

BANNER

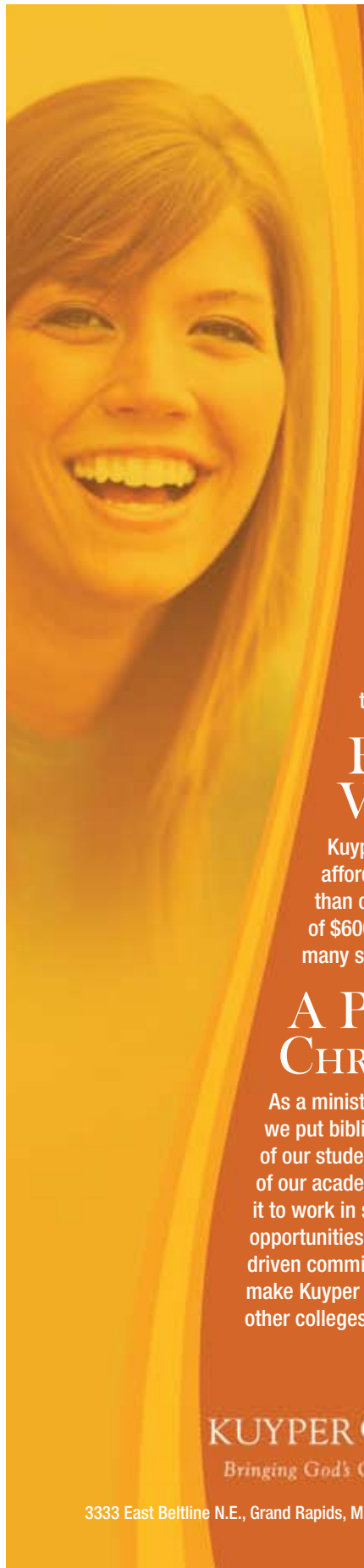
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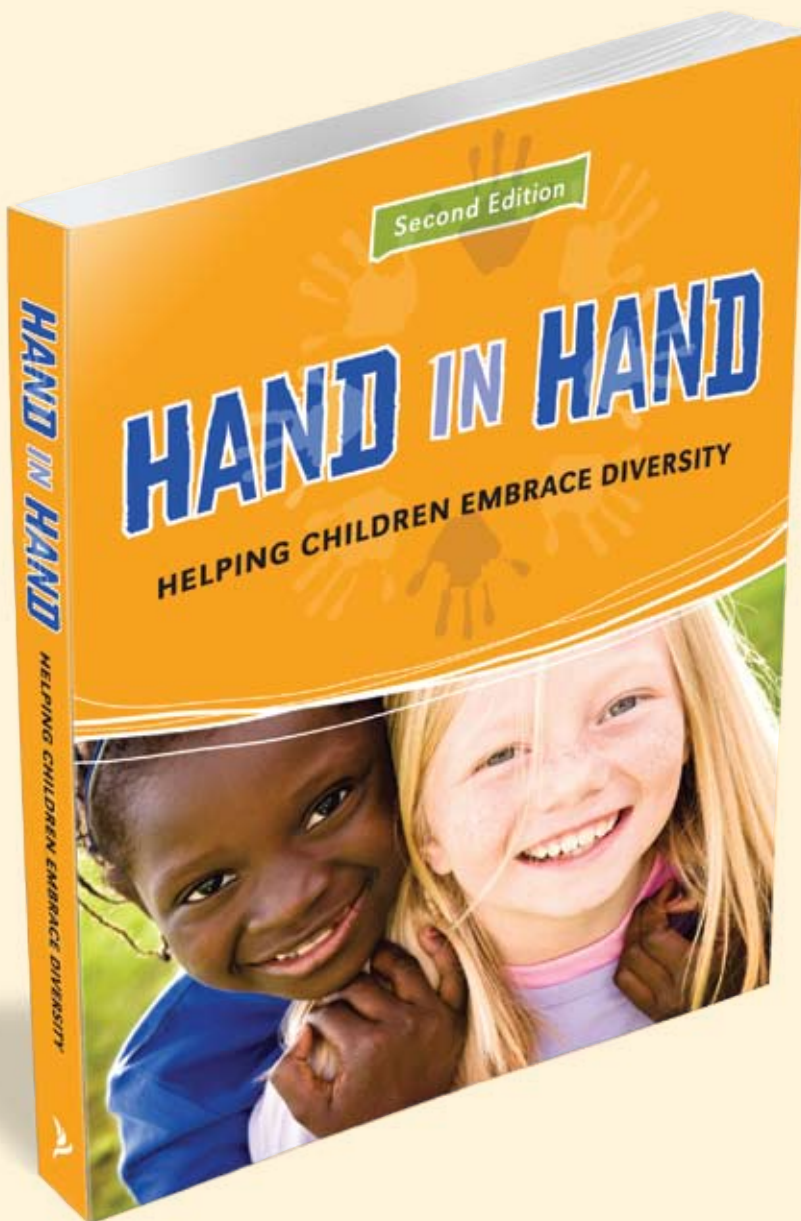
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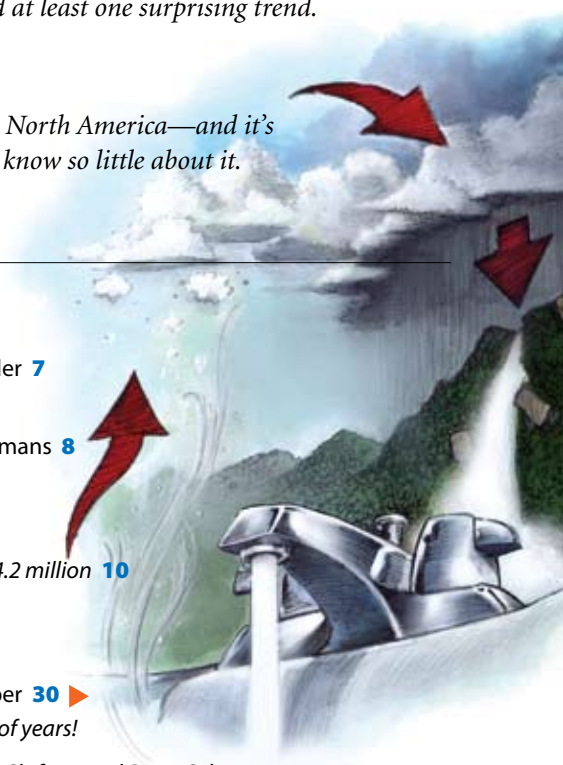
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Oops, I Did It Again

I'VE BEEN PONDERING SOMETHING THAT POPPED UP in our church's senior high catechism class (yeah, *that* catechism and it's *still* awesome).

We got into a discussion about sanctification, the ongoing work of God's Spirit in believers that shapes us to become more like Jesus. Call it discipleship, spiritual formation, or spiritual growth if you like.

Fair enough. But I have my doubts about the process. I don't see much evidence of sanctification, especially when I look in the mirror.

In my first congregations I had the strenuous privilege of joining in on every family visit made by the elders. I learned a lot. One question I posed (stole it from somewhere): "There's an old hymn that goes, 'Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before.' Is that true of your life?" After an awkward pause, as they decided whether to go with the "right" answer or the honest one, most respondents admitted that the hymn didn't match their experience. Progress on their way to sanctification seemed halting, slow, and marked by many lapses.

Supervisors who do performance appraisals of their staff tell me the same thing. Initially they have great ideals of guiding employees to become better workers. But experience teaches them that rarely will they be able to help employees make lasting changes. Personalities, weaknesses, strengths, and work habits are hard-wired.

There's one notable exception: some addicts. Once they hit bottom and get into a 12-step program, amazing things happen in their lives. It's tough sledding because when you take those steps seriously, you cannot avoid doing a radical overhaul of your personality and deepest self. Painful stuff!

Maybe we should all join a 12-step program. I can't honestly start off with, "Hi, my name is Bob, and I'm an alcoholic." But I could introduce myself with, "Hi, my name is Bob, and I have to be right all the time." Or "Hi, my name is Bob, and I talk too much and listen too little." Maybe it would help my sanctification for a group to press me to realize *and repair* the damage I've done.

On those family visits, though, answers to a follow-up question gave me more hope: "If every day with Jesus isn't always sweeter than the day before, how about every *decade*? When you take the long view, do you see progress?"

The answer would invariably be yes. In the long run, despite all the ups and downs, we're making progress on the salvation road. We're still a mess, but in softer hues. And we can honestly say we love Jesus more and experience more clearly our need and longing for the redemption he provides.

When our kids were little my wife and I would mark off their physical height on the wall. The kids were usually disappointed because their growth seemed imperceptible. A few weeks made no discernable difference. But somehow, somewhere down the line, they outgrew their parents by more than a head.

Let's keep confessing together the doctrine of sanctification. We need the constant reminder or we'll stop trying hard enough to be who God promises we really are already becoming. ■

Progress on
the way to
sanctification
seems halting,
slow, and
marked by
many lapses.



Alberta. See his blog at www.thebanner.org.

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Catch Me in My Scurrying

... Catch me in my mindless scurrying, Lord,
and hold me in this Lenten season:
hold my spirit to the beacon of your grace
and grant me light enough to walk boldly,
to feel passionately,
to love aggressively;
grant me peace enough to want more,
to work for more
and to submit to nothing less,
and to fear only you . . .
only you!

Bequeath me not becalmed seas,
slack sails and premature benedictions,
but breathe into me a torment,
storm enough to make within myself
and from myself,
something . . .

something new,
something saving,
something true,
a gladness of heart,
a pitch for a song in the storm,
a word of praise lived,
a gratitude shared,
a cross dared,
a joy received. . . .

— TED LODER

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Taking the Pulse of Our Future

THE FINDINGS The surveys suggest major changes that will forever alter our college campuses as well as our churches.

THE FINDINGS from the recent survey of Christian Reformed churches and their members (see “Who We Are Today,” p. 36) come a number of weeks after the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life released results of a far larger survey focused on religious life. As a Reformed Christian college president, I find that both surveys have significant implications for higher education.

Three factors suggest to me that major changes have begun and will forever alter our campuses as well as our churches. (Note: while the Pew Forum’s Religious Landscape Survey is limited to the U.S., the CRC survey focuses on both Canada and the U.S., albeit solely on the CRC.)

First, the CRC survey identifies a declining proportion of children attending Christian schools. With respect to higher education, many students applying to Trinity Christian College apply to local Wesleyan and Nazarene colleges and to state universities as well. Many times features such as facilities and athletics influence their decisions. It appears that CRC families are considering a wider range of colleges than only those providing a Reformed Christian education.

Second, the Pew survey finds that 25 percent of young adults ages 18 to 29 report that they are not affiliated with any particular religion. By way of comparison, only 8 percent of those 70 years of age or older report no affiliation. With respect to the CRC, we see a similar trend when looking at denominational loyalty. Our survey finds that 71 percent of those 62 and older describe themselves as very loyal, whereas only 53 percent of those younger than age 25 describe themselves in the same way (though only 3.9 percent of the survey respondents are from that age group).

Third, from multiple other sources, it is clear that the population of students of traditional college age is shrinking. Baptism records kept by the denomination and tracked by Calvin College’s director of institutional research suggest that the CRC reflects demographic trends across North America. The number of baptisms peaked in 1984, and the numbers have decreased since then. Not surprisingly, we find decreasing numbers of CRC young people ready to enter college each year.

The data are not encouraging for admissions directors at Reformed Christian colleges.

Moreover, we find ourselves facing fewer college prospects among a college-age generation that might claim to be spiritual, but one-quarter have no religious affiliation. And it seems that among those with a CRC affiliation, loyalty is significantly less than it is with their grandparents. (Not quite so incidentally, these 20-somethings mirror their parents—the 42 to 61 age group—in terms of denominational loyalty.) It’s little wonder that Reformed Christian colleges lose applicants to other schools.

Clearly, it is incumbent upon Reformed Christian colleges to make the case for

the value of what we offer in ways that will catch the attention of this denominationally distracted generation. And we must be flexible, finding new ways to connect to people who desire our educational programs but are past the traditional college entry age, unable to uproot their lives and move, and/or are unable to meet the financial challenges presented by the cost of education.

In the book *Dutch Chicago*, author Robert Swierenga recounts this early perspective and interchange among a largely immigrant group: “The church nurtured ‘children of the covenant’—a cardinal Calvinist doctrine—in the community of faith, while the school prepared them for a life in society. One immigrant complained of the financial drain of the Christian schools: ‘De school vreet de kerk op’ (‘The school will devour the church’), he declared. The fit rejoinder was: ‘Hoe meer de school vreet, hoe meer de kerk groeit’ (‘The more the school eats, the better the church will grow’).”

When the Christian school or college is deprived of that which feeds it—students and the resources needed to educate them—we will see further declines in our churches both in numbers and in commitment, both in our pews and pulpits.

Instead, let’s promote Reformed, Christian education at all levels so that churches will flourish through the power of the Holy Spirit. ■



Dr. Steven Timmermans is president of Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Ill.

LETTERS



Epiphanies

I found the visual graphic of the fist on page 7 of the January 2010 *Banner* both startling and unsettling. With its attendant article (“Burglary in Progress” by Reginald Smith), it’s an excellent reminder not to “judge a book by its cover.”

Well done.

—Lynda Smith
Salt Lake City, Utah

Reading the Bible

Hats off to Aminah Al-Attas Bradford and Mary Hulst for their thoughtful article “Reading the Bible Well” (January 2010)! As one who has worked with the Bible, taught from it, and edited commentaries on it for more than 50 years, I heartily concur that it’s important to read the Bible to be transformed into the image of Christ. Reading the Bible well also enables us to work more effectively toward the transformation of the world. . . .

I know of no better books for “Bridging the Historical Gap” and “Picking a Genre” than Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart’s *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* and *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. (However, as Fee has said to me, “People have a temptation to read books about the Bible rather than the Bible itself”). . . .

Someone has said that “if we have the Word without the Spirit, we dry up; if we

have the Spirit without the Word, we blow up; but if we have both the Word and the Spirit, we grow up.” Therefore, we must pray for the Spirit to give us insight before we read the Bible.

“Take and read!”

—Milton Essenburg
Holland, Mich.

Christmas Nightmare

Our small group had a great discussion about the short story “The Nightmare of Christmas” by James Schaap (December 2010). There were some questions. Was the story about the parents or the children? Was it about generational differences, the CRC immigrant culture, or parent-child relationships and expectations? In some ways we could all relate to the story. (But we would never trick our kids like that!)

Upon further reflection, the story is about all of the above. It is a story about family and life. To use a metaphor, it is about parents trying to complete a puzzle. These parents spent all their married life putting together this puzzle. How to raise the kids in the right way, how to teach them the faith, how to educate them, and how to pass on that hard work is very important.

Being human, parents want to see the final product, to see the puzzle finished. But, lo and behold, in old age they find out that a whole new puzzle is being designed. And they are not the ones designing it. Worse yet, they are merely one of the puzzle pieces!

The gift the parents in the story give themselves is their last-ditch human effort to complete their own puzzle. Their next life task will be to surrender, to know and trust that it is God who will complete it.

And so it is with us.

—Vicky Van Andel
Edmonton, Alberta

Catechism Neglect

In the November 2009 issue of *The Banner*, George Vander Weit responds to the question whether it is against Christian Reformed Church policy to have no catechism teaching in either the Sunday morning or evening service. He says that since the requirement is widely ignored, we should change our Church Order. I would ask, Couldn’t that be said about any violation of the Church Order?

Let me make the following observations:

1. Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, president of Calvin Seminary, notes that the catechism “presents 129 questions and answers of remarkably warm and practical Christian piety, including wonderful treatments of the Ten Commandments, of prayer, and of my only comfort in life and in death.”
2. Throughout my years of catechism preaching, I have found each successive trip through the catechism more exciting and rewarding.
3. Neglect of catechism preaching (or the other doctrinal standards), further impoverishes our churches in a time of increasing doctrinal and biblical ignorance.
4. In my teenage years in Woodstock, Ontario, the pastor at that time, Jacob Hoogland, said that catechism preaching keeps ministers from riding their favorite hobby horses and forces them to deal with the whole gamut of biblical revelation.

—Pastor Ralph Koops
Cambridge, Ontario

For the full text of this letter and the one from Milton Essenburgs, please see the February *Banner* online (www.thebanner.org).

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Michigan Church Stays Committed to Homeless Outreach

Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Mich., continues to support Martha's Table, an ecumenical ministry to Kalamazoo's poor and homeless, even though three other local churches have left in disagreement with the host church's policy of inclusiveness for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons.

Martha's Table brings partner churches and up to 100 homeless guests together on Sunday afternoons to experience Christian fellowship through worship and a meal at First Congregational Church in downtown Kalamazoo. Third CRC has been involved with Martha's Table since the ministry's start in 2007.

Rev. Ken Baker, pastor of Third CRC and chair of the board of Faith Alive Christian Resources, which governs *The Banner*, said Martha's Table is more than a place for homeless people to eat.

"These are resourceful folks who can find meals," he said, "but it is special when they find themselves part of a community where others respect them and sit to converse with them for a while."

The departure of the other three churches—Agape Christian Church, Word for Life Church of God, and Centerpoint Church (formerly Third Reformed)—came in the wake of the November 2009 approval by Kalamazoo voters of an ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The months leading up to the vote were marked by emotional lobbying on both sides of the issue. Rev. Matt Laney, pastor of First Congregational,



Martha's Table in Kalamazoo, Mich., brings together partner churches for food and fellowship with some of the city's homeless people.

CHRISTOPHER MCCUIRE PHOTOGRAPHY

was an outspoken advocate for passage of the measure.

"The divergent strength of convictions on both sides was no surprise," Baker said. "But I was not aware that for the three churches this represented a threat to their continued involvement in this ministry to the poor and homeless in Kalamazoo."

Ecumenical ventures are always challenging, Baker said, because they draw Christians into cooperation with other believers whose views may be quite different—but he said there is no

questioning the three departing churches' heart for the poor.

