

BANNER

MAY 2022

THEBANNER.ORG

A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing in a spiral-bound notebook. The person is using a black pen. The notebook has handwritten text on it, including the question "Do you like to write?". The person is wearing a red string bracelet and a green bracelet on their left wrist. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a church interior.

Church Shopping

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“To sing in my language really helps my spiritual growth because I am able to understand what I sing about God... I received Jesus’ saving grace through singing.”

- CHANTEL

As violence and war broke out in the Democratic Republic of Congo, hundreds of people were displaced. Chantel fled her home when she was just five years old. She lived in a refugee camp for many years and never learned to read.

When she moved to the United States, Chantel had to navigate a new culture and learning a new language. She had grown up praying and singing in church but found it difficult to now worship and grow in her faith in a church that didn't speak her language.

Because of your support, Chantel found a church home.

She now attends Strong Tower Ministries, a Resonate church plant that worships in both English and Swahili. It is a church designed to serve refugees like Chantel

Thank you for welcoming newcomers and providing them with a church home. Because of your support, this church plant is thriving!

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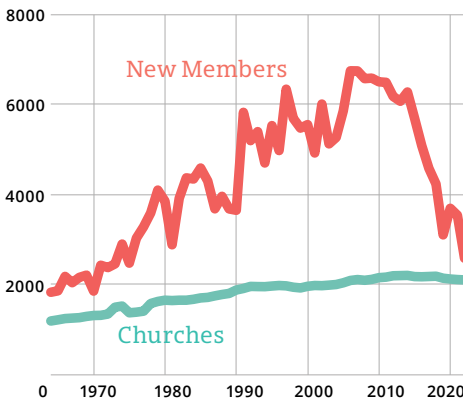
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BY THE NUMBERS

This graph depicts the number of people who were received into membership of the CRC, not including baptisms of infants of existing members, between 1970 and now. The green line tracks the number of Christian Reformed churches. New members include people who made public profession of faith, adults who were baptized, those who made public reaffirmation of faith, and small children of these new members.

New Members



Cover: Trying to find a community of believers in a new town can be difficult any time, but especially during a pandemic. // Photo by Marcos Paulo Prado/Unsplash

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: Ontario Campus Ministry's Findings on Youth Church Participation Match National Results
- » Podcast review: *Jane & Jesus*
- » Book review: *Morning and Evening Prayers*, by Cornelius Plantinga
- » Music review: *Into the Mystery*, by NEEDTOBREATHE

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CORRECTION

The article, "Queens CRC: The Future of a Signature Congregation in Dispute" (April 2022), should have said Rev. Paul Szto was the second Chinese pastor ordained in the CRCNA. The first, in 1955, was Rev. Isaac Jen.

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Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
Director of CRCNA Communications and Marketing



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FUEL TO THE FIRE



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Presenting and Underlying Problems

If we in the Christian Reformed Church do not resolve our underlying issues, we will never resolve our presenting problems.



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.

IN THE MEDICAL WORLD, the symptom that causes a person to seek help from a doctor, therapist, or other provider is the presenting problem. However, there could be underlying problems unknown to the patient that are causing the presenting symptom. For example, I might complain to my doctor of a chronic headache. That's my presenting problem. But my underlying problem might be a brain tumor.

Similarly, we as a denomination have a lot of presenting problems right now, from divisions over LGBTQ+ issues to anti-racism approaches, among others, and we have focused our collective attention mostly on these presenting problems. But what if we have some serious, unaddressed underlying problems?

In past editorials, I have identified our spiritual and intellectual pride, our need for holistic spiritual revival, an overly intellectual faith that assumes there are intellectual solutions to all problems, domesticating Scripture to confirm our agendas and biases, and a hyperfocus on outward religious conformity rather than inner spiritual transformation, to name a few. If we in the Christian Reformed Church do not resolve our underlying issues, we will never resolve our presenting problems. Even if we are able to end the same-sex marriage debate once and for all, some other issue will polarize and divide us if we don't deal with our underlying problems. Yesterday it was fighting over women in office; today it is same-sex marriage; tomorrow it will be something else. We will always fight over something unless we face and resolve our underlying issues. As far as I can tell, we have collectively ignored them.

We cannot simply pin the blame on so-called "liberals" on one hand or so-called "conservatives" on the other. For me, all sides of the debates share

the underlying problems. From my experience, it seems that too many readers cannot or will not see past their partisan lenses to read my editorials as diagnosing shared spiritual issues. That itself is a symptom of a bigger problem. For these readers, most of what I have written is cast and interpreted in light of polarized partisanship and the U.S. culture wars. Everything is read with the question "Are you for us or against us?" I would much rather people ask, "Are you for Christ or against Christ?" To that I would answer, "I have always tried to be Christ's servant."

Here is another underlying problem: I suspect the hostile sides in the CRCNA have different operative worldviews. I say "operative" because we might all espouse a certain theology or worldview, but what actually operates in our default postures and practices might be different. Are our operative worldviews sorely infected by unbiblical ideas?

Even the concept of worldviews is contested. Christians have different explanations of what counts as a biblical worldview. And yes, the concept of worldviews has been weaponized as well in our polarized world.

I fear I don't exactly know the way forward. But I know God, who holds us in his hands, knows the future and the way. And our trust is in God. **B**



REPLY ALL

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

The Silenced Middle

I personally identify politically with being in the “silenced middle,” as Shiao Chong ably expressed in his March editorial. ... I’ve found it helpful to be less focused on my “right” understanding of issues and more caringly focused on why others believe as they do. It is a relational shift for me, from staking out a position on an issue to first asking honest questions of the other as to what evidence (information) they personally have, what experience they might have gained on an issue, or what understanding they have that leads them to think as they do. By first holding back my political views to hear out the other person, and through information-seeking questions, I find it is a way to hold the other responsible—as long as I withhold any judgmental attitude I might have. It’s helpful to hold the concept that truth is generally somewhere between “opposing” positions. Therefore, as a follower of the Lord Jesus, I’m to humbly seek out that truth.

» Charles O. Miller // Willmar, Minn.

Surviving

I identify directly with this article (“Surviving After the Death of My Wife,” February 2022). I, too, lost my wife because of her sudden, tragic, head-first fall down our condo stairs in the

middle of the night on Nov. 4, 2020. We were married for 56 years. ... I unloaded my feelings onto God with many tearful laments. I persisted in many such prayers until God gave me his peace to accept his will in allowing her death to happen first (Phil. 4:6-7). ... I recommend to all people who have experienced a spouse’s death to do what is not in our culture but is in the Bible: persist in such prayers with tears while asking for God’s peace. He will give it to you as he has to me.

» Bruce Leiter // Hudsonville, Mich.

Inclusive Praise and Worship

I appreciated the February 2022 Vantage Point recommending at least one hymn per Sunday. As an organist for 60 years and a bass guitarist for 15 years, I greatly appreciated a comment made at a Calvin Worship Symposium session on inter-generational worship—namely, that good blended worship can happen when everyone comes to a service expecting to sing one song they don’t like! Younger members often come to appreciate well-chosen hymns, and older members can actively participate in many contemporary songs that have good lyrics, melody, and rhythm and are also singable. Other songs fade out in a year or two. Churches that have thrown out the organ should use piano and varied orchestral instruments for the hymn.

Dr. Glenn P. Verbrugge // Cadillac, Mich.

Like Ann, I grew up with hymns and organ music in church. But when my children were teens, we began attending a contemporary Christian Reformed church. Though at first I was unfamiliar with many songs, I came to love the worship songs. I still love the old hymns, which our church still sang as well. Some

of my favorite songs are contemporary worship songs that include a hymn in the middle or at the end. Maybe we should encourage songwriters to write more songs that have contemporary worship components as well as a verse or two of the beloved old hymns.

» Lynn Roukema // Prospect Park, NJ.

I’m not quite 60 yet, so I feel I’m at an in-between age for appreciating both praise music and hymns. I defend both! There is a place for praise and worship songs (as long as the same phrase isn’t sung over and over and over until it’s uncomfortable), and there is a place for the old loved hymns! It is possible and complementary to use both in worship. Our church has done a pretty good job of including both, although I think the hymns are sung a bit more than the praise songs. As a bonus, we have not thrown out the organ—we use the organ and piano often, and sometimes guitar and drums too!

» Deb Haak // Borculo, Mich.

Our Polarized World

In his article “Our Currently Polarized World,” Daniel Harrell shares from journalist George Packer’s article “How America Fractured Into Four Parts.” Seemingly, the “world” in this context centers on “Free, Smart, Real, Just AMERICA.” Has the “Christian” American worldview become increasingly narrow? Putting our Americanized factions and fights into the center of the persecuted church would be like tumbleweed in the wind. While the “free, smart, real, just” American church knows nothing of persecution in suffering for the name of Christ, ... the persecuted church has the greatest comprehension of the incomprehensible love of Christ. Could our greatest undoing be in smugly seeking rightness in the midst of fights and factions? Is that our contribution to “polarizing the world”? Perhaps our greatest calling is to seek shalom in the midst of persecution.

Barb Clouse // Battle Creek, Mich.

Conservative vs. Liberal

Human Sexuality Overtures

How is it possible that in the lengthy article “Classis Alberta North Addresses Human Sexuality Overtures in the Round” (online), there was not one word about seeking guidance from Scripture? The Spirit, yes, but who decides what the Spirit says and who he speaks to? Our prayers are with your members who still hold to Scripture as their guide. Why do those who want these changes not join denominations where this issue has been resolved? But no, the CRCNA has learned nothing from 1944, 1992, and probably another few times where irreconcilable differences just created a new church denomination. A gross misuse of time, effort, and paper.

» Harry Boessenkool // Lethbridge, Alta.

I WISH WE WOULD STOP using the terms “conservative” and “liberal.” Today these terms have become so broad that they don’t convey any clear meaning. They are used in political and church arenas, so they might have widely different meanings. We have to ask: conservative or liberal about what?

Further, the terms have become easy labels to dismiss our neighbors. In some circles the terms convey disgust or are used to demonize others.

Let’s get back to the original meanings. A conservative is one who seeks to conserve. So being a conservative is only good if what you want to conserve is good.

In Jesus’ day, was it good to conserve the old covenant and reject the gospel and new covenant in Jesus’ blood? Of course not. In this regard, Jesus and the apostles were definitely not conservatives. The hostile religious leaders were the conservatives.

Today, is it good to conserve a high view of Scripture as the inspired Word of God? Yes! We don’t want to flounder with a low view of the Bible as little more than human opinion.

In turn, the word “liberal” originally meant generous. It is a Christian virtue to be liberal with offerings for the poor.

“Liberal” can also mean open-mindedness to new ideas. In this sense our Christian colleges offer a liberal arts education. They educate students on a broad range of subjects and help them think critically about whether ideas or viewpoints are sound and true.

But the term “liberal” can have another facet: being not only open to new ideas, but readily embracing them.


What if new viewpoints or behavior stand opposed to biblical values? Like being conservative, being liberal about other viewpoints or behaviors is only

The terms have become easy labels to dismiss our neighbors.

good if the new ideas or behaviors are good. Was it good to be open-minded about Jesus’ message? Absolutely! No Christian would commend the close-minded attitude of the religious leaders.

Is it good to be liberal in embracing the popular view that there are many ways to God? No. That would abandon the teaching of Acts 4:12: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Being a conservative is only good if what you want to conserve is good. Being a liberal is only good if it means being generous or open to new ideas and embracing what is true and noble.

I hope God’s people will spend more time applying godly wisdom to the issues of our day rather than labeling people. Let’s conform our minds and actions to the mind and call of Jesus. To that end, I wish we would drop the terms “conservative” and “liberal.” 



Neil Jasperse is currently serving as a specialized transitional minister at Highland Christian Reformed Church outside of Cadillac, Mich.

As I Was Saying

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

- » A Prayer for Ukraine
- » Isolation 101
- » Christians as Builders



Church Shopping in a Pandemic

By Emily S. Bosscher

July 2021: Officially time to look for a new church. I was struggling with loneliness and longing for community, and in-person restrictions were easing up in Colorado enough to allow me to walk into a church again. But getting to this point was not easy, as my journal clearly reflects from that time:

*I DREAD entering the church/
space alone.*

*I DREAD the awkwardness, small
talk, feeling like an outsider.*

*I miss (my old church) and the
comfort and belonging, even though I
know it didn't start that way 16 years
ago either.*

*I know we are not designed to prac-
tice our faith alone and I know I*

*want to be a part of something ... but
inertia is a huge challenge! JUST DO
IT, RIGHT?*

I laugh at my attempts to motivate myself, but with my anxiety over the process and the ever-present reality that I'm 43 and single, there was no changing the awkwardness of looking for a new church.

The other huge issue was that we were still in the middle of a pandemic. Many churches were still online, and their safety protocols weren't always clear on their websites. I had last attended an in-person indoor church service on Ash Wednesday of 2020 and went to only a few outdoor services in the summer and fall. I moved to Denver in December 2020, so church attendance meant watching live services on YouTube—if the feed didn't cut out. Now it was July, a notoriously bad time

to look for a new church because of vacations, guest pastors, and a rhythm that is far from normal. But it was time.

I did my Google search and website scour, listing churches that seemed to fit what I was looking for. Next I created a schedule of worship times and where I would attend each week. Then I took a deep breath one Sunday morning, pumped myself up, and made myself step into the first of many churches, hoping to find a new “church home.”

I hate the idea that we evaluate and shop for churches. I hate that I was judging churches based on summer services. I hate that churches are struggling to get people in the door, making this a competitive process. Already in 2018 we were addressing this issue in elders meetings. I was researching Gen Z's relationship to

“the church” as an entity and their faith as a practice. *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, the 2019 book by David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, warned us of the hurdles facing the church in the near future, both in attracting Gen Z and keeping baby boomers. The post-pandemic church now faces atrophy on all sides: Gen Z, elderly members facing loneliness and isolation but wary of health concerns, families discovering that tuning in to church on a Sunday morning saves a lot of stress and time needed to dress and transport a family after a busy week, and retirees spending more time near grandchildren. Individual congregations are struggling to pivot technology and programs while discerning how to navigate mandates, common sense, and the misinformation, disinformation, and conflicting data and viewpoints about COVID-19 that have created anxiety, disruption, and discontent within the Christian community. Additionally, finances in churches are tight as giving is down.

In my search for a new church home I was mindful of all of that, which perhaps made this process that much harder. I thought my focus would be Scripture-based preaching, but I found a greater longing to be seen and acknowledged. In many churches not a single person said hello, and I had to ask the name-tagged greeters at the door for directions to the bathroom. I often left feeling more lonely than when I went in and tried to apologize for the church in my mind. I developed new Sabbath practices: go to a church, find a place to sit and reflect on the experience, send video reflections to a friend, and process with my brother. I discovered I wasn't finding community or connection or people to talk to. I longed for someone to see me and welcome me in.

