of Calvary trivia, and a program of music and other contributions from various church members.

Calvary's pastor, John Klompfen, interviewed three centenarian members for a video presentation. George Vogel, Bernice Noteboom, and Phares Lefever reflected on their time at Calvary CRC, recalling moments of the church's beginning and stages of growth.

The church was first known as Second CRC and was renamed in July 1971. Vogel talked about coming to the church with his parents in 1930 when English became the primary language used in worship services instead of Dutch.

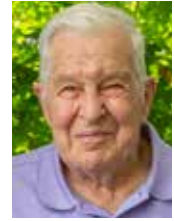


Brass players accompanied the congregational singing in Calvary CRC's Oct. 3 service of celebration.

Photo by Romi DeGroot

—Sarah DeGraff and Kyle Hoogendoorn

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Harvey Arlen Ouwinga

1932-2021

A man of prayer and an inspiration to many, Harvey Ouwinga welcomed each day as a gift and tried to reflect God's love in every moment of his life. He died Oct. 13.

Harvey graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and was ordained in 1957. He then served Birnamwood (Wisc.) Christian Reformed Church before being called up to serve in the U.S. Army. He attended Army Chaplain School and then served at Fort Polk, La., in Korea, and at Fort Hood, Texas, before moving with his family to Germany for three years. After discharge in 1969 he remained a reservist for six more years, retiring as a lieutenant colonel.

Harvey then pastored Cascade CRC in Marysville, Wash.; East Leonard CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; and Bradenton (Fla.) CRC. He then served for two years in Grand Rapids with Mission India before pastoring Second CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich. He retired in 1997 but continued to serve as an interim minister in 21 different states.

Harvey liked to build and fix things, especially cars. He enjoyed watching football, baseball, and playing golf.

He is survived by Ardythe, his wife of 67 years; four children and their spouses; 14 grandchildren; and 26 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Classis Watch: Late Fall 2021

Christian Reformed classes (regional groups of churches) meet two to three times a year, acting on matters with the guidance of the CRC's Church Order, the rules that member churches agree together to follow. Articles are noted here for actions taken by classes in the past few months. Quotations come from classis minutes.

Those **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** include Rev. Nate Meldrim (previously ordained in the Reformed Church in America, Church Order Art. 8) and candidates Tyler Helfers, Mark Broadus, Joshua Stammers, Femke Visser-Elenbaas, Lisa Meyer, Dawei (David) Shao, Kelly J. Buist, Sunghak (Paul) Yang, Jeff Liou, Jessica Maddox, Ryan Phan, K Joshua*, HoonJae Lee, Joshua*, Steven Dykstra, and Bryzon Masiboh (Art. 6 and 10).

Ministers **loaned** (Art. 13c): Revs. Dawei (David) Shao to Detroit Chinese Bible Church in Farmington Hills, Mich., and Sunghak (Paul) Yang to Korean Bible Church in Ann Arbor, Mich. (Classis Grand Rapids East).

Ministers released from a congregation (Art. 17a): Revs. Dan Meyer from Edson-Peers CRC in Edson, Alta., and Cal Hoogendoorn from First CRC in Sioux Falls, S.D.

Rev. Chelsey Harmon was designated as **eligible for call** (this action was taken in October 2020 by Classis B.C. North-West but was not previously reported). Rev. Paul Birnbaum was declared **eligible for call** by Classis Iakota.

**Beginning with Synod 2019 some candidates for ministry were accepted without revealing their full names publicly because they are involved in ministry where the security of those to whom they minister requires anonymity. K Joshua and Joshua, welcomed as ministers of the Word by Classis Thornapple Valley, are both ministering with Resonate Global Mission.*

Leaving Ministry in the CRC

Classes may end a pastor's ordained ministry status, guided by Church Order articles 14 and 17. Designations of release (reflecting the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office) are honorably released, released, dismissed, or in the status of one deposed (Art. 14).

Glenn Adams and Steve Van Noort were **honorably released** (Art. 14-b).

Ken Vander Horst was **released** (Art. 17d).

Emeritus status was granted to retiring minister Rev. John Ooms (Art. 18).

Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classis** (Art. 23) were Mark Crawford and John Simon (Classis Arizona); Nancy Yang (B.C. South-East); and Danta Covington (Southeast U.S.).

Ken White (Classis B.C. South-East) was **released** from ministry as a commissioned pastor.

Commissioned pastor emeritus status was granted to Ron Glass (Classis California South).

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

An emerging (unorganized) church does not have its own council and is under the care of a council of a neighboring CRC (Art. 38).

CrossPoint CRC in Chino, Calif., **merged** with Korean New Beginnings of CrossPoint Church (emerging).

Higher Calling Ministries (Classis Southeast U.S.) was recognized as **emerging**.

Fruitland CRC in Stony Creek, Ont., will **disband** (to close in June 2022). East Paris CRC in Kentwood, Mich., **disbanded** and closed.

Name change: Trinity CRC in Grandville, Mich., has changed its name to The Refuge.

Synod

Classes may direct requests or communications to synod, the broadest assembly of the Christian Reformed Church.

Classis Toronto is requesting four things of Synod 2022 in relation to proposed structure changes that have been progressing toward implementation, including a request to "pause implementation of the SALT (Structure and Leadership Taskforce) report ... until Canadian churches and members have been well informed and have had a reasonable opportunity to provide input." In May 2021 the Council of Delegates approved the SALT report to recommend to synod and appointed a team to oversee the finalization of joint ministry agreements that lay out how ministry of Christian Reformed Church will be accomplished between the U.S. and Canada.

Classes continue to send requests or communications connected to the report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality. **Classis Niagara** is asking synod "to affirm the biblical foundation sections of the report as being in accord with biblical teaching understood from a Reformed perspective" and to "recommend the report as a whole to the churches as a useful tool" in encouraging "biblically faithful responses" to pastoral situations connected to human sexuality. The classis also adopted one aspect of an overture written by a group of university students, asking that synod "create a plan of action to continue careful deliberation of the complex issues around human sexuality" and to encourage engagement with people affected by these issues.

—Alissa Vernon, news editor

Churches Affected by Floods in B.C. and Washington

From mid-November to early December 2021 a series of rain storms brought flooding to areas of southern B.C. and northern Washington, particularly the Sumas prairie region that straddles the border. Congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in Classis North Cascades, B.C. South-East, and B.C. North-West and their communities have been deeply affected by the losses. While The Banner expects further news coverage from these churches, this is one story from a writer who lives, works, and worships in Abbotsford, B.C.

On Monday, Nov. 15, 2021, water in the Sumas Prairie area of Abbotsford, B.C., began to rise quickly as rivers swollen by record-setting rains spilled over their banks and burst through dikes. Sumas Prairie is a historic lakebed that was dried to create farmland, so the water naturally flowed to the low ground. Most of the farms in the area were flooded, and evacuation orders were issued for the entire area. Major highways in the area were closed as they too became submerged. Sumas Prairie is bordered by Abbotsford to the west, Chilliwack, B.C., to the east, and Whatcom County in Washington State to the south.

Marcel deRegt, one of three pastors who serve Gateway Community CRC in Abbotsford, lives in Chilliwack. When the road connecting the two cities closed, he wasn't able to get to the church. Many of the church members who had to be evacuated from their homes were displaced to Chilliwack. On Sunday, Nov. 21, deRegt partnered with Cornerstone CRC in Chilliwack to host a gathering of all the displaced families who were stranded there. "The stories were unreal of people losing their homes, all their kids' toys and collections, furniture, and more," deRegt said. "They were waiting to go see their homes, or what is left, the farms and their livestock. The emotions were real and raw. Words can't express the pain and grief our families are experiencing."

At Gateway, where about a third of the member families were directly affected



Photo from facebook.com/cornerstonechilliwack

Volunteers from Cornerstone CRC in Chilliwack, B.C., unloaded donations collected to support people displaced by severe flooding in the Cascadia region.

by the flooding, the Nov. 21 service was one of hope and help. The morning worship service was a respite from a week of disaster response and the turmoil that brings. Justin Caruthers, Gateway's lead pastor, said church members sprung to action quickly, providing meals and lodging for those displaced and assisting with evacuation of farm animals as needed.

In Lynden, Wash., Sonlight Church was the staging ground for much of the early disaster response. Samaritan's Purse set up a command center at the church, and throughout the week more than 50 people were sheltered in the church building. Don Kok, an elder at Sonlight, was amazed at how quickly the church body was able to act. They had agreed to be a shelter for evacuees on Nov. 15, and by the next morning, buses of evacuees had shown up.

Many churches in the area were part of the first wave of responders who helped before government assistance could be mobilized. On Tuesday, Nov. 16, a church group was part of a team of 300 people that assisted in sandbagging and protecting a pump station critical for keeping floodwaters from gathering in the historic lakebed. Other churches collected food and supplies for the displaced. On its Facebook page, Cornerstone CRC in Chilliwack posted a

call for volunteers to unload supply boats sent by Mission Hills Community Church, a Christian Reformed congregation in Mission, B.C. They later posted: "Thank you to all those who came out to help unload boats filled with donations from Mission and help distribute them to The Salvation Army and the donation collection centre at Farmhouse Brewing!"

"More than anything," Caruthers said, "we have been absolutely amazed by how quickly this congregation and the surrounding community of volunteers, churches, and agencies have sprung into action. It has been overwhelmingly beautiful."

World Renew's Disaster Response Services, a branch of its mission that sends volunteer work crews to places that have been devastated by floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other disasters, expects to be involved at later stages. "There are other government and NGO organizations that are designed to take the lead in these early stages," DRS director Bob Laarman said. "We are, and will continue to be, in contact with churches and other NGOs to discern appropriate responses in the longer term. Recovery is always a longer process than anyone anticipates."

—Dan Veeneman

Christian Reformed Pastors Among Renewal Grant Recipients



Mark Mohrlang

Three Christian Reformed pastors and their congregations were among the 190 recipients of 2021 National (U.S.) Clergy Renewal Program grants. The grants, administered by Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Ind., are funded through Lilly Endowment Inc. They've been awarded every year since 2000 to provide pastors with a respite from ministry work for focused personal and spiritual renewal and to help restore congregations for vibrant and effective ministry. CTS has managed the program since 2012.

Sanctuary CRC in Seattle, Wash., received a grant for Pastor Mark Mohrlang; Platte (S.D.) CRC received one for Pastor Drew Hoekema; and Westwood CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich., received one for Pastor Michael Koetje. Their programs of renewal will take place this year.