Baker said that members at Third CRC are able to keep their personal convictions related to the Kalamazoo ordinance and issues of sexuality from affecting the congregation's ongoing commitment to Martha's Table.

Baker has written to the three churches, asking them to reconsider and come back to the Martha's Table. Their return, he said, would be "wonderful as a testimony to Christian grace and charity."

—Henry Huisjen

Toronto's Institute for Christian Studies Receives \$4.2 Million

The Institute for Christian Studies (ICS), a Christian graduate school in Toronto, Ontario, recently received a \$4.2 million gift from the estate of the late Lowell Andreas. It was the second school supported by Christian Reformed church members to receive such a gift. (See "Dordt College Receives \$3.9 Million," January 2010 *Banner*).

The gift—the largest in the Institute's history—was good news for ICS, which found itself in financial crisis this past year (see "Who Teaches the Profs," April 2009 *Banner*).

"Last year was a difficult year for ICS due to the recession . . . but our donors got us through it," said John O'Leary, director of development at ICS.

O'Leary stated that the gift came at a significant time of "rebirth and renewal" for ICS. "Mr. Andreas' gift will enhance priorities fundamental to the mission of ICS, including faculty and student support, information, and research resources," he said.

Andreas was former president of Archer Daniels Midland, an Iowa company that processes agricultural products. Andreas died April 4 at the age of 87.

—Sophie Vandenberg

Worship Delayed for Olympic Torch Relay

As the Olympic torch made its way across Canada for the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, one Ontario congregation delayed its worship service for a few minutes to watch the torch go by its building.

Fruitland Christian Reformed Church in Stoney Creek was about to start its worship service on Dec. 20 when Rev. Jerry Hoytema, a retired pastor who was leading the service, invited the congregation of about 300 people to step outside to see the torch relay pass by the church.

"Children and young people were particularly excited to witness this event and will likely always remember it," Hoytema said.

"This was great," said one of the church's elders.

Once they were back inside, worship commenced, with Hoytema reminding parishioners that "we get excited about the Olympic torch, but Jesus is the light that lights up the whole world, and we should be even more excited about that."

—Gayla R. Postma



JERRY HOYTEMA

Fruitland CRC in Stoney Creek, Ontario, delayed its worship service so parishioners could go outside to see the Olympic torch pass by on its way to the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver.

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Olthoff

1914-2009

Rev. John Olthoff, 95, cherished pastor, consummate preacher, fervent intercessor, and gifted musician, passed away following a sudden decline in health.

Olthoff was born and raised in Roseland, Ill. In preparation for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church, he attended Calvin Theological Seminary, graduating in 1944. He served congregations in Michigan, Iowa, and Wisconsin. After retiring in 1979, he served as interim pastor in ten congregations that had no regular pastor.

He is fondly remembered by the congregations he served. His parishioners remember his pastoral visits for the sincerity of his prayers. He considered song and music integral parts of worship. He and his wife, Sara, traveled widely, visiting 49 of the 50 states.

Olthoff was preceded in death by Sara and is survived by a son and his spouse, a daughter, four grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

—Louis M. Tamminga

For more on the life and ministry of Rev. Olthoff, please visit www.thebanner.org. In addition to being posted online, further information on recently deceased ministers is available each year in the front pages of the Christian Reformed Church's annual Yearbook.

CRC Pastor Testifies on Capitol Hill

A convicted felon living in Kentucky or Virginia has no voting rights, but one living in Maine or Vermont has full voting rights, even in prison.

Throughout the United States, a patchwork of different laws allows voting rights at discharge from prison or after completion

of parole, with some restrictions and exceptions.

Rev. H. David Schuringa, a Christian Reformed minister and president of Crossroad Bible Institute in Grand Rapids, Mich., is trying to change that.

On December 11, he testified on Capitol Hill in support of the

Democracy Restoration Act, S.1516 and H.R.3335, legislation that would uniformly restore voting rights in federal elections to an estimated 4 million people who are out of prison.

"This issue is terribly important," Schuringa said. "The best way we can be a voice for the voiceless in society is to speak out and give them their own voice—the vote."

Schuringa is optimistic that the legislation will pass in the current session of the U.S. congress, but does expect resistance from some who consider this a states' rights issue.

The mission of Crossroad Bible Institute, a ministry supported by many CRC members, is to provide people in prison with faith-based reentry education while guiding them into reentry agencies upon their release. They also provide churches with education on criminal and restorative justice issues.

—Calvin Hulstein



Rev. H. David Schuringa (second from left) testified on Capitol Hill along with Hilary O. Shelton, director of the NAACP Washington Bureau (left); Kimberly Haven, executive director of Justice Maryland (second from right); and Ronald Hampton, executive director of the National Black Police Association.

CALLS ACCEPTED

Candidate **Mark Neymeiyer** has accepted a call to Rusk Christian Reformed Church, Zeeland, Mich.

Candidate **Dave Spoelma** has accepted a call to Second CRC, Byron Center, Mich.

Keeping Kids Off New Jersey Streets

Giselle, a second-grader, is growing up in Jersey City, N.J., where many kids live in single-parent homes and after-school hours can be troublesome.

But Giselle and 65 other elementary school kids go to The After School Center run by New City Kids Christian Reformed Church for three hours after school every day. They come to sing, get tutoring, and learn skills such as dance, drama, music, and kickboxing.

All the kids are on teams named after universities. Giselle's team, Princeton, is an advanced drum class. It's normally for older kids, but Giselle's dedication and skill earned her a promotion.

"I like drum class and I get help with my homework at After

School," she said. "It's easier to do it here than at home."

One of Giselle's tutors is Greg Nelson, 17, who started attending New City Kids Church at age five and moved through the kids' programs into teen employment at age 14.

Greg has been a drum teacher and assistant team leader, and now is one of two team leaders helping to oversee all of the teen employees at the After School Center. Teen employees are given performance reviews, promotions, and raises and are expected to keep their grades up when they work at the center.

According to Wendy Eaton, the center's director of communication, the center was opened in 2005 and is funded by a combination of individual gifts, pri-



WENDY EATON

Giselle, with her tutor Greg Nelson, enjoys playing drums at The After School Center run by New City Kids CRC.

vate foundations, and government grants.

—Calvin Hulstein



BETH HEINEN BELL

Ministry Associates John Mundi (left) and Bernard Ayoola now lead the African Community Fellowship.

New Pastors for African Immigrant Church

Although they're a long way from their home countries, two African pastors are joining together to lead a small Christian Reformed congregation of African immigrants in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The two pastors of African Community Fellowship—Bernard Ayoola of Nigeria and John Mundi of Kenya—are ministry associates who are doing the job as volunteers. Although the church owns its building and is able to cover its expenses, it cannot yet afford to pay a pastor.

Like its pastors, the congregation is largely made up of African immigrants who hail from a variety of countries including Kenya, Uganda, Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, and Malawi. But despite its immigrant focus, the new pastors hope the church will grow in its diversity.

"The fact that it is an African church does not mean that we do not want others to come," Ayoola said. "We are saying that we have a unique way we worship here, a unique people here, [and] unique needs. We also want other people to come in, especially those who don't go to church."

Mundi agreed, saying outreach will be a focus of the church.

"One of the strategies is to engage in evangelism, because there is no way the church will grow unless we aggressively engage in that," Mundi said.

In addition to their pastoral duties, both Ayoola and Mundi are full-time students. Ayoola is finishing his Th.M. at Calvin Theological Seminary, and Mundi is in the Ph.D. program at Western Theological Seminary.

The church was founded in 2000 by Rev. Mwaya Wa Kitavi. Kitavi, who left to become the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Director for Christian Reformed World Missions, said of Ayoola and Mundi, "They are capable leaders. The church is in good hands."

—Christian Bell

Sharing Warmth on Cold Colorado Nights

On a cold early winter evening, 32 people gathered in the fellowship hall of Crestview Christian Reformed Church in Boulder, Colo.

But these were not the average churchgoing folks. The people who gathered were homeless, and they were at Crestview Church seeking warmth on the coldest of nights.

Recently the metro Denver Homeless Initiative found up to 563 people living on the streets in Boulder, where only 130 beds are available in shelters.

To help bridge the gap, Crestview began working with shelters in 2008 and offering the church building as an emergency warming

shelter. Amelia Dickerson, the church's local missions coordinator, is passionate about helping people who are homeless.

Crestview provides more than just a place to sleep by collecting coats, clothing,

shoes, and socks to give to those who need them. The church fridge is stockpiled with home-baked food for those who are hungry.

Dickerson sees the church's involvement in this outreach as obeying Jesus' command.



Some of Boulder's homeless people spend the night in Crestview CRC's fellowship hall.

"Jesus tells us to care for the widows, the children, the blind, the lame, and the poor," she says. "Hosting the warming center is an attempt to turn ourselves towards being obedient to that command in a literal way."

The people who enter the shelter see it in another light. Tom, a rugged older gentleman visiting the shelter, said, "You know, when people at a church who don't know you treat you better than your own family, well, that says a lot."

—Sarah Boonstra

CRWRC Lays Off Staff

With income falling short of budget projections (see *Banner*, January 2010), the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee has been forced to cut staff both overseas and in its North American offices.

A recent memo sent out by directors Andrew Ryskamp and Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo announced that 11 North American employees were laid off, nine in the U.S. office in Grand Rapids, Mich., and two in the Canadian office in Burlington, Ontario. Other staff have had their hours reduced.

Overseas, two people, one in Asia and one in the Philippines, have both been laid off, and other positions that were recently vacated will not be filled.

The positions eliminated include those of people involved in training and development, communications, church and donor relations, and support staff.

—Gayla R. Postma



BETT YANN VAN VEEN

John Knier (left) and Carl Burton help build a new house for a neighbor.

The House that Love Built

After Pat Lavallee's husband died, she lost her house near Williamsburg, Ontario, in a fire and was forced to live in a trailer in her back yard. Her neighbors, Andrew and BettyAnn Van Veen, felt they had to help. They asked friend Andrew Bouwman to assess the burned house, but it was beyond repair. So Bouwman drafted new house plans and the volunteering began.

More than 50 volunteers came from Williamsburg (Ontario) Christian Reformed Church, where the Van Veens attend, and from Bouwman's church, Immanuel CRC in Cornwall, Ontario to rebuild Lavallee's home.

The rapid progress amazed Van Veen. "It was like an Amish barn-build!" he said. In one day the volunteers framed the house, raised the rafters, and applied plywood to the walls and roof. Several times when dry weather was crucial, area rain passed the house by. Bouwman observed, "The good Lord was at work."

Widespread community support was evident. The township waived all fees for demolition, dumping, and building permits. Plumbing, electrical, and furnace work was donated by licensed contractors, and local lumberyards donated materials.

Lavallee said, "It was a godsend! I didn't know what I was going to do. It was unexpected and appreciated!"

—Brenda Visser

West Michigan Churches Make Plans for Worldwide Council

Christian Reformed churches in West Michigan will sponsor and host delegates from around the world who are participating in the Uniting General Council in June.

The Uniting General Council is the event at which the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) will

merge to form the World Council of Reformed Churches, the world's largest body of Reformed denominations.

More than 1,000 delegates from around the globe will attend the Uniting General Council, taking place June 18-28 on the campus of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.

On the first Sunday of the Council, delegates will join host churches for their morning worship service and for lunch. On the second Sunday, delegates will be invited to spend the day with the congregation and experience American churches and homes.

"The delegates are coming from 107 countries around the world, and many of them have never been inside the home of an American family, so they live with whatever stereotypes they have of that," said Rev. Peter Borgdorff, former executive director of the Christian Reformed Church, who is organizing the effort. "It is a cultural and fellowship experience of connecting with people of similar faith and Reformed heritage on a new page."

Congregations, in turn, will be able to interact with Christians from churches across the world.

"The benefit [for congregations] is to come face to face with representatives of the global church," Borgdorff said. "They've never had the opportunity to meet Christians from Indonesia or Africa or Germany. [The global church] is real and it takes real flesh and bones to make it live for them."

One church that is already preparing is LaGrave CRC in Grand Rapids, which will host 10 visitors and delegates and is raising funds both to sponsor delegates' trips as well as to help other churches that want to sponsor delegates.

"We have a lot of churches that don't have the resources, especially this year, to be sponsors," said Rev. Ed Blankespoor, who is part of a committee at LaGrave that is organizing the effort.

Christian Reformed churches, as well as congregations of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Church of Christ located in the Great Lakes region of Michigan, are especially requested to consider hosting delegates or help sponsor the costs of travel. More information is available at <http://reformed-churches.org>.

—Christian Bell

Massachusetts Teen a High School Heisman Finalist

Kristabel Stark, a senior at Whitinsville Christian High School, was one of 12 national finalists for Wendy's High School Heisman trophy, an award given for academic achievements, community service, and athletic accomplishments.

Stark, a member of New England Chapel Christian Reformed Church in Franklin, Mass., joined the other finalists in New York City in December where the two national winners were named.

An ESPN camera crew followed Stark for a "day in the life" profile aired during the televised awards program on ESPN2. Stark's school received \$2,000.

The award, sponsored by Wendy's, is given in conjunction with the more famous Heisman awarded each December to the most outstanding player in collegiate football.

The winner of the High School Heisman, which celebrates the achievements of the United States' top high school seniors, was selected from a pool of 54,000 applicants.

Stark has played soccer, basketball, tennis, and track and field in high school. She has been on the high honor roll every quarter, and played violin in the high school and chamber orchestras. She participated in music/service tours to Mississippi, New Orleans, and Washington, DC.

She said her biggest challenge is "finding a balance and managing my time." She added, "The different activities have only served to make me a whole person."

Stark plans to pursue a medical career in college next fall.

—Calvin Hulstein



DENNIS EPPLETT

Kristabel Stark (right), a finalist for Wendy's High School Heisman, with Michelle Howard, district manager of Wendy's Corporation.

Michigan Marine Receives Purple Heart and Community Support

United States Marine Sergeant Cory Gritter, a member of Graafschap Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich., was hit in both arms and legs by an IED (improvised explosive device) in Afghanistan on October 28. Since then, he and his parents have felt their church and community support in deep ways.

Gritter, 22, is part of the 3rd battalion/4th Marines as a Scout Sniper. He and two of his fellow Marines were awarded the Purple Heart, which is given to members of the military who are killed or wounded in action.

After the injury, Gritter was transferred to Germany for surgeries, and was then moved to Bethesda, Md., for more surgeries and therapy.

In November, Graafschap members tied yellow ribbons around the Gritter family porch for Cory's future welcome home. Nancy Gritter, Cory's mother, spoke of their church and community support through prayers, cards, gifts, food and finances. "The church and community have been great," she said.

From her son's bedside in Bethesda, Nancy Gritter said,



Church and community members tied yellow ribbons around the home of U.S. Marine Sergeant Cory Gritter (inset) for his eventual welcome home.



"There are churches and people all over the world praying. It is so amazing and such a comfort." She added, "We are so thankful to be part of a loving and caring church family and cannot imagine going through this without our faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

—Karen Gorter

PHOTO BY KAREN GORTER

Women's Shelter Gets New Playground

Money from the Christian Reformed Church's 2008 Sea to Sea bike tour has helped build a playground at a shelter for women and children in Orange City, Iowa.

The Bridge received a \$7,500 grant from the Sea to Sea funds to enclose the playground with chain-link fencing, lay down safety surfacing, and add a swing set, a fort, picnic tables, a play house, a sandbox, and big wooden chairs.

Fundraisers, gifts, and volunteer labor made up the rest of the project's \$20,000 cost. "I think we did well with it, actually," said director Sandi Altena, member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

The Bridge serves up to six women and their children for up to two years. The women and children are homeless or escaping domestic violence. Counseling in the areas of finances, employment, parenting, healthy relationships, and spiritual formation are part of the program.

The Bridge opened in 2007 and now serves a five-county area.

—Sherry Kooiker

Volunteer Art Hielkema helped assemble playground equipment for The Bridge, a shelter for women and children, to keep labor costs at a minimum.



N.J. Pastor Collects Shoes to Remember Darfur

When Rev. Ken Vander Wall, Christian Reformed campus pastor at William Paterson University in Paterson, N.J., visited Washington, D.C. last spring, he was moved by a display of 30,000 pairs of shoes near the Reflecting Pool on the National Mall.

The shoes called attention to 300,000 deaths in the Darfur region of the Sudan since 2003. Vander Wall went home motivated to do something similar in New Jersey.

With the help of more than 30 churches and 20 schools, including Eastern Christian High School in North Haledon, N.J., 15,000 pairs of shoes were collected and displayed at the Westfield Garden State Plaza in Paramus in November.

After the display, the shoes were donated to Soles4Souls, a Nashville-based charity that distributes shoes to people in need around the world.

—Calvin Hulstein

SANDI ALTENA



CRC, Mennonites Discuss War and Peace

In October, representatives of the Christian Reformed Church and Mennonite Church Canada held a symposium on war and peace in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was co-hosted by Rev. Bruce Adema, director of Canadian ministries for the CRC; and Robert J. Suderman, general secretary of Mennonite Church Canada.

The CRC has a long-standing tradition of just war theology.

Adema said that CRC adherents live in a tension: in one hand they hold a deep desire to “never want war,” and in the other hand they hold a desire to stand up for the weak and vulnerable, using redemptive, violent force by serving in the military if no other solution is evident. But, “If just war happens, we have not been effective agents of peace,” he acknowledged.

Mennonites do not justify the use of violence even when it promises to be redemptive.

The 43 participants, both Mennonite and CRC, were paired up and assigned the task of creating a Remembrance Day service palatable to both denominations. A common theme that emerged was that such a service would need to focus on lament for all war dead, rather than honoring only those

who gave up their lives in military service.

Rev. Herman Keizer, a retired CRC military chaplain and long-time high-level Pentagon ethical advisor, said, “. . . we have gained a deeper appreciation of the peace churches and what they can contribute to our efforts to be peacemakers,” citing a recommendation from the CRC’s Synod 2006 calling for the CRC to work more closely with peace churches and learn from one another.

