

# BANNER

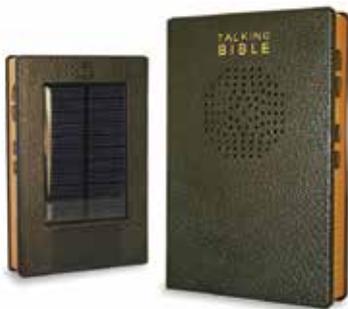
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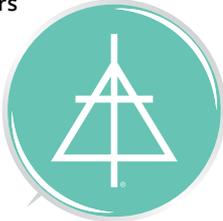
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## BY THE NUMBERS

The 2022 denominational survey asked participants, "Which generations of your ancestors have been involved in the Christian Reformed Church?"



### Generation to Generation

Great-great or more 17.7%

Some great-grandparents 20.1%

Some grandparents 22.7%

My parents 12.0%

None, I'm the first generation 22.7%

The survey was conducted in Spring 2022 by DataWise Consulting LLC. A total of 1,535 people from 151 churches responded.

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » Church Worldwide: 'Catfish Navy' Feeds Survivors After Mississippi Tornadoes
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**BANNER**

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# Mastery or Vulnerability

For years, I was not aware of my control issue—because it was cloaked in spiritual piety.



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

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

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Este artículo está disponible en español en [TheBanner.org/spanish](http://TheBanner.org/spanish).

**I HAVE A CONTROL ISSUE.** By God's grace I am better at keeping it in check now, but I still struggle with the desire to be in control. By this I do not mean "bossing people around." It is much more subtle than that. It is about spiritual control.

For years, I was not aware of my control issue—because it was cloaked in spiritual piety. I was guilty of practicing "righteousness by good doctrine" (Herman Bavinck, *The Certainty of Faith*, p. 26).

When I was 19, my sister gave me a Bible, and inside the front cover she wrote down 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." I took that to heart. I was already an ardent student of Scripture. I read Bible commentaries and books on systematic theology. When I was still in high school, my pastor entrusted me to lead an adult Bible study class in his absence. I had striven to master God's Word. But therein lies the problem. God and God's Word should be mastering me.

In my zeal to master the knowledge of God's truths, I failed to notice that my faith became rationalistic and that I was feeding my lust for power and control. As Francis Bacon said, "Knowledge is power." Knowledge of God's truth gave me intellectual power. It gave me a sense of intellectual control and security. I have the answers—or at least I can easily find them in God's Word. I can even use them to have power over others.

I had inadvertently turned Scripture into a tool under my control. I had assumed that correctly handling Scripture meant I should master Scripture, and the more I mastered it, the more holy or spiritual I would be. The more correct my doctrinal beliefs were, the more righteous or "approved"

I would be before God. In sum, it was a spirituality of mastery and control.

Only in later years did I notice that I had overemphasized the apostle Paul's metaphors of workmanship and athletic training that suggest mastery and control. Jesus gave a metaphor of vulnerability: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Children are not masters. Children in Jesus' time were the most vulnerable group around.

I remembered how I gave my life to Jesus, praying with tears flowing down my cheeks. I confessed my sins. I was vulnerable before the Lord, begging for his mercy and grace. Despite having entered God's kingdom with a posture of vulnerability, I somehow felt I could grow spiritually through a posture of mastery. But that was my spiritual pride disguised in doctrinal righteousness.

I used God's truths as an intellectual shield to hide my inner self from God. Having all the answers shielded me from being vulnerable before God and before others. It was a subtle way to keep God at a distance, if not in a box. Despite my professed theology, I lived like I, rather than God, was in control of my spiritual life.

Is this how the Pharisees could master the Scriptures yet have their hearts far from God (Mark 7:6)? I don't know for sure, but now I try to walk humbly and vulnerably with God. 

Please consider donating to *The Banner* so we can keep the conversation going. Give online today at [theBanner.org/Donate](http://theBanner.org/Donate). Thank you!

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# Getting a Letter to the Editor Published

We are a Christian  
community, and  
we expect our  
magazine—even  
the letters page—  
to reflect that.



Sarah Heth Sundt is the associate editor of *The Banner*. She is a member of Calvary on 8th in Holland, Mich.

*Editor's note: Due to a lack of usable letters to the editor this month, we thought we'd share this article from a Behind the Banner post published Oct. 15, 2021, at [TheBanner.org/behind-the-banner](https://TheBanner.org/behind-the-banner). It has been updated slightly for publication here.*

**HERE AT** *The Banner* we love to receive letters to the editor. Whether the letter is sharing positive or negative feedback, we appreciate that our readers engage with us by responding to what they've read in this magazine.

And it's important to us to share worthy letters with our readership, which we do in the "Reply All" section in print and online each month. (The only issue in which we don't publish letters is the July/August issue because we need the extra space to report on synod.) Part of the duties placed on *The Banner* by synod (the general assembly and governmental body of the Christian Reformed Church) is to "provide a vehicle through which church members can express their views and opinions on pertinent issues." The "Reply All" page is just one more way we provide a forum for conversation within the CRCNA.

Editor-in-chief Shiao Chong and I each read all letters sent to us, but not all letters make it onto the printed page. That's partly because of the volume of letters we sometimes receive, but more often it's because of the way the letter was written. So if you are interested in participating in our forum by having a letter to the editor published, here are a few tips to make it happen:

## 1. Follow the rules.

Our policy for letters to the editor is explained online at [thebanner.org/letters](https://thebanner.org/letters). All letters, including those submitted by email, must include your name and postal address. And letters should be brief—preferably 100 words or fewer. The longer it is,

the less likely we will be willing or able to make space for it. We do not print letters responding to previously published letters, and in fact we generally only print letters that are responding to an article in *The Banner* and not to anything that is not relevant to our publication. For example, letters to us about the latest political events that none of our articles touched on won't get published. It's helpful, therefore, to mention which article you are responding to when sending your letter. Please note that all letters responding to *Banner* articles will be considered for publication unless marked "Not for Publication." And letters may be edited for clarity or space considerations.

## 2. Speak the truth in love.

We are a Christian community, and we expect our magazine—even the letters page—to reflect that. Therefore, we don't publish angry, untempered rants. And we don't publish letters that perpetuate an untruth or diminish a complicated issue down to a black-and-white dichotomy. We also don't publish letters that explain or describe an article inaccurately. For example, if you write in to complain about an article you misunderstood, your letter likely won't be published as we do not wish to perpetuate a misunderstanding. Letters must be honest and, if not kind, at least not offensive. We don't expect all letters to express agreement, but we do expect a tone that is civil and respectful. We are all ambassadors for Jesus, after all, and he did say, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

## 3. Write well.

Letters must be clear, coherent, and to the point. Stay on topic, be concise and easy to follow, and contribute something new and positive to the

## Will We Ever Learn What Unity Means?

discussion. I recommend choosing only one topic to write on or one point to make.

It's a challenge, to be sure, to write in such few words a thoughtful and nuanced perspective that will add to the public forum of ideas we are trying to foster. But it's not impossible. Many of you have already written us letters that have brought important perspectives to the forefront. We hope our readers will continue to do so.

To send a letter to the editor, email [editorial@thebanner.org](mailto:editorial@thebanner.org) or send mail to 1700 28th St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI, 49508-1407. 