When I have
community at
church, I've been
invited in, seen
for who I am, and
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when offered the
bread and wine at
the Lord's Supper.

Churches are facing very real issues surrounding the future and funding and fracturing right now, and the issues that weigh heavily on the shoulders of pastors and consistories are not just about the well-being of the church as an organization, but the well-being of each congregant who might be dealing with mental health issues, brokenness, frustration, anxiety, and loss. Where to begin to invite and welcome people back to church after this pandemic? What are the right steps in trying to get people in the pews and starting to grow again? Perhaps we should start simply and address the most basic need: community.

Since that early group who called themselves Christians, church members have fed each other, shared what they had, helped those in need, and provided a place of belonging and community for people living in a time of unrest and unknown. They took care of orphans and widows and provided shelter for those who needed it. They became family for those who were seen as undesirable, outsiders, and the lowest. They offered discipleship and mentoring to youth and new Christians. There wasn't a need

to prove belonging through vaccination documents or voting records; there were no organizational charters mandating certain news sources or political affiliations. They weren't perfect, but they were a community.

As a single woman, I often don't feel at home in the church, where the focus is often on family and marriage and children. I don't have conversations after church with people my age because I can't contribute to stories about weekly school activities, soccer practice, or navigating the in-laws on holidays. When I have community at church, I've been invited in, seen for who I am, and called by name when offered the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper. This, I think, is what we should be offering to everyone right now who is longing for connection and recovery post-pandemic. Kinnaman and Matlock told us we will keep Gen Z in the church community through mentoring and discipleship. But really, isn't that what we all are looking for?

What is your church's next step? How about whatever is best for offering community to hungry exiles longing for a place that nurtures, heals, disciplines, and loves them after these difficult years? It's not going to look the same for every church, but everyone needs community, including those who are a little awkward, a little lonely, a lot anxious, and just wanting to be seen and welcomed. **B**



Emily S. Bosscher is an instructional designer, writer, and leadership consultant. She is in the process of becoming a member of Littleton (Colo.) Christian Church (Evangelical Presbyterian).

BIG QUESTIONS

Ethics

Is it right for Christians to care about sports when there are so many problems in the sports industry?

I'm a sports fan. But like you, I'm sometimes uneasy with the baggage that can accompany professional sports.

Why might some Christians be uncomfortable with sports? First, there is the outlandish money involved in some professional sports—a stark contrast to what most people make for doing hard and important work. Second, with huge amounts of money often comes the corruption that your question alludes to: financial and cheating scandals, the increasing prevalence of sports gambling, and so on. Third, isn't watching sports a bit frivolous when there are so many serious problems in the world that demand our attention? Fourth, isn't it easy for sports—the athletes we love, the competitions we want our team to win, the time and attention it takes—to become an all-consuming idol?

Idolatry is indeed a threat—a temptation that Christians ought to resist through the Spirit's leading. And for some of us sometimes that might mean saying no to professional sports. The thing about idolatry, though, is that it's rooted in the goodness of creation. We commit idolatry when we confuse something creaturely with the Creator, when we focus on the gift more than the Giver.

Created things, though they're always possible objects of idolatry, are from God and declared in Genesis 1 to be "very good." The roots of sport are to be found in embodiment, play, delight, work, and community—all features of God's good creation.



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

We should guard against sports taking on an outsized role in our lives. But we should also be open to the possibility that the beauty and power of athletic movement, the sheer excellence on display at the highest level of sport, and the exertion and delight of competition enable us to glimpse something glorious about our creation as embodied beings. When I think of something like Dwight Clark's catch in the waning seconds of the 1981 NFC championship game, Usain Bolt's 200-meter dash world record at the 2009 world championships, or Carli Lloyd's goal from midfield in the 2015 World Cup final, I sense that I am beholding a magnificence that God's good creation makes possible.

On this topic, I highly recommend Brian Bolt's book *Sport. Faith. Life.*, part of the Calvin Shorts series.

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

Missional Living

What might detract from our participation in God's mission in our neighborhoods?

Being surveyors: Who likes surveys? When we are surveyed, we feel like a number about to be made into a statistic, and often we are. While ethnographic

work can be helpful, it's not the same as engaging with neighbors as persons with their own stories and perspectives so that we begin to grow relationships of trust and mutuality.

Being service providers: An oft-repeated instruction is "find the need and meet it." But we're learning that someone "meeting my needs" isn't always that helpful. In fact, it disempowers me, creates dependency, and usually addresses only symptoms instead of root causes and deeper issues. Clearly there are times and places when basic needs must be met, but doing "to" or "for" is not the same as being with and among. When we come alongside, we discover the gifts of the other, learn and receive from our neighbors—who also bear God's image—and realize we're all in this together.

Being problem solvers: We are rarely good listeners when we're focused on finding solutions and resolving issues. Yet it's been said repeatedly that listening is often the greatest gift we can give. We all need to be heard. And if an act of listening was what got God started in responding to his people—"God heard their groaning" (Ex. 2:24)—perhaps that's where we should start too.

Being programmers: All of these roles, as well as running our own programs "for the community," leave us in control, meaning that we are the ones with

the power, resources, answers, and solutions. But what if we're not? What if God is? And, if we really want to discover and participate in what God is doing in our neighborhoods, what if we shouldn't be? Perhaps God's invitation and calling to us is first to be with, live among, and love our neighbors in such a way that we bear witness to the kingdom of God come near.

I wonder what might happen if, instead of putting a lot of time and effort into surveys, service provision, programs, and solutions, we simply committed to three conversations with neighbors each week?

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.

Faith Formation

Our Reformed tradition emphasizes a lot of head knowledge when it comes to growing in our faith. How much does knowing the right doctrines actually help us become Spirit-filled Jesus followers?

Knowing doctrine and being Spirit-filled Jesus followers go together well. It is possible to get too caught up in theology, to the point where one's relationship with Christ is merely theoretical. But it is also true that without knowing who God is as revealed in the Bible, we don't really know whom we're in relationship with.

So good theology matters, and it's important to monitor what our churches are teaching. We've seen bad theology in some published church school curriculum—for example, that what we learn from the story of Zaccheus is that we need to have good manners like Zaccheus did when he

invited Jesus to his home. That seems to be missing the main point of that story and turns a story about Jesus bringing salvation to Zaccheus into merely a lesson in how to be polite. There are also certain Christian sects that are clearly outside the bounds of creedal Christianity, so we certainly don't want an "anything goes" attitude when it comes to our theology.

But while doing our best to have good theology is important, it is also not enough. We need to cultivate our hearts so that Jesus lives in and through us. We need to spend time, both alone and with our faith communities, in spiritual practices such as prayer, acts of service, and reading the Bible to get to know the heart of God better and become more like Jesus. These spiritual practices help us to engage our whole selves when we come to God. We don't want to use only our heads; we also must include our hearts and our hands.

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 University and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.

Relationships

I was a child of Dutch immigrants in the 1950s, and my adult children are now asking more details about their grandparents, of whom they all have wonderful childhood impressions. Yet there are dark stories of abuse and infidelity. Should I share these stories with my adult children?

Because your children are asking, I think it would be more respectful to entrust them with the truth about

who their grandparents are, including the shadowy sides, than to paper over parts of your parents' story and continue to pretend they are still the perfect creatures of your children's childhood. Your children want to get to know their grandparents better, and they want to know what it was like for you living with your parents as an immigrant family. So by all means, tell your children that you love your parents, but also tell them there were some things that happened in your family that were very damaging.

Why? When you give truthful answers to your children's questions, you treat them as the adults they now are—people who from their own experience know about sin and shortcomings. You and your children will experience closeness and deeper relationships that come with sharing the truth, even truth about such weighty issues as infidelity and abuse. But do so with sensitivity, compassion, and understanding of the context of your parents' circumstances.

Remember too that being Christ-like includes not only the forgiveness Jesus modeled, but also the humility that teaches us not simply to judge, but to acknowledge and lament our mutual brokenness.

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



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

Delegates, Staff for Synod 2022 Meet for All-synod Prayer

NEWS

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Facilitator Jon Hoekema (top row, center) read Philippians 4:4-9 to prompt gathered delegates and staff into prayer.

Delegates and advisers to synod, the Christian Reformed Church’s broadest annual assembly, gathered by video conference for a prayer service March 30. Convened to pray intentionally for Synod 2022, the gathering was part of the denomination’s yearlong prayer initiative called Together Seeking God’s Face. It’s the first time synodical services has coordinated a pre-synod prayer meeting for delegates. Two others are scheduled, on April 27 and May 11.

“Having these prayer gatherings beforehand is crucial in moving ahead as a denomination,” said Jon Hoekema, pastor of Horizon Community Church in Downers Grove, Ill., and the denomination’s prayer shepherd for Together Seeking God’s Face.

Hoekema was joined by five prayer facilitators—Andy Sytsma, Diane Dykgraaf, Andrew Beunk, Syd Hielema, and Diane Averill—who led breakout groups of about 20 each through guided prayer using Philippians 4:4-9.

At the beginning of the event, CRCNA executive director Colin P. Watson Sr. said, “The purpose of tonight is simply to pray.”

When asked before the meeting about how the prayer time might navigate differing opinions, Hoekema said, “The focus for prayer is not our agenda but seeking God’s face, so the times of prayer are not going to address different views, but it’s really going to be times where we come together before God with a humble heart that we might reflect him.”

Delegates and advisers were encouraged to attend the event, though attendance was not required. There were 124 participants.

Synod is the annual leadership meeting of the CRC. The assembly did not gather in 2020 or 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Synod 2022 will meet June 10-16 on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., covering a weighty agenda that includes the human sexuality report requested by Synod 2016. Each synod is made up of 196 delegates comprising one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer from each of 49 classes (regional groups of churches).

—Kristen Parker

Minnesota CRC Launches Mentorship, Bible Study Program for At-risk Teens



Tuesday support groups and Thursday Bible study groups form the basis of the TreeHouse ministry to teens. (Photo courtesy of TreeHouse.)

Bridgewood Christian Reformed Church in Savage, Minn., launched a new ministry that offers meet-ups twice a week for teens identified by county case workers as at risk from various social ills.

The ministry is called Savage-Prior Lake TreeHouse, and it's part of a growing network of ministries of the Minnesota-based TreeHouse organization, whose mission is to end hopelessness among teenagers.

Savage-Prior Lake TreeHouse opened in February 2020, but it was sparked three years earlier with a question. How might Bridgewood CRC work against human trafficking? Church member Judy Halmrast felt called to this. She sought out some local anti-trafficking organizations, and the church offered an eight-week class on the subject, hoping to hear from God how Bridgewood CRC could be a partner in combating sex trafficking. Toward the end of the class, Halmrast said, it became clear that a most effective approach would be prevention. "Prevention was quite clearly God's leading," she said.

That's when Bridgewood contacted TreeHouse, which has worked to create healthy relationships among teens since 1979.

"Our role isn't flashy," Halmrast said of the congregation's prevention approach. "We

don't know which of the students we are saving from sex trafficking, but we do know we are bringing hope to those who are without, bringing Jesus to those who desperately need him, and changing the trajectory of the lives of precious teenagers."

Since February 2020, small groups of students have met at the church on Tuesday and Thursday nights to share their struggles in a safe space and offer one another support, led by mentors from Bridgewood CRC. Thursday nights focus on Bible study along with support and mentorship. The church reaches about 40 teens and is supported by 10 volunteers. Other community organizations have supported the groups by donating meals, transportation, and financial support.

Just a month after the groups started, when the COVID-19 pandemic began and rates of self-harm, anxiety, depression, and thoughts of suicide in teenagers increased, Halmrast said the small groups were more important than ever. "We want to be part of the work of God to directly transform lives," she said. "TreeHouse redirects kids from hopelessness to hope, and many of these kids have given their lives to Christ. I can't think of an endeavor that is more rewarding. This is what drives us to continue to invest in this ministry."

—Sarah DeGraff

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Stanley Jay Bultman

1939-2022

Stan Bultman, who died Jan. 8, 2022, leaves a legacy of Christian love and service to the many youth and adults to whom he ministered as pastor and chaplain. Compassionate, patient, kind, and a sensitive listener, he enjoyed people and was known for his warm smile and humor.

Bultman's strong work ethic started in fifth grade as he served customers at his family's meat market and grocery store. A graduate of Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, he also obtained a master's degree in Old Testament Studies from Brandeis University.

Ordained in 1966, Bultman served three Michigan congregations: University Church of Mount Pleasant, where he also directed Central Michigan University's campus ministry; Atwood CRC; and Northern Heights CRC in Kalamazoo. He served on many denominational boards and committees. After two years of Clinical Pastoral Education, in 1986 Bultman became director of Hospital Chaplaincy Services. Under his leadership the ministry expanded to include chaplains in other workplaces. He retired in 2006.

Bultman enjoyed family, music, reading, languages, camping, gardening, sweets, photography, violin repair, and woodworking.

Predeceased by granddaughter Katrina, Bultman is survived by Marcia, his wife of 60 years; three children; and five grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Classis Watch: Spring 2022

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 of Church Order are noted here for actions taken by classes in the past several months. Quotations come from classis minutes. (If minutes were not received by publication date, actions will be noted in the next Classis Watch.)

Those **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Arts. 6 and 10) include candidates Kyle James Sandison, Young Kwang Kim, Timothy Joo, and Robert Gruessing.

Those welcomed into ministry in the CRC **from other denominations** (Art. 8): Revs. Changho Ahn and Gilbert Varela (previously ordained in the CRC, 1995-2013).

Ministers loaned (Art. 13-c): Rev. Henry Serrano, from New Life CRC in Grand Junction, Colo., to CrossWind Church of Aurora, Colo.; Jack DeVries, from Bethel CRC in Listowel, Ont., to the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (extension).

Ministers released from a congregation (Art. 17-a): Revs. Brian Tebben from Life in Christ CRC in Salt Lake City, Utah; Nicholas Baas and Andrea Baas from John Calvin CRC in Truro, N.S.; Daniel Joo from Monroe Community CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.; and Charles Van Hoffen from Houston (B.C.) CRC.

Bill Weber (previously ordained in the CRC) and Revs. Norlyn Van Beek, Joel De Boer, and Steve Boersma are **eligible for call**.

Leaving Ministry in the CRC

Guided by Church Order articles 14 and 17, classes may end a pastor's ordained ministry status. In the case of Art. 14, designations of release reflect the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office.

Seung Jun Lee, Phil Eubank, and Ed Jiang were **honorably released**.