With a Purple Heart medal pinned to his lapel, Keizer advocated for a re-examination of attitudes and conventional weapons. “In World War II only 20% of the fighting force shot to kill; today that is up to 85%. . . . We, the US and Canada, have trained and have fielded the deadliest and most lethal force in the history of war fighting. I am concerned because soldiers are more concerned with killing than being killed,” he said.

The event inspired better understanding between the two denominations—and perhaps a renewed valuing of those who have different understandings of peace and how to achieve it.

Many Christian Reformed members have memories of World War II that continue to shape their thinking. Some Mennonites also share that story, but more are shaped by a collective 500-year history of migration prompted by violent religious persecution.

Before adjourning for a communal supper, Adema reflected in his worship mediation that, “When I look in your Mennonite eyes, I see Christ looking back at me.”

—Dan Dyck
(reprinted with permission from Mennonite Church Canada)

CRC Awards Second Annual Green Grants

The Christian Reformed Church awarded its second annual Green Grants to a church in Michigan and another in British Columbia.

In the U.S., First CRC of Grand Haven, Mich., needed to repair or replace a very inefficient boiler system. With no church funds available for the nearly \$20,000 project, the church began an aggressive program called Metal Recycle Ministry.

Volunteers pick up all types of metal throughout the community and deliver it to a recycling plant. By October 2009, the church had recycled approximately 172,655 pounds (78,315 kilograms) of metal that otherwise would have gone into a landfill and raised \$14,000 for the boiler repair.

“Almost every week volunteers receive a comment similar to, ‘Your church is doing this? Churches don’t usually do this type of work to benefit the community!’” said one church member. “Never underestimate the impact of doing good in your community.”

In Canada, First CRC of Vancouver, British Columbia, received the award for their “Garden of Eatin’”—a community garden devoted to neighborhood outreach and sustainable gardening practices.

The produce is used to host an annual community feast, and gardeners are also given the opportunity to donate their produce to a local soup kitchen.

The church also holds adult education classes on Christian stewardship, serves fair-trade coffee, has a church-wide recycling program, and has installed a bike rack.

First Christian Reformed Church of Grand Haven, Mich., won a 2009 Green Grant for its Metal Recycle Ministry.

To win the \$500 award, churches must demonstrate “effective and replicable ‘greening’ through education, lifestyle, and theological initiatives.”

“Some of our churches have already been making changes to their facilities, worship, and lifestyles in order to care for God’s creation,” said Kate Kooyman, Congregational Justice Mobilizer for the CRC’s Office of Social Justice and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. “We want those congregations to share their experiences and resources as well as encourage others to get involved in combating very real threats to the creation that God calls us as Christians to keep.”

Links to creation-care materials for individuals and congregations can be accessed at www.crcjustice.org. Churches can apply for the 2010 Green Grants from Aug. 1, 2010, to Nov. 1, 2010. An online application form is available at www.crcna.org/pages/osj_greengrantapp.cfm.



FAQS

Church

Q If elders and pastors no longer regularly visit congregation members in their homes and inquire personally about the state of their faith, have these leaders defaulted on one of marks of the true church: discipline?

A Home visitation is much maligned, probably because it was often treated either as an inquisition or as a social time of irrelevant banter with a brief mention of spiritual matters.

When done wisely, this traditional practice has many benefits. It gives every member one-on-one time with church leaders to convey anything they wish to express, something that's important in an impersonal world. Beyond that, it provides an opportunity for church leaders to visit members "on their own turf," to encourage them in their spiritual growth, and to thank them for their service to the congregation.

That said, our Church Order's requirement of "annual home visitation" (Article 65) is unrealistic. In the congregations I served in my 40 years of ministry we attempted to visit each person once every two years and would do so more frequently by request.

—George Vander Weit

George Vander Weit is a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church.

Relationships

Q My daughter is a picky eater. If she's eating healthy food, is it worth the tears that result when we require her to try new foods?

A As parents, it is almost impossible not to have some power struggles with the children we are to raise. But parents do need to pick their battles, carefully and deliberately.

Before age 2 parents make all the decisions, but after that most children are ready to begin exercising some power and control.

This is all part of their maturation process toward becoming confident and mature adults. Parents can celebrate this!

But what to do as your young daughter practices being in charge of what she eats while you also teach her the limits of her right to choose?

It might help to answer the following questions: 1) Is she undermining her health by her choice of foods? If the answer is no, I

**The Holy Spirit
is always
directing our
attention
to what God
has already
accomplished
in Jesus.**

would not consider it worth a power struggle. 2) Is it too cumbersome to allow her *her* food choices while also allowing you yours?

It might be worth telling her that it is more important to you that she feels comfortable than that she try new foods, but that there will be no compromise on eating healthy foods for supper.

And remember, children are great imitators. Before long she will be tempted to taste something that the rest of her family is eating with enjoyment.

—Judy Cook

Judy Cook is a family therapist living in Hamilton, Ontario. She is a member of Meadowlands Fellowship CRC in Ancaster. You may e-mail her at

judycook.thebannerqanda@gmail.com. All responses will be held in the strictest confidence.

Calling/Mission

Q I volunteer at my church as well as work and attend to my family. I find that I don't volunteer out of love but out of duty. Is this how it's supposed to be?

A I commend you for maintaining the desire to serve Jesus at home, work, and church. But serving the Lord out of duty is *not* how it's supposed to be! Our motivation should be gratitude, joy, and love.

Romans 12:1 spells out why we are called to serve: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." The Holy Spirit is always directing our attention to what God has already accomplished in Jesus. Jesus died on the cross because we fail to serve God in our home, work, and church. Second, when he rose from the dead he clothed us with his righteousness and glory. He is the only one who has served the Lord completely, and now imparts his servant-heart to us.

I am a church planter in Edmonton, Alberta, and I have been working very hard for the Lord. But last year the Holy Spirit revealed to me that I was lacking joy, love, and gratitude. The reason? I was working like a madman, trying to obtain the Father's approval. Then I was cut to the heart by the Holy Spirit that in Jesus Christ, the Father already says to me, "My good and faithful servant," and I don't have to work to gain his approval. In view of God's mercy, I can truly serve Jesus at home, work, and church with joy, love, and gratitude.

—Victor Ko

Rev. Victor Ko is pastor of Mosaic House Community Church in Edmonton, Alberta. ■

How (Not) to Talk About God

WHAT ONE CHURCH LEARNED BY PRACTICING “PUB THEOLOGY”

EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, it's good to ask yourself, “When was the last time I had a real conversation with someone who doesn't believe in God? Do I even know anyone like that?” The reality is that people of no religious belief are one of the fastest-growing segments of the population. They're also just the sort of people Jesus engaged.

With this in mind, our church began to contemplate how we could connect with people who would never set foot in a church on Sunday morning. We decided we had to go where people were already hanging out. So last year, on an October Thursday evening, we started a conversation group called “Pub Theology.”

We had cleared the plan with the owner of a local brewery and put up a few posters, but we weren't really sure what to expect. More than 15 people showed up that first night, and we've rarely missed a Thursday since.

In many ways we've connected with the crowd we set out to meet: people who have left the church but consider themselves “spiritual” individuals who believe in an undefined higher power, atheists, Buddhists, and others. It's an open environment: there are no presentations or lectures, just good talk over a good brew.

Fertile Ground and a Safe Place

One of Pub Theology's regular attendees, Steve, is an atheist. He loves coming because it's the first time he's met Christians who are willing to admit they don't know it all. “If more Christians were like this, I would be much more open toward people of faith,” he said to me. Many of the Christians who attended Pub Theology have said the same thing about people of unbelief. That is a healthy development. It opens the door to meaningful relationships that can become fertile ground where the gospel can be seen, experienced, and shared.

Rebecca, a former Christian who openly declares her lack of belief in God, noted that Pub Theology feels like a “safe

place” to talk about matters of faith. She also says she never senses a tone of condescension. “So often you try to talk to people about this stuff and it’s clear they feel superior to you and are less than subtle about their underlying agenda to convert you to their position,” she said.

Hanging out at the pub this past year has taught me that I have a lot to learn from people who think differently than I do. One of the unfortunate tendencies of Christians, myself included, is to surround ourselves only with people who think like us. This limits our own ability to think, to learn, to ask questions, to grow. It’s hard to be objective about something when you’ve never heard another perspective. It’s also easy to start thinking that you’ve got all the answers. Or that your answers are the best answers. Or that you need to talk with non-Christians only so you can “tell them how it is.”

Certainly we should be enthusiastic about what we believe and desire to share those beliefs with others, but we are short-sighted and ignorant if we think we’ve got the whole world figured out. Not to mention that few people enjoy talking with someone who thinks he or she has all the answers; the conversation tends to be a bit one-sided.

Persuading by Love

Often in encounters with people of different beliefs, Christians end up using oversimplified arguments in an aggressive way. In other words, we attempt to persuade someone by the cold facts, rather than by love and by reliance on the Holy Spirit.

In opposition to this, consider the apostle Paul: “When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power” (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

Consider also the approach Jesus took. Rarely do we see him engaging in arguments about God’s existence or even attempting to prove who he was through his miracles. In fact, many times Jesus’ miracles were for a different purpose: to bring healing. And often when someone wanted to tell everyone else about it, Jesus told that person to keep quiet.

Peter Rollins, in his book *How (Not) to Speak of God*, elaborates: “Instead of offering a scientific explanation that would convince, or publicizing the miracles so as to compel his listeners, Jesus engaged in a poetic discourse that spoke to the heart of those who would listen. In a world where people believe they are not hungry, we must not offer food but rather

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an aroma that helps them desire the food that we cannot provide.”

In our gatherings at the pub, we’ve had evenings where some well-intentioned Christians have shown up armed with Bibles, tracts, and pamphlets. Their agendas are written on their sleeves, and the conversations in these instances rarely go well. (Mis)treating people as the objects of evangelism has negative effects on them and on us: others can sense when we aren’t listening or aren’t taking their beliefs seriously. They are repelled by that, and we miss opportunities to learn something or to befriend someone when we open our mouths and not our ears.

Encounters with people of different beliefs will, for many Christians, be eye-opening, difficult, and challenging, perhaps requiring us to critically examine long- and deeply-held beliefs. To participate honestly and lovingly is to open yourself up to

sometimes scary doubts. If you choose to do this, prayerful preparation may be required.

Unexpected Blessings

These interactions definitely come with unexpected blessings as well. Sitting at the table with agnostics, atheists, Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, Muslims, Buddhists, and others has broadened my own perspective in a healthy way. I’ve learned things about other faith traditions, other ways of seeing the world. I’ve been forced to examine the things I believe and the things I take for granted. This is a good and healthy thing.

I’ve also learned that Christians aren’t the only people who want good things to happen in the world. While people of different belief systems may have different motivations for doing good, we can often agree on far more than we think. Even though people of non-belief are one of the fastest-growing elements of the population, we should not fear that statistic. Rather, we should see it as an opportunity to meet someone who sees the world differently yet often cares for it equally.

Today, when believers are portrayed as “delusional” and atheists caricatured as “evil,” we need more than ever to sit at the same table, ready to learn. When that happens, I can’t help but think that a little leaven of God’s kingdom mixes through the dough. ■



Rev. Bryan Berghoef is pastor of Watershed Church in Traverse City, Mich., a Christian Reformed church plant.



Be Perfect?

DOES GOD REALLY EXPECT PERFECTION FROM US?

ARE YOU A PERFECTIONIST? Is your boss one? Perhaps you have a perfectionist parent or sibling? In any case, you probably know that perfectionists can be hard to please. The pressure to be perfect is hard to escape. We live in a culture that demands, especially at work, things and products to be just right. Some of us, like me, also have perfectionist tendencies. When I try too hard and expect too much of myself—trying to write that perfect sermon or that perfect article—it can really slow me down or even paralyze me from doing what I can.

Perfectionism is a tough critic and master.

And how many of us expect perfection of our local church and/or worship experiences? How many of us expect perfection in our spiritual walk with God? Moreover, how many of us think that God expects perfection from us?

Jesus commands us in Matthew 5:48, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” That sounds impossible to live up to. What kind of perfection does Jesus expect from us? Are we doomed to failure and frustration?

To answer such questions, let’s first consider what biblical perfection is *not*. Then, digging deeper, let’s look at the Old Testament view of perfection, followed by the New Testament

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

—Matthew 5:48

view and the Matthew text in particular. You may be surprised by what we find.

What Biblical Perfection Is Not

Jesus is, first of all, *not* telling us to be sinless. In Western culture our conventional understanding of perfection has to do with flawlessness. To be perfect, we think, is to be without any defects, without any mistakes—to be flawless.

When we apply that definition of perfection to ethical behavior or to religious and spiritual perfection, we naturally think it means to be sinless, to be without any moral or ethical flaws, to be fully obedient to God’s laws.

But how can we ever achieve that? Our dilemma is obvious. We are sinners. We sin often and we sin repeatedly and, sometimes, we sin deliberately. How can any human being ever be perfect like God is perfect? And how can God demand such perfection from us?

Thankfully, God does not demand nor expect us to be sinless. First John 1:8-10 clearly states that all Christians sin and all have

Jesus' command sounds impossible to live up to.

to ask for forgiveness. Sinlessness is not the kind of perfection God is speaking of.

Old Testament Perfection

There are, mainly, two words in Old Testament Hebrew that mean “perfect”: *tammim* and *shalem*. *Tammim* is normally used in relation to being blameless in obedience to God’s commands. For example, Genesis 6:9 calls Noah “a righteous man, blameless [the King James Version (KJV) uses *perfect* here] among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.”

Shalem or *shalom*, which we normally translate as “peace” in English, can also be translated as “perfect.” When it gets translated as “perfect,” it is normally used with the word “heart” to describe undivided devotion to God.

For example, King Solomon, in dedicating the temple he built for the Lord, ends his blessing to the people of Israel with these words: “And may your hearts be fully committed to the Lord our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time” (1 Kings 8:61). The phrase “fully committed” is from the word *shalem*. The KJV translates this verse as “Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God. . . .”

The word *shalem* is translated similarly in 1 Kings 15:14. Speaking of King Asa, the text reads, “Although he did not remove the high places [of idol worship], Asa’s heart was fully committed to the Lord all his life.” (In the KJV: “Nevertheless Asa’s heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.”)

So we find that the Old Testament does not equate perfection with being sinless. Noah got drunk (Gen. 9)—not so perfect in our eyes, is he? But Scripture calls him blameless, or perfect. And when it calls King Asa perfect or fully committed in his heart to God, it explicitly notes that Asa didn’t get rid of the high places of idol worship in his country. Nevertheless, his heart was considered perfect with the Lord despite that huge mistake in his leadership.

It seems, then, that the Old Testament’s view of perfection before God is not a sinless or mistake-free existence, but rather being fully committed to God with an overall obedient life.

New Testament Perfection

We see a similar view in the New Testament. The Greek word translated as “perfect” in Matthew 5:48—and in many other passages in the New Testament—is *teleios*.

Outside the Bible, *teleios* carries a range of meanings that includes the concepts of being whole, unblemished, full, perfect, actualized, mature, supreme, and dedicated. In the Bible, *teleios* always seem to be connected to wholeness, completeness, undivided devotion, or maturity.

For example, 1 Corinthians 2:6 says, “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age.” The word translated “mature” here is the Greek

word *teleios*. Again, the KJV translates it as “perfect”: “We speak wisdom among them that are perfect.”

You’ll find another example of *teleios* in James 1:4: “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” We see the word used twice here: let perseverance finish its work (*teleios*) so that you may be mature and complete (*teleios* again). That’s why the KJV translates the verse this way: “Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

So the emphasis here, too, is not about being flawless or sinless. It’s about maturity, completeness, wholeness, and reaching your goal or destination.

In Matthew 5 we see all that and more. The immediate context suggests that the focus of the perfection in verse 48 is love (see verses 43-47). Believers must love all people as God loves them. Instead of loving our neighbors and hating our enemies, Jesus commands us to love our enemies because God causes the sun to rise and the rain to fall on both the evil and the good. If you love only those who love you, says Jesus, you are just like everybody else. But be perfect in love as God is perfect in love.

Jesus asks us to be mature and complete in our love, to be totally devoted and undivided in loving others, even our enemies, because God loves that way too. That’s what Jesus’ command to “be perfect” is all about.

Is God a Perfectionist?

So is God a perfectionist? No and yes.

No, God is not a perfectionist in that God demands flawless or sinless moral living from us. But yes, God is a perfectionist in that God calls us to live spiritually mature lives fully devoted to loving God and loving our neighbors—all our neighbours, even our enemies—just as God loves each of us.

Even in that sense, however, we find ourselves hard-pressed to be perfect. We still fail to be spiritually mature, to be fully devoted to God, to love our enemies.

Thankfully, God provides two aids toward our “perfection.”

First, Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, fulfilled all God’s requirements perfectly on our behalf. If we are in Christ, his perfection covers our failings.

Second, the Holy Spirit’s ongoing perfecting work in our lives will eventually culminate in our perfection in the new heaven and earth, when we serve God with all the saints in glory. We begin our spiritual lives in Christ’s perfection, grow in perfection through the Spirit’s work, and end in the perfection given to us at the new creation. Thanks be to God! ■



Shiao Chong is a Christian Reformed campus minister at York University, Toronto.

The Jagüey Grande church



The CRC's Cuban Bond

by Daniel R. Miller

Bessie Vander Valk was 20 years old when she became convinced that God was calling her to go to Cuba to share the gospel.

Her family and home congregation, Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Paterson, N.J., were dubious, but Vander

Valk went anyway. She arrived in the town of Jagüey Grande, southeast of Havana, in 1941.

Soon after, a charismatic young preacher named Angel Vicente Izquierdo came to Jagüey Grande to establish a church. The two began to work together. Vander Valk taught the women and children, and Izquierdo taught the men.

sion reached a milestone in 1951 when a church building was constructed in Jagüey Grande.

During the next few years, Izquierdo recruited six workers to extend the mission to new places. At the end of 1958, 12 organized congregations existed, and the Jagüey Grande church was supporting a day school with 75 students and two teachers.