**I WRITE WITH DEEP CONCERN** for the Christian Reformed Church. The tone and substance of too much of the dialogue surrounding Synod 2022's decisions about human sexuality has been less than respectful or charitable. It is unbecoming of our Christian community and has created a breach in our fellowship that might not be repaired. It might split the CRC sooner rather than later.

I believe we should be seeking middle ground. I believe God despises how the body of Christ has been divided when the Scriptures have called us to unity. Like other traditions, the Reformed tradition has embarrassing divisions. Consider the Reformed churches just in my hometown: There are CRC, Reformed Church in America, Protestant Reformed, United Reformed, American Reformed, and Netherlands Reformed congregations. Do we need yet another? What a contentious people we are! Let's make the case to instead learn to love across our differences.

I love our church. I am thankful to have been raised in Third Lynden (Wash.) CRC and to have been a member of Christian Reformed churches in Fort Wingate, N.M.; Rehoboth, N.M.; and now Sonlight in Lynden. They have blessed my family, now into a fifth generation in this denomination. Our churches, denominational agencies, and colleges have been an enormous blessing to the kingdom. How dare we ignore this! I can't imagine God approving when seeing what he has built through the Holy Spirit being rent asunder.

Many people do not know the pain that will come for hundreds, even thousands who cherish their Christian Reformed roots if the CRC splits.

I've talked to dozens who agree with me that Synod 2022's decision to make

### I believe God despises how the body of Christ has been divided.

a traditional view of human sexuality "confessional" is what creates the greatest threat to our unity. I happen to come out on the more conservative side of the issues, but I am not about to condemn and disassociate from those who disagree with me. I go to church with them—and I dare say most of us do. Do we want to give them the boot? Folks, we need to learn how to love one another—something Jesus was quite good at, as Samaritans, prostitutes, and others would attest.

I have yet to hear a good answer when I ask this question: What makes the seventh commandment rise above the rest of the commandments? Read the Heidelberg Catechism. Surely we have idolaters, Sabbath-breakers, blasphemers, haters (even of parents), cheaters, liars, gossips, and jealous folks in our churches. That sounds serious to me. Is that confessional? Shall we give them all the boot?

My plea is to allow the decision to affirm a traditional interpretation to stand but to remove the confessional status. Let's continue to wrestle with these challenging issues as congregations and a denomination. Let's be willing to listen and not so quick to condemn. 



Ron Polinder is a retired school administrator of Rehoboth (N.M.) Christian School and Lynden (Wash.) Christian School. He is an elder at Sonlight Christian Reformed Church in Lynden.

### As I Was Saying

Find the latest posts from our award-winning blog online at [TheBanner.org](http://TheBanner.org).

- » Life in the Balance: Equinox, Sabbath, and the Gift of Rest
- » Hope, Waiting, and Honor
- » Shine Like Stars



Photo by Sudarshan Bhat/Unsplash

# Building Bridges

By Lorilee Craker

**L**aura Pritchard's missionary journey started in 2005 when she was standing on a street corner in Liberia, West Africa.

It was nearly 200 years after 15,000 free-born Black people facing social and legal oppression in the U.S. were "repatriated" and relocated to the land of fufu (a favorite food of the Bassa people and the man who would become Pritchard's husband), waterfalls, and palm-fringed beaches.

That day in 2005 was Pritchard's second visit to Liberia via a sister-church relationship between Madison Square Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Providence Baptist Church in Liberia's capital, Monrovia, named after James Monroe, the fifth president of the U.S. and a supporter of Liberia's colonization. The link between the two churches was Reverend Samuel Reeves, a Liberian trained at Princeton Seminary who had been a pastor at Madison for several years and was again the head pastor at Liberia's oldest church.

Pritchard remembers asking God in her journal if she could be an agent of reconciliation between Africans and African Americans. "If you want me to come here," she told the Lord, "I will come."

As Pritchard continued to visit Liberia, her vision for building bridges grew. In 2011, she tested her idea, bringing

her first group of African Americans to Liberia. That was the year she also beheld Henry Pritchard, a gentle, kind, and determined Liberian farmer who would become her husband. For a time, Laura Pritchard's focus shifted as she worked to clear the immigration hurdles that existed for Henry, her then-fiance, to live in the United States.

Pritchard became the CRC's first long-term African American missionary, with a focus on building connections among African Americans, Liberians, and other Africans. She and her husband had each traveled a long path full of bends, twists, and detours to each other and to missionary work.

## A Long Journey

Born in Chicago, Laura Pritchard moved to Muskegon Heights, Mich., at age 7. Just after she turned 19, her beloved mother died at age 39 after entrusting Pritchard with the care of Pritchard's younger siblings. "It was very, very difficult," she said. "But I took Mama's words to heart. I left school, worked full time, and tried to raise two teenagers."

By 1992, Pritchard had started attending Madison, first serving as a volunteer and choir member eventually becoming the director of youth ministry and then of outreach, worship, and multicultural living. But she hadn't counted on falling in love with Henry Pritchard.

Henry also never expected to meet the love of his life in his late 40s, especially

an American who would bring him to live in her homeland for several years. Born in a Liberian coastal village called Buchanan, he had moved with his foster parents to the Monrovia neighborhood of Congo Town at age 7. His life was challenging and required grit, resilience, and faith.

"I lived through the civil war and raised chickens and farmed," he said. "Life was hard and difficult, but I had strong family ties, good friends, and I was involved in Bible study and prayer at my church. I loved my church."

Married in 2013 at the ages of 50 (Henry) and 51 (Laura), the twosome knitted their hearts and lives together, praying for God to order their steps.

## Finding Mission

Subsequent trips to Liberia in 2016 and 2018, in which the Pritchards brought groups from Madison Square, only deepened the duo's missional vision.

"By 2018, we knew we were called to be missionaries of the CRC, my denomination for 25 years," Laura Pritchard said. The couple began orientation through Resonate Global Mission and were commissioned as CRC missionaries. The Lord spoke to her: "The work you have started is not your work, Laura. This is my work—kingdom work."

The Pritchards view their work as threefold: Leading Leaders, Healing Ourselves, and farming.

With Pastor Sam Reeves, Laura co-hosts a radio show called *Leading Leaders* (currently on hiatus). She is contextualizing a nine-month leadership and life skills curriculum for Liberians through the Grand Rapids Initiative for Leadership.

“Healing Ourselves” is both a concept and a program. Underwritten by an Innovation Experiment Grant from Resonate, the Pritchards partner with Calvin University history professor Eric Washington to bring African American students together with Liberian counterparts to learn about each other’s history and identity. Through travel opportunities and monthly Zoom meetings, the inaugural group—three Calvin students and four Liberian students—gained more than just educational benefits.

“As an African American, I see the chasm between African Americans and West Africans,” Laura Pritchard said. “That chasm is a result of slavery, tribalism, colonialism. ... I asked God to let me be an agent of reconciliation in the African diaspora, and through this program, part of these students’ identities are healed. The healing and unity has begun.”

As a partner missionary, Laura Pritchard works with Providence Baptist Church to develop and facilitate sister-church relationships with churches throughout the U.S., modeled on the relationship between Providence and Madison. Her vision is to increase the African American presence in CRC missionary ranks and to “create spaces for healing conversations through the exploration of shared stories and history.”