Bruce Gritter, Andrew Zantingh, and Doug Van Essen were **released**.

Ramon Orostizaga was **released** "in good standing."

Bruce Anderson and Evert Gritter, previously retired, were **released**.

Ministers retiring (Art. 18): Revs. Richard Foss, Mark Scheffers, Adrian Eising, Paul Jorden, Thomas Wolhuis (effective June 5), Jim Wolff (effective July 1), Pedro Aviles (effective July 31), Al Breems (effective Aug. 1), Michael Winnowski (effective Aug. 14), Carl J. Leep (effective Sept. 1), David Hornor (effective Oct. 1), and Piet Heerema (effective Oct. 31).

Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Daniel Unterkoffler and Kaylyn Unterkoffler (Classis California South); Wai Kei Kezia Lai-Leung and Patrick Y. Lin (Classis Central California); Randy Green (Classis B.C. North-West); Jason McNabb (Classis B.C. South-East); George Tan (Classis Northern Illinois); and Melanie Wright (Classis Alberta North).

Annika Bangma (Classis Atlantic Northeast) was **released**, and James Simpson (Atlantic Northeast) was honorably released from ministry as a commissioned pastor (Arts. 24-d, 14-b).

Commissioned pastor emeritus status was granted to Laurie Moll (Classis Rocky Mountain) and Rick DeGraaf (Classis Huron).

New Ministries and Ministry Changes

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

Sembrando Vida Church in Vista, Calif. (Classis California South), and King's Covenant Church in Bridgewater, N.J. (Classis Hackensack), were recognized as **emerging**.

Hope for Life Community Church in Waterdown, S.D. (Classis Minnkota), organized in 2015, now has the status of **unorganized**.

The following congregations **disbanded**: **Kenosha** (Wis.) **CRC** (final service April 24); **Milwood Community Church** in Kalamazoo, Mich. (final service Jan. 23); **Syracuse Grace**, an emerging church in Fayetteville, N.Y.; and **Hope CRC** in Stony Creek, Alta. (final service Dec. 26, 2021).

Hanaro Community CRC in La Puente, Calif., and **Eastern Hills Community Church** in Aurora, Colo., **disaffiliated** from the CRC (Art. 38-f).

Synod

The report of the Committee to Articulate a Foundation-laying Biblical Theology of Human Sexuality, mandated by Synod 2016, is coming before Synod 2022.

Classis Atlantic North-East, Classis B.C. South-East, Classis B.C. North-West, Classis California South, Classis Georgetown, Classis Iakota, Classis Lake Superior, Classis Rocky Mountain, and Classis Wisconsin are sending communications supporting the human sexuality report. B.C. North-West further asks for **another study committee "to provide in-depth pastoral guidelines" for implementation of the report.** Wisconsin asks synod to **"admonish and if necessary discipline church officebearers and assemblies that have acted and taught contrary to the official teaching of the CRCNA** without going through the process of submitting overtures or gravamina (theological basis for dissent)." Classis Rocky Mountain is also sending one communication and one request that question the

report's thoroughness and ask synod not to accept it.

Classis B.C. North-West, Classis Central California, and Classis Southeast U.S. are making requests about specific details in the report. **B.C. North-West** asks synod **not to accede to recommendation D**, "that synod declare that the church's teaching on premarital sex, extramarital sex, adultery, polyamory, pornography, and homosexual sex already has confessional status." **Central California** asks synod to **correct "the apparent contradiction involving cohabitation,"** noting in one section it's condemned as sinful "because of its association with premarital sex," but in another it's proposed as a possibility for same-sex-attracted people. **Classis Southeast U.S.** asks synod to **revise the definition of homosexuality**, saying the "imprecise phraseology" of Synod 1973's definition, repeated in the current report, "has caused profound confusion within the CRC."

Classis Eastern Canada and **Classis Hamilton** each asks for further study, which Eastern Canada described as "a broad-based intentional season of listening to understand the real-life experience of persons and families dealing with minority sexual orientations and gender identities within CRC congregations."

Classis Toronto is sending a **communication from a congregation where "from (its) beginning people of different sexual orientations have belonged,"** hoping this leads to **"greater understanding of the potential deep impact that decisions flowing out of the human sexuality report might have on a number of churches."**

Classis Grand Rapids East is asking synod to **reject the human sexuality report** and "proposes a way to frame denominational differences over LGBTQ+ matters that will enable the CRC to persevere in unity and mission," asking synod **"to adopt in principle a 'local**

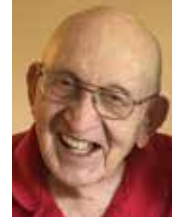
discernment' approach to differences over LGBTQ+ matters and ordination."

Classis Hackensack and Classis Grand Rapids South are asking for new task forces. **Classis Hackensack** wants one **"to develop church order procedure to discipline officebearers, including disaffiliation of a consistory or classis, initiated by a major assembly."** **Classis Grand Rapids South** wants one **"to recall and articulate core matters of agreement** (the Key Elements of Biblical Truth) and (to) create and provide suggestions, principles, and approaches to the churches ... for how we treat each other despite our differences."

Classis Hamilton, Classis B.C. North-West and Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan are sending communications about denominational restructuring, each asking in different ways for a **"balanced" or "parallel" binational structure.** The structure as adopted by the Council of Delegates in May 2021 includes an overall office of the general secretary comprising a general secretary and a chief administrative officer and a Canadian ministry office with an executive director—Canada. Council already intends to present a candidate for the position of general secretary, Zachary King, to Synod 2022.

—Alissa Vernon,
news editor

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Gerrit
Bernard Dokter*

1929-2022

Bernie Dokter had a deep and abiding love for the Lord and a great desire to share the good news of God's love. He loved preaching. Dokter died Feb. 27 at age 92.

After ordination in 1953, Dokter pastored Hills (Minn.) Christian Reformed Church. He then served as a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force from 1957 to 1960. He went on to pastor Ferrysburg (Mich.) Community Church and then was a missionary in Argentina and Honduras for the next 15 years. When he and his family left for Argentina, Dokter barely knew the Spanish language, but he became fluent enough to preach in Spanish. Dokter served for six years with Christian Reformed World Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission) as Latin America Secretary. He pastored Allen Avenue CRC in Muskegon, Mich., before retiring in 1994. He subsequently served as an interim pastor, helping various churches during difficult times.

Dokter was an avid golfer, continuing to play until he was no longer physically able. He enjoyed camping and gardening and was an excellent woodworker who created beautiful furniture.

He is survived by Lydia, his wife of 70 years; six children and their spouses; nine grandchildren; and eight great-grandchildren

—Janet A. Greidanus

Walking Through Transition Means Loss, Revisioning for Michigan Church

The Refuge, a congregation in Grandville, Mich., hosted its first worship service Jan. 2, marking the end of what had been Trinity Christian Reformed Church and the embrace of mission as a small, nimble flock.

This story of transition could be told in many ways. There's a story in the numbers: a building with pews for 500 people held 300 in 2008 and just 40 in 2021. But Craig Flietstra, The Refuge's council president, sees another story: people within the building who kept pushing forward, forming team after team to discern a new vision. "God wasn't ready to close the doors of our church," he said.

Pastor Gerry Koning said that when he was called to be Trinity CRC's pastor in 2004 he was asked to focus on church growth. The church began a Friendship Ministry with people with intellectual disabilities, a community garden, and a team to help clean and steward a stream next to church property. These initiatives were successful, but new people weren't joining the church.

In the summer of 2016, four church staff and six congregants joined the Renewal Lab at Calvin Seminary. Over two years, "we developed a new mission statement, vision statement, new values, and new goals," Koning said. These were accepted unanimously, but Trinity's council had a more immediate concern: the church might not stay financially solvent.

Council appointed an "options team" of five church members to propose possible financial paths. By summer 2018, none of the options had panned out. An attempt to rent the church facility to a theater group fell through, but Trinity still believed their building was its biggest asset.

Then a neighbor walked into Trinity to ask if a homeschool association could rent some space. More rentals followed, and the church slowly became financially stable. "During this period of time more families left Trinity, yet this is the



Now a small congregation with a big building, the remaining members of Trinity CRC have embraced their mission as The Refuge.

time when God started bringing people to us who were looking for space to rent," Koning said.

Then COVID hit. Like many churches, Trinity moved online, then to outdoor services. Two staff were laid off, and the remaining three staff members took a 15% pay cut. These were changes "appropriate for a small church," Koning said, and they helped the church survive. But "every budget is a step in faith," Flietstra said.

"We feel that we have a bright future as a missional church and a ministry center providing space for a wide variety of ministries," Koning said, noting "it was really the direction God had been leading us in for several years."

That's how they came up with "The Refuge" as a new name. "During a council meeting," Flietstra said, "someone said, 'God keeps sending us people who need help or are looking for something.'"

The church approved the name change in January 2021 and formed a transition team to help guide the move from one kind of church to another.

Koning believes The Refuge now can have an impact in its neighborhood precisely because the paring-down process of

becoming a small church has made it flexible and mobile. People with missional hearts are beginning to join. "We still have a bare-bones budget," Koning said, "but we are excited that when a need arises, like housing for the homeless, with the generosity of our Lord we have been able to raise thousands of dollars to help."

Still, the process of change has not been easy. "Seeing friends leave has been the hardest part for me," Flietstra said. They left because of disagreements, lack of youth programs, disapproval over the name change, and uncertainty.

What comes next isn't any more certain. "All I can say is that The Refuge will be a missional church with the focus on those who live in our community," Flietstra said. After that? "God holds the future."

—Maia VanderMeer

The Banner *began an occasional series related to church closure or reinvention last year with "Facing the Realities of When Churches Close" (March 2021, pp. 16-17). Do you have a story of a church coming to grips with closure or transformation? Feel free to let us know at news@thebanner.org.*

Church Members in Tech Fields Mentor Kids in Coding Club



Adults and children experiment together in the Ttokamsa Mission Church's robotics and coding class.

Noticing a need for computer education during the difficult and exhausting times of isolation and school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Ttokamsa Mission Church in Monterey Park, Calif., is offering a class in robotics and coding, pairing church members who have expertise in technology fields with kids in its children's ministry for a "Cooperation Mission Lab."

Ttokamsa Mission Church is a Christian Reformed congregation with services in Korean and in English. Kimberly Kim, Ministry of Education pastor, said the five-week sessions will run three times a year and are "an opportunity to experience the overall overview (of coding) in a fun way" while also being "a good tool for evangelism." She said the Cooperation Mission Lab, with adult experts mentoring young students, is an example of Ecclesiastes 4:9: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor." Kim said many registration requests have come from children outside the church, and the next set of classes is already full.

—Jonathan Kim

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Donald Peter Wisse

1930-2022

Though small in stature, Donald Wisse had a large presence. He loved the Christian Reformed Church and his role as pastor and preacher. Wisse died Feb. 27 at age 91.

Wisse graduated from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, was ordained in 1957, then served Wayland (Mich.) CRC; Family in Christ CRC, Ogden, Utah; Sunlight Community Church Lake Worth (Fla.); and Midland Park (N.J.) CRC, where he served for 25 years. In Utah, Wisse began serving as chaplain in the U.S. Air Force Reserves and while at Midland took sabbaticals to enable longer periods of service. He served for a year at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama and a month in Greenland. He retired from the reserves in 1990 as a colonel.

Retiring from full-time ministry in 1995, Wisse continued serving Sunlight Community Church during the winter months for many years. He was chaplain at Cedar Crest Senior Living Community in Riverdale, N.J., from 2006 to 2009. He taught history and English as a Second Language in Hungary and taught seminary students in Sudan. He was described by many as the Energizer Bunny.

Predeceased by daughter Diane in 2006, Wisse is survived by Ethel, his wife of 68 years; six children and spouses; 23 grandchildren; and 15 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Hofman Jr.

1929-2022

A fun-loving character with a ready smile, John Hofman Jr. was a passionate preacher who was devoted to the Lord. He died March 1, just before his 93rd birthday.

After first studying social work at the University of Michigan, Hofman graduated from Calvin Seminary. He was ordained in 1962.

He pastored the Protestant Reformed Church of Lynden, Wash., and Manhattan (Mont.) Christian Reformed Church before serving as a missionary in Guam for two years. He went on to pastor East Leonard CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Fort Wingate (N.M.) CRC; Bethel CRC, Lynden, Wash.; Ridgeview Hills, Littleton, Colo.; Elim in the Desert CRC, Tucson, Ariz.; Highland Hills, Grand Rapids, Mich.; and Faith Community Church, Zillah, Wash.

When living in Arizona the Hofmans fell in love with the desert. They retired in Green Valley, Ariz., in 1996. In retirement Hofman served various churches as interim pastor.

Hofman loved the outdoors, was a great horseman, and excelled at tennis. He liked riding dirt bikes and, later in life, his scooter.

He is survived by Dorothy, his loving "bride," as he would always call her, five children and their spouses, 17 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren, and one great-great grandchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Noteworthy



Chemistry professor **Joshua Zhu of Dordt University** in Sioux Center, Iowa, **received a grant of more than \$350,000 from the National Institutes of Health** for pharmacology, physiology, and biological chemistry research. “In the process of this research, we are hoping to expose our undergraduate students to the frontier field of biomedical-related research,” Zhu said. The research will “use chemistry tools to explore how the immunological protein (CCR5) is involved in biological processes such as immune responses and disease development.”

Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., and **Redeemer University** in Ancaster, Ont., have **appointed new presidents**, intending to inaugurate them in ceremonies in the fall of 2022. Redeemer made



David Zietsma



Wiebe Boer

its announcement March 4, naming David Zietsma, former provost and vice president of academics, the institution’s fifth president. Zietsma had been serving as interim president following Robert Graham’s departure in April 2021. Calvin University announced its 11th president March 28, appointing Wiebe Boer, the CEO of a renewable energy investment company



Amanda Benckhuysen

Amanda Benckhuysen, director of the Christian Reformed Church’s Safe Church Ministry, was one of five women leaders who **spoke in a *Christianity Today* webinar, “Reimagining**

Biblical Womanhood,” March 11. The webinar was part of *CT*’s monthly “Big Tent Initiative,” an “effort to amplify underrepresented voices and to better reflect the growing racial, ethnic, and denominational diversity of the North American church,” said Ed Gilbreath, the magazine’s vice president of strategic partnership. Benckhuysen said she was invited “both as a biblical scholar who has done work in recovering women’s voices and interpretations of Scripture and as someone who now works for the church in abuse prevention and response.”



Lynden (Wash.) Christian High School celebrated **state championships** for its **senior girls and boys basketball** teams March 5, marking the third time the Lynden Lynx boys and girls teams have taken the championship trophies home in the same year. Past double wins were in 1999 and 2018.