As the work expanded, the most pressing need was for money. Izquierdo and Vander Valk received irregular contributions from two churches in Paterson, but their six full-time evangelists had almost no support. Most of the new believers were people of limited means. Vander Valk had heard that LaGrave Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., was a financially healthy, mission-minded church, so she asked her husband to contact them.

The late Rev. Jacob Eppinga, LaGrave's pastor, forwarded the request to the congregation's missions committee, which immediately commissioned four members, including Eppinga, to explore the situation.

After a three-week visit, which included nightly outdoor preaching before hundreds of believers and warnings of the approach of Fidel Castro's rebel army, the delegation recommended that LaGrave sponsor the Cuban mission, at least until the needs could be presented to Synod 1959 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Within five months, they married—a development that proved crucial to the formation of the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba.

Their burgeoning ministry had no formal affiliation with any of the other Protestant denominations on the island. Izquierdo called it *La Misión Evangélica al Interior*. The mis-

As the work expanded, the most pressing need was for money.

Synod agreed to help, spurring the *Misión Evangelica al Interior* to become the Interior Gospel Mission of the CRC.

Difficult Times

The next decade was hard. Many Cuban CRC members and several pastors left the island because of the many roadblocks to ministry under Castro's rule. Contacts between the Cuban Christians and supporters in North America grew difficult, owing to the U.S. embargo of Cuba.

Eventually, a new generation of church leaders arose, combining a fervent evangelical spirit with support for some of the social goals of the Cuban revolution. Chief among these leaders was Erelío Martínez.

A teenager during the revolution, Martínez was ordained in 1963 and became head of the Cuban CRC in 1967.

Under his leadership and that of two other young pastors, David Lee Chang and Pedro Suárez, the Cuban CRC developed a progressive theological emphasis attuned to the contemporary situation. For example, they dedicated the year 1979 to a study of the Old Testament prophets because of their focus on issues of justice and concern for the poor.

The Cuban CRC demonstrated that it had something



(Top Right) Bessie Vander Valk, Angel Vicente Izquierdo, and their three children: Daniel Vicente, Jacob Jonathán, and Hulda Jewel (Above) Sunday school at the Agramonte church in the 1950s, "Snapshots of Worship in Cuba" RW 63, March 2002

to offer the new society the government was promoting. With the aid of foreign donors in the United States, Canada, and Europe, the denomination developed an array of social programs, including interest-free loans to homeowners, free meals for homebound seniors, transportation for people with medical appointments in distant cities, and distribution of relief supplies for victims of hurricanes.

While cooperating with the government on social issues, the church also defended the rights of believers. Martínez refused to participate in a public ceremony with a local official who had labeled him a "parasite" until the official apologized. Martínez and other leaders protested strongly when members of their churches were prevented from enrolling in the univer-

sity because of their Christian beliefs.

A Growing Church

The Cuban CRC has grown considerably in the past two decades. Formal membership has increased from 600 to more than 1,200. The number of fully organized congregations increased from 12 in 1980 to 20 in 2000. The proliferation of house churches permitted an increase in participation by non-members, bringing the number of people connected to the denomination to about 5,000. This period of growth coincided with the restoration of closer ties with the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

In an article in *Reformed Worship*, Rev. James Dekker, a former CRC missionary, wrote:



"Following the 1959 revolution, Cuban Christians were tough and faithful, but isolated. Sometimes they feared they were dying out, just as the government claimed they would. No single event turned the tide, but accumulated efforts brought changes."

In 1974 Rev. Erelío Martínez of the Cuban Christian Reformed Church managed to phone Dr. Roger Greenway, Christian Reformed World Missions Secretary for Latin America. That first personal contact in thirteen years was emblematic of a new opening of Cuban churches to Christ's worldwide ministry.

Members of North American Christian Reformed churches began visiting the island in the 1980s to offer Bible training and bring medical supplies. The Cuba Committee of La Grave CRC provided funds for the repair of old buildings and the construction of new ones.

Although Erelío Martínez died in 2005, evangelists remain active on the island and the church continues to grow, striving to be "wise as serpents and as harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). ■



Daniel Miller is professor of history at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Looking into the Eyes of Cuba's Future

About a year ago I visited Cuba with my husband, Larry Bos Sr., and a friend named Bill Boer. We represented the Cuba Committee of the Henry Beets Mission Society of LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. Rev. Derk Oostendorp was also there.

I recall sitting on the front porch of the guest house of the Christian

Reformed Church congregation in Jagüey Grande and watching the town wake up. Old trucks rattled down the street as the workday began. Adults on bicycles followed them. Horses ambled along, pulling carts.

Then came the schoolchildren, freshly scrubbed, smiles on their faces, and ready for the day. They wore their school uniforms and carried backpacks filled with books. They usually walk »



This map of Cuba shows the locations of CRC congregations and preaching centers.

What's It Like to Be a Christian in Cuba?

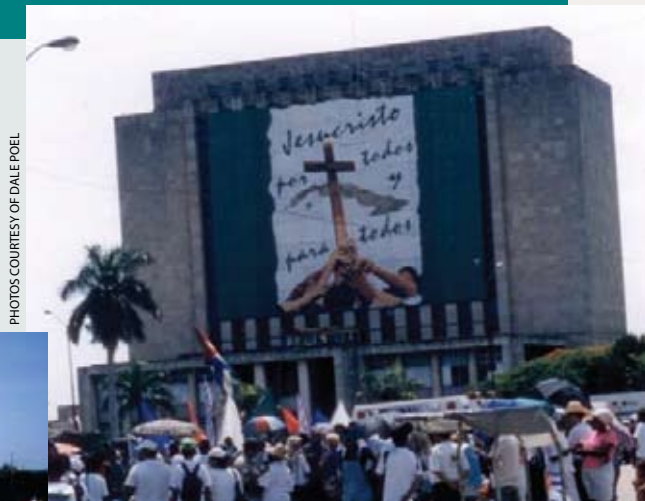
Is it easy or hard to be a Christian in Cuba? If you hand out tracts and preach on the streets without permission, you will be arrested. If you want to hold public outdoor services, you apply for permission to use amphitheatres. Sometimes you get permission; sometimes you don't. Christians may be harassed, but for years they haven't been persecuted; there is a difference.

When I first went into Cuba in 1985, I took about 20 Spanish Bibles, together with other texts. I got in with no trouble, but my CRC hosts were dumbfounded. They hadn't gotten anything for decades and a few of the earlier visitors from Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) had had things confiscated.

For many years, several church buildings that the CRC and others owned were expropriated by the government and used for housing the homeless or for warehouses. This drew bad press in the United States, but the government paid rent to all those churches until years later when they returned the properties.

Over the years, Cuban Christian leaders have shown commitment and intellectual, emotional, and spiritual muscle as they have kept pushing the edges of the envelope of rights for Christians, who have become more open and respected in the society.

—Rev. James Dekker is pastor of Covenant CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario, and a former missionary in Latin America, including Cuba.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DALE POEL



Thousands of Cuban Christians took part in an event called *Celebracion Evangelica Cubana* in 1999. In Havana, the streets were filled coming into Revolutionary Square, and the Cuban Council of Churches rented school buses to bring people into the city. Dale Poel (in the white hat), a CRCNA member from Nova Scotia who was in Cuba delivering a training program for civil servants, says the event was the most memorable experience of his time there. The large *Celebracion* poster is hanging on the side of a government building facing Revolutionary Square.



Henry Beets Mission Society

The 63-year-old Henry Beets Mission Society is named after one of the first pastors of LaGrave Avenue CRC. "The purpose of the Henry Beets Society is to promote Christian mission activity at LaGrave," says a history of the society.

Over the years, the society has supported many mission efforts with help from individual members of the church. It has worked in Central America and has helped to support mission work among the Navajo in New Mexico.

» to school with a sibling or a mother, since most of them can't afford the luxury of a bicycle.

When they reach the seventh and eighth grades, the kids are required to attend a government boarding school and are permitted to go home for only two days every other week. Those from Christian homes are in the minority and often get ridiculed for their beliefs.

Imagine the problems of parents trying to make sure their children have a solid foundation in Christian faith before they encounter this secular world. Thankfully, the Christian Reformed churches in Cuba are strong and faithful, teaching biblical principles through Sunday school, catechism, worship services, and summer camps.

It took many years to establish at least 15 CRC congregations in Cuba, but the denomination aims to double that

“The economic needs are many. Pastors of the CRC churches receive the equivalent salary of about \$25 (US) each month.”

number in a shorter time, says Rev. Enrique Alvarez, president of the executive committee of the CRC synod in Cuba.

"Each local church must start work in a new place with the goal of establishing a daughter church," says Alvarez. "Some churches have already caught the vision."

The Cuban CRC is highly organized, holding annual synod meetings at which church officials give a complete report on their finances, education criteria, visions, and goals for the churches. They insist that all churches adhere to the same format in all services.

Nonetheless, the economic needs are many. Pastors of the CRC churches receive the equivalent salary of about \$25 (US) each month. That's why LaGrave Avenue CRC has been active in sending support to the Cuban churches over the years.

During our visit we had the opportunity to visit the CRC church in Calimente. We were ushered to a seat up front and warmly welcomed by a full church. The Sunday school kids came in and sat in the pew in front of us.

Rev. Oostendorp began the service with prayer. As I bowed my head and closed my eyes, I was aware that someone was very close to my face. Slowly

opening my eyes, I saw beautiful big brown eyes looking straight into mine. A young boy had his chin on the back of the pew and was staring at me.

He quickly ducked down when he realized that I had seen him, but I had the

marvelous feeling that I had been looking into the eyes of the future of the CRC in Cuba. ■

—Dolores Bos is a freelance writer and a member of the Henry Beets Mission Society.

The CRCNA and Cuba

Although **Back to God Ministries International** is not allowed an official ministry presence in Cuba, listeners have received Spanish language broadcasts for years over short-wave radio. Today, BTGMI also sends about 3,000 copies of *Cada Dia*, a devotional booklet, to people in 54 locations. One reader wrote: "Dear brothers of *Cada Dia*. May God continue to bless you. We have just received the packages of *Cada Dia* and you just don't know the great impact they generate among those to whom we give them. The churches here in Cuba are being strengthened in their faith and continue to grow."

Christian Reformed World Missions is involved in leadership and evangelism training in Cuba. Joel Hogan, international ministries director for CRWM, says the CRCNA works carefully, but is committed to helping Christians in Cuba. Hogan and Rev. Luis Pellecer, Latin America regional director for CRWM, also sit on the Cuba committee at LaGrave CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., offering advice about how best to help Cuban churches.

The **Christian Reformed World Relief Committee** started working in Cuba in 2002, helping in disaster relief. CRWRC staff member Joel Zwier travels twice yearly to Cuba from his home in the Dominican Republic. Working with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) of Cuba, CRWRC supports a supplemental income-generation program to help families compensate for the ever-increasing list of services and products not subsidized by the Cuban government.

A number of CRCNA congregations and classes also have relationships with churches in Cuba. These include **Classis Alberta North**, which has a Cuba Connection Committee, and **All Nations CRC** in Halifax, Nova Scotia, as well as **LaGrave CRC** in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Remembering Cuba

The year was 1960. It was a time of great optimism and hope across North America. In Canada, new Christian Reformed churches were springing up like May tulips. In the United States, the CRC was growing exponentially.

The economies of both countries were accelerating at breakneck speeds. As the fins of Detroit's behemoths grew upward and outward, so also grew the hopes, dreams, and excitement for the future. The race to explore the new frontier of outer space was well underway, and a young, energetic, charismatic president proclaimed the U.S. would have a man on the moon within the decade.

But just 90 miles off the coast of southern Florida, change of a more menacing kind was taking shape. Communism had arrived on the southern edge of North America, and the threat of nuclear attack was a new reality.

The small island nation of Cuba was being transformed by a bearded rebel, and people were fleeing by the thousands.

While most of the refugees settled in metropolitan Miami, many moved north into places with cold winters and springtime blossoms. Sponsored and supported by Christian Reformed churches, many Cubans moved into unfamiliar communities where culture, climate, and language were strange and daunting.

As they arrived they were welcomed by people who themselves had been transported from "the old country" and knew all too well the challenges and opportunities of a new life in a new land. Immigrants, strangers in the land, embraced other immigrants. And while not everyone in North America received refugees with open arms, thousands stepped forward to make a real difference in their lives.



ISTOCKPHOTO

I know because I was there. As a wide-eyed 10-year-old I encountered, for the first time in my young life, a new world. Into my very white, very suburban, very Dutch world came these "strangers." They spoke a language I didn't understand, they did things in unfamiliar ways, and they didn't look "like us." Yet I soon discovered that they, too, were children of God.

They worshiped "my" God, believed in "my" Jesus, and were filled with the same Holy Spirit who lived in my heart.

It was my first real encounter with a new world. It was not, thankfully, my last. Today I find myself engaging brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world. I have discovered that, while the power of Babel still separates us and political ideologies cause us to salute different flags, one reality remains: we all have been adopted by God and, in unity, we call Jesus our brother.

It is good for me to reflect back to 1960. It is good to remember that God used a difficult political reality in a place I had never visited to shape and mold a young boy into a man called to engage people across the world as well as across the street.

It is also good to recognize that God is faithful and present in all circumstances. In the midst of a communist revolution, God continued to build his church. God's Spirit continued to transform lives. In spite of efforts to purge Cuba of God and the church, God worked in the lives of faithful followers and today the Christian Reformed Church is alive and well in Cuba. While it has struggled under circumstances that few of us can imagine, the CRC in Cuba has remained faithful to God's call to be his witness in the world.

Join me in celebrating God's goodness and grace in the lives of these brothers and sisters. ■

“ In the midst of a communist revolution, God continued to build his church. ”



Rev. Jerry Dykstra is executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

ROTC Students Prepare at Calvin

Following graduation in 2012 from Calvin College, history major Ross Pursifull will head from stateside military training to possible overseas combat.

Pursifull, one of 15 students enrolled in Calvin's ROTC (Reserve Officers Training Corps) program, says he and his fellow cadets realize that active duty looms, given the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "Joining a wartime Army means no surprises," said Pursifull.

Fellow Calvin ROTC cadet Becca Flim, one of three women in the program, agrees that "anyone who either enlists or commissions should realize that they are most likely going to deploy to a combat situation."

ROTC students get free tuition, money for books, and a graduated living stipend. Commissioned as second lieutenants after graduation,

students normally complete four years in the Army, followed by a stint in the Individual Ready Reserve.

Though Pursifull's dad was a Calvin grad, he didn't push his son toward Calvin. After checking out several other Christian colleges with ROTC programs, Pursifull visited Calvin. The combination of academics, faith, proximity to Lake Michigan—and ROTC—sold Pursifull.

Some students come to Calvin because of ROTC. Others, such as Ben Byma, a sophomore from Lansing, Ill., learn about it later.

"I found out because a guy on my floor last year was in the program," he said. "I came to Calvin mostly because it was one of the few Christian colleges that had an accredited engineering program."

Byma joined ROTC after doing the paperwork and completing the physical require-



Calvin's ROTC students were part of an Army swearing-in ceremony in September 2008. Left to right are David Eberle, Olivia Wenzel, John Eske, Joel Kizer (a Grand Valley student), and Ross Pursifull.

ments to enter. "In high school I thought a lot about enlisting in the military, but decided it would be better to finish college first. Then when I came to Calvin, I found out you can do both at the same time through ROTC," said Byma.

Freshmen ROTC students take "Preparing for Success as an Army officer," and sopho-

mores take "The Role of an Officer." Advanced courses come during a student's junior and senior years.

"I have gotten to know a lot of great people," said Byma, "and have learned how to rely on them while they rely on me." ■

—Phil de Haan, Calvin College communications and marketing

He Gave His Life

Note: Because sharing the names in and location of this story would put many people at risk, we cannot give details. But the story illustrates the cost for some who have embraced Jesus as Savior.

"Bensemann," a university student in a country in which major religions often collide, had a friend from a wealthy family who gave his life to Christ and then gave his life for Christ.

This is how this story of modern-day martyrdom—the murder of a young man for his beliefs—happened.

Bensemann's brother-in-law sent him a copy of the *TODAY* devotional book-

let published by Back to God Ministries International. Bensemann found it to be "educative, expounding on how faith is integral to the Christian life." He decided to share *TODAY* with a fellow student.

That student was from a prominent wealthy family who was very opposed to the Christian faith. However, through *TODAY* and the work of the Holy Spirit, this young man decided to follow Christ. Because of the faithful gifts given to support the production and worldwide distribution of *TODAY*, this young man's life was transformed.

Others challenged him to give up his faith in Christ. "Why would you give up

your father's wealth for suffering and living as an infidel?" he was asked.

Bensemann reported that his friend replied, "There is no joy and satisfaction in wealth and temporary things of this world compared to the peace and satisfaction I found when I received forgiveness of sins and assurance of being a child of God."

He was killed for that testimony.

"There may be times when *TODAY* may seem unfruitful and unproductive from a human point of view," observed Bensemann, "but it is not so. Only heaven will reveal the impact for Christ." ■

—Back to God Ministries International



New sources of funding will help CRWRC partners reach more people in Cambodia.

Even in a global recession and the resulting decreased charitable giving, CRWRC continues to help. In contrast to shortfalls elsewhere, funding for CRWRC's ministry in Cambodia is growing—in part because the Norwegian Mission Alliance has signed a five-year agreement to provide up to \$250,000 per year to support four of CRWRC's Cambodian partners.

These partners have worked with CRWRC for years to develop leadership skills and reach out to local communities with programs to address needs. Now that they are more able to work on their own, CRWRC has helped the partner organizations apply for funding from additional sources.

"We are grateful to receive this commitment from NMA, as it allows us to expand our work even though CRWRC is suffering serious program cutbacks," said Rick DeGraaf, CRWRC country consultant in Cambodia.