“Something powerful can come when we build relationships between folks in Liberia and here in America,” she said.

Pritchard remembers asking God in her journal if she could be an agent of reconciliation between Africans and African Americans.

#### A Passion for Farming

The third prong of the couple’s mission draws upon Henry Pritchard’s experience and enthusiasm for farming, a skill he employed in the U.S. by running an urban vegetable farm in Grand Rapids specializing in cassava and leafy greens. Although Henry must live in the U.S. for six months of the year until his American citizenship is settled, he has begun his five-year farming plan with a view to serve especially the children of his homeland.

“Henry has a passion fueled by the reality of Liberia’s systems, which were devastated by years of civil crisis,” Laura Pritchard said. From 1989 to 2003, a quarter of a million people were killed in the nation’s civil war, causing a massive breakdown in families, education, and infrastructure. Because so many parents died in the civil war, she added, “people have

raised themselves. No one is teaching young people agriculture.”

Henry has planted rice, cassava, and plantains, and he envisions a school being built near the farm in his home village. “The farm, the school, the kids, and the parents will all be connected,” Laura said. “The kids are being taught to steward the land God has given us. He has given us what we need to sustain us and what we need to flourish.”

Henry is excited for his dream to be realized and for the chance to impart his credos to the next generation: “If you don’t work, you don’t eat. Instead of asking for a handout, put your hand to the ground.”

#### The Journey Continues

Though the Pritchards love Liberia, it is a “hard place to work, serve, and live,” Laura said in an email newsletter. Power is out more often than not. Corruption is rampant. Unemployment is overwhelming. Illiteracy is high. Sickness and death are commonplace.

“There is struggle without and within,” she wrote.

Yet the Pritchards are buoyed by the encouragement and prayers of those who have invested in their missionary work. As they continue to raise support, the Pritchards labor on and lean on their Lord to endure faithfully.

“Even with all the difficulties we face, we are loved and covered by the God who called us,” Laura said. “As Liberians say, ‘We are in it!’” **B**



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich. The author of 15 books, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her on Instagram @thebooksellersdaughter or on her podcast *Eat Like a Heroine*.

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Relationships

#### Sometimes I feel like I'm failing as a parent. How do I move past the guilt?

Parenting is hard, and we don't always get it right. Every parent feels like a failure at times. Often we operate in the dark, making the best decisions we can with what we know at the time. And then there are days when we truly mess things up out of exhaustion, ignorance, or even our own selfishness. We are all broken people who fall short of God's ideal.

God commissions parents to protect, provide, and prune our children as they grow into citizens of God's kingdom. Our job is not to be perfect; that is not humanly possible. With realistic expectations rather than unattainable standards, we serve as parents to the best of our ability, following the Holy Spirit's leading.

We can have confidence that God has called and empowered us to be parents yet still show humility in acknowledging our shortcomings and making amends. When we lose our patience or make a poor decision, we can apologize to our kids. Our children look to us as their example for how to live. Through us, they discern a model for how to live as broken people in a broken world.

We all make mistakes, but dwelling in guilt and shame is unhealthy. Bad parenting decisions can arise out of feelings of guilt. When we feel ashamed, we can become indulgent parents and lose sight of maintaining healthy boundaries for our kids. Rather, we must hold in tension the exercise of parental authority and doing so with a servant's humility. We model what it looks like to lead while acknowledging our mistakes. God already died for us to remove our guilt



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

and shame, so we can certainly extend grace to ourselves.

Messing up is part of life. We can learn and grow from the mistakes we make. By humbly owning up to our mistakes and seeking the healing of the relationship, we model servant leadership to our families. This humble posture will be a gift that our children can emulate and value throughout their life.

Rev. Deb Koster leads the Christian Reformed Church's family and marriage ministry, *FamilyFire.com*, at ReFrame Ministries. She and her husband, Steven, worship at Grace Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Missional Living

#### How do we pray for God's mission?

Prayer, unquestionably, is central and foundational to discovering and joining the Spirit on God's mission. In Luke 10, Jesus' first instructions to the 70 appointed ones is to pray: "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers" (Luke 10:2). And then he sends them! To do what? To enter into the life of these Samaritan villagers from a prayerful, attentive, listening posture. They are directed to share peace, to receive, and to remain. This too is prayer as we discern and attend to God's presence and leading among the people to whom the Spirit sends us. Peter is sent to Cornelius to discover the Holy Spirit already at work in this Gentile leader (Acts 10-11). Paul and his companions are sent outside the city to women gathering by the river,

where the apostles too step into what God has already initiated in Lydia and her household (Acts 16).

These prayers involve asking, listening, and acting—perhaps not what first comes to mind when we think of the call to pray. Yet God's people have always been directed to "Hear the word of the Lord" (e.g., Ezek. 34:7, 37:4; Isa. 28:14, 39:5; Jer. 2:4, 29:20). Faithful Jews to this day recite the Shema, which begins, "Hear, O Israel" (Deut. 6:4-5). The command to hear means much more than allowing sound to enter our ears. The Hebrew word *shema* in other passages is translated as "obey" (e.g., Ex. 19:5; Deut. 12:28; Josh. 24:24; 1 Sam. 12:14). There is no separate word for "obey." Thus "to hear" entails not only being attentive, but responding, obeying, and doing! Our listening prayers, then, are also our doing/responding/acting prayers. We are invited and called to participate in God's mission by *shema*-ing the Spirit through the text, one another, and our neighbors.

Wondering where to start *shema*-ing prayer? How about with Luke 10:1-12? Hear it by reading it repeatedly, slowly, and attentively, allowing God to speak to you through it. What catches your attention? What nudges? Now act on it: share peace, be a guest of your neighbor, receiving whatever they give you and pointing to the kingdom of God.

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

**Faith Formation****Our children are visual learners, but so much in our worship and church programming is word-based. What's a parent to do?**

You're right that much of worship is word-based, especially in Protestant churches. Historically, in contrast to the Orthodox or Roman Catholic traditions, Protestant churches have been reluctant to include many visual elements in our churches because of a fear that they might lead to graven images. But that iconoclasm has diminished somewhat over the past 50 years. The visual arts are once again being celebrated, and artwork is being displayed in churches.

Yet Protestant worship is still word-heavy. Are visual learners just at a disadvantage? Not necessarily. Decades of studies show little or no connection between teaching to a child's preferred learning style and their achievement. So the good news is that "visual learners" can still get a lot out of word-based services.

Unfortunately, the words used in worship services are often not very child friendly. But there are a few things parents can do to help.

Educational research notes that we remember things we actually engage with. So become a "church whisperer." Explain to your children what is happening before and during the service. Give children an opportunity to reflect on the things that occur. This can help your child learn how to engage more in worship.

You could also allow your children to create pictures about what they are hearing. Use paper and colored pencils to illustrate the sermon. Suggest using a set of panels, like a comic strip, to draw their ideas. This will help them note and

organize what they're hearing. When you get home, ask your children to share their pictures with you and your family. Even if it looks like they're not paying attention, they might be very engaged.