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Beyond Sunday Morning



Living Out and Growing Our Faith in the Other 167 Hours of the Week

By Megan Herrema and Cassie Westrate

Our faith is formed every minute of every day, whether we're connecting with neighbors, driving carpool, playing sports, reading books, nurturing relationships, or pursuing career goals. So how can we be attentive to God at work in these everyday moments? And how can these moments also be opportunities to live out our faith in our neighborhoods?

These are the kinds of questions that prompted podcast hosts Karen DeBoer and Chris Schoon to invite Ruth Padilla DeBorst to be a guest on Faith Formation Ministries' *Open to Wonder* podcast.

Padilla DeBorst shared that when she and her husband moved to a portion of an old coffee plantation in Costa Rica in 2009, they knew that God had provided that place as an opportunity to grow into their calling. What that opportunity would look like specifically they left to the work of the Holy Spirit.

"This was not a big master plan," Padilla DeBorst said. "My husband and I didn't sit down and say, 'Five years from now we're going to be (a community of) so many people, and 10 years from now we're going to have done this, that, and the other.' It's really been more of an answer to God's call, one step at a time."

As the Padilla DeBorst answered that call, their home in Costa Rica grew into an intentional community called Casa Adobe. Supported by Resonate Global Mission, Casa Adobe is a communal residence housing several families and individuals, including young adults participating in one of Resonate's cohort opportunities. Community members gather for morning prayer, share meals and life together, and find ways to share their gifts with the surrounding community and creation.

"We're called into being good neighbors in our neighborhood—our physical neighborhood and the people living there, but also the broader environment, so caring for the river that's just down the road, gardening, creating, and encouraging our neighbors to develop urban gardens, seeking to be faithful to God in those things," Padilla DeBorst said. "That's where the intentionality comes together: living together, sharing life."

Supported by Resonate Global Mission, Casa Adobe is a communal residence in Costa Rica that encourages people to share meals and life together and find ways to serve the surrounding community.

While living in a communal residence isn't possible for everyone, Padilla DeBorst shared helpful questions and suggestions on the podcast for discovering ways to develop intentional community in any neighborhood.

As an example, she suggested, "Instead of every family needing to buy their own lawnmower, what if you got together with the neighbors on your block and said, 'Let's share one'? Because ecologically and in terms of our footprint on our world, it would make sense to do that. What if you purchased fruit and vegetables from a local farmer together, collaboratively, instead of each of you going to the supermarket?"

"The Holy Spirit is the inspirer of creativity. So I don't have a formula for you," Padilla DeBorst continued. "But ask the question: What would it look like to live more intentionally as a community that is seeking to live out the values of God's reign and God's justice and contribute to the well-being of our neighborhood, our city, in a less individual way?"

Growing Vibrant, Whole-hearted Communities

Though they're not sharing a lawnmower, one community of members from two Christian Reformed classes (regional groups of churches) in British Columbia is coming together for times of intentional learning about how to live out their faith for the well-being of their neighborhoods, cities, and regions.

They call this initiative "1Life: An Equipping & Learning Collective." 1Life developed out of a desire for renewal in classes B.C. North-West and B.C. South-East. In March 2020, both classes approved a joint team to curate an intentional "curriculum for Christ-likeness" that allows for deep theological reflection on each of the five callings named by the Christian Reformed Church: faith formation, servant leadership, global mission, mercy and justice, and gospel proclamation and worship.

The 1Life team of five "curators" partners with congregations in British Columbia to offer relevant and theologically grounded resources and opportunities related to these callings to help members grow in faith beyond Sunday morning.

"As 1Life curators we are committed to continually sifting through and sharing excellent content—articles, book discussions, workshops, etc.—that relates to each of the five callings of the CRC," said curator Liz Tolcamp, who also is the regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries in British Columbia. "Our curation is always toward wondering and exploring how the five callings serve as a path toward growing us to unity and maturity in Christ."



Resonate's Go Local initiative equips believers to be the hands and feet of Jesus in their communities, including using their bodies to spell out a note of encouragement for a neighbor going through cancer treatments.

Opportunities curated by 1Life included drop-in prayer times on the first and third Thursdays of each month and partnering with The King's University to offer public lectures. 1Life also connects folks with other Christian Reformed ministry initiatives, such as The Faith Practices Project (a collection of resources for exploring transformational Christian practices) and Hearts Exchanged (a learning and action journey designed to equip Reformed Christians to engage with Indigenous people as neighbors and fellow image bearers).

Sent Into the Neighborhood

Others within the CRC are making God's mission a part of their daily lives through Resonate Global Mission's Go Local program as they build relationships in the neighborhoods where God has placed them.

"In the modern era, I'm not convinced the model 'if you build it, they will come' will bring neighbors into your church's doors," said Peter,* an outreach team member at a Christian Reformed church in Tinley Park, Ill.

That's one of the reasons why Peter and four other members of his church participated in Go Local. Through the Go Local process, Peter and his wife have become more intentional about connecting with people in their quiet Chicago suburb through simple actions such as joining a neighborhood Facebook group and shoveling snow from neighbors' driveways.

This year, they hosted an *oliebollen* party. On New Year's Day, they huddled outside and served the traditional deep-fried Dutch treats to those who stopped by. "Neighbors stayed for a while, and we had a *heel gezellig* (very cozy) time," Peter said.

Not all of their neighbors attended, but the invitation opened up conversations with others in the community. While a woman a few houses down the street was shoveling snow off her driveway, Peter went outside to shovel his own driveway. As the two met at the sidewalk, she asked how the party went. Peter asked if she knew very much about the couple who lived in the house between them, and she shared

that one of them had had multiple back surgeries, including one surgery that past summer. They decided to shovel their neighbor's driveway together.

Peter said this work is about being "Christ in the neighborhood" and, even more importantly, "watching the Holy Spirit work while we are simply God's vessels of love and hospitality."

Stepping Out in Support

In Calgary, Alta., Ben* has started taking daily walks around his middle-class neighborhood—a practice he started because of Go Local—and has gotten to know quite a few of his neighbors.

One day he met someone new: Arin.*

"He had appeared from a home that our neighbors tend to refer to as the 'halfway house'—a place that is home to an always-changing cast of young men who do not interact with neighbors," Ben said.

Despite the warm weather that day, Arin was hiding in a sweatshirt, his hood pulled over his head. He asked to borrow a phone. Ben didn't have his phone with him, so they walked over to Ben's house. The two sat outside, and Ben learned that Arin had moved around quite a bit in his lifetime, was currently living on a disability stipend because of mental illness, and roomed with six other men. He had spent most of his money on drugs and had pawned his phone to pay a debt to a friend who was threatening him. He hadn't eaten in days.

Ben made Arin a sandwich, helped him get his phone back from the pawn shop, and connected him to a local pastor, who used church funds to help Arin secure groceries.

"The more we talked, the more I seemed to be drawn into (Arin's) life," said Ben. Arin was eager to heal from his drug addiction, and a few weeks after meeting Ben, he was taking those first steps. He had stayed sober and had also found work.

"It makes me realize that every meeting is the beginning of a relationship. And relationships require commitment," said Ben. "I am slowly introducing (Arin) to a couple of neighbors, ... hoping to build a bit of a community support network."

Because Ben had been taking a walk every day and was being intentional about opportunities to build relationships with his neighbors, he met Arin. Ben was able not only to support and encourage Arin, but to step into his neighborhood and join God at work.

"Being intentional and available in our neighborhoods actually makes a difference for us and our neighbors," said Karen Wilk, a Resonate Go Local catalyzer. "Perhaps we shouldn't be so surprised that these simple actions become life-giving and faith-forming experiences, since we believe that God is at work in God's world. But somehow, we always are!" **B**

*Names have been changed

Becoming Community-focused Churches Together

DURING THIS PAST YEAR, Diaconal Ministries Canada heard from several churches looking for creative ways to become more integrated into their communities despite the ongoing pandemic.

“Churches were seeing job losses and increases in food insecurity, mental health issues, and addiction, among other things,” said Rachel Vroege, Diaconal Ministries’ Western Canada regional ministry developer. “It wasn’t so much the ‘why’ of community engagement, but the ‘how’ that they were looking for. They needed some tools and resources.”

One such tool is Diaconal Ministries Canada’s Community Opportunity Scan, a process in which experienced staff walk alongside churches to help them discover how they can engage with their local communities and see them transformed through the love of Christ.

Typically, a COS happens with a single church as a group of leaders looks at the church’s specific community and discovers how the church can meet existing needs. However, with the ongoing pandemic and with some fresh insights received from the denomination’s Connections Project, Diaconal Ministries staff wondered if it was time to bring together a small group of churches to learn and share their experiences together, Vroege said.

Seven Canadian CRCs from across the country took part in this pilot COS learning cohort, which started in the fall of 2021. Jodi Koeman, World Renew’s Church with Community coordinator, co-led this group and invited churches from the U.S. that also longed to be more deeply integrated into their communities.

While it took quite a bit of work to turn the COS material into an online-friendly learning cohort, Vroege and Koeman said the effort was worth it. Each of



Many churches are working to reach out to their communities. In this photo, John Calvin CRC in Truro, N.S., hosts an end-of-summer block party (prior to COVID) with a barbecue, games, and hockey.

the six sessions featured a teaching component, inspirational stories from churches (some of whom had completed a COS in the past), small group break-outs, and some homework. Topics included elements of a community-focused church, discerning a church’s readiness for community engagement, learning how to define your community to discover its assets and strengths, and incorporating prayer.

“Watching churches journey together and learn from each other has been one of the highlights of this group,” Vroege said. “Cross-pollination has so many benefits, and in my experience, churches that embark on this journey with an ecumenical approach (partnering with other churches in their town or city) tend to ‘go all the way.’ The posture and way churches engage is much more about mutual accountability and a sincere desire to work together for God’s kingdom.”

“Above all, the COS is really just a starting point for churches,” said Mark Vanderwees, Vroege’s counterpart for Eastern Canada. “The even bigger win is changing the culture and posture of a church, helping their members become more community-focused and community-minded. When this happens, it

begins to shape every area of ministry in the church and leads to even greater opportunities down the road!”

Vroege agreed. “Sometimes it takes years before we see a church truly dive in and engage with their community,” she said, “but it reminds me that the COS process planted small seeds—seeds that are now taking root—and that is exciting to see.”

Participants have shared their appreciation for the online learning group and are looking forward to what it might mean for their local congregation. “It has been great to participate in a gathering in which people are interested and excited to live out their faith in (their) neighborhoods,” shared Mike Booy, member and former deacon at Sonlight CRC in Regina, Sask. “The support of Diaconal Ministries’ staff to encourage and coach us has been very important.”

Diaconal Ministries staff hope to launch a second COS stage this fall focused on helping churches who have identified ministry opportunities to take the next steps. **B**

—Erin Knight,
Diaconal Ministries Canada

The View from Here

Living 24/7 Christianity

THE FAITH WE ARE CALLED TO live out as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, while important on Sundays, is even more critical as we live each and every day.

This has become abundantly clear over the past two years. As we have endured several waves of COVID-19, we have learned to transition our church services and programs to an online mode and have recognized that this reaches some audiences we had previously overlooked. Many congregations also have expanded ministries to include more neighborhood services that serve those in need as a reflection of our faith.

Throughout all of this, communities around the globe have become acutely aware that we are all connected. We all share the same earth and its resources—or lack thereof. What affects one of us will affect others. COVID-19 began as an outbreak in one part of the world but quickly became a worldwide pandemic.

Lately, the war in Ukraine has exposed the vulnerability of the earth to this simple truth. Every location and every person is interconnected. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, “We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ never tells us that our faith is only for the Sabbath.

King also once preached a sermon about the parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10. In it, he reflected on the fact that the priest and the Levite, when they came upon the beaten man, asked themselves, “If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?”

King said that is the wrong question. The question we as Christians should be asking is, “If I don’t stop to help this man, what will happen to him?” This is the essence of the gospel: love in action. It is this love in action that brought Jesus Christ to become incarnate, to dwell with us in our mess, and to die for us on the cross.

Because of our connection to mission and missionaries in Ukraine, we are aware of the deep suffering of many there and elsewhere in Europe. We are also beginning to see the war affecting the lives of people even in North America: fuel prices are rising, spurring an increase in the costs of numerous other services.

These pain points are being borne mostly by those who can least afford it. This is certainly true in the United States and Canada, but it is even more true for people in other countries that depend heavily on farm exports from Ukraine and Russia for their very livelihood. Egypt, Lebanon, and other

countries receive most of their grain from Ukraine and Russia; their food supply is now at risk.

Our world is in pain, and many despair of a solution. As Christians, we know who we are and to whom we belong. We also know what we must do: love God and demonstrate that love by loving our neighbors. This includes neighbors who are close and those who are far away. It even includes the neighbors with whom we disagree.

This is our command regardless of the day of the week or the time of year. Jesus reminds us in Mark 12:30-31: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ... ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ never tells us that our faith is only for the Sabbath. In reading the stories of the Bible, it’s clear that our faith is to be lived out every day—no excuses.

In this issue you will find stories from ministries of the Christian Reformed Church as we strive to do God’s will worldwide. May you be strengthened and your faith girded by these acts of God as the Holy Spirit continues to work for our good in accordance with God’s Word. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

May it be so. To God be the glory!



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

Worship Workers in Conversation



"Led worship virtually in pajama pants."

"Droopy music stand problems."

"Led outdoor worship services in less than 0 degrees Celsius."

BINGO!

WORSHIP LEADERS IN CHRISTIAN

Reformed congregations now have a way to talk about these kinds of shared experiences and to learn from each other in community. This year, Worship Ministries began hosting videoconference gatherings for worship leaders in each classis (a regional group of churches).

While pastors have opportunities to meet each other and connect in classis meetings several times a year, worship leaders do not. Many have never met each other, and many feel isolated in their own contexts without a good support system available.

As we emerge from yet another wave of COVID-19 and pandemic isolation, Worship Ministries' goal is to lay the groundwork for organic relationships and community for worship leaders—paid and volunteer alike. What might it look like if worship leaders connected with one another in such

a way that they decided to regularly gather, either virtually or in person? How could resources and ideas be shared in a way that fosters unity and collaboration within each classis? What work needs to be done to ensure a local network of support for those who pour themselves into the worship life of the church week after week? These are a few of the questions that prompted Worship Ministries to facilitate these gatherings.

Worship leaders from classes Alberta North and Alberta South/Saskatchewan held the first two meetings, and already Worship Ministries is marveling at the ways God is working through faithful congregations in both of these classes. Each meeting began with a round of "Worship Leader Bingo"—an opportunity to laugh, shake our heads a bit, and commiserate about the many behind-the-scenes ways worship leaders have had to adapt in the last two years. There is something comforting about being in a room—even a virtual room—with others who have shared the same struggles and found some of the same solutions. Bingo created space for introductions, for sharing joys and challenges in each congregation, and for fresh ideas.