Congregations and pastors apply together for the program and can request up to \$50,000, applying in April for grants awarded for the following year. Christian Theological Seminary does not say how many applications it receives each year but notes the program is competitive and each year receives more proposals that it can fund. Being denied and encouraged to reapply is common. Both Koetje and Mohrlang were approved on their second applications.



Drew Hoekema

Koetje, Mohrlang, and Hoekema all see time away from ministry for renewal as essential. Mohrlang pointed out the biblical example in Exodus 23:11 of letting land lie fallow every seven years so the land would be more productive later. Hoekema said he understands that being in full-time ministry is not harder than other jobs, but the spiritual and emotional toll it can take requires times of renewal to ensure a continued and effective ministry in the long term.

Westwood CRC requested \$48,282 for Koetje to travel to and take courses at Jerusalem College, visit the Pacific Northwest, and spend time in Europe. His sabbatical is centered on a theme of "Living Water." Koetje said the sabbatical will provide "time and space for spiritual renewal, physical and emotional refreshment, experiential learning, and strengthening of family relationships."

The theme of Hoekema's sabbatical plan is "Riches in Christ." He intends to take classes at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, N.C., and spend time with his family.

Mohrlang's plans include a trip to Europe, some shorter local trips for personal reflection, and spending time in a recording studio getting back to his musical roots.



Michael Koetje

Congregations may allot a portion of the funds to hire fill-in preachers and to pursue their own renewal projects. Westwood CRC plans to explore the "Living Water" theme with a worship coach and to create a theme-based banner.

Christian Theological Seminary asks recipients at the end of their sabbaticals to report about their leave and the results. Grants are open to Christian congregations in 49 U.S. states that have an ordained pastor. (CTS administers a separate program for Indiana congregations.)

Lis Van Harten, director of the CRC's Pastor Church Resources, said that for many years she has encouraged and continues to encourage eligible pastors to apply. She said 65 Christian Reformed pastors have received grants since 2000.

—Dan Veeneman

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**‘The Kingdom of God
Has Come Near’**

By Cassie Westrate and Laurisa O'Brien

When you think of God's kingdom, what do you picture?

In Luke 10, Jesus sends out disciples and tells them to share that "the kingdom of God has come near." In the Christian Reformed Church, we see glimpses of God's kingdom come near all the time—but we also recognize that we live in both the "already" and the "not yet."

This plays out in many ways. Someone comes to know Christ, but their family and friends are not interested in joining them to learn more. One family gains access to clean water, food, and economic opportunities, but their neighbors still struggle to afford food daily. For every answered prayer, there's still a "not yet" story. There's something we're still hoping for and working toward. Here are two of those stories.

Stepping Away from Witchcraft

Mr. Kham is the spiritual leader and healer of a tribe in Cambodia that believes in the power of witchcraft. He holds a lot of respect in his community—and he also recently decided to follow Christ.

But he's not yet ready to share his new faith with others.

"(Kham) has been holding the power of witchcraft for his people in the whole village and surrounding areas. He prayed for rain, (and) rain came," explained Resonate Global Mission missionary Navy Chann-Chhay.

Chann-Chhay and her husband, Ly Chhay, facilitate Timothy Leadership Training in villages throughout Cambodia where witchcraft holds a powerful grasp on people's spirituality. TLT is a curriculum of Raise Up Global Ministries that Resonate missionaries like Chann-Chhay and Chhay use to equip local pastors and other Christian leaders for effective gospel witness.

Pastor Sopheap is one local leader who has been participating in TLT. After the training on caring for God's people, Sopheap felt convicted to share the gospel. He made a plan to visit several villages, but he also felt burdened to talk with someone he interacted with almost daily: Kham.

Kham and Sopheap had worked together for quite some time, and Kham always respected Sopheap. When Sopheap shared the gospel with him, Kham was intrigued by Jesus. The two men met regularly for years to read and discuss the Bible, pray together, and build a friendship.

A VSLA meeting provides a safe space for women to learn and connect.



Mr. Kham decided to follow Jesus after two years of studying Scripture with Pastor Sopheap (pictured).

"Slowly (Kham) saw the life and testimony of Pastor Sopheap's family and how (Sopheap) serves others without conditions and shows love and sympathy for those who are poor," Chann-Chhay said.

One day, Kham decided he wanted to follow Christ. But that was just the start of the story.

As the spiritual leader of his tribe, Kham holds a respected position. His decision to follow Christ will affect his entire community. He still has a lot of questions about Christianity that do not have simple answers. He's not yet ready to share about his Christian faith with his family and tribe.

“He wants to take time to understand the Lord Jesus more,” Chann-Chhay said. “He does not want to disturb his family and the village until he is sure.”

Discipleship is a lifelong process, and that’s why it’s an important part of Resonate’s ministry. Pastor Sopheap continues to meet with Kham and disciple him, and Chann-Chhay and Chhay continue to support, equip, and mentor Sopheap as he works with Kham.

“We pray that God will change Mr. Kham’s heart and he can share the gospel to his family and his whole village,” Chann-Chhay said. “If Mr. Kham leads, (it’s likely that many of the) villagers will follow. That is exciting!”

Finding Income Security

Brenda is a member of one of World Renew’s Village Saving and Loan Associations in Zambia. She shared that many women in her village do not contribute financially to their family because they do not have a steady stream of income. It causes tension in some marriages, and several women buy charms from witch doctors in exchange for their husbands’ love and loyalty in marriage.

“This is part of normal life these days for women who have not joined a VSLA group,” said Brenda.

That was Brenda’s story too, but when she joined a VLSA group, God renewed her life. In many communities throughout the world, people do not have access to banks or formal lending programs. This can make it difficult for individuals and their families—many of whom live day by day—to find their footing to income security.

The VSLA program equipped Brenda with strong business and saving skills. While Brenda would be unable to secure a loan from a bank, she was able to borrow money from her VLSA group and invest in growing and selling produce. Through her new business, she has been able to save more, pay back the loan, and put money toward her family and church community.

“Now I play my part in providing for my family with groceries and fees for my children using the money from VSLA,” said Brenda.

VSLA groups do not only result in income stability—they also foster healing in marriages, spiritual lives, and vocation. “Like most women in VSLAs, my involvement in productive activities to put food on the table has revised my husband’s and my relationship,” said Brenda. “Nowadays, the only charm I give my husband is supporting him in providing for the family and sharing the gospel that we listen to in meetings.”

Discipleship often is a key part of VSLA groups. “Each time my group meets, we always start with prayer, Bible reading, and sharing,” she said. “My fellow members’ spiritual lives have improved greatly. Even those who did not attend church are now in fellowship with church activities and live together in harmony, as brothers and sisters in Christ.”

Brenda is thankful for the positive impact the VSLA has had on her life—but there are many people in her community who still struggle to meet their daily needs and who turn to witchcraft for answers. World Renew continues to implement the VSLA programming in countries throughout the world trusting in God’s guidance in the economic, spiritual, and relational transformation of vulnerable communities.

God’s kingdom is certainly near through Brenda and her VLSA group in Zambia, and through Pastor Sopheap and Mr. Kham in Cambodia. But there’s still so much work to be done as we work toward the portrait of God’s kingdom in Revelation 21:

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” **B**

Beyond the Coffee: How Global Coffee Break Helps Churches with Outreach

FROM ITS ORIGINS, Coffee Break's mission has been to reach neighbors with the gospel. Even the name "Coffee Break" communicates a safe, welcoming, and relaxed environment where neighbors feel invited to participate. Once someone visits a Coffee Break group, they are introduced to the Bible, the very Word of God that has power to effect life change.

Today, Coffee Break has expanded to become Global Coffee Break, and groups have formed in more than 20 countries, multiple languages, and many denominations.

The Global Coffee Break team is busy equipping leaders and churches to reach out to their communities in a variety of ways, but the common thread is discovering God's Word together. Here are a few stories from the past year:

Refreshing Souls in India

When Jeong-sun Lim and her husband, Gwang-ho Song, first arrived in India as missionaries, Lim wasn't sure where to begin. Following God's leading, she began a Coffee Break small group Bible study with other missionary women. In the small group the women joined hearts to receive refreshment, recover from challenges, and breathe new life into each other. The loving community of the Coffee Break Bible study gave the missionaries courage to continue God's work in the communities and neighborhoods to which they had been called. Soon they launched new groups with neighbors and church members. As a result, Coffee Break ministry has spread to many parts of India, and there is now a need to translate Bible study materials into Hindi to reach even more people with community, love, and God's Word.



Coffee Break groups meet around the world to discover God's word in 25 countries and over 10 languages.

Church Evangelism

David Bosscher, pastor of Lakeside Church in Alto, Mich., noted the impact of Coffee Break on his community. "There is a level of life change that really can only start to happen when (people) start experiencing God daily in Word and prayer themselves. That rhythm of opening a Bible can have massive effects. And Coffee Break can help instill that in the lives of those that (attend)."

Though the church's Coffee Break program has been for women in the community, Bosscher said, he's recently began discipling participants' husbands.

Coffee Break After Hours

Jenny Griffin is a former Coffee Break co-director, a woman who values time in the Word, and a mom who understands how hard it is for women with kids at home to find space to study

the Bible. Due to COVID, her church's Coffee Break was meeting online, but the Zoom session offered at the usual Coffee Break time wouldn't work for moms with young children at home who ordinarily used the childcare the church offered at in-person meetings. God placed these young moms on Griffin's heart, and she came up with the idea of offering the Coffee Break Bible study "after hours." Moms could put their children to bed and join from their own homes without having to get a babysitter. It has been a beautiful success.

God is using Coffee Break around the world. What can God do in your community through his Word? **B**

—Amy Friedman,
Raise Up Global Ministries

The View from Here

Living in the Not Yet

MY FIRST INVOLVEMENT with the denominational leadership of the Christian Reformed Church was in 1986 as a board member for the Synodical Committee on Race Relations. At the time, there was great hope that soon—very soon—we would all enjoy the fruit promised by Jesus in his command to the church to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. There was a sense at the time that all of us Christians in the CRCNA were leaning heavily into this vision. But almost 40 years later, we know that we're not there yet—not as a church, and certainly not as a society.