Finally, talk to your pastor or worship committee about how to make the language used in worship more accessible for children, for those for whom English is not a first language, and for those who visit your church. Ask them to think about how your worship can be more visually interesting. All worshipers will benefit from receiving the message in multiple ways.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer in faith formation with the Congregational Ministries team of the Christian Reformed Church. Robert Keeley is professor emeritus of education at Calvin University. They recently retired after 31 years as directors of children's ministries at 14th Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Mich.

**Ethics****We know from Scripture that Christians are commanded to forgive. But is it always required, even in situations of abuse or violence?**

"Required" might not be quite the right word. There is indeed something about the depths of God's forgiveness of us that creates a call for us to extend forgiveness in human situations of wrongdoing. When Jesus' disciples ask him whether it's sufficient to forgive an offender seven times, Jesus adds some astonishing multiplication (Matt. 18:22). And he immediately underscores his point with the parable of the ungrateful servant (18:23-35)—a reminder that God's forgiveness of our huge debt of sin should mean that we are willing to forgive the meager debts of offense owed to us.

Yet in situations of horrifying violence or abuse of the vulnerable, we're not really talking about a meager debt, are we? While all sin might be in some sense equal in God's eyes, we usually acknowledge varying levels of severity in the human realm. If someone says

something unkind to me, my recognition of God's gracious forgiveness should naturally lead me to be quick to forgive. But isn't a situation of violent, predatory victimization of a child something different?

The call to quick forgiveness can minimize the weight of an offense. To say to a victim "God forgave you, so you must immediately forgive" is a form of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." Furthermore, pressured forgiveness isn't really forgiveness. Genuine forgiveness is freely given and sometimes requires the Spirit's patient work along a journey of healing. It is also important to recognize that forgiveness doesn't automatically absolve the one forgiven of culpability and consequences for the harm they caused, even if they are sorry.

If a victim is eventually nudged and empowered by the Spirit to forgive their perpetrator, let us give thanks. If that journey isn't straightforward or the destination is complex, let us extend prayerful compassion rather than judgment. And let us always remember that forgiveness does not always have to involve reconciliation. One can forgive while remaining unable to enter into renewed relationship with the one forgiven, especially if the offender has not repented. And sometimes the breach of trust and resulting trauma are simply too much.

Just as our sanctification is never complete on this side of God's kingdom, so also our journeys of forgiveness may be only partial. What they look like when fulfilled in the kingdom we do not yet know.

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



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

# 'Be Kind, Love Big': A Young Girl's Family Shares Friendship in Her Name

## NEWS

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Photos by Greg Chandler

**Volunteers with Be A Ruby share coffee, water, and a meal in Grand Rapids, Mich.**

Tables draped in bright pink tablecloths line the sidewalk of South Division Avenue in Grand Rapids, Mich., holding hot cups of coffee, bottles of water, hot dogs, and containers of chili. It's a "Feed Your Neighbor" event, the main outreach of Be A Ruby, a nonprofit organization started by Harry and Miranda Rissley in memory of their daughter, Ruby.

Joined by family members and volunteers from their church, Faith Community Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich., the Rissleys feed about 125 people who are homeless one Saturday every month.

Ruby Rissley was 7 years old when she was struck and killed by a car while on her

way home from school in February 2021. Nine months later, her parents launched Be A Ruby, wanting to do something good in Ruby's name alongside her three brothers: Harry IV, Leo, and Finn.

"When we were first deciding what we could do to help the community, this came to mind," Harry Rissley said. "We threw something together one month, and we've been going ever since."

The organization's slogan is "Be Kind, Love Big." Harry Rissley says that was very much Ruby's personality. He says everyone to her was a friend.

"She always wanted to do things for people. Community outreach—that's what she did," Rissley said.

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## Noteworthy

In addition to the monthly meals for those who are homeless, Be A Ruby provides other assistance to people facing challenging situations. It provides family dinners during the holidays and offers help with home repairs.

“If something in the house breaks—(air conditioning), the heater—we try to get



**Harry Rissley (right) talks with a neighbor at a “Feed Your Neighbor” event in Grand Rapids, Mich.**

somebody that’s in that trade to help out with their time, and we’ll help with some parts,” Harry Rissley said.

Roger Groenboom, pastor of Faith Community CRC, said the church’s deacons and the congregation have contributed offerings and hosted clothing drives and an auction in support of the neighborhood outreaches. Grace Bible Fellowship in Jenison, Mich., is another contributing church.

“Ruby was a joyful, kind, smiling little girl, always wanting to help others,” Groenboom said.

—Greg Chandler



Photo from senateidems.com/brinks

### Senator Winnie Brinks

legislature’s upper chamber and began her leadership duties in January. She was elected to the Senate four years ago after serving in the Michigan House of Representatives for six years. In the process, she became the first woman legislator to represent Grand Rapids in the Senate in more than a century.

“It’s just really gratifying for me to be able to be in the position to make a difference in my constituents’ lives, and now, as (majority) leader, in the lives of people across the state,” said Brinks, who attends Sherman Street CRC in Grand Rapids.

Brinks recently supported legislation opposed by the Michigan Association of Nonpublic Schools and the Michigan Catholic Conference with concerns it goes against religious freedom protections in the U.S. Constitution. The bill expands Michigan’s civil rights protections to include sexual orientation and gender identity. Brinks says she sees her role is making sure every person in society is valued.

“For me, extending those protections in things like housing and employment and public services, ... (even) something as simple as eating in a restaurant, to make sure we are treating everybody fairly and without judgment is something that’s a high priority for me as a public servant.”

**Winnie Brinks, the first woman to be named majority leader in the Michigan State Senate,** is a member of the Christian Reformed Church.

Brinks, 55, is a Democrat representing the city of Grand Rapids in the Michigan

**The Manhattan (Mont.) Christian High School boys’ basketball team achieved its second consecutive Class C State Championship** win March 11, defeating Big Sandy (Mont.) High School at First Interstate Arena in Billings, Mont.

Layne Glaus, the school’s athletic director, and assistant coaches Ryan Ruffato and Tyler DeVries coached the Eagles to a 26-1 season.

Glaus said he’s grateful for the boys’ success but more thankful for the growth in faith he witnessed in the players as they focused on a “culture of J.O.Y.—putting Jesus first, others second, and yourself last.” Glaus said he was glad for “great senior leaders who worked hard to keep the focus there.”

A past assistant coach said the team’s post-game prayer circle at center court was a highlight of every game. Inviting team members from the public schools they play against to join in the circle “has become a meaningful and God-glorifying time,” Kendal Walhof said.



Photo by Dan Chesnet (Belgrade News)

**The Manhattan Christian School Eagles (in white) stand with their championship game opponents, the Big Sandy Pioneers (in purple), in a prayer circle at center court.**

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)

## Classis Watch: Winter/Spring 2023

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, a regional assembly where they take actions together guided by articles of Church Order. The following are actions taken by classes since November 2022.

Candidates **welcomed into ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Arts. 6 and 10): Kent Sanders, Kristy Bootsma, Klaas Walhout, Ryan Farrell, Paul Park, Stewart DeJong, and Tricia Bosma.

Ministers welcomed into ministry **from other denominations** (Art. 8): Revs. Jordan Hall, Joshua Lee, and Jason Truell.