Worship leaders talked about important topics like the theological and pastoral implications of continuing or discontinuing livestream worship, why many have decided not to return to in-person worship yet, and how our corporate worship will forever be changed as a result of the experiences of the past two years. There are so many conversations to be had, and engaging in this kind of dialogue will only benefit the church and its leaders.

As Worship Ministries builds on its #ThisIsCRCWorship campaign, these regional gatherings of worship leaders are one way of getting a glimpse of the marvelous diversity of worship in our denomination and allowing that to be a way to unite us moving forward. Worship looks different from congregation to congregation, but we are united in our worship as "one body and one Spirit, just as we are called to one hope, ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-5).

—Katie Roelofs,
Worship Ministries

Inspire 2022 Workshop: Is Your Church Safe?

EVERY WEEK, the Christian Reformed Church's Safe Church office receives calls from those who say they have experienced some form of abuse in their church.

"We regularly get calls from church leaders and churchgoers about abuse of power and other types of abuse in our churches," said Amanda Benckhuysen, director of Safe Church Ministry. "Our job is to help you make your church a safer place."

Churches have not always paid much attention to abuse prevention, but that

changed when Synod 2019 passed a number of rules requiring classes and congregations to give abuse prevention higher priority.

At Inspire 2022, a denomination-wide worship and ministry event to take place Aug. 4-6 in Tinley Park, Ill., Benckhuysen will present a workshop on this topic. She will discuss the role of Safe Church, best practices for prevention and response, and the resources her office has to offer churches. She will also introduce the new Safe Church assessment tool, designed to help churches discern

areas of risk and opportunity in abuse prevention.

"We are not the police," Benckhuysen said. "We want to walk alongside people and churches and help them in the work of abuse prevention and response."

This is just one of more than 80 workshops that will be shared during the three-day Inspire event. Other workshops will focus on evangelism, church planting, ecumenical

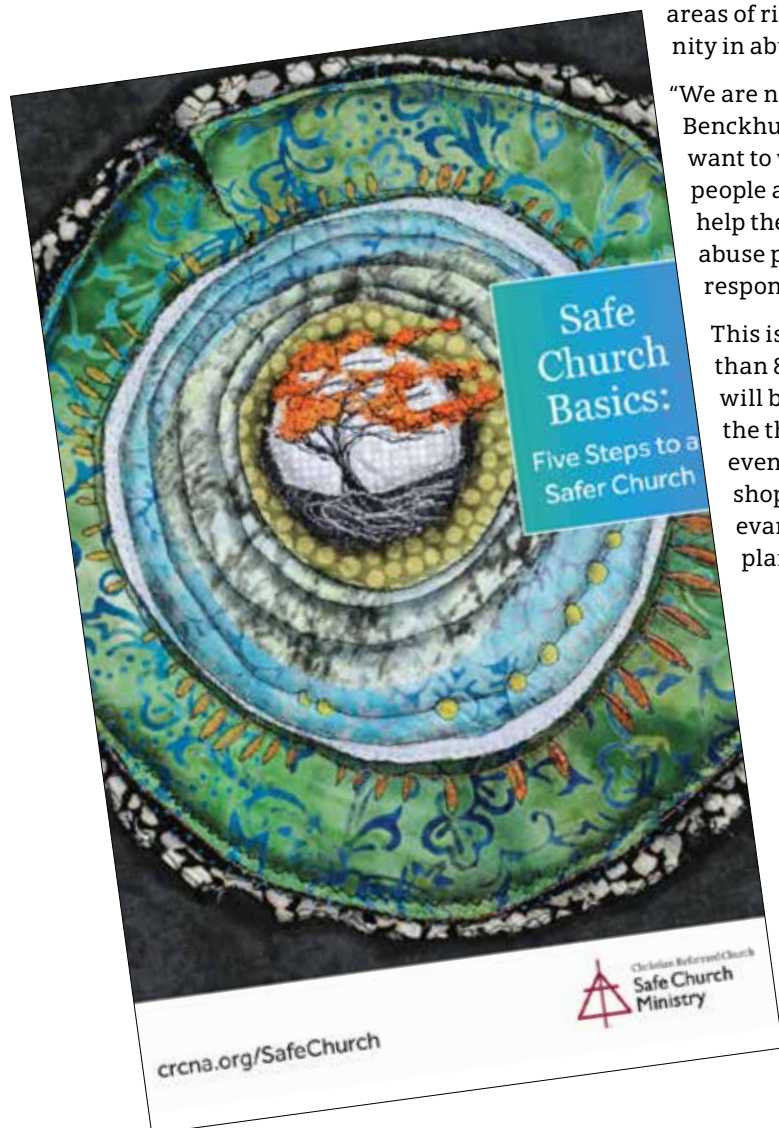
relations, prison ministry, deacon work, worship, preventing pastor burnout, fostering faith formation in children, and much more.

Inspire 2022 also will host four plenary speakers, a concert by Sandra McCracken, and times of worship, and it will offer plenty of time for people to mingle and talk together.

"Inspire is designed for anyone who is involved in ministry of any kind at a local congregation," said Kristen deRoo VanderBerg, one of the event's organizers. "Our goal is to equip and energize people so that they can go back to their churches rejuvenated to serve."

To learn more or to register, visit crcna.org/Inspire.

—Chris Meehan,
CRC Communications



A Source of Strength in Desperate Times

REFRAME MINISTRIES' partners around the world often receive messages from people who are lonely and exhausted.

"I pray so that I don't have to feel lonely anymore," Mikahel wrote from the United States. "I pray that I can make contributions to the world. I want to be free from this anxiety and depression. I'm exhausted."

"I am still not going out, and I don't see very many people other than my close family," Ito shared from Japan. "But when I hear your voice on your programs, it makes me feel like I have one more person that I'm seeing, and I feel energized."

As ReFrame's longest-serving ministry leader, Sergei Sosedkin has been responding to messages like these from Russian language speakers for 20 years. He says he has seen the number of them rise during the pandemic, and he fully expects that trend to continue as war hits Ukraine.

Recently he received one such message from a woman named Nina, who lives in Siberia.

"Nina said she is married with two children, and she has a supportive church family," said Sosedkin. "But that didn't stop her from being lonely."

Nina shared that both of her parents had died from COVID-19. Soon, her grieving had spiraled into depression.

"I don't have any emotional strength left," Nina wrote. "I recently spent an entire day in bed, depressed, wearing one of my late father's shirts. Please help me."

In Sosedkin's response, he told Nina that Jesus, too, knew this feeling of being alone despite being surrounded by people. Referencing Mark 3, Sosedkin shared the story of how Jesus found himself surrounded by a crowd



Nina felt alone in her home, living with depression after the death of her parents.

stock image

of people who believed he was out of his mind and possessed.

In the end, Jesus took comfort in his closest friends, his disciples, who believed in his words and that he is God.

"In him we find friends everywhere," Sosedkin said. "ReFrame connects with believers in Burkina Faso, Mexico, and Japan, among other places, and in Jesus' name, we have friends in all of these places."

Nina was grateful for Sosedkin's thoughtful and biblical response. She said she would continue to seek comfort in the words of Christ as well as the community she has in him through both her church and

ReFrame's Russian media ministry programs.

As war escalates in Eastern Europe, Sosedkin says he anticipates many more messages like this in the year to come. "I'll continue to encourage these hurting people with the knowledge that believers around the world are praying for them and looking to the same God as a source of strength in times of crisis."

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries



The Good News is For All People!

In Burkina Faso, West Africa, Mariam was in deep pain. Her marriage of 28 years was crumbling. Her husband had been unfaithful, and she did not know where to turn.

Thankfully, she was not alone.

Through ReFrame's French ministry partners, she found a radio program. She learned that God had not left her. Radio producers and follow-up staff in her area helped her see that God's people were there in her time of need.

Thank you for answering God's call to share the good news to the ends of the earth.



**ReFrame
Ministries**

is the new name of
Back to God Ministries International

You can reach people like Mariam at
ReFrameMinistries.org/give



New Life

AS SPRING BEGINS, the snow melts, and we begin to see glimpses of green among the treetops. Birds fill the air, winging their way to their northern homes for the summer. The first of the flowers peek above the ground, reaching toward the sun's warmth. Across the forest floor is a mat of old, brown leaves that fell from the trees in the autumns before. Compared to the bright colors of the emerging flowers, the old leaves seem dull and quite ugly. But the leaves, like everything in God's creation, play an important role.

Each fall deciduous trees (the ones whose leaves fall off) prepare for winter. Essentially, they sleep for the winter. If trees still have leaves when there is snow, it can be a little dangerous; the branches can get too heavy and might break. And with less sunlight to feed the tree, the leaves are not really needed any more and fall to the ground. But the leaves' role does not end there.


As fallen leaves gather under the trees, they help to keep moisture in the soil and protect it from washing away when it rains or when the snow melts. They help to provide insulation for the spring flowers as they begin to grow, and animals use them to help keep their homes warm in the winter. And as the leaves age, they begin to break down, feeding thousands of insects whose job it is to help the leaves decompose. Decomposing leaves put nutrients back into the soil to feed the trees and other plants around them and give them new life.

With spring also come Good Friday and Easter. It's the time of year when we remember and celebrate what Jesus did for us through his death and resurrection. Jesus died so that our sins can be forgiven. He gave us the gift of a new life. He is risen!

Try This!

Go out to explore creation and look for signs of spring. Make a list of everything you find. What do they all have in common?

Dig Deeper

Read John 3:16, 1 Peter 1:3, and Romans 6:9-11. Think about how these verses relate to Easter. Often at Easter we see eggs, flowers, lambs, and bunnies. What do all these things have in common? What do they have to do with Easter? 



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



Covenantal Communication in a Polarized Culture

By Stacey Wieland

Editor's note: This article is the fourth in our series "Seeking Shalom in the Midst of Polarization." The series, in collaboration with The Colossian Forum, aims to examine the state of polarization in the U.S. and Canada and explore Christian strategies to overcome it. To read more articles in the series, visit TheBanner.org.

It's difficult to handle disagreements, especially when we care passionately about an issue and have concerns about the assumptions or implications of other perspectives. Yet how we engage division within the body of Christ is important—and not just because getting the issues right matters. How we engage one another in the midst of conflict shapes us and our communities. It can also strengthen or undermine our witness to a watching world. If Christians are to confront divisive issues faithfully in the context of our current culture of polarization, we need to reimagine what communication in the face of conflict might look like as well as what it might help us accomplish. By expanding our imaginations and reforming our habits, Christians and their communities will better reflect Christ and can offer an attractive alternative to those beleaguered by the division.

Our Limited Imaginations for Engaging Conflict: Cocooning or Combat

Our imaginations for how we might communicate in the midst of conflict are limited and limiting. We tend to

understand our primary options to be either cocooning or combat. Cocooning happens when we avoid conflict by gravitating toward those who see things the way we do or by artfully avoiding divisive topics with those who do not. While cocooning can be a useful and appropriate response to conflict when the issue is trivial or when it is not the right time to engage, when it becomes a patterned response to conflict it increases polarization and distrust. Cocooning communicates to the other that they are not even worthy of our time and engagement. Sometimes we cocoon because we fear that a particular perspective is too dangerous to engage. But engaging various perspectives from the basis of Scripture as interpreted by the confessions is something the Reformed tradition is deeply committed to.

One reason that cocooning is so common is that our limited imaginations lead us to think of combat as the primary alternative. In combat, we approach disagreement with an adversarial posture that seeks to persuade others of the merits of our position while critiquing other points of view. We listen not to understand, but to form a strong response or to find flaws. While debating the merits of different positions has value, an adversarial approach often leads us to view those with whom we disagree with distrust and contempt, leading us to interact out of fear and with a desire to control. Even in churches, we often mimic the intimidation, manipulation, name calling, defensiveness, and aggression that commonly characterize

engagement in our polarized culture. Combat further entrenches us, deepening and magnifying our divisions. While there is value in considering how we might redeem debate, I'd rather offer a hopeful alternative—a posture and practices that help us navigate conflicts faithfully by pursuing love of God and neighbor in how we engage conflict.

Expanding our Imaginations for Engaging Conflict: Covenantal Communication

Covenantal communication prompts us to remember God's covenantal promises, which demonstrate love for and commitment to people and make a relationship with God possible. The Bible tells us of covenants not only between God and humans but also between humans (e.g., David and Jonathan). In our relationships with one another we should seek to understand and emulate the promises God makes to us. Covenantal relationships are not simply about satisfying our own needs, but are an invitation to serve one another and to serve God's world together. In doing so, we can humbly participate in and witness to God's kingdom.

At a very basic level, Scripture calls us to treat each other as unique individuals created in God's image. This means we should minimize our tendency toward selfishness and propensity to treat others as objects we manipulate for our own purposes. Of course, this principle applies to how Christians should treat anyone with whom they

disagree, whether inside or outside of the church. Within the body of Christ, though, we are called to an even higher standard.

Covenantal communication seeks to follow the way of Jesus by engaging one another with a spirit of self-sacrifice and of openness to what God is doing in and through the relationship. God's covenant with us is marked by self-giving love, most notably through Jesus' death and resurrection. It is Jesus' example of sacrifice for the other that we are called to emulate in our relationships, bearing with one another in love (Eph. 4).

In covenantal communication we approach conflict collaboratively rather than competitively. Instead of seeing one another as enemies, as we might in combative communication, we ask God to help us see one another as partners in pursuing truth and love together. That doesn't mean we all see things the same way or that we will all come to the same conclusions. It means we are collectively oriented toward a shared goal of following Christ and participating in God's kingdom.

In the face of division, covenantal communication prompts us to go slowly and think about the long term. It requires a commitment to engage in conversation with the goal of cultivating connection and understanding rather than simply attaining power or promoting our own positions. As John Calvin Davis suggests in *Forbearance: A Theological Ethic for a Disagreeable Church*, Christians are called to forbear with one another despite our differences. Davis defines forbearance as "a positive commitment to living with the productive discomfort of difference as a reflection of the grace of God."

Living out our covenant with God and one another in the midst of division

In covenantal
communication
we approach
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is challenging. But that challenge provides us with an opportunity to learn together how we can better follow the way of Jesus. When we invite God's help in demonstrating self-giving love in the midst of conflict, we are formed to look more like Christ.