The new funding will help CRWRC's partners continue programs focusing on health, sanitation, the environment, good governance, animal husbandry, and education. While CRWRC will still provide advice and consultation to these partners, it will now focus its funding on five smaller churches.

"In Cambodia, churches are referred to with the same word as for a Buddhist temple. These temples are simply places where people can pray and bring their offerings. Not much else is expected," said DeGraaf. "However, what CRWRC's small church partners are doing is changing that perspective."

Some people are seeing churches in a different light: as places that can reach out and help their communities.

"Getting people to participate in the development of a village is the most positive thing that is happening as a result of our work together," said DeGraaf. "What excites me is that local churches are leading the way." ■

—Kristen DeRoo VanderBerg

Creative Funding Expands CRWRC Ministry

After decades of civil war and authoritarian rule, Cambodians are reluctant to trust anyone, especially those in positions of authority, including in churches.

But the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) has slowly

and faithfully gained the trust of the Cambodian people they work with. In consultation with CRWRC, churches are helping communities to improve people's lives by building latrines, digging wells, starting schools, and improving agriculture.

Coffee Break Bible Study Translated into Spanish

Imagine trying to study the Bible in a language that is not your own. It would be tricky for some and impossible for others. That's why Viviana Cornejo, ministry developer for Hispanic ministry for Christian Reformed Home Missions, recently translated into Spanish a Coffee Break Bible study for Latino women attending a weekly program organized by Crosswinds CRC in North Holland, Mich.

"The desire of Hispanic churches for having Reformed material for small groups is deep. Constantly we keep receiving requests, and we don't have much to offer," since much of the small group material is only in English, says Cornejo.

"In our eagerness to serve the church, we decided to do our translations, and we're starting now with the *Discover Your Bible* series. . . . The responses were wonderful and encouraged us to keep doing this."

This latest project sprang from two Crosswinds members starting a Coffee Break Bible study. Although a small portion of the members are Hispanic, the organizers wanted to include them. Unable to pay to have the material translated, they asked Home Missions to help.

Co-coordinators Shirley Vanden Berge and Nance Gezon say they were pleased Home Missions allowed Cornejo to take on the project.

"We are so grateful for the support and services that are provided for us by our denomination," says Vanden Berge. "We find these materials translated by Viviana to be priceless."

Emelia Rodriguez, one of the women in the study, says she appreciates the translation because it helps her understand the Bible better. "I go back home and write what I learned in my Bible," she says. ■

—Chris Meehan, CRC Communications

From Prime Minister to Missionary

Former Ethiopian Prime Minister Tamrat Layne recently testified in a town hall meeting at Calvin Theological Seminary about how God changed him from a communist who denied God's existence to a disciple of Jesus Christ.

"Freedom comes through the gospel," proclaimed Layne.

For 15 years Layne lived in the mountains as a guerilla fighter, hoping to overthrow Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam. In 1991 his army of almost 200,000 soldiers defeated government forces. He became prime minister, serving from 1991 to 1995, and then was deputy prime minister and defense minister until 1996, when he was imprisoned on corruption charges and put in solitary confinement.



Former Ethiopian Prime Minister Tamrat Layne: "Freedom comes through the gospel."

Five years into his 12-year imprisonment, a nurse gave Layne a pocket Bible. With only the Holy Spirit to teach him, he avidly read the Bible, and in the solitude of his prison cell, as he says, "Jesus found me." When he wrote his wife, who had fled Ethiopia for Kenya, and told her how and when Jesus had found him, she wrote back to tell him that Jesus had found her on the same day.

"I learned about God's omnipresence, not through books or a teacher, but from God's presence with us at the same time in different countries," Tamrat says.

Released in 2008, Layne publicly confessed his sins of violence and visited those who had thrown him into prison. "I still love you," he told them. Having known him as vengeful, his former

political allies were aghast, asking, "Are you the same person?" He replied, "I am the same physical person, but I am not the same inside."

Soon after Layne's release, he received a visa to the U.S., where he lives with his wife and two children. He hopes to return to East Africa to help transform African society and its leaders by the power of

the gospel. He is forming a ministry dedicated to this goal. His motto used to be, "Freedom comes out of the barrel of a gun." Now his slogan is, "Freedom comes through the gospel." ■

—Richard Sytsma is dean of students and international student adviser at Calvin Theological Seminary.

Ministry Shares at Work in the Dominican Republic

Steve Brauning is grateful for the gift of ministry shares when he considers what the support of CRC congregations in North America has meant to the growth of the Christian Reformed Church in the Dominican Republic.

Recently that church celebrated the organization of a new classis. The classis, the 12th in its denomination, was formed in the mountainous community of La Mercedes.

More than 300 people attended the event, at which a number of pastors were commissioned. Four pastors also were ordained and installed in four congregations, several local preachers were recognized, and a regional steering committee for the new Pedernales classis was established.

Fifteen students from the local Reformed Bible Institute graduated that day—an especially pleasing development for Pastor Antonio Vazquez, "who has taught the Bible Institute classes and worked with this group of churches for the past several years," says Pastor Jose Manuel Gutierrez, president of the board of the CRC in the Dominican Republic.

It was also a good day for Brauning, who visited churches in the area and has provided support and mentorship for Pastor Vazquez through the CRC's growth ministry team.

"The Pedernales area is very close to the Haitian border, and most of the churches are made up of undocumented Haitian immigrant agricultural workers on plantations," Brauning says. Most of those workers don't speak Spanish and they can't travel out of that area. So Pastor Antonio's work was key in organizing the November event.

Brauning says that without the support that comes via ministry shares, events such as this might not have happened. ■

—Chris Meehan, CRC Communications



The Sitio Nuevo Christian Reformed Church building, in the Mercedes area of Pedernales, was built by the congregation with volunteer labor and local materials.

What About Water?

Did you know that the earth is a “closed system”? That means, for one thing, that the water we drink and use today has been here for a very long time. It falls as rain; collects into streams, rivers, lakes, and oceans; and then evaporates back into the clouds and starts all over again.

So the water that comes out of your faucet might contain molecules that were once part

of a lake that a dinosaur swam in! Or it might have been blown out of a whale’s spout hundreds of years ago! Or it might even be the same water that Jesus walked on in the Sea of Galilee. How cool is that?

Read on for some fun and interesting water facts and activities.



SCOTT HOLLADAY



11 Easy Ways to Use Less Water

1. Turn off the water faucet while brushing your teeth, instead of letting the water run. That can save 25 gallons every month.
2. Fix all leaky faucets (inside and outside)—a dripping faucet can waste 10 gallons of water a day (300 gallons every month)!
3. Take a shorter shower (even by a minute or two). That can save up to 150 gallons of water every month!
4. Save water that you use for rinsing fruits and vegetables and use it to water your houseplants.
5. Wash your pets outside, and you’ll water the lawn at the same time.
6. Use towels more than once instead of washing them each time.
7. Keep a pitcher of water in the refrigerator for drinking instead of running tap water until it’s cold!
8. While waiting for your bath or shower to warm up, catch the water in a bucket to use for plants or flushing the toilet.
9. Use a broom instead of a hose to clean the driveway.
10. Start a compost pile instead of using the garbage disposal —this will save water, and you can use the compost to make your plants or lawn healthier.
11. Tell all of your friends these tips, and they’ll save water too!

—Facts provided by www.crwc.org.



Water Facts Quiz

Q. What uses more water: a shower or a bath?

A. An average bath requires 30-50 gallons of water. Most showers use less water than a bath, but it really depends on how long the shower is—some people are in there for a REALLY long time! Next time you take a shower, plug the bathtub and see how full it is after you're done. Is it less than the amount of water you use for a bath?

Q. What percentage of an average person's body is made up of water?

- a. 25%
- b. 60%
- c. 98.6%

A. The answer is "b." An average adult's body is about 60 percent water. (But babies' bodies are about 70 percent water! Why do you think that is?)

Q. True or False: The average person in North America uses about 80-100 gallons of water every day.

A. That's true. And that's a lot of water!

Q. Which activity uses the most amount of water in one day?

A. Flushing the toilet.

Q. True or False: About 50 percent of all the water on our planet is in the oceans.

A. False! The oceans hold about 97 percent of all the water on earth. But since it's salt water, it's not good for drinking.

Q. True or False: Every day about 10,000 kids die from diseases that result from drinking unclean water.

A. According to the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, that's true. To learn about how you and other kids can help collect money to provide clean drinking water for people around the world, ask your parents to contact the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee at 1-800-552-7972 in the United States or 1-800-730-3490 in Canada and ask about CRWRC's Water of Life program.



Top-10 Reasons You Should Drink Water

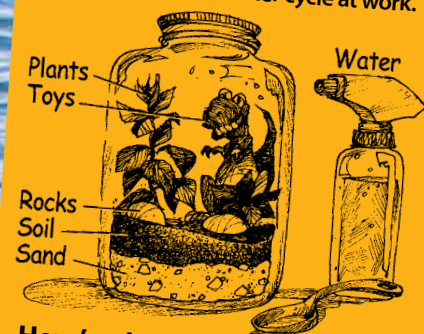
1. We need water to live! People can survive for only about a week without water if it's not too hot outside. The hotter it is, the more water you need.
2. Water helps move nutrients around in your body. Plus your blood is mostly water, so if you drink enough water, your blood moves around more easily.
3. Drinking enough water gives you more energy. When you're dehydrated, you feel tired.
4. Your brain is about 70 percent water, and your lungs are about 90 percent water—so they both need water to work well.
5. Water has no sugar or caffeine in it, so it's much better for you than soda.
6. Water from your faucet costs much less than other drinks.
7. Your body uses water to flush out toxins (bad stuff that your body doesn't want).
8. It's good for your stomach! Water helps your food digest properly.
9. Water helps stop headaches, since people who are dehydrated often get them.
10. God made it, and it's good for you!



Sandy Swartzentruber works for Faith Alive and is a member of Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, Mich. Her favorite way to drink water is with lemon and fresh mint.

Make a Terrarium

You can make your own closed system so you can watch the water cycle at work.



Here's what you need:

- Medium or large glass container (If you have one with a cover, that's the best, but you can always use a goldfish bowl with plastic wrap on top.)
- Sand or gravel
- Potting soil
- Small plants
- Stones, plastic animals, or other things for decoration
- Spray bottle

Here's what you do:

- Wash your container well with dish soap, inside and out. Rinse it well, and dry it.
- Put a 1-inch (3 cm) layer of sand or gravel in the bottom.
- Add a 1-to-2-inch (3-6 cm) layer of potting soil.
- Use a spoon to scoop out small holes for your plants. Plant them, and press the soil around them down lightly. Add decorations.
- Spray a few ounces of water onto the plants and soil.
- Cover the terrarium. Put it near a window but out of direct sunlight.
- Watch it for a few days. If the soil looks dry, mist it with more water. If it looks too wet, take the cover off for a few hours to let some water evaporate.
- After things look balanced, leave it alone! You shouldn't have to water your terrarium for a long time. If any plants die, you can just remove them or add new plants.

The most recent survey of the Christian Reformed Church revealed at least one surprising trend.



Who We Are Today

IN A COMMUNITY as widespread and diverse as the Christian Reformed Church in North America, reading a survey about its members can be a lot like attending a family reunion, says CRCNA Executive Director Jerry Dykstra.

“Every so often, the family gets together, you take a picture, and you compare this year’s picture to the one from last year, or from five years ago,” said Dykstra. “The kids are growing up; maybe Grandpa and Grandma aren’t in the picture anymore. You look at the trends over the past few years of taking pictures and you ask yourself, ‘What have we learned that will help us to move forward?’”

In the fall of 2009, the denomination received its most recent family snapshot in the form of results from the CRCNA’s 150th anniversary survey: *Spiritual and Social Trends and Patterns in the Christian Reformed Church in North America*. Written and compiled by the Center for Social Research of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., the survey takes a close look at the demographics and patterns shaping the denomination—everything from church loyalty to the surprising connection between personal piety and stewardship.

The CRCNA has conducted similar surveys through the Center for Social Research every five years since 1987. However, this survey, distributed in late 2007 and early 2008, was done via the Internet for the first time—both to save money and to

widen the sampling selection. A random selection of 125 churches throughout North America received an invitation to participate, and the final results are based on answers from the 67 congregations who responded.

“I was impressed that [using the Internet] worked as well as it did,” said survey co-author Rodger Rice, who now works as stewardship education consultant for the Barnabas Foundation. “It’s always difficult to get the lower age brackets to participate. . . . I think this gave us a more accurate representation of all age groups.”

The 2007 survey kept many of the same questions as previous surveys in order to compare data, but added questions pertaining to healthy congregations—a new priority for denominational leadership. The survey also added a section on stewardship, as that is often tied to spiritual development.

While denominational leaders say they weren’t too surprised by most of the survey findings, the results give congregations plenty to consider as the CRC looks ahead to its next 150 years.

CRC Trends

One benefit of asking the same questions since 1987 is that it gives the CRC a 20-year portrait of both our social and spiritual trends. But the numbers haven’t always gone in a direction church leaders would expect.

For example, although “denominational loyalty” was on the rise in the mid-’90s, the 2007 survey found that 53 percent of respondents consider themselves “very loyal” to the CRC—down from 63 percent in 1997. For Dykstra, that means the denomination needs to change how the idea of loyalty is perceived—to think about what would make people want to be *engaged* in the CRC rather than simply “loyal” to it.

“I think we need to stop thinking of our denomination as an institution and think of it more as a place in which we do unified ministry and share a common passion for world transformation,” said Dykstra. “So we’re not thinking in terms of institutional loyalty, but a loyalty to the mission of God as it plays out in the CRC. If we do it well, I would expect that trend will change.”

Another notable trend is declining enrollment in Christian schools. Among households with children, the proportion of CRC youths receiving Christian education fell from 41 percent in 1978 (according to an old Christian Reformed World Relief survey) to just 19 percent in 2007.

Some of that, Dykstra said, can be attributed to the fact that more families are coming into the CRC without the historical commitment to faith-based education that was present a generation ago.

But the data perhaps signal a need to change approaches when it comes to faith formation in children and young adults. Mark Rice, director of Faith Alive Christian Resources, said the CRC can no longer assume that a part of children’s religious education comes from the school setting.

“I think we’ve compartmentalized faith formation, in that it happens in school and it happens in 45 minutes on Sunday,” said Rice. “But it’s not that easy anymore. I think we as a church and Faith Alive as a denominational publisher have a greater role to make sure faith formation is no longer done the traditional way. In the broad sense, I think we need to focus on everybody in the church, cradle to grave—a multigenerational approach.”

But even a multigenerational ministry strategy might be in danger if current congregational trends continue to favor an aging population. It comes as no surprise to church leaders that the average age of the denomination continues to rise. The 2007 survey found that **the median age of CRC members stands at 52 years old**—up from 50 years old in 2002 and 44 years old in 1987.

Dykstra said we need to find ways to engage a younger, more diverse segment of the church. “That may mean we need to step outside our present thinking about who we are

and begin to expand our ministries, particularly in terms of ethnic diversity.”

While most demographic trends in the survey confirmed what church leaders already knew, many were surprised by one trend: the declining frequency of church members’ participation in devotional activities.

According to the survey, **the practice of spiritual disciplines (private prayer, Bible reading, and devotions, for example) has been falling steadily**, especially since 2002.

That stood out as a concern for many denominational leaders, including Rev. Daniel Mouw, pastor of South Grandville Christian Reformed Church in Grandville, Mich., and a member of the CRCNA’s Board of Trustees.

“To have the matter of piety quantified like this is revealing,” said Mouw. “It’s hard to build a spiritual life without some critical pieces of the puzzle like prayer or Scripture reading, so I do think it’s something the church has to address or encourage. If that centerpiece of your life isn’t being nourished, you’ll run out of steam rather quickly.”

Wellness Check

Within the past few years, CRC leaders and the Board of Trustees have made it a priority to ensure that the denomination is building healthy local congregations.

To help with that goal, the 2007 survey asked a number of questions on *perceived* congregational health, without defining the concept. Based on the responses, Dykstra said, the denomination can form a much more accurate definition of what it means for a church to be healthy.

The 2007 survey identified 11 different indicators of congregational health (including authentic spirituality, servant leadership, and loving relationships) and asked respondents to evaluate their congregation’s health in each.

Those who took the survey were most likely—at 83 percent—to say their church was “very healthy” when it came to making the Bible central to every area of their lives.

On the other hand, **only 21 percent of respondents said their church was “very healthy” in the matter of disciple making.**

Historically, the CRC has not been tremendously strong in the area of evangelism, so such responses aren’t out of the ordinary. Still, results like those will help the church in terms of learning why people answered the way they did, said Rev. Mark Vermaire, pastor of Crossroads CRC in San Marcos, Calif. »

“I found the extreme contrast between the top and bottom category [in this question] most helpful in evaluating our current situation,” said Vermaire, who is also president of the Board of Trustees. “It makes me want to ask the question ‘What do we mean when we say we hold the Bible as central?’ And since disciple making should be our goal in so many different aspects of life . . . this type of question may help us explore many of the concerns suggested in the survey.”

One troubling statistic to emerge in this section was that **more than a quarter of respondents said it was “definitely untrue” that someone in church leadership had approached them regarding faith issues** in the past six months.

However, both Dykstra and Vermaire cautioned against a quick rush to judgment in this case, since the survey did not specifically define “leadership.”

“Does ‘leader’ refer only to pastors?” said Dykstra. “Does that include church staff and staff ministries? I would think so, but I don’t know how people answered. [But] quite honestly, the fact that they even perceive that they haven’t had contact is significant—it means we need to help our leaders focus on that area. And it means we probably need to do a more effective job of engaging with people.”

Giving

As noted earlier, the 2007 survey included a section on income, gifts to the church, and stewardship for the first time, inspired by co-author Rodger Rice’s work with the Barnabas Foundation, a Christian estate-planning organization that also provides stewardship education.

Among other things, the survey found that the median percentage of household income given to the CRC (not including Christian education tuition) is 6.1 percent. **Just 21.9 percent of respondents gave 10 percent or more of their income to the church.**

The survey also established that those **Christians who pray, read the Bible, and have personal devotions on a daily basis give more of their income** (7 percent) than those who do not have a regular devotional habit (4.2 percent).