Ministers **loaned** (Art. 13-c): Revs. Mitch Sheahan to the Bridge Church in Portage, Mich.; Paul Park to Korean Church of North Denver, Colo.; Mark van Stee to the International Protestant Church of Zurich, Switzerland. **Loans extended:** Revs. KyungRyul Lee to the Grace Valley Presbyterian Church in San Jose, Calif., and Andrew Chun and Daniel Hwang to the Korean Christian Church of Denver, Colo.

**Ministers released from a congregation** (Art. 17-a): Revs. James Hildebrandt from the now-closed Reformed Church in America congregation of River Rock Church in Sheboygan, Wisc.; Adam Stout from Faith CRC in New Brighton, Minn.; Peter Oh from the San Jose New Hope CRC in Santa Clara, Calif.; Allan Kirkpatrick from Maranatha CRC in Calgary, Alta.; Katherine Hirschberg from Monroe Community Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.; Phil Leo from Barnabas Foundation (called by Pullman CRC in Chicago, Ill.); Jeff Kroondyk from Cadillac (Mich.) CRC; Seongjun Kim from Ames (Iowa) Korean CRC; and Lee Khang from Lao CRC in Holland, Mich.

Hildebrandt, Stout, Oh, and Revs. Josh Van Til, Ed Gerber, and Nick Baas are **eligible for call**.

### Leaving Ministry in the CRC

*Classes may end a pastor's ordained ministry status guided by Church Order articles*

*14 and 17 and indicating a designation reflecting the manner and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including resignation from office.*

Christopher Lee, Chris Allen, Jonathan Fischer, Mark Hilbelink, and Katrina Olson were **honorably released**.

Dominic Palacios was **released**.

Cory Van Sloten was **deposed** (Art. 82).

Dan Gregory was **released** (Art. 17-c).

**Ministers retiring** (Art. 18): Revs. Derek Van Dalen, Matthew Le, Jahng Soo Jeong (effective Dec. 12, 2021), Gary DeVries, Kent Van Til, Calvin Hoogendoorn (effective April 30), Harry Zantingh (effective June 30), Andrew Vander Leek (effective July 15), Jim Busscher (effective Aug. 16), Rick Nanninga (effective Sept. 3).

### Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors** (Art. 23): Edwin Dalupan and Fred Kim (Hudson), Aleke Dekker (Toronto), Steven Perry (Lake Erie), Russell Kent (North Cascades), Emily Hull (Thornapple Valley), Sandi Nemecek (Rocky Mountain), Diana Gaggero (Rocky Mountain), Wilmer Lopez and Helen Lopez (Rocky Mountain), Geronimo Morales (Northern Illinois), Diego Flores (Northern Illinois), Eli Munoz (Southeast U.S.), Cooper Wyatt (Southeast U.S.), and Kyle Beckrich (Art. 24-a, Illiana).

Byran Choyce (Classis Grand Rapids East) was **released in the status of one dismissed**.

**Commissioned pastor emeritus status** (Art. 24-e) was granted to Anne Vander Hoek (Alberta North), Clay Warren (Pacific Northwest, effective May 31), and Bob Grussing (Grand Rapids South, effective Sept. 1).

### New Ministries and Ministry Changes

*An emerging (unorganized) church does not have its own council and is under the care*

*of the council of a neighboring CRC. An organized church has its own council (Art. 38).*

The following congregations **disbanded** or dissolved: Family of Faith Church in Kennewick, Wash.; Cleveland Zion Church in Parma, Ohio; and Bethany CRC in Holland, Mich.

Living Well CRC in El Monte, Calif.; Lord's Love Mission in Hawaiian Gardens, Calif.; Heaven Bound Ministry in Cerritos, Calif.; Union with Christ Church in Palo Alto, Calif.; New Joy CRC in Fontana, Calif.; and The Journey CRC in Kitchener, Ont., all **previously designated as emerging, are no longer meeting or are no longer affiliated with the CRCNA**.

The emerging congregation of Sky City CRC in Rosemead, Calif., **merged** with established church Chinese CRC in Monterey Park, Calif. The merged congregation, called Sky City CRC, is **organized**.

Hope Community Church in Lowell, Ind., and Sunrise Community Church in Austin, Texas, **disaffiliated** from the CRC.

Life Church of Yakima, Wash., and Happy Church in Los Angeles, Calif., **organized**.

### Synod

*Synod 2023, the CRC's broadest assembly, is scheduled for June 9-15 at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. Several classes are sending requests or communications.*

To encourage churches to include prayers of lament in worship services, **Classis Quinte requests a change to Church Order Art. 61**: "The public prayers in the worship service shall include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, *lament*, and intercession."

**Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan requests a revision to two articles in the Belgic Confession, replacing the words "the Anabaptists" with "those."** "While the errors mentioned (in these articles) were specific to the Anabaptists at the time the Confession was written,

these errors are no longer specific only to the Anabaptists," the request says.

Many communications relate to Synod 2022's decisions around human sexuality and to confessional-difficulty gravamen—a tool described in Church Order Art. 5 to allow ordained officebearers to express a concern or question about a point in one of the church's confessions.

**Classes Grand Rapids East, Ontario Southwest, Holland, Toronto, Lake Erie, and Rocky Mountain sent requests about Synod 2022's interpretation of "unchastity" in Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 and its confessional status, asking synod to declare it instead to be "a reasonable interpretation of 'unchastity'" (Grand Rapids East) or having "the weight of synodical authority" (Rocky Mountain) but not bearing confessional status.**

**Classis Eastern Canada requests Synod 2023 "to declare that a classis of the CRCNA, in response to local needs and circumstances, may declare that (Synod 2022's definition of "unchastity") be considered inoperative."**

**Classis Grand Rapids East is requesting that synod "prevent and reduce the harming of LGBTQ+ persons" by calling "all churches of the CRCNA to love their LGBTQ+ members and neighbors by protecting them from unloving and hateful speech as well as violent actions."**

**Classes Illiana, Northcentral Iowa, Grandville, Central Plains, and Georgetown are sending requests to clarify the use of confessional-difficulty gravamina and that they not be accepted "when one has settled convictions or objections to our confessions" (Illiana). Illiana requests that those who "cannot personally agree with our confessional beliefs" should request a release from ministry or position. Central Plains requests several actions to ensure that members of the CRCNA's agencies, ministries, boards, broader assemblies, and other entities**



**At the January meeting of Classis Lake Superior, stated clerk Henry Gunnink (right) presented a thank-you to Wayne Tobak, who served as classis treasurer for 43 years.**

"affirm, without reservation, all the doctrines and beliefs of the CRCNA."