The Posture of Covenantal Communication

Our covenantal promises change our posture toward each other. Posture, of course, refers to our physical orientation, but in this context, I'm using it to refer more broadly to our character—who we are and how our habits, thoughts, and motives orient us toward others and lead us to interact. Covenantal communication is marked by a posture of expectancy, curiosity, generosity, and responsiveness, which are all deeply rooted in Christian virtues.

Covenantal communication takes an expectant posture rooted in faith and hope. Scripture tells us in Colossians 1 that Christ holds all things together. This promise relieves us of the angst of seeking to hold them together ourselves. It invites us to live and interact as people of hope. As Davis suggests

in *Forbearance*, living in faith and holding on to hope should prompt us not to passivity, but to a different form of engagement when discerning important matters as the church: "(W)e listen to and stick with each other; we entrust the dialogue and decisions of the present to the greater hope we have in God's future." Holding a posture of expectancy in the midst of conflict opens us up to what God is doing and enables us to orient toward others with curiosity, generosity, and responsiveness.

Covenantal communication also takes a curious posture rooted in humility and discernment. Curiosity prompts us to seek to understand those with whom we disagree and to explore why we come to such different conclusions. This curiosity stems from humility, which reminds us that we only see in part (1 Cor. 13). Humility—paired with expectancy—helps us remain open to better understanding who God is and what God is doing in the world as we engage across our differences. Curiosity pairs humility and discernment: we seek to discern what is true and just, recognizing that listening, study, and reflection are all good gifts that help us move toward that goal.

The posture of covenantal communication is also generous, rooted in charity and compassion. Research on self-serving bias helps us understand that we are typically more generous to ourselves than to others. When we interpret motivations, we are overly charitable to ourselves (and those whom we think of as being like us) and less charitable to others. A generous posture prompts us to presume others' good intentions and to operate from the assumption that our brothers and sisters in Christ who come to different conclusions from ours are also seeking to be faithful. Similar to curiosity, generosity starts with good listening rooted in openness to understanding

rather than prejudice. This enables us to have a different kind of discussion, one in which we explore how one another's views connect to our faith and in which we can engage differences compassionately.

Finally, covenantal communication takes a responsive posture rooted in practical wisdom. As we interact, we must respond to the particular situations, conversations, and individuals in front of us. In other words, covenantal communication is not a formula or a rote technique. It requires us to be genuinely present, reflective, self-aware, and other-focused as we engage our differences. Practical wisdom asks us to balance conviction and compassion by both listening carefully to others and vulnerably offering our own perspectives, experiences, and questions.

An expectant, curious, generous, and responsive posture aimed toward self-giving love helps us in the midst of division to remain open to one another, to what God is doing, and to being formed to look more like Christ. It also helps us engage patiently, forbearing with one another and growing in love for God and neighbor in the process.

Practicing Covenantal Communication

Practicing covenantal communication is how the Spirit forms us to have a virtuous posture and manifests the fruit of the Spirit. Much could be said about how to practice covenantal communication interpersonally. Let's focus on some basics: turning toward one another, affirming our unity in Christ, and uncovering fears and loves.


One way to practice covenantal communication is to turn toward each other through connecting. Psychologist John Gottman studied newlyweds in their first six years of marriage, finding that the couples who stayed married turned toward

one another far more frequently than those who divorced. Gottman encourages couples and others to make (and respond to) consistent bids for connection—moves that vie for one another's attention and communicate a desire to connect, such as a quick squeeze of the hand or a lengthy conversation. A very simple suggestion for covenantal communities is to actively pursue those whom we would rather avoid. Bids can be simple invitations to connect and should not always be in relation to a particular issue that is causing distance. When there is conflict, we should turn toward one another, engaging rather than avoiding. While taking a time-out to cool hot emotions or to process can be helpful, patterns of avoidance and stonewalling are destructive. Turning toward one another is ultimately about cultivating connection in a way that confirms the other person and communicates a commitment to the relationship.

A second way to practice covenantal communication is to affirm our unity by remembering whose we are and who God calls us to be. Turning to Scripture and praying together when we are in the midst of a difficult conversation can remind us of our unity in Christ. Rather than focusing on the substance of the disagreement, there is value in centering on what the Bible indicates about how we are to engage one another. We might, for example, turn to 1 John 1 to remember what the Bible says about loving one another or to Galatians 5 to remember the fruit of the Spirit. We can also turn together to God in prayer, asking for help in loving God and one another as we engage the conflict together.

A final way to practice covenantal communication is to go deep together to uncover the fears and loves underlying our strong reactions to particular issues or perspectives. It is helpful to

think of our stated views as the tip of an iceberg. It is invaluable to understand what lies below the surface of a particular position or emotional response. When we go deep, we explore the values, assumptions, and experiences that underlie what's on the surface. It is especially valuable to inquire about the fears and loves beneath our deeply held views. Taking the time to figure out what good gift we fear is being threatened can help us better understand what is at stake for ourselves and for others. This excavation work also helps us identify shared loves that span our differences. Discovering our shared loves helps build unity and can help us discern ways to continue to live faithfully together despite our differences.

Covenantal communication offers a way for us to reimagine how we might approach and engage one another amid division within the church in a divided culture. The posture and practices of covenantal communication can help us enter into seemingly intractable disagreements in ways that imitate the self-giving love of Christ in how we speak and act. When we practice covenantal communication, we invite God to form our hearts, minds, and mouths as we build up the body of Christ. Loving God and neighbor not only in the decisions we make but in how we engage each other as we come to those decisions helps the church more fully participate in God's kingdom. 



Stacey Wieland is vice president of programming at The Colossian Forum. She holds a Ph.D. in communication from the University of Colorado at Boulder and worked as a communication professor for 13 years, most recently at Calvin

University. While Stacey was raised in the Christian Reformed Church, she is currently a member of Grandville United Methodist Church, where her spouse serves as pastor.

Rhythms of Justice and Mercy

God's love for people who have been marginalized, discarded, and taken advantage of reverberates throughout the Bible.



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

Editor's Note: A version of this article was published at crcna.org/FaithFormation/practices.

TRUE CONFESSION: I lack rhythm. Somewhere between what my ears hear and how my body moves, the beat gets distorted. But I still love listening to music and dancing around the house.

Perhaps the rhythm I find most challenging and most important, however, is God's heartbeat for justice and mercy. God's love for people who have been marginalized, discarded, and taken advantage of reverberates throughout the Bible. Psalm 146:7-8 describes how God's care extends to those who are oppressed, hungry, in prison, blind, or bowed down.

But I must admit that despite being so clear, consistent, and strong, God's heartbeat gets distorted and out of sync as it works its way through my calendar, home, bank accounts, work, and relationships. I need to practice justice and mercy as part of my ongoing formation as a follower of Jesus.

I see at least four formative aspects of justice and mercy practices.

Imitating God's character: As we respond to Jesus' invitation to "Come, follow me," justice and mercy practices usher us into the patterns of loving others that Jesus declared were central to his mission (Matt. 11:2-6; Luke 4:14-21). These practices serve as tools through which we learn to imitate Jesus' actions. The Spirit works through this imitation to form us in Jesus' character.

Being attentive to the image of God in others and in us

Matthew 25's record of the sheep and goats parable teaches us that what we do to the people we consider to be the least valuable and important we do also to Jesus. This passage shows that justice and mercy practices are important both because they affirm

that other people have been created in God's image and because they help us embody God's image as we put justice and mercy into tangible action.

Actively loving our neighbor

As we practice justice and mercy, we become immersed in working out how to love our particular neighbors in their circumstances. Through these particularities, we often become more aware of systemic challenges and barriers that often contribute to injustice. In this way, practicing justice and mercy tangibly teaches us what it looks like to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:28-34), which shows us what it looks like to know and love God (1 John 4:7-21).

Participating in the shalom (abundant life) of God's coming kingdom

Finally, through justice and mercy practices, the Spirit forms us to more fully and more faithfully participate in the life of God's coming kingdom. As Scripture points out (Isa. 65:17-25; Rev. 21:22-22:5), this "beautiful community" is marked by the end of violence and the flourishing of all people. Justice and mercy practices make us into apprentices of the coming new heaven and new earth.

Invitation

For me, learning to imitate the rhythm of God's heartbeat takes intentional, repeated practice. I find I need to listen frequently to the echoes of these rhythms in Scripture. I need to watch and learn from others who have been keeping time with the rhythms of God's justice and mercy much longer than I have. I also need to do more than listen; I must actually put justice and mercy into practice (James 1:22). **B**

1. Besides justice and mercy, what else do you think God's heart beats for?

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Ethnic Diversity and the CRC

We now have a growing rainbow of cultures showing gifts and perspectives that can broaden our thinking and our practice.

In the past few years we have heard a growing assertion echoing around the globe: “Black lives matter.” Some people, notably many in evangelical Christian churches in North America, have challenged the assertion. We’ve seen counter-assertions: “white lives matter” and “all lives matter.” These are apparent attempts to counter or correct the message echoing around the world.

I am mystified and chagrined by this controversy in the church. Of course Black lives matter, and it is important in the church of Jesus, in the historical and present context of North America, to say so unequivocally.

Many who challenge the “Black Lives Matter” slogan are objecting to the politics and the organization associated with the slogan. Yet I wonder if we can take a humble and introspective step back and lower the temperature of the controversy enough to listen. Jemar Tisby points out in his book *The Color of Compromise* that the energy of too many is spent in offering a defense of white people in America rather than listening to and seeking to learn from the experience of Black people.

“Christian complicity with racism in the twenty-first century looks different than complicity with racism in the past,” he writes. “It looks like Christians responding to ‘black lives matter’ with the phrase ‘all lives matter.’ ... It looks like Christians telling black people and their allies that their attempts to bring up racial concerns are ‘divisive.’ It looks like conversations on race that focus on individual relationships and are unwilling to discuss systemic solutions” (p. 190).

Sadly, even the concept of systemic racism has become controversial. Our dominant Western culture is

so engulfed in a belief in individualism that many cannot imagine any corporate responsibility or the power of systems connected with race. Two sociologists and theologians, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, describe this by using the term “accountable individualism,” meaning that “individuals exist independent of structures and institutions, have freewill, and are individually accountable for their own actions” (*Divided by Faith*, p. 76-77). When this conviction becomes pervasive within us, there is an inability to consider the power and presence of governmental, educational, and other social systems and their influence on the realities around racial disparity.

Considering that, I believe the Christian Reformed Church will not be healthy and holy until we look at our history and behavior. We have been good at making statements, setting goals, and appointing committees to propose initiatives regarding racism and diversity. But we have been slow and unreliable in matching these with actions that create effective change. We have been so slow that many Black pastors, members, and congregations have left our denomination. In my personal observation it looks as if the number of Black congregations formerly in the CRC exceeds the number of current ones. Our ill health as a denomination pertains not only to Black lives, but to many people of color. Consider the reality that each of the five people of color who have been appointed to lead our Office of Race Relations either resigned in frustration or was asked to leave. This has to tell us something about the challenges of this work, especially if we look at it systemically rather than individualistically.

We’ve been blessed as a denomination by growing numbers of congregations from cultures currently identified as “minority.” Whereas earlier in



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our denominational history we had only one basic culture, we now have a growing rainbow of cultures showing gifts and perspectives that can broaden our thinking and our practice. We have congregations that emerge out of Black culture. In their DNA is a sensitivity to the ways the gospel includes the message of justice. Our Korean members have a deep experience of fervent prayer that many of us need to learn. Our Hispanic brothers and sisters can teach us about the gifts of fiesta and siesta. (See Rev. Felix Fernandez's "This Rhythm is Gonna Get You," January 2017.) Our Indigenous members can call us to accountability in the importance of relationships rather than results.

Yet we persist in holding onto ways of being and doing that are unfamiliar and even unproductive to our newer members. We believe so deeply that our treasures are good that we project them as being superior. We must seek to discern if our attempts at inclusion are experienced as tokenism or if they are truly effective. Are we ready and willing to pass power to members who are currently "minority" but might become "majority"? Can we consider what it looks like to be known as a Reformed denomination that reflects a gathering of nations rather than a denomination that emerged out of a Dutch-European Reformation heritage?

What do we need to do to move forward? Here are three steps to consider, individually and corporately (modeled after suggestions in Tisby's book *The Color of Compromise*):

1. Study

We need to acquaint ourselves with the history of race in America. We need to work hard and humbly to understand the experience of recent immigrants and long-term ethnic

minority members. The CRC's Office of Social Justice has suggestions for material that can enhance our understanding. Each of us can commit to reading from the literature about race and immigration that has been produced just in the past decade. Each of our churches can commit to having courses and sermon series each year that attend to the biblical calls for justice, unity, and repentance for elitism.

2. Relationships

We need to broaden the bubble of our personal relationships to include people outside of our families and our own cultural heritages. Such friendships usually come only through intentionality. We'll only understand the experience of those different from us if we build, cherish, and submit to such a lifestyle.


3. Propose and Implement Changes

The missing element here is often action. What can we as local churches, as regional bodies, and as a denomination do to create a new future (rather than just talk about it)? I suggest that the best changes will follow ideas offered by leaders of minority communities. The rest of us need to be ready to hear ideas that might even question some of our sacred cows, such as the Church Order. The late George VanderWeit, one of the most dedicated churchmen of the CRC in recent decades, said at Synod 2010, "We have a church order that was developed in the 1600s in Europe for Anglo people. ... A comprehensive, not piecemeal, rewriting of the Church Order is needed. It needs to be a modern and more hospitable document, one that reflects diversity in church and culture."

What if a task force of grassroots leaders engaged in a brainstorming session to find three or four initiatives

they believe we need—and then what if we committed significant resources to implementing them? This is an idea for every level of our system—local church, regional bodies, and denominational ministries.

I am convinced that our future depends on our ability to adapt and change. We will either become a denomination known for its diversity or we will become a footnote in the history books. Even as I am not sure of our ability to meet this challenge, I am sure that it is the will of God, and that God's kingdom will come. I've read it in God's account of the end of the story:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (Rev. 7:9). 

Why *Drive My Car* Is Better at Home

IF EVER THERE WAS A FILM that was better suited for online streaming than watching on the big screen, it's *Drive My Car*—and I mean that as a compliment. *Drive My Car*, now streaming on HBO Max, is a glorious deluge of language and culture. Without the liberty to pause and rewind, the inattentive viewer will miss not only huge amounts of communication but quite possibly the entire narrative thrust of the film.

Drive My Car stars Hidetoshi Nishijima as Yusuke Kafuku, a renowned Japanese director who is learning how to cope with tremendous betrayal and loss. Yusuke embraces the idea that silence is golden and buries his grief deep in his work. He accepts an assignment to cast, direct, and star in a film version of Anton Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya*. Yusuke's spin is that the entire performance will be done in multiple languages: Japanese, Indonesian, Malaysian, German, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Korean, and Korean Sign Language. The performers must undergo a tremendous shift in their rehearsal process as they can no longer rely on a shared language. Yusuke tells them to focus on the acting itself, drawing from each other's emotions and other nonverbal cues.