Mouw admits that the topic of giving isn’t often discussed in congregations. “It’s a very difficult issue in terms of how you address it. But if those [survey] numbers don’t go up, the denomination will be in trouble.”

So what does that mean for the CRC? According to Dykstra, it points back to the idea of healthy congregations and the notion of first strengthening a person’s spiritual health.

“I really think stewardship’s an important piece of our Christian walk—having generous hearts and using what God’s given

us in appropriate ways,” said Dykstra. “And healthy congregations really also are generous congregations.”

Looking to the future

One concern echoed throughout the survey was the gradual evaporation of the ethnic and cultural heritage that traditionally held the denomination together.

To address that issue, survey co-authors Rodger Rice and Neil Carlson concluded by offering what they suggest to be **five keys to the future of the CRC**: spiritual development, stewardship education, disciple making, leadership training, and keeping in touch.

Rodger Rice said his hope is that the denomination can use these practices as a new “glue” to bind itself together under a Reformed perspective.

“I really believe we’re onto something here, if we ask ourselves how we can make our ministry work in these five areas,” said Rice, who has authored or co-authored every CRCNA survey since its inception in 1987. “I’m convinced that if we make sincere efforts in those areas, we will become a healthier congregation of believers.”

Dykstra is also optimistic about the future. Although the survey highlighted a number of things that need work or sparked concern, the CRC’s executive director said he has much to be thankful for as well: the Bible is still at the center of the church; many people see their congregations as at least relatively healthy; church leaders are actively engaged with their youths.

Most important, **the denomination has been actively addressing many of the questions raised by the survey** even before the results came out.

And that brings Dykstra back to the idea of that family reunion snapshot taken every five years or so. “This survey is a valuable tool that reminds us that [when the survey was done] we were 150 years old, and the next time we do this we’ll be 155,” he said. “So what is happening to us as we age? Maybe we’ll revitalize, and I hope that we do.”

“But you have to look at the photo and say: ‘This is who we are. We wish we had lost a little weight before we took the picture, we wish we didn’t have so many wrinkles, but we took it anyway and this is who we are. Now, what are we going to do?’” ■

Read the Full Survey You’ll find the full results of the Christian Reformed Church’s most recent survey online at www.crcna.org/pages/research.cfm. Look under the link for the “Final Report.”



Beth Heinen Bell, a former *Banner* intern, is a freelance writer and photographer working throughout West Michigan, and an activities coordinator for senior citizens in Grand Rapids.

Changing Our Interior Landscape

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

—Matthew 11:28-30

DEEP DOWN, everyone longs for a simpler life. Deeper down, all of us know that we are our own worst enemies in achieving that kind of life.

Simon Whitfield, the triathlete who won gold for Canada at the 2000 Olympics in Australia, did something about that longing for simplicity. After his Olympic success he moved to an artistic and ecologically sensitive community in Saltspring Island, British Columbia. By adopting a simpler lifestyle, he feels less driven and generally happier. Whereas he used to be the kind of person who had to have the latest gadget, he says that he is now more easily content with what he already has.

Like Whitfield, many city folks also dream of a more restful life. As part of that dream, they may buy a cottage or cabin, imagining idyllic days, an easygoing lifestyle, and less stress. Unfortunately, many of them end up applying urban standards to their new rural surroundings.

The result? Cottages that are more accurately called houses, lawns that take hours to tend, and double mortgages that force people to work even harder to make the payments. Is this the simple life? More like the frantic life.

So what’s the answer? Changing our exterior surroundings can help to some degree. A restful room in our homes or a favorite place to retreat can do wonders for our harassed spirits. But nothing

works like changing our interior landscape. That’s where Jesus comes in. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,” Jesus said. “I will give you rest.”

Before he says, “Go,” to disciples Jesus says, “Come.” I visualize him patting the space beside him, inviting me to come and sit for a spell.

“Voluntary simplicity says we will find happiness and meaning in life through relationships—within ourselves, with others, with the earth, and with God.”

—Gerald Iversen,

Alternatives for Simple Living

I imagine him speaking directly to my heart with words that confront me and also comfort me. As I visualize myself sitting beside him and taking in his wonderful words, I can feel my spirit lifting, my courage returning, and my sense of purpose sharpening. By relinquishing control and allowing Jesus to be my Master, I receive his beautiful gift of shalom.

Most of our cultural role models are restless people who have become celebri-

ties by virtue of their relentless pursuit of fame, wealth, or success. “Do this,” one person says. “No, that,” advises someone else. The next time you look at a newsstand stocked with magazines, remember that the pictures on most of the covers feature the current crop of driven celebrities pushing our world to the brink of insanity.

Tragically, contemporary Christianity is often more a reflection of our driven culture than a countercultural model of a different way of life, a truly restful life. By focusing on programs instead of relationships, the church is often guilty of leaving people lonely for the personal touch that everyone needs. By emphasizing legalities and impossible standards of holiness and purity, church leaders often place unbearable yokes on weary shoulders.

Jesus does not do any of that. “I am gentle and humble in heart,” he says, showing us his interior landscape. “My yoke is easy and my burden is light,” he concludes, offering us a simpler life built on the gentle peace that he lived to give.

The call to discipleship is a call to a simpler life, a gentler life, a more contented life. It is about letting Jesus quietly sit in your heart. It gains control by giving control over to the Master. It finds rest by losing anxiety through the restful realization that the Lord is near. ■

To Think About

- Where do you feel harassed or driven?
- How can you restore simplicity to your life? Where will you begin?
- Is it possible to be restful while working hard?

This article was excerpted from the book *Follow Me: Daily Readings for Disciples*, co-authored by Peter Slofstra and Peter Schuurman as part of the *Disciples* series from Faith Alive Christian Resources.

Beyond Bombs and Burqas



ISTOCKPHOTO

IN EUROPE, AFRICA, AND NORTH AMERICA, the increasing visibility of the Muslim world is challenging both Christianity and secular societies. The 9/11 destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City, the 2005 bombing of a subway in London, and similar sensational atrocities around the world have heightened Christians' awareness—and fear—of Muslims. Books on the topic contain a great deal of helpful information and a spectrum of opinions—some reassuring, others frightening.

Muslims, Christians, and Jesus by Carl Medearis (Bethany House), is a practical guide for Christians who interact with Muslims. When Medearis was evangelizing Muslims in Lebanon, he ducked prejudice against Christians by calling himself a follower of Jesus and by inviting Muslims to learn more about this Jesus who is praised in the Koran.

A detailed and dense volume, *God's Continent* by Philip Jenkins (Oxford University Press) explores the impact of Muslims on European society. He outlines the complexities involved and details the

differences between violent radicals, devout but peaceful Muslims, and many who are no more Muslim than most Europeans today are Christian. While Jenkins makes it abundantly clear that accommodating devout Muslims in thoroughly secularized European societies is difficult, he remains optimistic that, over time, Muslims will embrace the European values of tolerance and respect.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book *Infidel* (Simon and Schuster), is the most readable of these books, but also the most likely to incite fear of Muslims. It is a personal account of the oppression Ali suffered in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and Kenya as a girl before she fled her family and faith and claimed refugee status in The Netherlands. She became a member of Parliament there, but her strident criticisms of Muslims sparked violent reactions. The government took another look, discovered that she had lied on her refugee application, and so deported her. She moved to Washington, D.C., to work for the American Enterprise Institute. (For a CRC-related story, see *Cracks in the Crescent* by Hussein Hajji Wario.)

These and other books offer facts, history, and personal experiences. The challenge for us is to learn to love all God's people with the same love our God has for all people. ■



Jim Romahn is a freelance journalist in Kitchener, Ont., where he belongs to a church plant called *The Journey*.

Sensational atrocities have heightened awareness—and fear.

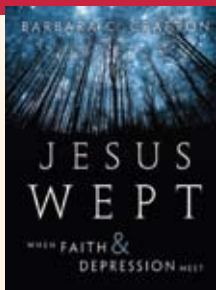


In the Hands of God

by **newsboys**
reviewed by **Paul Delger**

Grammy-award nominated band newsboys celebrates the end of an era with the release of their latest album, *In the Hands of God*. This CD marks the close of lead vocalist Peter Furler's singing career with the group, which blew onto the scene in the mid-'80s and has been one of Christian rock's most popular bands for the last two decades. *In the Hands of God* includes a great worship song, "Lead Me to the Cross," and the album is rich in the trademark newsboys sound and poignant lyrics, particularly on the title cut and "The Way We Roll." (inpop records)





Jesus Wept: Where Faith & Depression Meet

by **Barbara C. Crafton**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Fedema**

Based on her own experience and that of many others, Episcopal priest Barbara Crafton describes depression as “the sapping of spiritual strength and joy, the graying of everything.” She realistically and compassionately explores issues such as shame, guilt, fear of rejection by God and the church, medication, and support for caregivers. Though some aspects of her theology aren’t biblical, her insights into how the church does and could better deal with depression are invaluable. (Jossey-Bass)

Second Life

reviewed by **Lloyd Rang**

Since 2003, an online community called Second Life (secondlife.com) has been inviting people to create a new online world—for free. People who download the Second Life software get to choose how their online avatar looks, and then interact with the avatars of people from around the world. Some virtual streets and places in Second Life are depraved. Elsewhere, however, you’ll find churches and congregations and those who believe that all of Second Life must be redeemed.



Youth Culture Websites

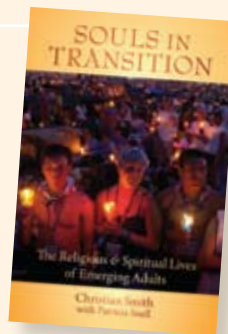
reviewed by **Ron VandenBurg**

Discerning today’s shifting culture is a challenge for parents and youth alike. Parents and youth leaders can use all the help they can get, including websites, as they discern what is shaping kids’ perspectives. Visit songlyrics.com to read the lyrics of almost any kind of music. Then explore jango.com or youtube.com to hear the song or watch the video. The Center for Parent/Youth Understanding (cpyu.com) offers parents a collection of recent and essential news, articles and booklists, top ten media listings and links that help shed the light of God’s truth on youth culture’s messengers.

Souls in Transition

by **Christian Smith and Patrica Snell**
reviewed by **Robert N. Hosack**

This much-anticipated follow-up to Smith’s 2005 *Soul Searching* provides a definitive look at the religious and spiritual lives of “emerging adults” (ages 18-23) in the U.S. today. The Notre Dame-based authors draw on candid interviews with thousands of young people over a five-year period, part of a vast, ongoing longitudinal study. While heavy on survey data, tables, and sociological research, the work confirms the crucial role parents and adult congregants must play to help root emerging adults in their faith. (Oxford)



There

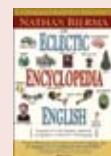
by **Marie-Louise Fitzpatrick**
reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Fedema**

“When will I get There?” a young girl asks in this picture book as she travels in her imagination over hills, past towns, and in nature. Speaking in whimsical, creative questions, she seeks to make sense of the world that she finds both exciting and frightening. As her questions explore possibilities and uncertainties, she decides that even though she won’t go There right away, one day she definitely will. Fitzpatrick eloquently captures the quintessential child: courageous and inquisitive, yet fearful and longing for familiarity. (Roaring Book Press)

THE LOWDOWN



Just Java: Bolivia’s Best Coffee (boliviastbestcoffee.org) exists solely to help fund the International Orphanage Union’s small church-sponsored orphanages in Bolivia. Order your coffee now to support the cause.



Words for the Wise: Nathan Bierma’s book *The Eclectic Encyclopedia of English* is a collection of the best of his column “On Language” written for the *Chicago Tribune*. (William, James & Co.)



In the House: Lifehouse, popular popsters in both the mainstream and Christian markets, release their fifth studio album, *Smoke and Mirrors*, this month. (Geffen)

Active Faith: many Olympians are Christians too. Go to beyondtheultimate.org to read the testimonies of many Christian athletes, including past Olympians.

Check thebanner.org for links to find out more about these titles.



BY JOAN RINKER

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AN INVISIBLE DISABILITY

WHICH DISABILITY is the most prevalent in North America: Down syndrome or spina bifida? Autism or cystic fibrosis? None of the above. What about muscular dystrophy or cerebral palsy? Nope, not those, either.

The most common congenital disability in North America is largely unknown, despite its disabling effects on thousands of babies each year.

The Van Zwier* family didn't know about invisible disabilities when they adopted a beautiful blue-eyed, blond-haired toddler. All their love, Christian education, and work to create a wholesome environment seemed to have no effect on their daughter as she grew up, piling up one school suspension after another and finally ending up in trouble with the law.

The Smiths were in a similar state of ignorance when their son, a handsome and apparently healthy 11-year-old, sexually molested a younger sibling and, even after Christian therapy, later molested a neighbor child.

And the church eventually gave up on Scott Vanderklet after his financial woes fell into a predictable pattern of spending each time cash came his way.

Wait a minute—we were talking about disabilities, weren't we? What do disabilities have to do with behaviors like those?

The answer lies in a well-known toxin and in a specific part of the brain it contacts. That toxin is alcohol and the brain area is the frontal lobe.

Adults display predictable behaviors when alcohol overtakes them—they may forget their manners, relax their morals, or entertain grandiose notions. Chronic

alcoholics shed their responsibilities and lose their grip on reality. But babies? Babies don't drink, so how could they be disabled by alcohol?

Tens of Thousands

Society has coined the term "crack babies" to describe the shivering, underweight infants born under the influence of drugs. The rush of cocaine through their little bodies leaves them weakened and unhealthy. But "alcohol babies" suffer damage that is much more permanent and disabling.

As alcohol passes freely through the placenta and directly into an unborn child's brain, it chemically burns away cells that govern logic, reasoning, and self-control. Depending on the amount and frequency of alcohol exposure and the child's stage of development, the damage can be slight or it can be completely devastating.

THE MOST COMMON DISABILITY IN NORTH AMERICA IS LARGELY UNKNOWN, DESPITE ITS EFFECTS ON THOUSANDS OF BABIES EACH YEAR.

There are tens of thousands of “alcohol babies” among us, most of them with no visible signs of their disability. They may be small in stature or have facial features that are slightly unusual. Then again, there may be nothing at all unusual about their appearance. But the damage to their brains starts drawing attention as they grow older. They usually have

- trouble with self-control, leading to problems respecting limits, persons, and property;
- trouble with logic and mathematics, leading to the inability to handle money;

Getting Help

If this information about prenatal alcohol brain injuries describes you or someone you care about, there is a lot more to learn. Getting a proper diagnosis of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder is not easy, given that many family physicians were trained before FASD was clinically identified. You should probably start with an Internet search on the subject within your geographic area, entering a topic such as “FASD diagnosis—Alberta.”

Alcohol babies can be upbeat people—loving, exuberant, and gifted. Learning how to cope with their disabilities can be easier if their brain injury is identified at an early age.

Parents of alcohol babies can find a series of helpful teaching tips under “Resources” at www.skfasnetwork.ca.

The following sites are also helpful:

- www.withchildwithoutalcohol.com (medical facts about drinking alcohol during pregnancy)
- www.alcoholbabies.com.
- www.nofas.org
- www.faslink.org.
- www.publichealth.gc.ca (search for “FASD”)

- trouble with memory and reality, making it difficult to be seen as reliable tellers of facts.

Which skills are missing depend on which part of the brain is chemically burned during its tender growth. Living without those skills is like trying to use a computer with a seriously flawed operating system.

Tragically, the damage is irreversible. At this time, coping mechanisms are all that can be offered in the way of hope to alcohol babies.

Tough Questions

What does it mean to home, church, school, and community to realize that many criminals, “down-and-outers,” and sex-trade workers are prenatally brain-injured people? How does God view their responsibility for what they do? What can Christians do to help such people? And how can we prevent the increasing numbers of alcohol-related brain injuries?

Those questions are a long way from being answered. Since prenatal alcohol disability (often called FASD, or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) has been clinically studied for only a few years, there isn’t a lot of information available to assist in diagnosis or treatment. What we can address right now is prevention. But advice to abstain from alcohol during pregnancy often falls on resistant ears. Adding to that the fact that up to half of pregnancies are unplanned leads to the even more unpopular conclusion that sexually active women of childbearing age should avoid alcohol entirely.

Whatever decisions are made at the individual level, it’s time to take the alcohol-and-pregnancy issue out of the shadows and into the public forum for education and examination. Our homes, churches, and communities will be the better for it. ■

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

A Word from Scripture

The Old and New Testaments are not silent on the subjects related to alcohol and pregnancy. Consider the following:

- For pregnant women: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16).
- For people dealing with brain-injured people: “Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone” (1 Thess. 5:14, New Living Translation).
- For alcohol babies themselves: “For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have” (2 Cor. 8:12, TNIV).

Fast Facts

- According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 40,000 babies are born with alcohol damage annually in the United States—more than infants with spina bifida, Down syndrome, and muscular dystrophy combined.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada estimates that 1 percent of Canadians, or about 300,000 individuals, have some form of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, and that 9 in every 1,000 are born with FASD.
- A recent forum in Illinois put the cost of caring for alcohol babies in that state alone at \$741,000 *per day* (foster care, special education, criminal justice, social services).
- More than 50 percent of alcohol babies end up in the criminal justice system.
- Prenatal alcohol brain injuries are 100 percent preventable.



Joan Rinker is co-chair of Alcohol Babies Anonymous, a Christian response to FASD. She attends Providence

Christian Reformed Church, Beamsville, Ontario.

Decoding Our Good News

HAVE YOU EVER LISTENED TO A BROADCAST of a NASA launch? Or heard an accountant, lawyer, or engineer discuss a tricky question relating to his or her specialty? At times such experts may as well be speaking another language. Their jargon works perfectly for them, providing precise words for complex concepts or situations. But those terms and expressions can be frustrating for everyone else to follow.