**Classis North Cascades suggests synod "establish a one-year timeframe for discipling" officebearers and others (faculty and staff members within CRC churches, institutions, and agencies) who have filed a confessional-difficulty gravamen in hopes of "bring(ing) them back to a faithful and consistent confession." Should difficulty with synod's decisions persist at the end of that year, North Cascades suggests the individual must file a request to revise the confessions, which will be heard by synod, or end their service to the church.**

**Classis Huron requests a reaffirmation of the CRC's "commitments to manage disagreements within our congregations, and amongst churches, with love, charity, and grace, and ensure that all who seek to follow Christ are afforded a respectful place to honestly share their views and listen to those of others."**

**Classis Niagara requests that synod refrain from reading notes or communications from the credentials of delegates to synod that protest the seating of women delegates.**

**Classis Zeeland requests synod "make a definitive statement on the practice of assisted suicide in all of its forms."**

**Zeeland also asks for a study committee "with the goal of clarifying the relationship between the council, classis, and synod," taking "particular note of the authority of the church and its various assemblies in light of the issue of discipline and excommunication on the local level, and church discipline and disaffiliation at the classical and synodical level." Even without such a study, Zeeland is asking Synod 2023 to enact discipline on a narrower assembly by requesting a dissolution of Classis Grand Rapids East, which has withheld action on the instructions of Synod 2022, and a redistricting of its member congregations.**

**Classes Northcentral Iowa, Zeeland, Lakota, and Lake Superior have responses to Synod 2023 about a proposed Code of Conduct presented at Synod 2022 and returned to the churches for feedback. They request that synod not encourage the use of the Code of Conduct, Lakota says "the vague and extra-biblical terminology in the Code of Conduct ... lacks the Scriptural context ... (and) is thus open to broad and potentially abusive interpretation," and "mandating the use of the Code of Conduct for unordained ministry leaders and employees in classes and in local churches establishes a new and unhealthy precedent." Northcentral Iowa calls for "the practice of discipline to be revitalized in the church" as a measure to prevent abuses. Lake Superior proposes a re-write with "greater Scriptural support."**

**Classis Holland appeals to synod with a communication "in pursuit of scriptural and confessional unity" on matters related to human sexuality.**

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

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## Michigan Church Offers Language Learners Practice Time With Native Speakers

At Lee Street Christian Reformed Church, situated in a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood in Wyoming, Mich., church members and neighbors of the congregation are taking part in a crossover language learning program.

For one hour on Thursday nights, English speakers learn Spanish, and for another hour Spanish speakers learn English. In between is a 30-minute crossover period where participants get to practice what they've learned.

"We put people at tables. We mix them up so that English speakers are talking in Spanish to the Spanish speakers, and then the Spanish speakers (are) talking in English to the English speakers," said Joel Van Dyke, one of the pastors at Lee Street. "It creates relationships around tables where each is learning the language of the other. Each (participant) is able to share their heart language with the other."

Lee Street's neighborhood has a large immigrant population, primarily from Central America. Almost 90 percent of the students at the high school one block from the church are Hispanic, said Van Dyke, who once led a ministry in Guatemala that was connected to Resonate Global Mission.

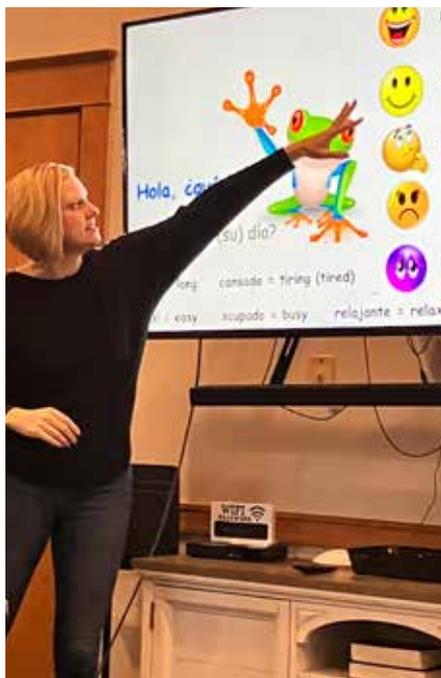


Photo by Greg Chandler

### **Amanda Cisneros teaches Spanish and English classes at Lee Street Christian Reformed Church.**

A company called EdConnect runs the language classes at Lee Street. Its founder, Amanda Cisneros, taught Spanish for 17 years at Holland (Mich.) Christian High School. She had been looking for a space to offer her classes after a previous site was no longer available. Some members of Lee Street had been learning Spanish from Cisneros and suggested their church building.

The crossover classes fit with Lee Street's mission to be fully integrated with its community. Van Dyke said the church uses the phrase "building bridges to otherness" to express its intent of connecting with its neighbors.

"We want to (see) Latino families and North American families who arrive with different perspectives hanging out together, being in fellowship, (and) building authentic friendships," Van Dyke said. "We want a church that clearly represents the diversity and the beauty of the diversity within our neighborhood."

Brenda Addie, who became a member at Lee Street about a year and a half ago after the church she had been attending closed, said she enjoys the Spanish classes.

"I'm wanting to learn Spanish so I can interact with Spanish speakers in our congregation," Addie said. "I also run the PowerPoint (during Sunday worship services). A lot of times we have both languages up on the screen, but it's helpful to know the Spanish. I can read it better than I can converse in it."

About 20 people for whom English is their primary language are taking the Spanish classes, and about 15 people for whom Spanish is their first language are learning English, Cisneros said.

"It's been really neat to see the English speakers and the Spanish speakers put themselves out there and practice the opposite language together," Cisneros said. "That can be really hard or intimidating for people, but then a lot of them say it's their favorite part of the class."

The church began offering the eight-week courses last fall. Those who complete the first level can continue with more advanced instruction. Cisneros said they offered a new session in April.

There is a fee for the classes, but the church offers scholarships for those who might otherwise be unable to pay for them, Van Dyke said.

—Greg Chandler

## CRC Ministry Cares for MSU Students After Campus Shooting



**Some Campus Edge students enjoy a game night at Horrocks Farm Market in Lansing, Mich.**

When Campus Edge Fellowship at Michigan State University hosted its weekly Bible study Feb. 13—the night of a campus shooting that killed three students—locked-out graduate students sheltered at the fellowship house.

Campus Edge is an outreach to graduate students whose fellowship house lies on the eastern edge of MSU's East Lansing, Mich., campus. As the group wrapped up that Monday evening, students were not allowed to return to the locked-down campus, so the ministry cared for them until early Tuesday morning.

Campus Edge Pastor Dara Nykamp said that in the days following that tragic and intense night, the ministry offered special types of support to students and staff. On Spartan Sunday, as students returned to the reopened campus, the group hosted a table where they shared snacks and hugs and prayed with people who stopped by. When the ministry's supplies were depleted, Nykamp said more items were providentially provided by caring strangers. The graduate students to whom Campus Edge ministers also handed out gift cards at the law school, to student interns at the veterinary clinic, and around campus at other graduate hangouts. "It helped them a great deal to be a part of helping heal the campus," Nykamp said.

Three students died and five were critically wounded in the shooting; the suspected assailant was later found off campus and

reportedly died from a self-inflicted gunshot when approached by police.

Nykamp said she sees more of a hunger for connection and community on campus in the weeks since the shooting. It seems to have "caused a lot of folks to reassess," she said, noting that many more students have been reaching out to Campus Edge and other campus ministries. While still sorting through their own emotions and trauma, some of the ministry's graduate students who are teaching assistants are finding opportunities to support their undergraduate students. Nykamp prays that the new receptivity will continue.

The Campus Edge Fellowship house is open for conversation, study space, and use of its library. The ministry also offers support and community through meals, bonfires, game nights, and hikes. It pursues conversations on faith and different faith perspectives through Bible studies, Pub Theology meetups, and Food and Focus days.

Campus Edge has ministered to MSU students for 16 years. Its partners in ministry include the nearby River Terrace Christian Reformed Church, Resonate Global Mission, Campus Ministry Association, and Classis Lake Erie (a regional group of Christian Reformed congregations).