As humans, we have a tendency to look toward the future. We are always striving for that next milestone: to be old enough to drive, to find that special someone to marry, to become parents or grandparents, to get that next promotion in our career. In many ways, this is good. Our vision for the future drives us to set goals and work toward them. But ambition can also cause us to lose sight of the “right now” and overlook the blessings God gives us each day.

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I see this in our ministries as well. Over the years, synod has mandated that our congregations work together in a variety of areas, including disaster response, global mission, disability awareness, abuse prevention, faith formation, race relations, justice, or worship. We've started ministries and hired staff to address these shared mandates, and those staff are passionate and dedicated about that to which they've been called.

From my vantage point, I see staff giving their time, talents, sweat, and tears to their work. Many of the success stories from these efforts are shared on these pages of *The Banner* each month. Yet for every success, we remain painfully aware of areas where the work is not yet accomplished.

We see the great needs that continue to exist in our world, and we feel frustrated that our efforts are not yet meeting them. There continue to be communities who are hungry, people who have not heard the gospel, church buildings that remain inaccessible to those with disabilities, systems that perpetuate racism, and places that do not adequately prevent abuse.

I encourage us to not grow weary. Rather than merely looking toward the future and all that remains to be accomplished, let us also pay attention to the blessings happening right now.

When we consider the truth that we're not where God wants us to be yet, let's not forget to pause and recognize some encouraging signposts of where we are now.

We're not there yet, but still we see new churches being planted, new leaders being engaged, and many new cultures and peoples being integrated into the denomination—and all are being mutually transformed into the likeness of Christ.

As we strive to live the kind of lives described in 1 Peter 4:8-11, using the gifts we have received as faithful stewards of God's grace, let us look at the daily evidence around us and notice the many ways that God is already blessing our efforts. And let us give thanks for God's faithfulness even as we pray for the work that lies ahead.



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.

Speaking a Message to Ancient Churches

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY New Testament professor Jeffrey Weima has written a user-friendly book that examines and helps explain the seven sermons the apostle John recorded in the second and third chapters of Revelation.

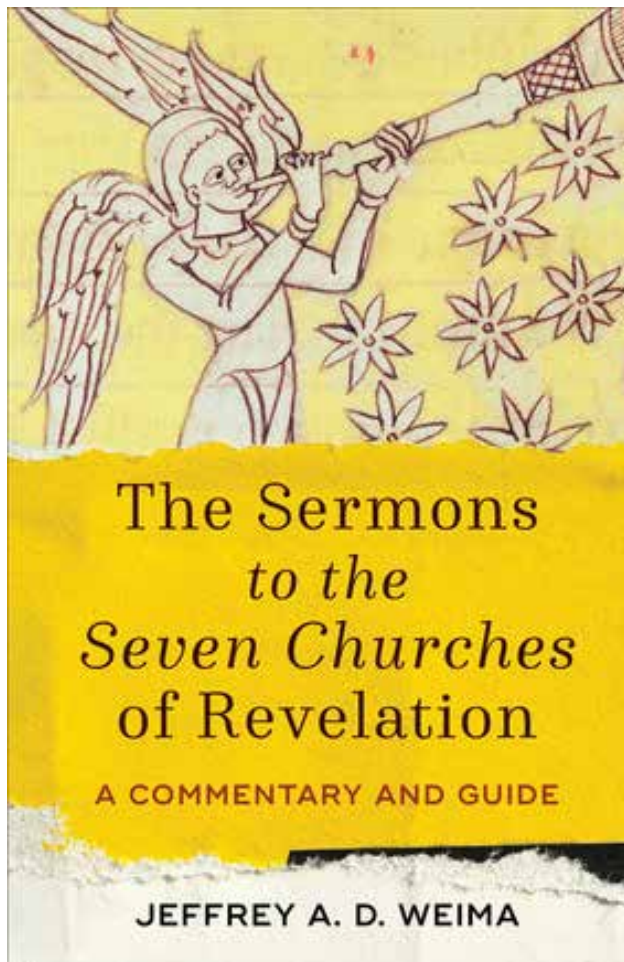
Inspired by God, the sermons were written down and sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor.

“The seven sermons are typically seen as written to churches that are spiritually healthy, encouraging them with the good news that Christ will come and ultimately vindicate their faith in him,” Weima said. “Careful study of these sermons, however, reveals a different picture—namely, that most of these early churches were spiritually unhealthy, and thus Christ has to warn them about the ways that they are compromising their faith. The fact that the modern church in the west is also guilty of doing the same things makes these sermons especially relevant and applicable to today’s situation.”

The sermons in Revelation are written to send a message of inspiration to Christians being persecuted for their faith. In some cases, Weima said, these Christians were even condemned to death for refusing to accept the Roman gods.

The startling imagery and metaphors in the seven sermons can, like the rest of Revelation, be intimidating for some readers. Weima, however, opens his book by explaining that his goal is to make the sermons come alive by offering background, purpose, and a framework that can help readers more deeply appreciate these sermons.

“I want to show how these seven ancient sermons are still relevant for today,” said Weima in an interview.



Weima is a biblical scholar who for years has led tour groups to many places in the Middle East. When the tour stops in modern-day Turkey, where the seven churches in Revelation were located, he offers insights and explanations to bring people more deeply into those passages of Scripture. He includes those insights in his book.

“Each chapter ends with my own sermon as a model of how the text could be preached or taught today,” Weima said. He ends the chapter on the church in the ancient town of

Philadelphia—one of the only two churches that held fast to their faith—with these words: “When our faith is tested and persecution (or hard times) comes our way, how are we going to respond?”

He adds: “Let us recommit ourselves to Jesus Christ, ... who sets before us an open door by which we have free and full access to God and the kingdom.”

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications

Beyond the Service: Church Property and Creation Care

WHEN SUNDAY WORSHIP ENDS, a congregation's property continues to be a physical expression of Christianity to the surrounding community. How can we "let the light shine" even after the service is over?

Members of the Climate Witness Project say that a first step in this direction is to adopt a stewardship mindset. When we think as stewards, church property becomes more than a private investment for the good of the congregation. It can also be viewed as an opportunity for public good.

For example, a congregation could demonstrate the value of creation care by reducing its carbon footprint and investing in sustainable practices. Consider Campus Chapel, a student ministry at the University of Michigan. It installed solar panels to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. The ministry knew this was an important way to be more ecologically sustainable, but the decision went beyond clean energy production. Ministry leaders explained that care for creation was part of their Christian witness to students.

Similarly, in Grand Rapids, Mich., Church of the Servant incorporates stewardship principles in its energy use and landscaping choices. The congregation uses plants native to the area to minimize water use and to provide a habitat for wildlife. To decrease energy use, church members also installed a white thermoplastic roof and switched to energy-efficient light bulbs.



Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich., planted native trees on the church grounds to improve the local environment.

Congregations can do much more than invest in sustainable practices. A study from the University of Pennsylvania found the average urban church contributes \$1.7 million in value to its community each year through programs and outreach. One way to multiply this value is to use church grounds for community care.

Some Climate Witness Project partner churches have done this by focusing on local food production. Covenant CRC in Appleton, Wis., for example, decided to convert an unused portion of its land into a community garden as part of a city program. It has become a valued asset in the neighborhood.

"There are 12 available plots, and only two of us from the church are using them. The rest are being cultivated

by neighbors," shared Gail Miller, the garden's founder.

The church also added an uncommon feature: raised gardening beds and plastic mats to improve accessibility. "This has made gardening accessible for a neighbor in a wheelchair, as well as an older gentleman who finds the raised bed easier to use," Miller said.

Psalm 24:1 reminds us, "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." In other words, God is the true owner of the land on which our churches were built. When we use these spaces for community good, we act as faithful stewards of the land and buildings entrusted to us.

—Julia Camenisch,
Climate Witness Project

Victories and Challenges

DIANDA FOUND ReFrame Ministries' French radio program and decided to give her life to Christ. Still, her conversion story is far from over.

"The enemy has made it difficult to share the gospel with people from Muslim backgrounds like Dianda in Burkina Faso, West Africa," said Kurt Selles, ReFrame's director. "Because of family pressures, Muslim-rooted traditions, and sometimes even persecution, some Christians will never be able to worship with others or even meet another Christian in person."

ReFrame Ministries' partners in Burkina Faso share the hope of the gospel with people in these challenging situations by using media. Christian Reformed congregations and individuals partner with them in this work.

After Dianda heard a program that specifically addressed from a biblical perspective the challenges that women in her region face, Dianda decided she wanted to follow Christ. She was overjoyed to share her conversion story with ReFrame's French ministry partners in her area. But she also knew that her choice had come at a cost.

Soon her family began mocking her for her faith in Christ, and she knew that without help, she would lose her new faith. She called ReFrame's ministry team to connect with other Christians in her area and to receive additional resources and prayers for strength.

"New Christians and seekers still need someone to answer their questions and fill the role that church plays for those who can worship safely in person," Selles said.

Every day, ReFrame's ministry teams around the world hear stories like Dianda's—stories of people who find God's Word through audio or video



Members of ReFrame's French ministry team in Burkina Faso produced the program that Dianda heard.

programs and are transformed by what they hear. In many cases this becomes a lifelong transformation. Yet others in Dianda's situation simply find it too hard to keep living alone as a Christian. For now, Dianda is still in touch with ReFrame's ministry team, and they continue to disciple her.

"Thank you for your support and prayers," said Marc Nabie, ReFrame's French ministry leader. "I am glad to share God's blessing on our ministry through the partnership with ReFrame. In cases like Dianda's, there are victories to celebrate, but also challenges to pray for."

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

global missions is changing

Around the world, local leaders are rising up and planting churches in their communities. Here are three reasons to support local leaders:



1

They already understand their culture, language, and social networks.

2

They can contextualize the training so it is relatable and practical.

3

They are invested in their communities because they already live and work there.

Join us in our work of local leaders training local believers to plant churches around the world.

To learn more, scan this QR code or visit us online:



multiplicationnetwork.org



Plants in Winter

IN THE NORTH, sometimes it feels like the world stops when winter arrives. The little animals disappear underground to hibernate or curl up somewhere to stay warm. The tree branches are bare, and the flowers in the garden are gone. But did you know that many plants need this time of cold winter weather to grow and bloom? Buried deep under the snow, there is something happening in roots, bulbs, and seeds.

Why don't plants grow during the winter?