We run into a similar situation when we try explaining basic Christian beliefs to newcomers and seekers. We regularly use a number of terms that are so handy and meaningful we find it quite difficult to explain the Bible's central message without them.

That can cause an unnecessary stumbling block in the course of what could be a life-changing discussion with someone who needs to hear Jesus' good news.

Let's look at four examples of words we use to describe key concepts new Christians should hear about early on:

1. Grace
2. Redemption
3. Covenant
4. Salvation

Try explaining the basics of Christian belief without using any of them.

We need to have
alternative words to
 explain that we are
 talking about a *rescue*.

When I got my first Bible, I was in my mid-20s and reasonably well educated. Not knowing any better, I bought a King James Version. Considering the difficulties I had in school with Shakespeare, I would have made a different choice if I had known I'd be plowing through words like *wherefore* and *verily* while trying to get to the key issues I was hungry to learn.

However, I did acquire the habit of substituting, in my own mind, simpler words for those puzzling terms. I still do it today, even when using my New International Version.

Grace, for example, has primarily one meaning in the current vernacular: something to do with beauty, delicate presentation, or movement. Telling someone that we are saved "through

God's grace" will not do much to explain this important Christian concept. I now substitute "grace" with "unearned kindness" whenever I come across that word.

The same applies to *redemption*. It's rarely used in everyday North American English, nor is the root word, *redeem*. Somehow we have to find a way to express that it means to "buy back," perhaps as in someone paying a ransom.

When we perform the sacrament of baptism, we often speak of God's *covenant* with us. The fact that we are involved in a two-way deal, or bargain, with God is important and amazing. But talk of a covenant will likely pass over the average person's head, causing us to miss the opportunity to explain our faith to unchurched friends and family who may be present for a baptism.

People in the media have studied how to reach a broad audience. We need to do the same.

Salvation is one of Christianity's key words and concepts. It is perhaps the hardest one for which to find alternative terms that really satisfy. It's of no use to explain to someone that her *salvation* depends on Jesus Christ if she has no clear understanding of that term, much less why she needs it. We need to have alternative words at the ready to explain that we are talking about a *rescue*.

One source we can turn to for faith language in the vernacular can be a paraphrase version of the Bible such as *The Message*. While these are not true translations of Scripture, they give us some ideas for better ways to explain things without using our beloved jargon.

It's worth noting that it was precisely in order to make the gospel more accessible to new Christians that the New Testament was written in everyday, informal Greek language. And later, so it would make sense to the average person on the street, Martin Luther translated the Bible into everyday German.

However we work it out, it is important, as Peter tells us, to "be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15). ■

WEB Q'S See discussion questions at the end of this article on *The Banner's* website: www.thebanner.org.



Tim Morrison attends River City Church in Cambridge, Ontario, a church plant of the Christian Reformed Church.

Advertising Information

Deadlines: March 2010 issue is 2/1/10. April 2010 issue is 3/1/10. Visit www.thebanner.org for complete details.

Prices: Most ads are \$0.33^{US} per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.26^{US} per character applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements. Photos are \$22^{US} extra.

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Publication of advertisements implies neither endorsement nor approval by *The Banner*, Faith Alive Christian Resources, or the Christian Reformed Church. We reserve the right to refuse or edit any ad for appropriateness.

Denominational and Classical Announcements

General

AGENDA FOR SYNOD 2010 Synod has established the following deadlines for materials to be received by the executive director of the CRCNA for the synodical agenda:

- Reports of standing committees and affiliated youth and educational agencies are due on February 15.
- Reports of agency boards are due ten days after the conclusion of the board meetings, but no later than March 1.
- Overtures and appeals are due no later than March 15.
- Names and addresses of delegates to synod on the printed Credentials for Synod, as well as the completed information sheet on each delegate, are to be submitted by stated clerks of classes as soon as possible but no later than March 15.

Materials will not be included in the printed Agenda if received after the synodically established deadlines.

Gerard L. Dykstra, Executive Director

Available for Call

AVAILABLE FOR CALL Kelowna CRC and Classis BC South East are pleased to announce that John S. Gerrits is available for a call. John faithfully served the Kelowna church for some 10 years before requesting to be released from the congregation under Article 17 in order to take a leave of absence from ministry before accepting another call. John can be reached at 250-764-4643 or gerritsfamily@shaw.ca

Meetings of Classis

Classis Alberta South & Saskatchewan will meet in regular session on Friday March 12, 2010 in Taber, AB. Agenda items are should be submitted by Feb. 15, 2010 to Mr. Al Brander, Stated Clerk, at derkabss@gmail.com or at 1203 High View Point, High River, AB T1V 1N9.

CLASSIS GEORGETOWN will hold its February 2010 meeting at the Prince Conference Center on the campus of Calvin College. The meeting will begin at 8:30 AM. All items for the agenda must be received by January 7, 2010. Harold Postma, S. C.

Eligible for Call

HAVING BEEN RELEASED from active ministerial service to Lakeside Chapel in Ludington, MI, Rev. Gregory J. Kett has been declared eligible for call by his calling church, the Second CRC of Fremont, MI. He can be contacted at 215 S. Lakeshore Dr., #11, Ludington, MI, Tel. (231) 425-8819. E-mail: gregorykett@hotmail.com.

Financial Aid

CLASSIS GR NORTH is taking applications from students studying for ordained ministry in the CRC, who are members of one of the churches of its Classis, and are in need of financial assistance. Please contact Rev. Jon Huizenga at PO Box 419, Rockford, MI 49341 or at jonhuiz@iserv.net by March 15.

CLASSIS KALAMAZOO invites students from their Classis (undergraduate or graduate level) who are planning to pursue full-time ministry in the CRC and are in need of financial aid for the academic year 2010-2011 to apply no later than February 28, 2010 by contacting Paul Vander Kamp, 2221 Ridgefield Rd., Portage, MI 49024, phone

269-321-0709, vdrkmp@juno.com. Undergraduate students must be at least in their junior year during 2010-2011. Students presently receiving aid must reapply.

STUDENTS FROM ZEELAND CLASSIS preparing for ordained/non-ordained ministry in the CRC are invited to apply for financial aid to the Classis Ministry Leadership Team for the 2010-2011 school year. For information, contact Judi Steenwyk, 880 Mid Bluff Drive, Zeeland, MI, 49464 (616) 772-1772. All requests to be received by April 1, 2010.

Congregational Announcements

MESA & APACHE JCT. WINTER VISITORS: Worship with us at Maranatha CRC Dec. 6 through April 11, 10:00 A. M. at 6159 E. University Dr., Mesa, AZ. Rev. Gary Hutt, Pastor. Info: 480-668-0478.

Birthdays

100th Birthday

With thankfulness to God, we congratulate **John Bergsma** on the occasion of his 100th birthday on Feb. 4, 2010. Love from his children, Jim Bergsma (deceased) Langley, B.C.; Jenny & Art (deceased) Kleine, Abbotsford, B.C.; Bernie & Margaret Bergsma, Georgetown, Ontario; Esther Post, Abbotsford, B.C.; Margaret & Fred Bosma, Bill Luimes (deceased), Lethbridge, Alta; 18 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren. Celebrating an open house on Feb. 4, 2010, 2pm-4pm at Menno Home, 2021 Primrose St., Abbotsford, B.C. Correspondence to: Mr. John Bergsma, Menno Hospital, 106-1-32945 Marshall Rd, Abbotsford, B.C. V2S 1K1.

FLORENCE KREDIT, CHCC #208, 855 Aaron Dr, Lynden, WA 98264 celebrates her 100th birthday on Feb. 5. She is cherished by her children Jean & Al Van Dalfsen, Clarice & Rev. Barry Blankers, Harlan & Linda Kredit, Mavis & Harold Terpstra, Carolyn & Jim Wynstra, Rev. Eleanor & Bill Rietkerk. She is adored by her 22 grandchildren, 51 great-grandchildren, 4 great-great grandchildren.

JOHANNA VANDER SYS, 18350 Summer St., Artesia, CA 91701, will be celebrating her 100th birthday on February 17. Her children, Al and Rika Scheenstra, Milton and Jan Vanderburg, and Merf and Carolyn Tanis, as well as her grandchildren and great grandchildren give thanks for her example of faith and love. Great is God's faithfulness!

90th Birthday

JEANETTE DAVIES (NEERHOF) of 408 S. 11th Street, Oostburg, WI 53070 celebrates her 90th birthday February 2. Her children and step-children give thanks to God for her example of love and faith.

MINNIE DYKSTRA (OLTHOFF) of 18228 Walter St. Lansing, IL, 60438, will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 1. Her daughters, Ruth Vander Zee and Jan Ornee, along with 6 grandchildren, 8 great-grandchildren, and in laws, give thanks to God for Grandma's health and caring spirit.

BRUCE (BOTE) OURENSMA, 419 West Main Street, Lake City, IA 51449, celebrates his 90th birthday on February 6. John, Laurel and Nico thank God for Heit's life with us.

JANE STEENSTRA, 679 Waterview Ct. Grandville MI 49418 celebrated her 90th birthday on February 1st. Husband Richard and daughter Mary Jane Kars (both deceased). Children: Marcia McDonald, Martin & Marcia Steenstra and Robert & Mary Steenstra, 8 Grandchildren, 9 great grandchildren all of whom give thanks to God for her faith and the love she shows to those around her.

Anniversaries

75th Anniversary

VANTUINEN, Wesley & Mildred. 2380 Aurora Pond Dr. Wyoming, MI 49509 celebrating 75 years of marriage on Feb. 19, 2010. Children: Glenn & Marcia (deceased) Slenk, Don & Leslie Diekevers, Bill & Emese VanTuinen, Jim & Ruth Sytsma, John & Jai VanTuinen. 12 grandchildren, 28 great grandchildren. Praise God for continued good health!

70th Anniversary

POPMA: With great joy and deep gratitude Rev. Repko and Ini Popma celebrate, with the entire family, their 70th wedding anniversary on Feb. 28. Great is Thy faithfulness! Best wishes may be sent to Leaside Retirement Residence #725, 10 William Morgan Dr., Toronto, ON, M4H1E7

65th Anniversary

BOTTING, Rev. John and Leona (Zylstra) Jenison, MI Celebrating 65 years of marriage on Feb. 14 with their family. We praise God for his many blessings. Children: JoAnn & Wim vanVugt, Judie & Phil Hamstra, John Botting, Jim Botting, Lori & John Schout, Audrey Watson, 13 grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren.



DORDT COLLEGE

Dean for the Natural Sciences & Director of Scholarship & Research

Dordt College is seeking an innovative person with a strong track record of teaching and scholarship/research and a passion for Christian higher education to serve in this dual role on the Academic Leadership Team. Our selected candidate will lead the natural science division's academic departments in faculty hiring and development, enrollment growth, and program and curricular development. In addition, this person will have proven skills to support and encourage the entire Dordt faculty to develop scholarship and research as an integral part of their service to Dordt's mission and thereby strengthen our culture of scholarship across the campus.

A review of application materials will begin immediately. Qualified persons committed to a Reformed, Biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Erik Hoekstra, Provost • Dordt College
498 4th Avenue NE • Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697
Fax: (712) 722-6035 • E-mail: provost@dordt.edu
Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/academic_affairs

50th Anniversary

DE KAM Andy and Gloria (Mulder) celebrated their 50th anniversary on December 29. Their children are Don and KyongSun De Kam, Brenda Tervoort, Jeanna and Ren Spoors. 7 grandchildren. To God be the glory!

GROENBOOM, Roger and Ticks (Tamel) of 232 W. Butterfield, Elmhurst, IL 60126 will celebrate their 50th anniversary on February 19. Congratulations and much love from your family: Maria & Karl Vos (Leia, Emily, Aimee) Roger & Alison Groenboom (Angelyn, Grant, Heidi) We thank and praise God for your example and His faithfulness!

LENDERINK Warren & Ilene (Bos) will celebrate their 50th anniversary on February 13, 2010. Children: Greg & Carla, Cindy & Brad, Jeff & Stephanie, Dan & Chrissy, & 11 grandchildren. God is so good!

PASTOOR, Daniel and Esther (Furda-Hoekstra). Feb. 19. 3234A West Meadows Ct., Sheboygan WI 53081. Children: Randy & Carol Hoekstra, Candy & John Piersma, Jeff & Sue Pastoor. 8 grandchildren. 4 great-grandchildren. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

Church Positions Available

New Hope Community CRC, Kincheloe, MI, is seeking a pastor. We have an exciting, diverse congregation with a passion for community outreach. We have strong ministries in place, and there is the potential for more to be developed. We are a small rural community in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Our current membership is about 40 member families. To obtain more information or a church profile please contact Joni Andary at 906-478-3205 or jandary@centurytel.net.

ORANGEVILLE CRC in beautiful Orangeville, Ontario, is seeking a full time pastor with strong leadership skills as well as a passion for evangelism and community outreach. The ideal candidate is a gifted speaker, able to apply sound biblical preaching to daily life, and is comfortable leading both traditional and contemporary worship styles. Orangeville is a growing rural community of 30,000, located within one hour of the cultural delights of downtown Toronto as well as outdoor activities such as skiing, hiking, boating, camping, etc. Please contact John Oorebeek at 519-928-9796 or jmoorebeek@sympatico.ca for more information.

First Rocky Mountain House Christian Reformed Church, located in Central Alberta's lovely Parkland area, is seeking a part-time, gifted person to assist the congregation in its ministries and "prepare God's people for works of service." The Coordinator of Ministries will work with the pastor and many volunteers in the areas of education, evangelism, youth and summer camp ministry. The position requires a strong grounding in Scripture and the Reformed tradition as well as gifts of administration and oral and written communication. An information package is available upon request as rockycrc@telus.net. Mail resume to: First Rocky Christian Reformed Church; RR # 3, Site 4, Box 6; Rocky Mountain House, AB T4T 2A3.

YOUTH PASTOR We are a multi-cultural church that was planted in sunny So Cal. Our heart is to impact the community around us with the Gospel in word and deed. oasis_church@msn.com www.oasischurchmv.com 951-653-0737.

SUMMITVIEW CRC, on the sunny side of the Cascade Mountains in Yakima, Washington, is searching for a full-time pastor due to the approaching retirement of our pastor. Our small, loving, intergenerational congregation is looking for solid Bible based preaching to guide us on our spiritual journey and encourage us as we grow. Our church profile is available from Jerry Kobes at 509-697-5041 or gwkeng@elltel.net.

BELLEVUE CRC, Bellevue, WA, located in the beautiful Pacific Northwest is seeking a pastor. BCRC is a warm, welcoming congregation with a strong desire "to be the Heart and Hands of Jesus." We are looking to grow by living out this mission statement under the guidance of our new pastor. Please contact PastorSearch@bellevuecrc.org or visit www.bellevuecrc.org.

FIRST CRC OF EDMONTON, ALBERTA is seeking a senior pastor. We are looking for a pastor who is a strong preacher and mentor,

Obituaries

BOLT, Dr. Martin J.; age 65; December 25, 2009; 4056 3 Mile Rd. N. E., Grand Rapids, MI 49525; He was preceded in death by his parents, Rev. Martin and Tena Bolt and by his brother, Rev. Calvin Bolt. Survivors include his wife of 42 years: Nancy (Boylon) Bolt; children: Dr. Daniel (Dr. Jee-Seon Kim) Bolt of Madison, WI, Dr. Michael Bolt of Grand Rapids, Dr. Sara Bolt of E. Lansing, Laura Bolt of Jackson; granddaughter and grandson; brother: Dr. Robert (Carolyn) Bolt; sisters: Theresa Brouwer, Norma (Lloyd) Tinholt; and sister-in-law Arlene Bolt.

BRUXVOORT, Stanley H., age 78, Dec. 23, 2009; 805 15th Ave E, Oskaloosa, IA 52577; Survived by wife Reuvena (Dieleman) of 58 yrs; Children: Keith (Bev) Highland, IN; Mike (Linda) Oskaloosa, IA; Jacki (Duane) Matter, Lynden, WA; Kent (Cheri) Fort Worth, TX; 13 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren. Thanks, Dad, for being a lifelong example of a humble servant of God.

with the ability to relate well to the many generations represented in our church while challenging and aiding us as we move forward in the calling God has for our congregation. If you have any questions, or to forward us your resume or profile please contact Melissa at melissa@haarsmafarms.ca.

WESTVIEW CRC located in Grand Rapids MI is seeking a full time Minister of Worship. The Minister of Worship is the primary leadership position for all ministries at Westview but most particularly for those related to worship and will work in coordination with our Minister of Congregational Life, Director of Music, Senior High Youth Directors, Middle School Youth Director, church Secretary and other staff at Westview. In addition to preaching 75% of the services, he will want to diligently promote evangelism and outreach through dynamic leadership of the 166 families / 485 professing members of Westview. For more information or to receive a Church Profile please contact the search committee (Bob Zwiers - Chair) at search@westviewcrc.org or call the church office 616-453-3105 www.westviewcrc.org.

RUDYARD CRC is seeking a full time pastor. Rudyard is located in the eastern U P of Michigan. We are a traditional church, established over a 100 years ago, with a healthy outreach program, and about 65 families. For information and a church profile please contact Walter Bandstra at bandstra@lighthouse.net.

SENIOR PASTOR-PALOS HEIGHTS CRC (IL) is seeking a spiritually gifted preacher who will lead our congregation to praise and worship heartily, develop more fully as vibrant Christians, encourage our youth, and reach out to embrace those whom God is leading to our fellowship. Having been served for a year by a Specialized Interim Pastor we are now actively searching. If you wish to explore God's call with us, contact Bill Davids, Search Team at bill.davids@clarence.davids.com. Visit our website at paloschurch.org for more info.

YOUTH PASTOR/DIRECTOR: Grace Christian Reformed Church of Chatham, Ontario has an exciting leadership opportunity. The individual we are looking for will need a strong ability to pastor, encourage and develop the faith of our young people. We are looking for an individual with the appropriate seminary education, post secondary degree, or equivalent experience to lead our youth in a full time staff position. To inquire or apply contact Patrick at mcnamara.family@sympatico.ca or mail your resume and cover-letter to: Grace CRC YP Search Committee, c/o Patrick McNamara, 255 Tweedsmuir Ave. W., P. O. Box 337, Chatham, ON (Canada) N7M 5K.