—Anita Ensing Beem

### IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Neville Lawson Koch*

1944-2023

In August 2020, Pastor Neville Koch was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia, a disease he faced with grace and confident hope. He died Feb. 15 at age 78. At Neville's memorial service, a ministry colleague described him as "the personification of goodness." Others described him as humble, sincere, and having a gentle and discerning spirit.

Born in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Neville graduated from Colombo's Wesley College and studied at the Dutch Reformed Church Seminary in Sri Lanka. Ordained in 1969, he pastored two Dutch Reformed churches in Colombo. In 1977 he moved with his wife and baby to study at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Mich. After graduation in 1978 they returned to Sri Lanka to serve Dutch Reformed churches for the next 18 years.

In 1996, the family immigrated to San Diego, Calif., where Neville worked in a manufacturing job until accepting a call in 1997 from San Diego Christian Reformed Church, where he remained until he retired in 2009. He later served as chaplain at Avalon Hospice and Interim HealthCare. His book, *The Light Shines Through*, written for those facing discouragement and burnout, was published in 2019.

Neville is survived by Lorraine, his wife of 50 years; two children; a son-in-law; and one granddaughter.

—Janet A. Greidanus

## Churches in Canada Waiting for Sponsored Refugees' Arrival

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates over 103 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced as of mid-2022, with 32.5 million of those being classified as refugees. In November, Canada announced its intent to see 27,505 refugees settled as part of private sponsorships in Canada in 2023. As in the past, many of those sponsorships are through church congregations, but hopeful sponsors are seeing significant delays in processing applications for refugee claimants in Canada.

Dena Nicolai, the refugee sponsorship and resettlement program associate with World Renew in British Columbia, sees wait times of two to three years from when sponsors submit an application. "The lengthy period of time between when a refugee sponsorship application is submitted to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and when the sponsored refugees arrive in Canada remains a continual challenge for both sponsors and, even more so, for refugees overseas awaiting resettlement in safety," she said.

Bonnie Kissack, a member of the core refugee team at River Park Christian Reformed Church in Calgary, Alta., said the team feels the pressure these delays have caused. River Park currently has four refugee applications (for three individuals and one family) on file with IRCC that have been approved for over two



**River Park Christian Reformed Church hosted a chili cook-off Feb. 5 to raise money for its refugee fund.**

years. By the end of April, three of the applications will have been approved for three years. While the team waits, Kissack said, it is supporting these claimants financially and emotionally as they live in refugee camps and wait for word on their applications.

The team sees the support as necessary even if the people they are waiting for are not yet in Canada. Because River Park "committed to sponsoring this family, it was felt that in order for them to experience optimal success in Canada, education was a necessity for the school-aged children. Being out of school for two to three years was not an option," Kissack said. Costs of support—including school tuition, food, and medical care—come to more than \$13,000 per year for just one family waiting for their approved application to move forward, the River Park team

said. Funds to cover these expenses are contributed by River Park members.

In Canada, World Renew is a sponsorship agreement holder—an organization given the opportunity to partner with IRCC and "hold" the agreements of individual sponsors, such as River Park CRC. World Renew is working with other sponsorship agreement holders and other groups interested in refugee justice (such as the CRCNA Centre for Public Dialogue and Citizens for Public Justice) to push the government for more movement on these files and to reduce the wait times to where they were before COVID-19—about 12 months.

"The government sets targets each year for the number of refugees it hopes to have resettled here, and church sponsorship groups are eager to be part of helping the government with that goal as part of our call to do justice, love mercy, and welcome in the name of Jesus," Nicolai said. "But (those sponsorship groups) cannot do that without the government's assistance."

—Dan Veeneman

# Increase in Religion-targeted Crimes in Canada Spurs Think Tank to 'Face Down Religious Hate'

A brief released March 16 by Ottawa-based Christian think tank Cardus presents a serious increase in police-reported incidents of hate crimes targeting religious communities, particularly those who are Jewish and Muslim, in Canada. This is "occurring against a backdrop of increasingly negative public attitudes toward the contributions of religion and faith communities to Canada," the brief says.

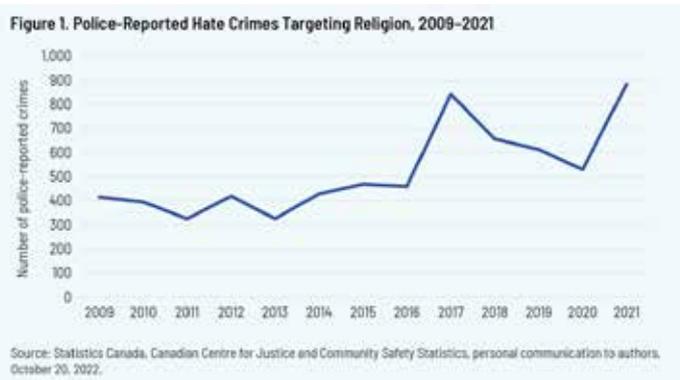
Having collaborated with the Angus Reid Institute over the past five years to study Canadians' religious practices and their views toward other faiths and atheism, Cardus found that "while the proportion of Canadians who say that the overall contribution of religion and faith communities is a mix of good and bad has remained steady since 2017 at just under 50%, those who say that the bad outweighs the good has increased from 14% to 22%."

"Negative attitudes about the contributions of people of faith and religion are more concentrated among Canadians who are themselves non-religious," the brief says. "Among respondents who are non-religious, almost half (46%) believe that faith communities' contributions to Canada and Canadian society are mostly negative. In contrast, Canadians who identify with a religion are overall more likely to see the presence of all religions in public life, not just their own religion, as benefiting the country as a whole."

The views of Canadians presented in the survey are categorized along a "Spectrum of Spirituality," developed by Cardus and Angus Reid to better capture Canadians' religious identities and their spiritual lives more than traditional labels—such as

"Protestant"—alone. "Non-religious" is one of four categories determined by respondents' answers to eight questions probing their belief and practice.

Rev. Andrew Bennett, faith communities program director at Cardus, and Johanna Lewis, a public policy researcher, co-authored the brief, which takes a hopeful view amid the reported negative perceptions. "As fellow Canadians, we can and will disagree in important ways. Yet when we cultivate mutual understanding, we will



**In 2021, hate crimes targeting religious communities reached their highest point since 2009, with almost 900 such crimes reported by police.**

work together as neighbors to strengthen our common life and flourish together," they conclude.

They encourage "public, business, and civil-society leaders" to deliberately cultivate and model "understanding and appreciation of different ways of life in a pluralist, diverse society such as Canada." Giving examples of policies to confront religious discrimination in the workplace and a tone of religious inclusion to be set by public figures, the co-authors urge "leaders and policymakers to strive to ensure that the gift of Canada's religious diversity is preserved for generations to come."

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Julius Vigh Jr.*

1934-2022

Four days before he died Nov. 30, 2022, Julius Vigh, 88, made his last trip out of the house for Thanksgiving dinner. "One memory I will cherish forever from that night," said one of his children, "is after my brother prayed, my dad held his hand up and said in a strong voice, 'Wait. Before we eat, let's sing "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow."'"

Born in Budapest, Hungary, Julius and his family immigrated to the United States in 1950. From then on he expressed thankfulness to God for the life he was able to live in the U.S.