When a plant is growing, it uses its leaves to catch sunlight and make food for energy. If plants tried to grow during the winter, they could freeze and be damaged. It also would be hard for them to get enough sunlight during the short days and enough water when it is frozen. So at the end of the growing season, the food that the plant made is moved out of the leaves down into the roots to be used during the winter. This is why gardeners don't cut the leaves off of tulips right after they bloom. Instead, they let the leaves die as the nutrients go back into the bulb.

How do plants know when it is winter?

Plants can't just look at a calendar. Instead, shorter days and lower temperatures cause chemical changes that prepare the plant to rest, or go dormant. When a bulb's dormant period begins, a chemical stopwatch starts counting. Only after a certain number of chilling hours will the bulb be ready to start growing again. This is so that the bulb isn't fooled into thinking it is spring before it really is. Many bulbs need 10-14 weeks between 32 and 45 degrees Fahrenheit. In places where temperatures don't get cold enough, people give their bulbs a pretend winter by putting them in the refrigerator!

What do plants do during the winter?

When bulbs finish growing above ground, they are busy growing underground—growing roots and even multiplying so that there will be more flowers next year. Depending on the soil temperature, tree roots can continue slowly growing during the winter even while the aboveground part of the tree is dormant.

The next time you see a snow-covered garden or the bare branches of a tree, remember that God is at work even when it seems like there is nothing happening! 



Rachel Lancashire is a freelance writer with an educational background in wildlife. She grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and currently attends Gilmour Memorial Baptist Church in Selwyn, Ont.



Past Controversies, Present Insights

Women's Suffrage and the CRCNA

By Will Katerberg

"Past Controversies, Present Insights" is a series we have published online. It explores past controversies in the Christian Reformed Church that threatened or even led to division and splits within the denomination. How do we view these controversies now? And what can we learn from them? Read more articles along this theme at TheBanner.org/tags/past-controversies-present-insights.

American women won the right to vote in 1920 with the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. Women were winning the right to vote in Canada at roughly the same time. For many suffragists, their Christian faith had led to participation in missions and reform movements such as prohibition and the abolition of slavery—and from there to seeking their right to vote. Their victory completed decades of activism, but suffrage also was just the beginning of an ongoing revolution for freedom and equality for women.

This ongoing revolution included the church. Should women have the right to vote in their churches? The suffrage question for the church

was a consequence not only of political change, but of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s and evangelical revivals in the 1700s and 1800s.

A majority in the Christian Reformed Church opposed women's suffrage. In 1912 and 1913 in *The Banner*, for example, Jacob Vanden Bosch maintained that women's suffrage would upend traditions in society, politics, and the church. The Bible taught that society consisted of families, not individuals. Votes by men represented not just the men themselves (as individuals), but also the women and children in their families.

Some Christian Reformed leaders promoted women's suffrage, however. Rev. Johannes Groen, for example, argued that the "subordinate position

of women” was not rooted in “creation” but was “a result of sin” and the “curse” on “mankind.” Men and women had different roles, he allowed, but women had a right “to assist in regulating” the things that affected their sphere. Without the vote they were reduced to “playthings.”

Groen’s was a minority view in the CRC in the 1910s. Some of his critics claimed that the matter was “confessional.” If so, then supporters of suffrage were transgressing Reformed teaching. They might be sanctioned, lose their ordination, and even be excluded from the church.

In 1916, the CRC synod decided that “women’s voting right is a purely political matter” and did not belong “on the terrain of the church.” CRC folk could actively support or oppose women’s suffrage.

In *The Banner* in August 1920, Reverend E. J. Tanis commented on the 19th Amendment. He expected CRC women to use their new rights. Nothing in Scripture clearly condemned “woman suffrage,” he observed. And it was “the consistent, natural, and logical development of the American system of suffrage,” in which “the individual citizen, and not the family,” was “the unit in the state.”

Suffrage in the Church

CRC magazines occasionally discussed the impact of women’s suffrage in the decades that followed. Women had avidly taken to voting and some had held public office, *The Federation Messenger* noted in 1930. Their presence had not purified American politics, however, as some suffrage advocates had hoped. Women too were sinners, after all, like men.

In September 1950 in *The Banner*, Henry Schultze connected women’s suffrage to social changes: women

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seeking roles beyond homemaking; married couples “needing” both spouses to work to pay for nice suburban homes; divorce becoming more common; and wives claiming authority equal to their husbands. Historians describe these trends—women seeking the same freedoms as men—as the “democratization” of the family. The price was too high, Schultze feared. Reformed Christians should continue “to fight the gods of selfishness and materialism.”

The ideals and habits associated with suffrage also began to reshape churches. Did men in church life represent their wives and children? Or should women and men represent themselves and have equal suffrage in the church? Articles in *The Banner* and other Christian Reformed magazines discussed these questions regularly beginning in the 1930s.

In 1934, for example, Henry J. Kuiper answered a question about widows being allowed to vote at

congregational meetings. Voting was not mere consultation with consistories governing. It was part of church governance. Inviting women to vote would amount to “an announcement of their right to hold office as well as the men,” Kuiper argued, and contrary to Scripture.

The question did not go away, however. Women asked for the right to vote in some congregations. Some congregations supported it; others, concerned about uniformity in the church, wanted Synod to decide. Still others opposed it.

The CRC was not alone in addressing these issues. They were common among churches in North America and in Western Europe. The CRC continued to look to the Netherlands and to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod to assess trends and for biblical insights.

A synodical study in the early 1950s concluded that “it would be unwise” to “make a pronouncement” on the question as there was not “sufficient clarity” among the churches. It also noted that the RES supported women voting at congregational meetings. Women shared with men the “office of believer.” Their voting was “fitting and proper.” Local customs should be considered. Articles in *The Banner* and other CRC magazines commented on the issue regularly in the 1950s.

In 1955, Synod again appointed a committee to study women voting in congregational meetings. In 1957, aware that there was no consensus in the CRC, it approved a local option. Women “may participate” with the same rules that governed the participation of men, it decided. However, “the question as to whether or when” women would be “invited” to partake was left “to the judgement of each consistory.”

Requests by women to partake more fully in the life of the church along with support from classes and congregations lay behind Synod's decision. Biblical declarations of equality of women and men as believers before God made it difficult for synod to come to simply deny women's suffrage. Texts that seemingly forbade authority by women over men and ordained different roles for them in church and society weighed heavily too. Already in the 1950s, however, the question was whether limitations on women's roles were social prejudices or God-ordained. The decision in 1957 was equivocal, but it marked a sea change.

Making Room for Women

George Stob, for example, had been wary of women's suffrage in the church in 1952. But in 1957, he argued that the church should not "keep Christian women from the councils of the church" or "circumscribe their activities." It should instead "use their talents and abilities to fullest advantage." The New Testament, he said, called the church to sweep away forms of backwardness and make room for women in the "household" of the church.

The local-option compromise of 1957 meant that the issue continued to come up on occasion. In 1985, *The Banner* published a story about a woman from Indiana who had protested to her classis the exclusion of women from voting in her congregation.

By the 1970s, the question increasingly was about women holding the church offices of deacon, elder, or minister. In the 1980s and '90s, the CRC similarly would take a local approach to women holding church offices, allowing classes leeway about implementing women's ordination.

From the Inside Out

The way I've written this sketch of women's suffrage suggests that the equality revolution infiltrated churches from the outside. But that's only part of the story. The opposite is true too. The Reformation itself set off an unintended revolution that undermined traditional authorities and spurred the individualism of modern life that critics of women's suffrage like Schultze lamented.

Martin Luther's stance before German political and religious authorities in 1521 is illustrative. "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason," he declared. "I cannot and will not recant anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me."

What was the authority that Luther appealed to here? Was it Scripture? "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures." Or was it his individual conscience? "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures." Was it effectively both?


Luther himself rejected applying "Christian freedom" and individual conscience to society and politics, but other Reformers make such connections. Whatever Reformers like Luther and Calvin intended, these ideas encouraged both religious, social, and political revolutions in the long run.

Could any man be denied the right—indeed, the obligation—of conscience in matters of religion, society, and politics? This was a revolutionary question. Could any woman be denied? This was the natural next question and even more revolutionary.

Evangelical revivals in the 1700s and 1800s inspired individualism in society and democracy in politics, continuing what the Reformation had started. Women sometimes led them. At the

same time, the ideals and habits of capitalism and democracy accented individualism in Christianity. "Jesus is my personal savior" is both a Christian confession and a modern declaration.

Protestant Christians have been wrestling since Luther and Calvin's time with tensions between individual freedom and conscience on one hand and community and confessional traditions on the other. Traditions that emphasize covenanted community, such as the CRC, also are shaped by appeals to individual conscience and histories of church splits. Calvinists who confess a theology of election nonetheless require a personal profession of faith for full membership. Parents' choice to baptize their children is not enough. At some point, women and men alike must decide for themselves what to confess and whether to join a church. And they can always choose otherwise.

From a long point of view, then, women's suffrage in the CRC in the 1950s was a product of the Reformation and democratic revolutions. Both have shaped the modern experience of individual choice and the tensions that result in trying to reconcile freedom and conscience with community and claims to authority. 



Will Katerberg is a professor of history and curator of Heritage Hall at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. He is a member of Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids.

Rose's Faith

A desire to know
Jesus was born
within her and
never left.



J. Cameron Fraser is a retired Christian Reformed pastor in Lethbridge, Alta., who now concentrates on writing as well as preaching. He is the author of *Learning From Lord Mackay: Life and Work in Two Kingdoms*.

ROSE WAS AN ELDERLY WIDOW from a wealthy and influential family well known in Vancouver's Jewish community. Her husband had been a successful businessman. But it was her relationship with her father that had the most lasting influence. Rose hated her father, who had been harsh and authoritarian. Because of this, she found it difficult to think of God as a heavenly Father. When she was young, however, she had seen a picture of Jesus, who struck her as kind and loving. A desire to know Jesus was born within her and never left.

Rose was in her mid-70s by the time I met her, and she had decided to make one final effort to get to know Jesus. But she insisted that no one in her family or the Jewish community should know of her interest. At times she despaired of even trying, thinking it was simply too late for her.

The first thing I tried to do was to have her read the New Testament to get a real picture of Jesus. I showed her where Matthew was and suggested that if she read a chapter daily she would get through a book a month. My wife Margaret and I also read to her Edith Schaeffer's book *Christianity Is Jewish*, which she found helpful. But getting her to read the Bible was more difficult. She just couldn't do it.