MIDLAND PARK CRC, located in a small town in metropolitan northern New Jersey is seeking a pastor to help us grow in our faith. We are a caring congregation in the process of working with a renewal team so that we can effectively share the gospel with our community. For a church profile or for more information contact Samuel Steen at masneets.aol.com.

MRS. CORA "Jacoba" De Jong; aged 85; December 22, 2009; 2500 Breton St. S. E., Kentwood, MI 49512; She is survived by her husband of 64 years, Sidney "Sicco" De Jong; her children, Gerben (Janice) De Jong, Carole (John) Ornee, William (Karen) De Jong, Edward (Tamara) De Jong, Diane (James) Visser, Richard De Jong, and Yvonne (Steven) Dykstra; 23 grandchildren; 20 great grandchildren.

DE RUITER, Joseph, age 85, Vesper, WI went to be with our Lord on December 30, 2009. Survived by his wife of 60 years, Pearl (Schoonveld); children: Joe Jr. (Cheryl), Al (Linda), Dave, Christine, 9 grandchildren, 9 great-grandchildren, 3 sisters, and 2 brothers.

HOGAN, Norman, 82, of Artesia, CA, went to his eternal rest on Jan 1, 2010. He is greatly missed and remembered with love by his wife of almost 60 years, Lillian Hogan, seven sons and daughters-in-law, 19 grandchildren, and 8 great grandchildren. Memorials to Christian Reformed World Missions.



HUIZENGA, Rudolph "Rudy," age 91 of Crown Point, formerly of Cedar Lake, passed away Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2009. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Catherine; six children: Rudy (Nancy) Huizenga of MI, Dave Huizenga of Whiting, Paul (Doreane) Huizenga of CA, Calvin (Beth) Huizenga of

WI, Mark (Diane) Huizenga of Momec, IL, Rachel Huizenga of OR; ten grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; sister, Henrietta (late Joseph) Norman of Munster. Preceded in death by son, Peter; brothers and sisters. Rudy was a member of First CRC, Crown Point. He was a World War II Army Air Corps veteran. Rudy was a retired Evangelist from the Back to God CRC, Engelwood, IL and Second Reformed Church, Highland. He was also pastor at Beacon Light CRC, Sheboygan, WI and pastor of a small church in Muskegon, MI. Rudy was a member of the Republican Party and ran for office in Cedar Lake where he was on the Zoning Board.

LEYSTRA, February 15, 1923-December 6, 2009 Sjouke, passed away peacefully in Surrey BC into the Lord's presence, dearly loved by many friends and relatives. Loving husband of "Elen", Eelkje for 56 years. Survived by brother Jan and sister Geertje De Vries of Friesland and sister Jenny Post of USA. Four children Elly (Steve), John, Bart (Arlene) and James. Grandchildren: Christi, Jennifer, Mathew, Michael, Janine, Deanna, Braden, Cameron, and two great-grandchildren, Olivia and Kaleb. Forever in our hearts and will be dearly missed. He was predeceased by three brothers and two sisters. A memorial service was held on December 12, 2009 at the Surrey Covenant Reformed Church. (#316-9010-158th Street, Surrey BC V4N 5G4)

NAGEL, Mr. Calvin H.; 86; December 24, 2009; 2500 Breton Woods Dr. S. E., Unit 4009, Grand Rapids, MI 49512; He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Elaine (Van De Riet); children: Dr. Dennis (Margaret) Nagel of Grand Rapids, Pamela Nagel of Texas, and Deb Stephens of Grand Rapids; grandchildren: Tara, Rachelle, Noah, and Alex; great grandson: Caleb; brothers: Donovan Nagel of Wisconsin and Douglas (Lois) Nagel of Grand Rapids; sisters-in-law: Cynthia Vera Walters of California, and Jessie Van De Riet of Minnesota.

PASTOOR, B. William; December 23, 2009; 2932 Overlook Summit Dr. S. E., Grand Rapids, MI 49546; Bill is survived by his wife Evelyn; step-children: Stephanie and Pieter Disselkoen, James and Victoria Steenberg; grandchildren: Annelise and Kai Disselkoen; sister: Ilene Magee; special aunt Janet Yonker; brothers and sisters-in-law: Henry and Marlene Van Proyen, Carol Olthof, Fred and Evelyn Olthof, Shirley Olthof, Wallace and Marianne Bratt.

RUSSOM, Janice (Westenburg), age 66, Denver, CO went to be with her Lord on Dec. 9, 2009. She will be fondly remembered by her daughter, Beth (David) Steen, 2 grandchildren, and siblings: Vi (Duane) Sjaardema, Ron Westenburg, Marve (Sandy) Westenburg, many nephews and nieces. Memorial Service was held on Jan. 16 at 2nd CRC of Denver, CO.

SCHRIPSEMA, Mrs. Anna; aged 95; December 6, 2009; She was preceded in death by her husband Henry Schripsema Jr., son-in-law Glenn Brouwer. She is survived by her children: Carol (Dick) DeVries of Loveland, CO, David (Betty) Schripsema of Kenosha, WI, Joanne (Jack) Hulst of Ada, MI; 14 grandchildren; 32 great grandchildren.

TRIEZENBERG, Bertha (Gesink) age 99 Dec 17 (BD1-19-1910) Preceded by her husband Clarence "Doc" Triezenberg, daughter Bette (Mike) Oostendorp. Survived by Clarence "Butch" Triezenberg, Barbara (Gary) Palmer; 7 grandchildren; 9 great-grandchildren.

VAN EERDEN, Connie Lynne (Vande Bunte); age 68; December 27, 2009; 3375 Lakeshore Dr., Holland, MI 49424; She is survived by her beloved husband of 46 years, William (Bill) Van Eerden; children: Susan (Eric) Vroegop, Laura (Curt) DeGroot, and Anita (Haans) Mulder; 8 grandchildren; siblings: Jack (Margaret) Vande Bunte, Tom (Gail) Vande Bunte, and Gail Vande Bunte; sister-in-law: Lynne Van Eerden; and brother-in-law, Jim (Shirley) Van Eerden.

VANDER VLIET, Harry A., age 83 of 1435 Rokosz Lane, Dyer, IN 46311, formerly of Denver, CO passed away on December 15, 2009. He is survived by his wife, Eloise M. (nee Broertjes); one daughter, Joy (Robert) Krygsheld; son-in-law Jerry Vander Kooy; four grandchildren: Amy and Nicole Vander Kooy, Samuel and Jennifer Krygsheld; one brother, Nelson (Betty); and one sister-in-law, Shirley Vander Vliet. He was preceded in death by his daughter, Sue; and brother, William. Funeral services were held in Lansing, IL on Dec. 19, 2009. Memorials may be made to Illiana Right to Life or Illiana Christian High School.

VAN WINGERDEN, Mr. Nicholas; aged 86; December 12, 2009; 2111 Raybrook S. E., Apt. 2001, Grand Rapids, MI 49546; He was preceded in death by his parents: Arie and Nellie DeBruin; and brother: John Van Wingerden. Surviving is his wife Carrie; children: Cindy (Steve) Buher and Randy (Vicki) Van Wingerden; sister: Jo Ragsdale; sisters-in-law: Joan DeGroff and Marilyn Van Wingerden; grandchildren: Gretchen Buher, Chad (Stacey) Buher, and Jenn (John) Kane, Kaeta (Matt) DeHoek, Amy Wingerden, Heather (David) Breen and Tiffany Duyst; and great-grandchild Lorelei DeHoek.

VEGTER, Margaret (Laman); aged 91; November 8, 2009; 930 Edison N. W., #101, Grand Rapids, MI 49504; She is survived by her husband of 68 years: Alvin; son: Albert and Jeanne Vegter; daughter: Gretchen Bush; grandchildren: Chris Vegter, Suzanne Vegter, Katrina Vegter, David and Megan Diercks, Jeff and Heather Bush; great grandson: Nathan; brother: Rev. David Laman; and sister: Pearl Eadie.


Employment

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SUMMER RENTAL Summer weekly rental, Historical Highland Park on Lake Michigan in Grand Haven, Mich. Sleeps 7 616-842-7366

COTTAGE FOR RENT: Upper Silver Lake, Mears, MI. \$750 per week in June, \$800 per week in July & August. Contact jdcountryclipper1@yahoo.com or 616-490-1623 for more info.

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PRAIRIE'S EDGE

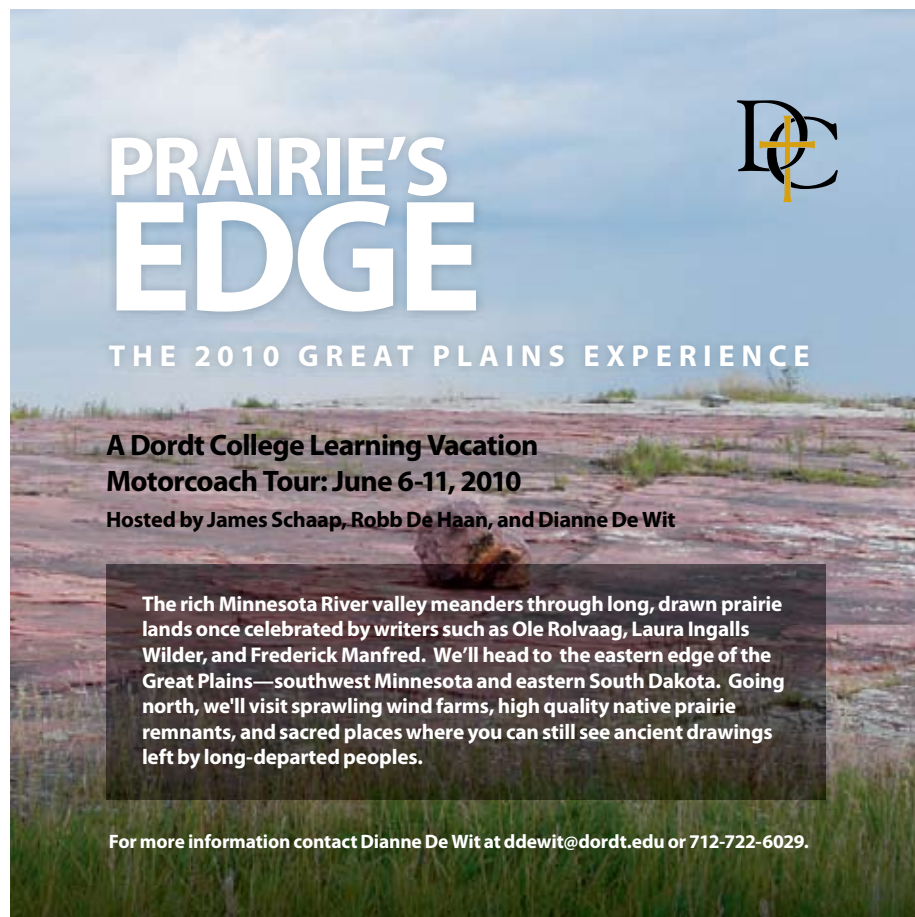
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Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697
Fax: (712) 722-6035
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Punch Lines

Send Us Your Photos!

Now that John Calvin's 2009 whirlwind world tour is over, *The Banner* is pleased to inaugurate a brand-new photo feature on these pages. But we need your help again!

Keep your cameras handy, because in 2010 we'd like you to send us photos of CRC- or Reformed-related items that pop up in unexpected places.

Lynn and Dave Setsma, members of LaGrave Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., spotted this sign in—of all places—Bozeman, Mont. They don't know who the owners of the salon are, but we'd love to hear the story behind the name. Bozeman salon folks, if you're *Banner* readers you can contact us at info@thebanner.org and tell us all about it!



There was a little boy in the early 1890s who hated to use the family's outhouse. He disliked it in the winter because it was too cold. He disliked it in the summer because it was too hot. He disliked it all year long because it smelled bad.

One day, after a spring rain, the boy decided to push the outhouse into the river. He grabbed a large stick and started shoving. After much effort—splash! Into the river it went. The boy danced for joy. Then he returned to the house for supper. His father came in late.

"Billy," said his father, "someone pushed the outhouse into the river today. Do you know anything about that?"

"It was me, Father," Billy admitted reluctantly. "But I heard George Washington told the truth when he cut down a cherry tree and he didn't get in trouble for it."

"True," said Billy's father. "But George Washington's father was not in the cherry tree."

—John Veltkamp

Gladys had just moved to a new community and was looking for a church home. She was impressed by the beautiful building and music of the first church she visited. However, she thought the sermon was really boring and noticed a number of worshipers nodding off.

Afterward, the minister encouraged the worshipers to greet each other. Gladys turned to the man on her left. "I'm Gladys Dunn," she said, extending her hand.

"You and me both," the man replied.

—Henry Haarsma

A few days before my daughter turned 6, I threw a very girly birthday party for her. I made a tiered pink cake. I put streamers everywhere. I made tutus for the little girls who came. We also made a craft. It was a blast.

On her real birthday a few days later, my daughter's teacher sent her home with a birthday journal. The children love to write about what they did on their big day, and I looked forward to what my daughter would say about her party.

William wrote: "We opened presents. My favorite was the vehicle play set."

Jill wrote: "I got my ears pierced! They are sparkly!"

My daughter wrote: "I am going to have leftover pink cake."

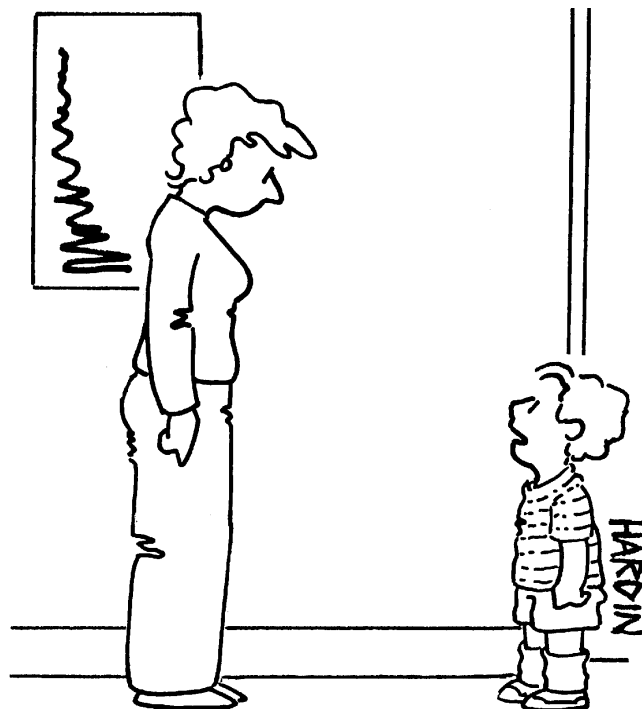
—Emily Dykstra

My 3-year-old granddaughter, responding to her mother, said, "Oh, I didn't know THAT. But that's because I'm not as old as you."

—C.R. Lindemulder

A mother skunk was in the forest with her baby skunks when she realized they were all surrounded by coyotes. The mother skunk did not want to show her fear, so she gathered the young ones together as the coyotes made their approach. Then she said, "Children, let us spray!"

—Dave and Sylvia Kloosterman



"I'm going to bed — I've had about all of me I can take for today."

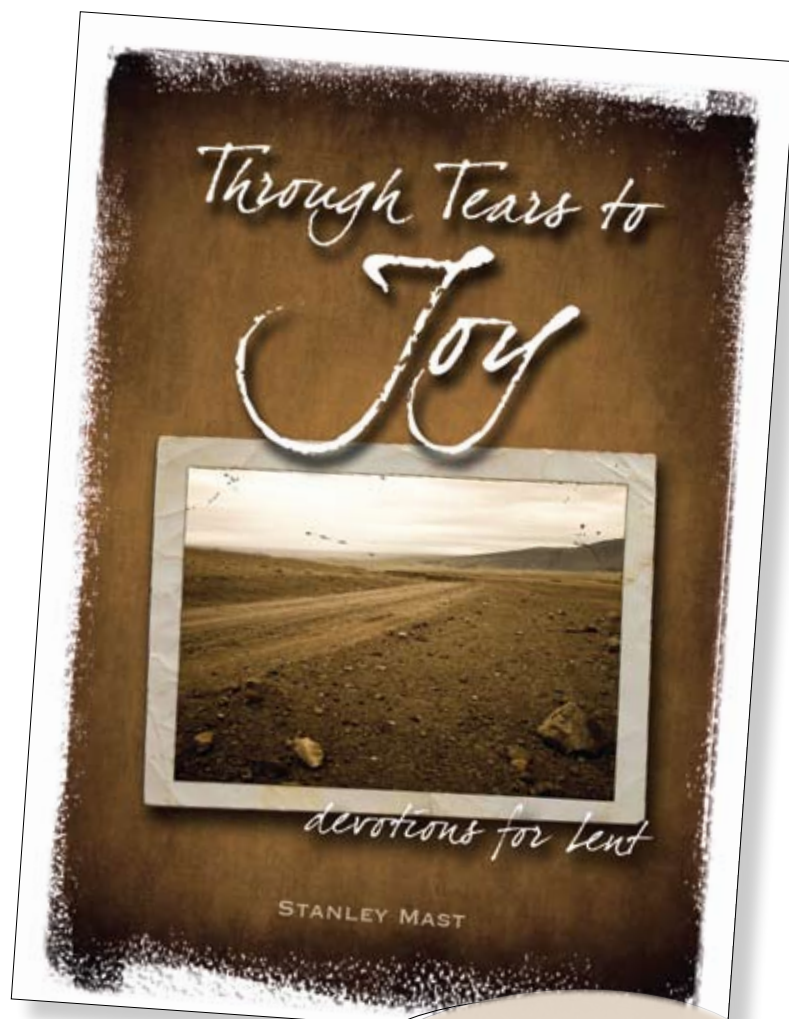
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