This direction mirrors the viewer's experience. Instead of being able to use shared language, we need to be on high alert, scanning facial expressions, vocal tones, and differing cultural cues—all while reading the subtitles. This unique exercise of the mind could possibly confuse English-speaking audiences.

A particularly exemplary scene is when Yusuke and his driver, Misaki (Tōko Miura), are invited to the house of his translator, Kon Yoon-su (Jin Dae-yeon), for dinner. Kon and his wife, Lee Yoon-a (Park Yu-rim), are both

Korean, but Lee communicates only through Korean Sign Language, which Kon interprets for the others. Lee has been given a part in Yusuke's film, and at the beginning of the dinner, Yusuke asks Lee why she decided to audition, given her disability. Lee responds that she was originally a dancer, but since having a miscarriage her body doesn't function the way it used to.

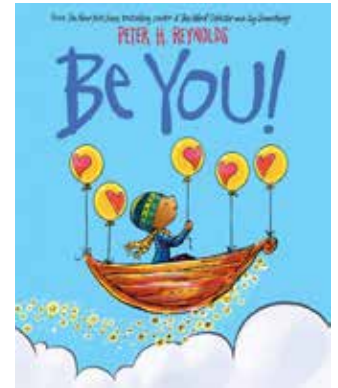
This is a big deal. People in Asian cultures tend to be emotionally guarded with strangers or among professional colleagues. Sharing a personal tragedy, such as a miscarriage, is not acceptable dinner-table talk. It can even be considered rude to inconvenience honored guests with the burden of your personal problems. That Lee was so willing to communicate her grief through the auditory silence of sign language spoke volumes and added to Yusuke's own journey toward reckoning with his past trauma.

This beautiful scene represents a film best consumed on a streaming platform so you can pause, rewind, and resume at your own pace. *Drive My Car* reminds Christian viewers to value multiculturalism and to develop a posture of humility through learning for the sake of loving God and neighbor. As Kon Yoon-su tells Yusuke, "I learned sign language after meeting her. I wanted to know her language, so I learned it." It's a fitting exhortation for the people of God in a multilingual, digital world. **B**



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 Korean-American

multigenerational ministry located in the Upper Manoa Valley.



Be You

By Peter H. Reynolds

Reviewed by Mary Ma

This book begins with a reassuring parental tone: "You are born to be so many things. My wish for you—no matter where your journey leads—is for you to always ... Be You!" "Be you" means to be curious, adventurous, connected, persistent, different, kind, and brave. It means that you can be your own thinker and choose your own direction. It also means taking time to be alone to connect with yourself: "Hear your own thoughts—your inner voice. Listen to your heart."

Created by *New York Times* bestselling author Peter H. Reynolds, the brief rhyming sentences on each page unfold different aspects of being one's true self, and the illustrations expand on it in ways readers will find visually uplifting. Christian parents can use this book to talk to their children about their God-given uniqueness. (Orchard Books)



King Richard

Reviewed by Darrell L. Delaney

King Richard is a movie about tennis players Venus and Serena Williams and their dad, “King Richard” (Will Smith). Smith’s performance is Oscar worthy because he truly becomes the character, down to his mannerisms, speech, heart, attitude, and conviction. Richard Williams uses some unconventional methods to train his girls to be professional tennis players, including a detailed 78-page plan for their whole career that he wrote before they were even born. Most of what Richard predicted came true.

This made me think of our God and how he has planned our lives down to every detail. Just like King Richard, who predicted what his daughters would be and then helped them to become just that, God has predestined us to live for him and then helps us to become like his Son. That’s good news. (Warner Bros)



A Perfect Day

Jennifer Yerkes

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

What makes for a perfect day? In author-illustrator Jennifer Yerkes’ vision of a pure and flawless day, a morning begins in peaceful harmony with the music of nature: the *chirp-chirp* of a yellow bird, the *cree-cree* of crickets, the buzzing of bees, and the croaking of a frog. Soon joining in are the whooshing of the wind in tall grasses, the hissing of a slithering snake, and the *rah-rah* of a fox. As the song continues throughout the day, it is interrupted by the roll of drums—thunder!—and the crash of cymbals—lightning! Then maracas—pelting rain—mark the rhythm. Simple narration and vibrant illustrations capture for young children the wonder and majesty of God’s creation and inspire gratitude for the music and sounds of God’s world. (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers)



Room to Dream

By Kelly Yang

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

In this third book in the Front Desk series, 12-year-old Mia Tang is bursting with excitement because she will be returning to China with her parents to visit the family and community they left behind five years before to immigrate to the United States. Along with their friend Hank, Mia and her parents experience the contrasting realities of China’s old ways and the nation’s exceptionally rapid modernization. Author Kelly Yang once again adroitly tackles themes of discrimination, bullying, colorism, poverty, economic greed, and sexism. Her profound insight into the difficulties immigrants face is a result of her own experience as a child of Chinese immigrants who moved to California and operated a motel much like the fictional Calivista. *Some profanity.* (Scholastic Press)

The Lowdown

Mutual Flourishing in Marriage: In *Choosing Us*, Gail Song Bantum and Brian Bantum reveal the lessons, mistakes, and principles that have helped them navigate race, family history, and gender dynamics in their 20-plus years of marriage while inspiring readers to pursue mutual flourishing in their marriages. (Brazos)

Obi-Wan Kenobi: The series begins 10 years after the dramatic events of *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*, in which Obi-Wan Kenobi faced his greatest defeat: the corruption and downfall of his best friend and Jedi apprentice, Anakin Skywalker. (May 25, Disney+)

Journey Into the Unknown with Doctor Strange: In *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, the Marvel Cinematic Universe unlocks the multiverse and pushes its boundaries further than ever before. (Marvel Studios)

The Book Woman’s Daughter: In this sequel to the beloved *Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, by Kim Michele Richardson, Cussy Mary’s daughter, Honey Lovett, travels through Appalachia to bring books to those who need them most and learns that she has to fight for herself just as she is fighting for others. (May 3, Sourcebooks Landmark)

Sacrificing Isaac

It is undeniable that children hold a special place in God's heart.

HOW CAN GOD ASK ABRAHAM to sacrifice his son Isaac, even as a test of obedience (Gen. 22)? Isn't that cruel and a case of child abuse?

According to philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac was a paradox of ethical duties. The only way for Abraham to obey God's word was for the promised patriarch to commit murder, thereby disobeying God's prohibition against murder and contradicting God's promise that Abraham would become the father of a great nation through Isaac. So why would God ask Abraham to sacrifice his own son? Should such a request lead us to believe that God is cruel and abusive?

It is undeniable that children hold a special place in God's heart. Psalm 139 describes how the preborn are marvelously made from the inside out by their Creator, who knit them together in their mothers' wombs. As a result, parents are entrusted with a two-fold God-given responsibility. Ephesians 6:4 calls parents to demonstrate restraint so as not to crush their children with their words and actions, and it directs fathers and mothers to lavish their children with the life-giving instruction that comes from God. In other words, parents are told to look after their children with the same love and concern God has for them. So if God loves children, why does God want Abraham to place Isaac on an altar?

It is impossible for us to understand God's request to Abraham without fast-forwarding in our Bibles to the story of the Exodus from Egypt. In the book of Exodus, God unleashed 10 different plagues upon the Egyptians in response to the king's rebellious refusal to let God's people go. The 10th plague is vital to our discussion of Abraham's test. In the Passover, God called Pharaoh to account for his sins by taking the life of every firstborn

son in Egypt whose doorframe was not covered in lamb's blood. This story in Exodus gives us a framework for understanding Genesis 22. When God instructed Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac, Abraham must have known what God was doing. God was calling Abraham to account for the sin in Abraham's life. It would be Isaac's life for Abraham's sin. So instead of focusing on whether God is cruel and abusive, we must first approach Abraham's test by acknowledging that God is holy and just and that the penalty for sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

Did God ask Abraham to sacrifice Isaac because God is cruel and abusive? No. God had a greater purpose. The further we go in Genesis 22 the more we discover that God's request was designed to demonstrate not only his holiness and justice, but also his love and compassion. Jewish rabbis have a story they tell about the testing of Abraham's faith. Tradition says that while Abraham and Isaac were traveling up one side of the mountain, the ram that would take Isaac's place on the altar was climbing up the other side. God wasn't asking Abraham to rationally understand God's request, but instead to radically trust that God would provide, making a way where there was no way (Heb. 11:19).

The beauty of what happened on Mount Moriah is that it prepares us for the cross. The great ascent of Abraham, Isaac, and the ram up Mount Moriah prepares us for the great descent of Christ at Calvary. On the altar of the cross, God's holiness and justice meet God's love and compassion. Through the cross, the Bible teaches us that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Genesis 22 should not cause us to question God's goodness; the paradox is designed to teach us how to walk by faith on our way to paradise. **B**



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

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

Down

- 1. The problem that makes a patient seek a physician's help
- 2. *The Book Woman's* _____, the sequel to *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*
- 4. The type of trees whose leaves fall off each year
- 5. One way to deal with polarization is _____ communication
- 7. The Faith Practices _____, a collection of resources
- 13. Prayer initiative _____ Seeking God's Face
- 14. This in action is the essence of the gospel
- 15. When God spared _____, it prepared us for the cross
- 16. Jesus started his life on earth as a fleeing _____

Across

- 3. An organization whose mission is to end hopelessness among teenagers
- 6. Author Emily Bosscher writes that _____ is what churches should be focused on creating
- 8. A California church's "Cooperation Mission Lab" is connecting kids with _____
- 9. We need to live our faith beyond this day
- 10. Community _____ Scan
- 11. The "king" title character of the Will Smith movie
- 12. Lynden (Wash.) Christian High School scored two state championships in this sport
- 16. Author Chris Schoon lacks this
- 17. First name of the main character of *Drive My Car*

Answers to the April 2022 puzzle

Ask. Connect. Share.

The CRC is big. Since we can't always meet for coffee, let's meet at The Network to compare ministry notes. Covering over 60 different ministry topics, you'll find blogs, discussion topics, ministry Q&As, and much more. Get involved by asking a ministry question, posting a blog, or sharing a resource today.

Visit [crcna.org/network](https://www.crcna.org/network)

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Church Positions Available

FULL TIME LEAD PASTOR: Sully CRC (Sully, Iowa) is prayerfully seeking the next lead pastor God has chosen for us. Nestled in the heart of the Midwest amongst sprawling farmland, enjoy the perks of a small-town and ease of travel by being located just south of Interstate 80. Our congregation seeks a pastor who has a passion for intergenerational shepherding and discipleship. A pastor who has the same calling as we do: to cultivate space for people to experience the transforming love of Christ. We invite prospective pastors to inquire further about using his unique gifts to glorify God and edify the body by joining our family of believers. Please contact sullycsearch@gmail.com.

FULL TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR Maranatha CRC of York, ON is seeking a dynamic full-time Youth Ministries Director. If interested, please email office.yorkcrc@gmail.com or call (289) 757 4114 or visit our website <http://www.maranathacrcyork.ca/jobs.html>

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

HOPE CRC IN RIVERSIDE CALIFORNIA, is prayerfully seeking a Pastor to lead our congregation. We desire a pastor who is faith-centered, compassionate, engaging, has a heart for evangelism and an ability to successfully reach out to our diverse community. Our Church is located in sunny Riverside California and has the distinction of being 45 minutes away from the mountains, the desert and the ocean. Parsonage is available if desired. To learn more about us, visit our website at: <http://www.hopecommunitycrc.com/> Please email your resume or inquiries to: hopecsearchcommittee@gmail.com

INTERIM ASSOCIATE PASTOR Bethel CRC, Listowel, Ontario is seeking a part time Interim Associate Pastor. Request job description or submit your resume to WilB@w-u.om.ca

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

SECOND CRC GRAND HAVEN, MI: We seek a pastor whose delight is in the work of the Lord, with gifts of preaching, pastoral care, and strategic outreach. Our church is abundant in spirit, eager to grow and serve God with our future shepherd. More information may be found at: secondcrggrandhaven.org or network.crcna.org/ Contact: Jameson Goorman at SecondCRCGHSearch@gmail.com or (616)843-1755.

Denominational Announcements

CALL TO SYNOD 2022 The council of Encounter Church CRC, Kentwood, Michigan, calls all delegates to Synod 2022, elected by their respective classes, to meet virtually for the convening session on Wednesday, May 25, at 6:00 p.m. EDT; followed by the in-person meeting in the Covenant Fine Arts Center on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, beginning Friday, June 10, at 8:15 a.m. All area CRC members are invited to join the delegates in worship at the Synodical Service of Prayer and Praise on Sunday evening, June 12, 2022, at 5:00 p.m. in the University Chapel, Calvin University, 1835 Knollcrest Circle SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Rev. Dirk M. vanEyck, pastor at Encounter Church CRC, will deliver the message. All CRC churches across the continent are requested to remember the deliberations of synod in their intercessory prayers on Sunday, June 5, and Sunday, June 12. Council of Encounter Church CRC, Kentwood, Michigan

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

HENRIETTA BILLINGS. We plan to celebrate her 90th birthday May 21, 2022 at 2-4pm. At Royal Park Place, 500 Parkside Dr., Zeeland, MI 49464. We have great gratitude for his Blessings and Faithfulness. Main entrance to the dining room.

Obituaries

BANNING Helen Koopman, age 87, of Whitinsville, MA, was welcomed to her heavenly home on February 23, 2022. Cherishing her memory: husband for 65 years, Willard Banning; children, Lyn (Tom) Bartholomew, Pam (Jeff) Bajema, Kay (Steve) Holm, Lori (Keith) VanderWeele; 12 grandchildren; 5 great grandchildren; siblings, Tom (Joan) Koopman, Don (Doris) Koopman, Dot (Ed) Jaasma and Bob (Dianne) Koopman. Proverbs 3:5.



BYKER, Will, age 84, of Hudsonville, MI; went to be with his Lord and Savior on December 2, 2021. Beloved husband of Mary Jane, who resides at 145 Columbia Ave Apt 626 Holland MI 49423. Father of Mitchell (Carol), Melanie (Kevin) Rigg and Kristin (Devin) DeBoer and loving grandfather of 18 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild. We are thankful for his life of Christian leadership and loving care for family and friends.

DEN BESTEN, Alice (Beukelman), age 106, of Holland, MI, passed peacefully to her heavenly home on Feb. 16, 2022. Originally from Corsica, SD, she was preceded in death by her husband Fred, son Glenn, and grandson Grant. She is survived by her daughters Frances Hamstra and Beth Burton, her daughter-in-law Jan Den Besten, six grandchildren, nine great grandchildren and two great great grandchildren.