One summer Rose came to visit us on British Columbia's Sunshine Coast, where we lived at the time, but she made it clear she didn't want to discuss religion. She had concluded that if God wanted her to become a Christian, he'd give her a sign. We agreed to her terms but also told her what Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 12:38-40 about seeking signs. In effect he said that the only sign they would be given would be his resurrection. We have the evidence for that in the Bible. The Bible is God's sign to us.

Nevertheless, just as God had allowed Rose to be impressed by the picture of Jesus, he did condescend to give her what she took to be a sign. She had a chronic ulcer problem and had an attack while visiting us. She prayed for peace and that her ulcer would not bleed. When she got to the hospital, she found that God had heard her prayer. Encouraged by this, she determined to seek Christ again.

We again encouraged her to get into the New Testament, showing her once more where Matthew was and suggesting she read a chapter a day. I called her at her home the following week to see how she was doing with her Bible reading. She was halfway through Mark!

Not all our problems were over, though. While she gladly embraced Christ as her Messiah and the Son of God, she had difficulty understanding how he could also be God. We had many discussions about these issues.

Sadly, Rose developed cancer and died quite suddenly, still with many questions, but with what I believe was a genuine faith in Christ. She used to sing a childhood song into which she had interposed the name of Jesus. How much understanding God requires as evidence of faith must ultimately be left for him to judge. But the thing that impressed me and gave me hope was the way Rose started to make real spiritual progress as soon as she began seriously reading the Bible with a sincere desire to learn. Whoever comes to it with such a desire to learn and to find God will not be disappointed. **B**

1. What has been your experience sharing your Christian faith with people who aren't Christians?

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Learning Mercy from Down Syndrome

I thank God for what he has taught me in my work with Doug, but I do not think the primary effect of that work has been to make me more patient.



William B. Bowes is a mental health counselor and writer in Boston, Massachusetts and a graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

I CAME TO MASSACHUSETTS to get a master's degree. It was the next step in what I had always hoped would be a fulfilling career in the mental health world. After my college years, I had worked in sales for a while, and I was ready to change direction. I had put it off for a while for all of the typical reasons, most notably because of the financial burden of graduate school. As many a poor, perfectionistic 20-something does, I floundered in the malaise of indecisiveness and insecurity for a few years, praying for a sign, and then one day I packed my bags and drove for 20 hours until I saw the Boston skyline.

To help pay for my schooling I found a job working with a middle-aged man named Doug Pacheco, who has Down syndrome. I have to admit it was a little intimidating, given that I had very little experience with developmental disabilities. But when I first met him, with his balding head, innocent smile, Wizard of Oz T-shirt, and rather unwieldy gait, it was easy to like him.

Being a philosophical 24-year-old product of skateboarding culture, I had long hair and a beard at the time. Doug has told me many times since that when he first met me, he thought I looked like Jesus. I had first met him at a restaurant on Boston's North Shore, and for some reason, even years later, he likes to make fun of the fact that (in his opinion) I ate the restaurant's entire supply of cornbread. "Remember? You kept shoving it in," he has reminded me many times, making motions of someone pushing things into their mouth.

Down syndrome is a curious thing. After working every day for years now with someone who has it, I can say it is not what I thought it would be. When I tell people I work with people who have Down syndrome, they often

make comments about the patience I must have. I have grown tired of those comments—not because the work does not require patience, but because it casts my work in a more negative light than I would prefer and makes me look like some sort of saintly Mother Teresa type.

I thank God for what he has taught me in my work with Doug, but I do not think the primary effect of that work has been to make me more patient. Rather, working with Doug has taught me what mercy looks like in action. It has forced into me a Spirit-wrought compassion I did not have before. It has compelled me to see great value and worth in the sort of person that is generally assigned less value by society, whether directly or indirectly. In the simple, habitual, day-to-day process of making his food, giving him medicine, helping him do laundry, and listening to his infinitely recycled jokes that he still finds just as funny, I learn what serving looks like: not the simple Christian idea of serving someone by doing good, but the sometimes mind-numbing and often menial tasks that make up what it looks like to serve someone who cannot do anything for you in return. In this way, there has been much for me to learn about mercy.

Doug is not one for long conversations, but he tries. He'll ask me what I did today and how many classes I have even though he's asked me the same questions every day for three months. He has a fascination with televangelist Joyce Meyer, whose program he often watches in the mornings. Doug was raised attending church services, which he still attends with his parents on Sundays.

In some of the moments we have together, I often will think about what God wants from Doug's life. Although he is different, Doug still so



surely bears the image of God, and the church cannot forget to honor that. I believe one day, when all this is over, Doug—like all of us—will be made whole in heaven. I cannot help but wonder what I would say to him then. Laying aside the “why” questions when it comes to Doug’s condition, there is so much to be gained from loving and caring for a person with Down syndrome. And that’s just who Doug is: he is a person, valuable in his own right, simply because of who he is. He is not defined by his disability and has no less worth in God’s sight. And he should have no less worth in our sight.

I did not meet Doug because I needed to learn something from him or because a disability is meant to serve some teaching or preparatory purpose. Even so, in the most unexpected ways, I truly believe working with him has changed me as a person and shaped me for my future work in mental health far more than my schooling did. This is not so much because of one experience as much as

it is because of the fact that meeting him where he is every single day has required me to more deeply appreciate mercy and the need for it. There are days when working with him is incredibly difficult. There are days when I wish he was no longer limited by Down syndrome as he is. But in all of it, I think I understand Jesus better because of him. I understand more of what it means to see value in someone purely because of who they are and not because of what they can accomplish or how much they can benefit me or anyone else.

As a Christian I have the beautiful comfort of knowing that God shows mercy to me. But it cannot end there, because in Christ he calls me to radically show mercy to others.

I had thought I came to Boston to go to graduate school, and I had thought I took the job with Doug to help me pay for it. But years later, I have learned mercy from walking with Doug to the bus stop, from cleaning up shards of glass from some kitchenware that

slipped from his hands, and from laughing at his same jokes that I have heard 10,000 times. I understand mercy better because of Doug Pacheco.

As Micah 6:8 famously reminds us, God desires that we should love mercy. Of all that I have learned in working with people with Down syndrome, it is that learning to love mercy rarely looks like what we expect it will. **B**

Shang-Chi Stirs Themes of Identity and Belonging

SOMETIMES I HATE that the hyphen in “Asian-American” commonly exists.


As an Asian American, I find it a constant reminder of our otherness. But the newest addition to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, succeeds in creating a twist on a historically undesirable narrative.

Shang-Chi has all the bells and whistles that we’ve come to appreciate with all superhero films in the MCU: quick-witted humor, action sequences, character cameos, Easter eggs, and the ever-present struggle between good and evil. But in many other ways, its appeal—especially for Asian Americans—is the visceral affirmation we experience when the nuances of Asian culture in North America are portrayed with dignity and accuracy.

For example, Shang-Chi (played by Asian Canadian Simu Liu of *Kim’s Convenience* fame) is the reluctant hero who has a complicated past. There’s nothing new here on the surface; this is a common movie trope. Equally common is his line, “All I ever wanted was a normal life.” But hearing this phrase coming out of the mouth of an Asian American character adds an uncanny layer of familiarity. For many Asian Americans, like Shang-Chi, our goal was never to stand out, but to fit in. The anonymity of normalcy was a greater virtue than cultural exceptionalism because we always carried with us a desire to be unnoticed for the purpose of inclusion.

And while this desire to fit in is at the forefront of our collective psyche, there exists an equally persistent and conflicting desire to stay connected to the culture of our ancestral homelands. *Shang-Chi* gets this nuance correct as well. In a scene where Shang-Chi is revealing his identity to his partner, Katy (played by Awkwafina), she comically ridicules him for changing his name from Shang to Shaun—a laughable attempt to hide his true identity.

The impact of this comedic moment might be missed by most, but the proximity in pronunciation from Shang to Shaun represents a yin-yang struggle that Asian Americans know all too well. The shaky, wobbly-knees tension of straddling two cultures without ever fully leaping from one side to the other is the driving force of the movie, but by telling it through the narrative lens of an Asian American, *Shang-Chi* offers a refreshing take on an old theme.

Following in the footsteps of *Crazy Rich Asians*, *Always Be My Maybe*, and *Minari*, Marvel’s *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* joins other recent films that have highlighted the hyphen of a dual identity in a positive way. This film portrays Asian exceptionalism not as something to shy away from, but as an avenue into inclusion. (PG-13, Marvel Studios) 



Daniel Jung is a graduate of Calvin Seminary and lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, with his wife, Debbie, their two children, and their long-haired chihuahua. Together they serve at HCPC Living Stones EM (livingstonesem.com), a multigenerational

Korean-American ministry in the Upper Manoa Valley.



Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church

By Matt Smethurst

Reviewed by Cedric Parsels

Matt Smethurst sets out to help churches regain a more biblical understanding of and greater appreciation for the office and work of deacons. He starts with an overview of how the church has historically thought of and utilized deacons. He then turns to Scripture to explain the origins of the diaconate, the biblical requirements for those who would serve as deacons, and the responsibilities of the office. Finally, Smethurst reminds us that the office of deacon (ideally) is a reflection of Christ himself. This relatively short book would serve well as the basis for a book study, especially one predominantly made up of elders and deacons. (Crossway)



The Real Life Podcast

By Jefferson and Alyssa Bethke

Reviewed by Kayleigh Fongers

Remember a time when podcasts weren't as popular as they are now? Even then, Jefferson (Jeff) and Alyssa Bethke were podcasting. The married Christian couple launched their podcast in 2014. Several years and a name change later, the duo still shares wisdom through *The Real Life Podcast*.

The heart of the show is authentic, faith-based conversation on topics of theology, culture, and family life. As Jeff shares in the intro, the couple's goal is for listeners to feel as though they're sitting in the Bethkes' living room drinking a cup of coffee and engaging in discussion. This genuine feel makes the show appealing and engaging for listeners. Episodes of *The Real Life Podcast* are available for streaming on most podcast platforms.



Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land

By Toni Jensen

Reviewed by Agnes Mastin

Toni Jensen's recent book, *Carry*, jars the audience out of its comfort zone. It's difficult to read at first, but as the reader nears the end of the journey, it becomes difficult to put down. It is important to note that while Jensen mentions the Bible Belt, Sunday school, and enjoying going to church, this is not a story of a journey toward Christ. It is a powerful, poetic memoir about what it means to exist as an Indigenous woman in America, told in snapshots of the author's encounters with gun violence. I encourage those who choose to pick up this nonfiction piece to take frequent breaks and practice self-care, as the content is not for the faint of heart. (Ballantine Books)



Only Murders in the Building

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

Martin Short is getting rave reviews for his hilarious portrayal of Oliver, a sweet but narcissistic aging Broadway producer who, along with Steve Martin's character, Charles, launches a true-crime podcast as they chase down clues to who murdered someone in their posh apartment building on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Selena Gomez's Mabel is the needed cup of black coffee to Oliver and Charles' dessert of nonstop antics. Part satire, part comedy, and part murder mystery, the show raises good questions about the true-crime craze. Do we dehumanize victims (and even killers) by reducing human beings to characters in a story we follow? As content creators, to what lengths will we go for more followers or, in this case, podcast listeners? Rated TV-MA for strong language and gory images. (Hulu)

The Lowdown

You're Only Human:

Kelly M. Kapic offers a better way to make peace with the fact that God didn't create us to do it all. Readers will emerge better equipped to cultivate a life that fosters gratitude, rest, and faithful service. (Brazos)

Based On Francine River's Beloved Novel:

Redeeming Love is a powerful retelling of the biblical book of Hosea against the backdrop of the California Gold Rush of 1850. (PG-13, Jan. 22, Universal Pictures)

Ben and Erin Are Back:

Since 2016, the dynamic duo of Ben and Erin Napier has been transforming their small town of Laurel, Miss., one historic home at a time on their hit show *Home Town*. Season 6 drops Jan. 2. (HGTV, Discovery+)

Violeta: This sweeping novel from Isabel Allende, the *New York Times* best-selling author of *A Long Petal of the Sea*, tells the epic story of Violeta del Valle, a woman whose life spans 100 years and bears witness to the greatest upheavals of the 20th century. (Ballantine)

Does the Bible Support Slavery?

The first
Christians pointed
to a different way.



Kurt Schaefer, of Wayland, Mich., is professor emeritus (Calvin University) of history of economic thought and an M.Div. graduate of Calvin Seminary. He is an elder (and parish accordion player!) at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids. He is the author of *Husband, Wife, Father, Child, Master, Slave: Peter through Roman Eyes and Singing with Jesus: The Lord's Psalm*.

THE BIBLE SUPPORTS SLAVERY? “Yes, but Roman slavery was different,” say some. Yet Stanford’s Walter Scheidel (*Cambridge World History of Slavery*) concludes, “The story of the Roman slave supply must count as one of the darkest chapters of human history.” One-third of Italy was enslaved, many for sex. There’s evidence of branding, excruciating work assignments, and barbaric punishments, but no evidence any slave had a day in court under slave-abuse laws. The enslaved were legally property. Most, especially the masses of non-prestige workers, would never be freed. None could be freed before age 30, and adult life expectancy was roughly 37. Women were rarely freed before menopause, ensuring their children remained enslaved. Enslavement was enforced by omnipresent police brutality.

Passages like Colossians 3:22 tell the enslaved to obey their masters. Is Paul OK with this slavery?

That would contradict the other ideas and practices of Jesus and the first Christians. They believed all persons are created in God’s image, contradicting the Roman legal theory justifying slavery. They espoused Beatitudes and fruit of the Spirit inconsistent with enslavement. They shocked Romans by making the last first. They accepted all classes, nationalities, and ethnicities equally. They openly critiqued public and political culture, despite facing martyrdom.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians is half of a pair of letters, both publicly read in Colossae. Philemon, Colossians’ twin, addresses the former slave-owner Onesimus. The letter explains that Paul has been sheltering and collaborating with Onesimus, violating Rome’s fugitive slave law. This was an extremely touchy subject. Runaway slaves undermined the empire. Romans exquisitely coordinated all levels of government and military to eradicate fugitive slave

holding; the penalties for runaways and accomplices were substantial. Yet Paul is in his element. He is open about his civil disobedience, praises Onesimus, and chides Philemon. Paul attacks the ideological basis for slavery, operative since Aristotle. Onesimus, Paul says, is by nature a brother to Philemon—a family member and fellow heir, not an inferior or a piece of property. Slavery has no rationale. It doesn’t reflect differences in character or aptitude or destiny or essence or dignity.

So why does Paul tell slaves to obey their masters? This might actually be part of a compassionate approach to subverting slavery. Why even mention the culture’s assumption about slave behavior unless Christians sensed and were taught that enslavement was inconsistent with what Christians know and believe? Some might have concluded insurrection was expected of them, especially when Paul has challenged fugitive slave laws. Paul suggests the disobedience of slave rebellions isn’t likely to help the enslaved. The last rebellion had ended in a bloodbath.

Instead, the New Testament’s authors undermine slavery’s foundations. This was supported in various ways by Gregory of Nyssa, St. Patrick, Origen, Augustine, and John Chrysostom.

The New Testament addressed a culture that constructed personal identity from stereotypes about ethnicity, gender, class, legal status, and age. The first Christians pointed to a different way. When your sense of self is grounded not in individualism or labeling, but in being a sibling in a diverse community framed by God’s love, many new things become possible: respect for others, careful listening, laying down privilege for others’ good, and working for change. Achieving this new sense of identity required the first believers to face their own ignorance, habits, cowardice, and assumptions—and to repent. This has always been the Christian way. **B**

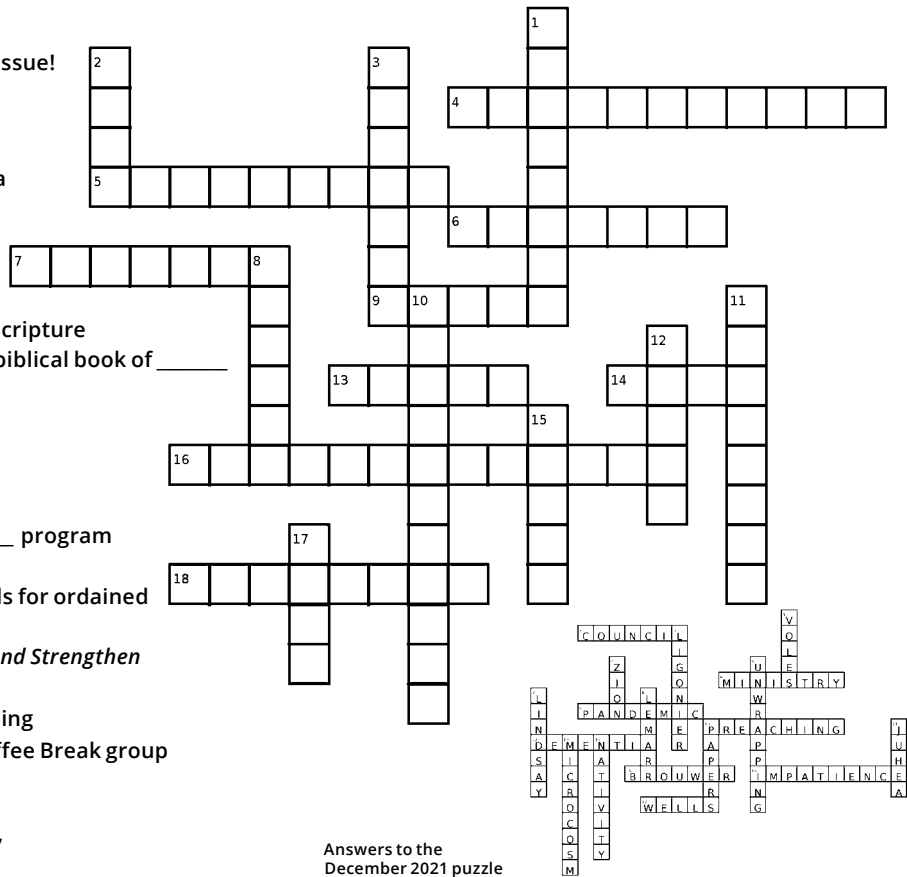
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

Down

- 1. First name of the president of the CRC in Cuba
- 2. He is a spiritual leader and healer in Cambodia
- 3. Climate _____ Project
- 8. Three Michigan Christian schools won championships in _____
- 10. Where plants grow in winter
- 11. A runaway slave Paul helps and mentions in Scripture
- 12. *Redeeming Love* is a powerful retelling of the biblical book of _____
- 15. What Micah 6:8 tells us to love
- 17. First name of actor Liu, star of *Shang-Chi*


Across

- 4. This is a response to repentance, not sin
- 5. Heroes Camp in Mishawaka, Ind., runs a _____ program for girls with a local CRC
- 6. Clergy _____ Program grants fund sabbaticals for ordained pastors in the U.S.
- 7. Title of book with the subtitle *How They Serve and Strengthen the Church*
- 9. The _____ Prairie was subject to severe flooding
- 13. Where missionary Jeong-sun Lim began a Coffee Break group
- 14. An elderly Jewish widow in Vancouver
- 16. Dutch word for "Reformed"
- 18. It can cause us to lose sight of the "right now"



Answers to the December 2021 puzzle

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DEADLINES: 1/10/22 February; 2/7/22 March. Subject to availability. Details online.

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

Congregational Announcements

BRADENTON CRC WELCOMES WINTER VISITORS AND VACATIONERS! Our Florida church is diverse in ages and interests but united in passionate service to our Savior. Sunday services at 10 A.M. and 5 P.M. Weekly Bible studies are available in person or on Zoom. We also offer various other events and gatherings. www.bradentoncrc.org

Church Positions Available

1ST CRC DEMOTTE INDIANA SEEKS FULL TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR Job description and contact information are on our website: www.1stcrcdemotte.org

ESCALON CRC IN CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY is in search of an ordained male who will join our 5 person staff as our Pastor of Congregational Care under our Lead Pastor. Interested applicants can see full job description and apply at our website: www.escaloncrc.org

FAITH FORMATION PASTOR Hope Fellowship CRC in Denver, CO is searching for a pastor who will give leadership to the areas of congregational life and discipleship. For a full job description and church profile reach out to us at pastorsearch@hopefellowshipcrc.org

FULL-TIME YOUTH AND WORSHIP DIRECTOR: Tacoma Community CRC seeking youth/worship director to be part of our team. For more information and to apply visit www.tacomacrc.org

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 bruceandlisa@hotmail.com. Job description and church profile are available on the portal. Housing is available if needed.