GRITTER, Gladys Irene, age 98, of Kentwood went to be with her Lord and Savior on Friday, March 4, 2022. Gladys was born on July 23, 1923 in Hawarden, Iowa to Fred and Ida Kooi. After growing up on a farm, she proudly served her country in the Navy Waves during WWII. While in service she met her husband, George, to whom she was married for almost 65 years. Gladys was a loving mother, grandmother, and great

grandmother who cherished being with her family. She participated in a wide range of activities. She loved her church, First Kelloggsville CRC, later Ideal Park CRC, and was a ladies Bible study leader and Sunday school teacher. She wrote a great number of poems, many of which were published. Painting was another hobby, along with numerous crafts. Mom loved acting and was a member of many groups that performed comedy skits throughout Grand Rapids. At the Holland Home she launched a yearly talent show put on by the residents. She enjoyed traveling with her husband, visiting the birthplaces of many of our presidents and spending winters in Florida. Gladys was preceded in death by her husband, George in 2011, and her son, Ken in 2021. She is survived by her children: Bob and Ruth Gritter, Cindy and Vincent Gargaliano, Judy and Jim Kleinwolterink, and daughter-in-law, Mari Gritter; 11 grandchildren; 23 great grandchildren; siblings: Clarence (Marie) Kooi, Stanley Kooi, Glenn (Patricia) Kooi, Irene Kooi Chadwick, and Mildred Kooi; brothers-in-law: John Peterson and Bill Gritter; sisters-in-law: Marilyn Waanders and Carole (Geof) Gaiser.

HOLWERDA, David of Grand Rapids, MI, died March 10, 2022, age 89. He will be remembered by his wife of 67 years, Gayla (Kortman) Holwerda; siblings and in-laws, Harry and Joanne Holwerda, Norma and Don Bratt, Trudy and Cornie VanTol, Phyllis Kortman, Meribeth LeFebre, Karla Laninga; his children and grandchildren, Marigay and Greg McClune (Geoff and Liz McClune, Chris and Emily McClune), Faith and Carl Triemstra (Rachel and Brian Bardolph, Justin and Rachel Triemstra), Sondra and Tom Minnema (David and Charlotte Minnema, Ben Minnema and Betty Haisma, Anna and Brennan Boice), Lynn and Mark van Stee (Elena van Stee, Adrian van Stee, and Amelia van Stee); eight great grandchildren and many nieces and nephews. He was a member of First Christian Reformed Church.

JOHNSON, Larry, a devoted husband, father, grandfather, brother, uncle and friend, 72 of Holland, MI went to be with his Lord and Savior on February 28, 2022. He was a man of faith with a kind and gentle spirit. Larry was born in Holland on March 13, 1949. He graduated from Calvin College with a BA degree in Education & a minor in Religious Education. He will lovingly be remembered by his wife of 50 years Bonnie (Keen), his children and grandchildren: Matthew Scott (deceased), Derrick & Lexi Johnson (Axel, Ian, Izak) of Grand Haven, MI and Aaron & Jen Johnson (Silas, Remi) of Pasadena, CA.



MOEKE, Burton, 85, of Mancelona, passed away March 8, 2022. He was born on October 13, 1936, in Zeeland, MI, the son of Albert and Jenny (DeJonge) Moeke. On August 31, 1957, in Holland, MI, he married Sharon Lee Mills

who survives. Also surviving are son Burt II (Sharon) Moeke, Jill Moeke, 5 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren. Preceding him in death were a grandson Ryan Austin, a brother George Moeke, 2 sisters, Gertrude VanDorple, Vivian Layton and his parents. Funeral services were held. Spring burial in Fairview Cemetery, Mancelona. Arrangements by Mortensen Funeral Homes. Online guestbook www.mortensenfuneralhomes.com

RUTER, Glen age 88, of Garner, IA formerly of Kanawha, IA passed away January 26, 2022, in Mesa, AZ. He is lovingly remembered by his wife of 69 years, Carolyn; children Anita (Steve) Hubers of Pease, MN; Dave (Ruth) Ruter of Sioux Center, IA; Daryl (Kim) Ruter of Clear Lake, IA; Arnie (Jennifer) Ruter of Arvada, CO and Angela Pringnitz of Garner, IA. 19 grandchildren and 25 great-grandchildren. He was a life-long member of the Kanawha CRC and farmed for nearly 60 years. Glen & Carolyn wintered in Apache Junction, AZ for 35 years enjoying making new friends there.

SCHAAFSMA, Miriam Cooke, age 94, died peacefully on February 3, 2022. In 1948, she married Sybrant J. Schaafsma (d. 1999) and they had 4 children, Mary Helen (d. 2018), Timothy (Krista), Jane, and James (Nancy). She is also survived by 5 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren. Her passions included education, current affairs, family history, the arts, travel, and justice for all. A memorial service is planned for June 13, 2022, in Grand Rapids (check <https://www.zaagman.com> for details). Gifts can be made to Rehoboth Christian School or World Renew. We find comfort in the promise that in life and in death she belongs to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

SMIT, Rev. Wolter, age 87, follower of Jesus, passed away on March 4, 2022 in Surrey BC. He is survived by his wife Nelly of 61 yrs, children Kathy, Jacqueline, Monique, Shan & spouses, 15 grand/great g'children, and extended family across Canada. Condolences @ www.wiebeandjeskefh.com

VAN DER DYKE, Allen J., went to be with his Lord on March 16, 2022, age 86, of Villa Park. 2430 Pfingsten Rd, Glenview, IL, 60026. Beloved husband of the late Helen Van Der Dyke, nee Boerman; loving father of Sandra (Glenn) Binstein, Michael (Victoria) Van Der Dyke, Barbara Van Der Dyke, Kathy Van Der Dyke, and the late Donna (Robert) Goedeke; devoted grandfather of Amy (Daniel Walker) Binstein, Jenna Binstein, Joy and Brian Van Der Dyke, Samantha, Jeremy, and Andrew Goedeke; great-grandfather of Cooper Walker; fond brother of the late Alice (the late John) Van Tholen, and brother-in-law of the late Alvin (Joan) Boerman; uncle of many nieces and nephews. Memorials to the Ministry of Michael & Victoria Van Der Dyke, C/O Resonate Global Mission, 1700 28th Street SE. Grand Rapids, MI 49508, or Beacon Hill, A Home for Life Fund, 4201 Corporate Dr. West Des Moines, Iowa 50266, are appreciated.

Judean Desert at sunset, Israel

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SOUTHERN FRANCE**
Sep 16 – Sep 24 | *Bruce & Judy Buursma*

ROME AND THE AMALFI COAST
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Sep 29 – Oct 13 | *Jeff & Karen Blamer*

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Van Essen, Clarence, age 94, passed on to his heavenly home on February 4, 2022. He pastored 6 CRC congregations over 36 years of ministry and enjoyed people of all ages. He is survived by his wife of 70 years, Henrietta (Vanden Bosch), his children Carla (Bryn) Jones, Doug (Vicky), Vivian (Pete) Battjes, Deb (Steve) Van Drunen, and Beverly (Clark) Holesinger, 21 grandchildren, & 58 great-grandchildren. See full obit at mountfuneralhome.com

VANDER WALL, Gerald L., passed on February 24, 2022. He will be missed by his wife, Jessica (Beets), children, Valerie (Mike) Volkema, Paula (Rick) Edwards, Sondra (Rick DeVries) Kuiper, Bill (Tobee) Vander Wall, and Sue (Dan) Haveman; 14 grandchildren, eleven great grandchildren; sister-in-law Fran Vander Wall, and sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Dick and Wilma Nock; and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, five siblings, and son-in-law, Bill Kuiper. He was a member of LaGrave Avenue CRC.

WITTE, Ruth J. (Wolma), age 94, joined her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in heaven on Thursday, March 24, 2022. Surviving are her children, Linda R. Witte (Chicago), Curtis R. (Ruth) Witte, (Grand Rapids), Kevin L. (Vicki) Witte (Colorado Springs); grandchildren, Jonathan (Amanda) Witte, Christopher Witte, and Carolyn Witte (all of Grand Rapids) and sister-in-law, Mae (Witte) Boersema (Jenison). She was preceded in death by her husband of 64 years, the Rev. Wilmer R. Witte, her youngest child, Gayla R. Witte, and her sister and brother-in-law Marilyn and Harwin DeVries. Together, Ruth and her husband served Christian Reformed Churches in Ackley, Iowa, Walker, Michigan, Holland, Michigan (Pillar Church), Western Springs, Illinois and Grand Rapids, Michigan (Mayfair). She was a member of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

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Will We Welcome Jesus?

Millions of people are on the move today. Like Jesus' family, they do not choose to leave. They are forced to.



Ruth Padilla DeBorst is a theologian, missiologist, educator, and storyteller, as well as a wife of one and a mother of many. She serves with Resonate Global Mission leading the Comunidad de Estudios Teológicos Interdisciplinarios.

THEY DID NOT CHOOSE to leave their land. They were forced to. Violence pushed them out, and a search for survival pulled them forward. Joseph and Mary ran for their lives, carrying their child along dangerous roads full of bandits to the safety of an unknown place with a language strange to them. When we celebrate Christmas each year, it reminds us of God-with-us, Emmanuel—God is so much with vulnerable humanity that God became a fleeing refugee!

Millions of people are on the move today. Like Jesus' family, they do not choose to leave. They are forced to. They are running for their lives across rivers, oceans, and deserts. They are fleeing untold violence and unsustainable living conditions: extreme climates, droughts, and floods. Unlike Jesus' family, who settled for a time in Egypt, they are often arriving to inhospitable places where they are categorized and treated as criminals, shunned and rejected.

What justification is typically offered for that rejection? Legality—or absence of it. Migrants are said to be entering countries illegally, breaking the law of the land. But this issue leads to another question: what law is preeminent and takes precedence over others? The United Nations' 1951 Refugee Convention grants several rights to people fleeing serious threats. Among them are the right to not be punished for entering a territory of signatory countries (Art. 31), the right to freedom of movement (Art. 26), and the right to work (arts. 17-19).

In addition, as the community of another king, the Creator God who rules over and above any nation or group of nations, Christians are held to an even higher law. Jesus summed it up this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and

with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). Without any mushy sentimentality, this demand sums up the entire law given by God to Israel from its very beginning. The law of Moses included explicit demands regarding the acceptance and care of vulnerable people, including foreigners. Leviticus 19:33-34 and 23:22 paint the picture.

Jesus affirmed that he had come not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). As the only One who not only taught the law but lived it out perfectly, Jesus reached out to outsiders, walked through despised Samaria, and even healed the servant of a Roman centurion. We have only a vague idea of how old Jesus was when he and his family returned to their land after their time of asylum in Egypt. But one cannot help but wonder if he might not at least recall the stories of Mary and Joseph about that phase of his life. Perhaps those stories were in the back of his mind when, talking to his surprised disciples about the final judgment, he affirmed that whoever welcomes the stranger has received him (Matt. 25:38-40).

According to God's law of love, welcoming the stranger is a measure of our love of God and a tangible way of welcoming Jesus himself. Might we, then, need to seriously question any pride, prejudice, or policy that hinders that expression? My prayer is that the Christmas celebration of God-the-refugee among us might open our hearts, neighborhoods, churches, and homes to those who seek safety at the end of their perilous journeys. **B**

I Made Him Cry

He pointed to a chair and told me he'd have my watch fixed in a couple of minutes if I wanted to wait.



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

I MADE HIM CRY. I didn't mean to, but it happened. I'd stopped in to his store to get my Fitbit band repaired. I handed the bespectacled, gray-haired man at the counter the baggie with the various pieces and the broken pin, acknowledging the clumsiness that had resulted in breaking the metal band. I told him I'd stumbled over a parking block and smashed my arm against a block wall, wreaking havoc on my arm and the band. As repair people often do, he tut-tutted a bit before heading back to his workbench. He pointed to a chair and told me he'd have my watch fixed in a couple minutes if I wanted to wait.

I settled in the chair, and through our masks we chatted a bit. We talked about the curse of COVID-19 and the misery all around. Business was bad, but maybe down the road things would get better. His wife waved from the back room and called out a greeting. She thanked me for my business. Replacing a pin in a watch band isn't much business.

He fell silent as he bent over his work, and I checked my phone for messages in the quiet of the store. Surrounded by softly ticking clocks, I was reminded of all those who were waiting. Waiting for a better tomorrow, some future better day. In the midst of hard times, sometimes all you have is hope for the future.

I got up and wandered around the room a bit. Beautiful ancient clocks with price tags well beyond my budget were everywhere. Old grandfather clocks and dusty antiques nearly filled the floor and walls. Standing by the front window, I watched a couple of police officers walk a scruffy-looking handcuffed man to one of their cars. The wife called out, "It looks as if somebody is having a very bad day."

I nodded. "And here I am, complaining about a broken wrist band."

I sat back down and waited some more. I checked Facebook and Instagram and then made a couple of Scrabble plays against my siblings.

He walked back to the counter and laid the repaired Fitbit in front of me. "That should do it for you." He smiled. "Next time don't be so rough on it."

I grinned sheepishly. "I'm at the age where I stumble and lose my balance a lot. I can't promise I won't be back."

He laughed. "I can relate."

"How much do I owe you?"

He waved a hand. "How about \$2?"

It wasn't enough to use plastic. I opened my wallet. There was nothing but a \$20 bill. I threw it on the counter and said, "Keep the change."

"I've got change." He stepped toward the register.

"Nah, forget it. Your time is worth way more than two bucks. Besides, it's gotta be tough being a small-business owner these days."

That's when he cried. It wasn't a big sobbing jag. Just a little catch in his throat as he blurted out, "Thank you. That means a lot." Above the mask his eyes shimmered with tears. "I really needed to hear that my time is worth more than a couple of bucks."

It's hard to imagine how a small, family-owned clock shop can survive the pandemic, but I pray it has. **B**

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This year's writing contest is sponsored by a generous gift from the MultiplicationNetwork.org.



- » Deadline for submissions is midnight, June 24.
- » Contest open to anyone ages 16-23 who has not been previously published by *The Banner* and who is a member of or regularly attends a Christian Reformed church. Immediate family members of staff of *The Banner* and the CRCNA are not eligible.
- » Articles should be no more than 1,000 words in length, submitted as a Word file or Google doc and accompanied by a separate cover letter that includes your name, address, phone number, where you worship, and brief biographical note. Do not include this information on the essay itself. Email to info@thebanner.org with the subject heading "Writing Contest."
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