LEAD PASTOR East Saugatuck Church, located just south of Holland, MI, is seeking a full-time lead pastor. The ideal candidate will be gifted in Biblical preaching and have a heart for discipleship, community outreach, and congregational care. To learn more or access our church profile, visit espoint.org. Send questions and resumes to search@espoint.org.

LEAD PASTOR NEEDED IN HAYWARD, CA (SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA) Christ's Community Church (CRC). We are a multicultural church with exciting worship and warm fellowship looking for someone to lead us into our next chapter. For more info contact CCCPastorSearch21@gmail.com

MINISTER OF THE WORD Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Saskatoon Sk is seeking a minister of Word and Sacrament, who will devote himself to prayer, study of God's Word, the proclamation of the Gospel and the shepherding of our membership. For more information, please contact Joel de Haan at dehaan.joel@gmail.com or view our ad on network.crcna.org

PASTOR: First CRC of beautiful Thunder Bay, ON is prayerfully seeking a Pastor to preach Biblical and engaging messages, provide spiritual leadership promoting the faith formation of all age groups, and guide us to be a positive impact on our local community. Please email your resume or inquiries to search@frcrctbay.ca.

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. Interested applicants may email kvoldsteadt@gmail.com or fprcguam@gmail.com or call 1-671-734-7778.

THE PALO ALTO, CA CRC SEEKS A PASTOR to lead us in worship and outreach to our community. For more information, see our job post and profile in the CRC Portal or contact the committee chairman, Don Sterk, at don@sterk.org.

WORSHIP LEADER/DIRECTOR (PART TIME) HOLLAND, MI We're looking for a worship director for our growing community at The Foundation Church in Holland, MI. Join us and experience Sunday mornings as we worship with contemporary songs of praise, meaningful prayer, and messages focused on the Word of God. Contact us at SearchTeam@foundationchurchonline.org

Seeking potential nominees for
Chief Administrative Officer
 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America

This is an opportunity to serve the church by

- Guiding and overseeing the leadership, strategy, and performance of the CRCNA administration, ministry agencies, and ministry partners.
- Promoting the governance partnership between synod, the Council of Delegates, the Canada and U.S. boards, and ministry boards, and ensuring compliance with the denominational ministry plan through joint ministry agreements and other methods.
- Overseeing the administrative and ministry leadership systems of the CRCNA, including capital and operating budgets, and ensuring these achieve budget metrics and outcomes.

The nominee will exemplify a strong, vibrant Christian faith marked by humility and integrity. He or she will also be a strong leader with a master's degree and senior-level experience in complex organizations that include oversight of administration and finance operations. He or she will also be a member of the CRNCA (or be willing to join) and demonstrate a deep respect for the polity, theology, history, and growing diversity of the denomination.



For more information visit crcna.org/careers. Please direct all inquiries to the chair of the Chief Administrative Officer Search Team, Dr. Patricia Harris, CAOSearch@crcna.org.

Birthday 90 Years

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

SADIE (HEERINGA) VISSCHER will celebrate her 90th birthday on January 21st. With her husband Herman, who passed in 2015, she had 4 children: Carol (Rick- deceased), Sharon (Paul), John (deceased), and Bryan (Memory). This group soon grew to a family of 6 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren (thus far). We rejoice and give thanks for her care and influence in our lives. Birthday greetings are welcome and can be sent to: 4708 West View Drive, Everett, WA 98203.

TINA VAN DYKE of Grand Rapids, formerly of Sioux Center, Iowa, celebrated her 90th birthday on December 4. Her children Steve (Vonnie), Alan (Cyndie) Joan Crull (Terry), Mike (Lillian) and Wayne, 9 grandchildren and 17 great grandchildren thank the Lord for all his blessings on her long life.

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 75 YEARS

VAN ZEE, Harold and Jeanette (Hansum) 725 N James Ave, Apt C, Tea, SD 57064 celebrated their 75th wedding anniversary November 25, 2021. They, with their children and grandchildren, praise God for His faithfulness and many blessings.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 70 YEARS

ZIGTERMAN, Ron & Chris will celebrate their 70th wedding anniversary on January 18th, 2022. We praise the Lord for their example to our family of God's faithfulness.

Obituaries

DIELMAN, Clarissa, age 97, of Grand Rapids MI, passed away on Saturday, November 20, 2021. Cris was preceded in death by her husband Frank Dieleman, her son, Dale Dieleman, a grandchild, Josue Francious Dieleman, her parents, John and Abbie Tiddens, and her sister Mae Van Hekken. She is survived by her sister Amy Ritsema, her sons and daughters-in-law, Steven and Connie Dieleman, Reverend Randall Joe and Marcia Dieleman, and daughter-in-law, Sarah Dieleman. Clarissa (Chris) was a grandmother to nine grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. She will always be remembered for her confidence in God, love for family and extensive friendships. Clarissa was a member of Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids.

DYKSTRA, Lois, age 85, passed away peacefully in Grand Rapids on November 22 after a long battle with cancer. She was predeceased by a son, Bryan, and a daughter, Susan. She is survived by Thomas, her husband of 62 years, daughter Linda Jonker (Peter), three grandchildren, Kat, Patrick, and Abby, and her special life-long friend Shirley Hoogeboom. She was a member of LaGrave Ave. Christian Reformed Church.

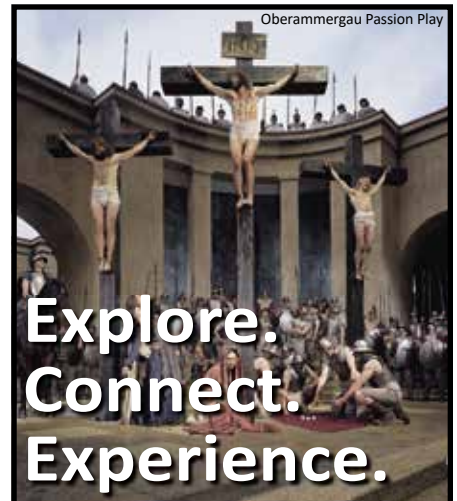
HELDER, John S. age 91, of Kentwood, MI passed away peacefully on September 14, 2021. He was the loving husband of Gertrude (deceased) for

65 years. He was the loving Dad of Karen Helder, Ron Helder, Jim Eaton, Mary Van Noord and Bob and Cathy Helder; dear Grandfather of Lisa and Matt De Haan (Emily and Kaitlyn), Jonathan and April Van Noord (Owen and Alaina), Elizabeth and Jordan Wheeler, Andrew and Nora Helder, and Jessica and Curt Jennings. He is survived by several brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews and nieces. John loved, encouraged and served his colleagues and friends at Mills Paper Company, WJBL Radio, The King's Choraliers, the founding Board of Sunset Manor, Zondervan Singpiration, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, North Bay Resort at Big Star Lake, the City of Kentwood, and the Churchmen's Luncheon at New Community Church. We are thankful for his life of inspirational solos, creative service, positive perspective and encouragement as John sang often that "His Eye is on the Sparrow" and he knew that God watches over all of us.

KEEGSTRA, Patricia, 84, of Spring Hill, FL passed away on October 12, 2021. She was born in Hasbrouck Heights, NJ on September 9, 1937. She was married to Carroll Keegstra in Grand Rapids, MI on June 5, 1958. She graduated from Eastern Christian High School in 1955 and Calvin College (now Calvin University) in 1959. She played the violin, piano, and organ and taught piano. She also sang in her church choir along with her husband, Carroll. Patricia loved horses and dogs, particularly her buckskin, Tanner, and her little poodle, Becky. After retiring from selling jewelry she became a craft jeweler. A serious photographer since high school, she used her skill documenting her other love, traveling the world with her husband, Carroll Keegstra. She is survived by children Phillip and Kathy Griffith (Maryland), Beth and Debra Hall (Alabama), Russ and Mary (Florida), and Sue and Joe Bartholomew (Michigan); grandchildren Kayla, Austin, and Jackson; siblings Hildred VanderVeen (Illinois) and Bart and Doris Houseman (Maryland).

KOSSEN, Rose (Hoitenga), 86, passed away unexpectedly on October 12, 2021. She graduated from Grand Rapids Christian High School and Calvin College, and later earned a master's degree in Guidance and Counseling. Rose and her husband John were married for 53 years before his passing in 2009. Rose is survived by her four daughters and their husbands, 11 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

VANDER LUGT, Annetta, age 80, died November 5, 2021, after a difficult battle with Lymphoma. She was preceded in death by her parents, her husband Al, her daughter Emily of 2019, her sister Elizabeth, and other in-laws. She will be missed by her sons Eliot Vander Lugt (Hector), Ethan Vander Lugt (Terrie), Ellen Mora (Pablo); 6 granddaughters; 3 grandsons; 10 great grandchildren; her sisters Marlene and Joyce; her brother Harold and sister-in-law Lois Hooyer. She is remembered as an educational teacher of Salt Lake City, a head organist at Madison Avenue CRC in Paterson, NJ and at Neland CRC in Grand Rapids MI, along with being a worship leader, piano teacher, and loving member of Neland Avenue CRC.



2022 GUIDED ITINERARIES:

THE NETHERLANDS: OFF THE BEATEN PATH
Apr 3 – Apr 15 | *Henk Aay & Bob Hoeksema*
\$ Refundable Deposit \$

NETHERLANDS WATERWAY CRUISE
Apr 8 – Apr 16 | *Bruce & Judy Buursma*

PRAGUE & DANUBE RIVER CRUISE
May 7 – May 18 | *Ellen & George Monsma*

PASSION PLAY TOUR: SOUTHERN GERMANY & AUSTRIA
May 15 – May 24 | *Rev. Jim Pollard*

GERMANY: LUTHER, BACH, AND THE PASSION PLAY
May 22 - May 31 | *Pastor Chris Lane with Dick & Candice Wallace*

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN TURKEY:
May 23 – Jun 4 | *Dr. Jeffrey Weima*

IRELAND PAST AND PRESENT
Jun 16 – Jun 25 | *Debra Freeberg*

EUROPEAN HANDBELL FESTIVAL
Jun 18 - Jun 29 | *Deborah Rice & Keith Cole*

PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND
Jun 20 - Jul 2 | *Bill & Lyn Vanden Bosch*
\$ Refundable Deposit \$

THE CANADIAN ROCKIES
Aug 20 - Aug 28 | *Bruce Buursma*

ROME AND THE AMALFI COAST
Sep 24 - Oct 2 | *Mindy Miller & Eric Kuhn*
\$ Refundable Deposit \$

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WINTER, Peter Arent previously of Brantford, ON died Oct 28, 2021 in Barrie ON, age 86. He leaves behind his wife, Katie, children, step-children, grandchildren, and step-grand & great-grandchildren: Janette Winter-Wassink & Dick Wassink: Ada, Ian, Lea, Zoe; Yolanda & Jeff Polet: Jimmy, Christina, Stephanie; Arnold & Betty Winter: Bernice, Amy, Sophia; Erica & Matt Posthuma: Thomas, Andrew and Evan. Angie & Garry Zondervan: Joel and Jackie, Andrew and Jaclyn, Matthew and Amber, Stephen; Ed & Teresa Aukema: David and Teresa, Michael and Jordan; John & Kristie Aukema: Nathan, Kaleb, Grace; Richard & Claudia Aukema: Xander, Esme, Emiel; and Kim & Andrew Coutts: Bryn, Jack. Pete was predeceased by his first wife, Nell Winter-denDekker(2005), daughter, Bernice(1984) and daughter-in-law, Johanna(2018). See: hillandrobinson.com

Employment

INAUGURAL VICE PRESIDENT OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE Bethel University, located in St. Paul, Minnesota, is pleased to announce its search for the inaugural vice president of student experience. Bethel seeks a Christ-centered, forward-thinking, strategic, and collaborative leader who will create a vibrant student experience and provide dynamic and purposeful leadership to the Bethel community. As a senior leader, the vice president of student experience is responsible for the activities and learning experiences that take place alongside the academic curriculum at all schools within the university, including the College of Arts & Sciences, College of Adult & Professional Studies, Bethel Seminary, and the Graduate School.

It is expected the successful candidate will have a minimum of 10 years of progressively responsible successful leadership at a senior administrative level. A deep understanding of lifespan development and faith formation through the lifespan is required. While experience in higher education is strongly preferred, those with a proven track record of the development of programs, systems, and processes that cultivate faith formation are encouraged to apply. Master's degree in areas related to student experience, counseling, or faith formation or equivalent is required. A Ph.D. or other doctorate degree is preferred.

Bethel was founded as a Seminary in 1871 by Swedish-American Baptist minister John Alexis Edgren. The Baptist General Conference (now Converge) took on support in 1914 and it became Bethel College and Seminary. In 2004, the institution became Bethel University, a change in name that better matched their broad and growing scope of academic offerings. Now a thriving liberal arts university, Bethel has deep roots in a pietistic, evangelical Christianity characterized by vibrant faith, devotion to Scripture, and an irenic spirit.

According to Study.com, Bethel University ranks in the top ten best Christian Universities in the nation and 91% of seniors rank their

Bethel education good or excellent. With more than 100 areas of study across four schools, Bethel develops broadly educated, critically thinking Christians who know what it means to follow their dreams with a living faith.

Candidates are asked to submit electronically (in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF): (1) a letter of interest that focuses on the areas of opportunity described in the profile; (2) a curriculum vitae; and (3) the names, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers of five professional references. All inquiries, nominations, and applications will be held in strictest confidence, and references will not be contacted without the applicant's expressed permission. Applications, inquiries, or nominations can be sent to: BethelVPStudentExperience@agbsearch.com. To receive full consideration, materials should be received on or before January 10, 2022.

Please visit our profile at <https://www.agbsearch.com/searches/inaugural-vice-president-of-student-experience-bethel-university> to view more detailed information about this position. Additional information about Bethel University is available at: <https://www.bethel.edu/> AGB Search is assisting Bethel University with this very important search. Candidates are encouraged to reach out to the consultants to discuss this opportunity.

Dr. Kim Bobby, Principal, AGB Search
Kim.bobby@agbsearch.com
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Executive Search Consultant,
AGB Search
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A Letter from a Brown Brother in Christ

My brownness has allowed me to see the most pressing issues of our day from a different point of view.



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


I DON'T CONSIDER MYSELF white or Black. I'm what you might call a brown brother in Jesus Christ. As a matter of fact, brown people are a blend of white and Black ancestry. My last name is Fernandez, which originates in Spain, but both my parents hail from the Dominican Republic, and I was born and raised in Miami, Fla. I can speak three languages: English, Spanish, and Spanglish. Yes, Spanglish—a combination of English and Spanish that is a very real part of everyday life in Miami. Recently, I was reminded of my whiteness when I was diagnosed with a potentially debilitating hand condition called Dupuytren's disease. It is nicknamed "Viking disease" because it is believed to have been passed down by the Vikings and is disproportionately present among those of Nordic descent. Now, every time I look at the palms of my hands I'm reminded of my whiteness, but every time I flip my hands over and look at the backs, I'm reminded of my Blackness. It is remarkable how much darker my brownness can get with just a couple of hours in the South Florida sun. Remember, brown people don't get red in the sun; we just get browner.

The good news about my recent diagnosis of Dupuytren's disease is that after my last MRI, the doctor said that my condition is currently inactive. In fact, my doctor couldn't believe it. He said he had never seen a case like mine before, one in which the condition was evident but completely dormant at the same time. So this most likely means that my whiteness gave me the disease, but my Blackness has kept it in check. Needless to say, I consider myself blessed to be brown.

Another big blessing of being a blend of colors is that my brownness has allowed me to see the most pressing issues of our day from a different point of view. This is why it is so troubling

for me to look around and see such a divided church and country. I see so many lines that divide the church: white vs. Black, mask vs. no mask, vaccinated vs. unvaccinated, open borders vs. closed borders, and the have-too-much vs. the have-too-little. When I see these divisions, my brownness compels me to ask, "Is there a third way to approach these issues?" As a matter of fact, there is! My brownness has enabled me to see things from a third perspective.

What if we began looking at the issue of immigration from the perspective of what God's Word has to say about our responsibility toward aliens and foreigners? Whatever happened to "hate the sin but love the sinner"? It seems to me like nowadays we not only hate the sin, but we also manage to hate the sinner. What if we looked at the issue of racism from the perspective of the apostle Paul, who reminds us in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"?

It seems that the world we live in continues to grow more polarized with each passing headline. My third perspective has taught me that instead of meeting in the middle, we should meet at the cross of Jesus Christ. It's at the cross where we see that the nails the Roman soldiers drove into our Savior pierced both sides of his hands: the lighter side and the darker side. 

Medicine



Illustration for *The Banner* by Grace Bruin while a student under art teacher Susan Van Geest at Avall Academy, Minneapolis, MN.



Rachel Kramer Hibma writes poems and essays inspired by her experiences with chronic illness. A former English teacher and school counselor, she now does freelance writing and editing. Rachel and her husband, Dane, attend Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

WE SIT ACROSS from each other in that circle of leather recliners, drinking liquid gold vitamins into our forearms, eager to suck life back into our bodies.

She was my student and I her school counselor five years ago when we spoke of dreams and class schedules in that tiny office with a window in the door.

She was the one who offered to deliver cookies when I left for those uncertain weeks of rest, or was it when I left for good, feeling the cold, grey surface of a life at rock bottom?

I've seen her since, stocking dresses and jeans at a local boutique, but I could duck around racks to avoid her view. Now, she is my direct gaze, and I hers.

It's her first day here, to my seasoned six months. Her face is written with pain and uncertainty as the doctor brings more pills. She is buried under an electric pad on her lap.

"It feels funny," she says.
"I just want it to be done," she tells her mom, once, twice.
My heart bleeds for her.

I offer her phrases, trite as they feel passing through my lips:
"I know what you mean ...
like that for me too ...
you'll understand the pills ...
write it down for you ...
you'll know what to do ...
give it time ..."

Somewhere in our conversation, her eyes soften, look less afraid. Her mouth curls up at its corners.

And I'm sitting in my office once more:
My words the only medicine
I have to give. **B**

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2022

IN PERSON OR ON DEMAND

10 Monday

ANGELA WILLIAMS GORRELL

The Gravity of Joy

Underwritten by
Holland Home
and Howard Miller

11 Tuesday

L. GREGORY JONES

Trusting Institutions:
Rediscovering the Power
of Christianity's Surprise

Underwritten by
Howard Miller
and the deVries Institute for
Global Faculty Development

12 Wednesday

**SARAH STEWART
HOLLAND AND
BETH SILVERS**

Keeping it Nuanced: How to Have
Grace-filled Political Conversations

Underwritten by
the Henry Institute for the Study
of Christianity & Politics

13 Thursday

REUBEN MILLER

Halfway Home: Race,
Punishment, and the Afterlife
of Mass Incarceration

Underwritten by
I.C.N. Foundation

14 Friday

RICK STEVES (VIRTUAL)

Why Travel Makes Us
Better Global Citizens

Underwritten by
Covenant Living of the Great Lakes

17 Monday

**LATASHA MORRISON
IN CELEBRATION OF MLK DAY**

Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's
Heart for Racial Reconciliation

Underwritten by
Larry & Mary Gerbens
and Liza & Khan Nedd

18 Tuesday

MAX STOSSEL

We've Been Sneaking into
Your Brain: The True Impact
of Social Media

Underwritten by
Miller Johnson

Encore Event 7:00 p.m.
(in person only)

19 Wednesday

**ADMIRAL
JAMES STAVRIDIS**

Geopolitical Security
Concerns in a Technologically
Transforming World

Underwritten by
Bruce & Mary Okkema and the
Peter C. and Emajeane Cook Foundation

20 Thursday

COLUM McCANN

Making Peace with Stories

Underwritten by
Patrick and Maria O'Hare

21 Friday

N.T. WRIGHT

Galatians in Three Dimensions

Underwritten by
the Center for Excellence in Preaching

24 Monday

G. SUJIN PAK

Wrestling with the Word:
Biblical Interpretation
through Church History

Underwritten by
the Stob Lecture Series

25 Tuesday

SIMPLY THREE

Simply Three in Concert
& Conversation

Underwritten by
Holland Litho Printing Services

Encore Event 7:00 p.m.
(in person only)

26 Wednesday

**COL. NICOLE
MALACHOWSKI**

Harnessing Headwinds of Change

Underwritten by
Barnes & Thornburg, LLP

27 Thursday

BRAD MONTAGUE

Becoming Better Grownups

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GMB Architects + Engineering
and Samaritas

28 Friday

GARY SCHMIDT

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Why Stories Move Us

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