Julius served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1953-56. He then studied at Calvin College (now University) and Calvin Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1964, pastoring Bethel Christian Reformed Church, Redlands, Calif.; Fresno (Calif.) CRC; Portland (Mich.) CRC; and Dildine Community Church, Ionia, Mich., which became New Life CRC after a merger.

After retiring in 1991, Julius, who could fix almost anything, worked as a handyman. He loved camping with family in the mountains, especially in Yosemite National Park, and enjoyed playing card and board games.

Julius is survived by Zita, his beloved wife of 64 years; five children and their spouses; 19 grandchildren; and 24 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus



# Creating Space for Women in Leadership

By Naomi Bula, World Renew

**P**atience works with the Community Health Committee in her village of Nuru, Kenya, providing training and support to help improve maternal and child health. She felt dismayed when participants in the program, time and time again, asked, “We hear and understand your message about the importance of good nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation, but how can we achieve it without water?”

Then another development agency began a water project nearby. Recognizing that this could be the answer to the women’s question, Patience encouraged others in Nuru to connect to the project. She stressed the benefits: women would not have to walk long distances to fetch water, access to clean drinking water would help reduce incidents of waterborne illnesses, and families could increase their crop productivity.

The community was sold on Patience’s idea. They sought the technical expertise they needed and gathered contributions to cover the cost of having water piped directly to their homes. So far, 30 households in Nuru have piped water. For these families, the drought currently hitting the region is not affecting their ability to grow bountiful gardens and protect their health. Patience stepped forward in bold leadership, helping to align generosity, dedication, and partnership for families in Nuru to flourish.



Patience provides training and support to improve maternal and child health in her community of Nuru, Kenya.

### Ripple Effects

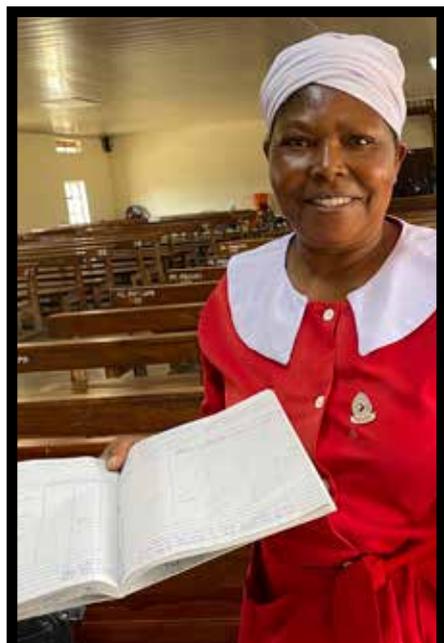
Studies have shown that when women have access to education and employment opportunities, they are more likely to invest in the well-being of their families, including their children’s education and health. This has a ripple effect on society as a whole as educated and healthy children are more likely to grow up to be productive and engaged citizens.

Astrid’s story is another example of this. Astrid lives in Zambia’s capital city of Lusaka in a settlement where many homes were built without proper infrastructure. Substandard sanitation services and high flooding rates bring risks of cholera outbreaks each rainy season. Most of Astrid’s peers are daily wage earners, earning just enough to get by.

That was Astrid’s story as well, but then she joined a savings group for women that is hosted through a local church.

Astrid stepped into a volunteer leadership role as the group’s bookkeeper. “We were struggling to send our children to school or even buy soap,” she said. “But participating in the group has taught us to increase our capability to help our children, to clothe them, to feed them, and to send them to school.”

Not only that, but the group decided to try raising chickens together. Astrid created a chicken shed in her yard for the collaboration. She shared her resources and has led the group to success. “The chickens have grown, and we’ve sold them, and some are even laying eggs,” she reported, “so we’re very thankful.”



Astrid might not think of herself as a woman in leadership, but her initiative helped foster success for a savings group in Lusaka, Zambia.



Astrid proudly displays eggs gathered in the chicken shed in her yard. Raising chickens has helped her savings group send their children to school.

Astrid might not think of herself as a woman in leadership, but her initiative has helped propel her savings group to success. When women are empowered, everyone benefits. They are better able to fulfill their God-given potential and contribute to the flourishing of their families and communities.

### Rising Up

“It’s very important for women to be in leadership positions because if decisions have been made that are going to impact your life, or how you do business, or how you exist, you should have a voice in these decisions,” said Kagwiria Muturia, senior adviser of justice, rights, and gender equity for World Renew. “This has not been the case. If a country has a culture where women don’t have a place, their role is to be quiet. I don’t think this is primarily a Global South

challenge because even if you look at the statistics of the developed world in terms of how many women have made it to positions of political leadership, only 27 countries in the world have women leaders. That’s just 13%.”

World Renew Co-director Carol Bremer-Bennett agrees. “Females make up the majority of the people who work in global development—it’s as high as 70%—yet less than 20% of the CEO and the top leadership positions are held by women,” she said.

Representation matters both for decision-making processes and for effecting change for the next generation. “I hope that as I work in this field, I’m empowering and helping to raise up new leaders who will see that this is a possibility,” Bremer-Bennett added.

There are some situations where building leadership capacity among women can’t be the first step. “It might be too ambitious to walk into the community and say, ‘Oh, we don’t have women in leadership here,’” Muturia said.

“They need something to eat first. They need access to health care.”

“I see time and time again as I travel the world and talk to Indigenous leaders and communities that the women are the ones who really can be the first to take a risk,” Bremer-Bennett said. “Sometimes it just takes a person to be willing to take that risk.”

Esmeralda helped to promote a seed bank project in her community in Jirón Reyes, Nicaragua. “It has grown bit by bit,” she explained. “We started off with just a few pounds of seeds, but now we have several large silos.”

In this community where extended droughts impact harvests, the ability to save local seeds over multiple seasons is key to surviving crop loss. “This is security for us, and we hope this can continue to grow, to help other people



Carol Bremer-Bennett, World Renew-U.S. director, believes that representation of women in leadership matters for decision making as well as for creating change for the next generation.



Esmeralda helped promote a seed bank project in her community of Jirón Reyes, Nicaragua.

who need it," Esmeralda said.

Esmeralda had to make her voice heard to make the seed bank project happen, and in doing so she inspired men and women in her community—including her husband, Gerardo.

"I'm not the founder of the seed bank," Gerardo said. "The person who started

that was my wife. It started through a women's savings group, and out of that money bank came the seed bank. My wife told me to get involved, so I got involved."

#### **Making Change From Grassroots to Governance**

While human welfare and economic health are the primary aims of World Renew's community programs, there's always attention paid to gender justice too. "A lot of our program facilitators are trying to ask the questions: Where are women in leadership within the community? How many men and how many women do we have? What's their participation?"

Muturia said. "Lots of the change that happens globally begins at the grassroots level. If we're able to build that agency for our community partners and the communities that they work with and build that critical mass of people who see the value of having women in leadership, then the women themselves create the space to engage."



Kagwiria Muturia is the senior adviser of justice, rights, and gender equity for World Renew.

"There's a concept of making space for women, but we're already there," Bremer-Bennett added. "I believe it's a matter of being fully present in those spaces and raising our voices. I do see it a bit more as taking the space, taking the opportunity, and then making sure that we're supporting each other."

Muturia agreed: "As women, we need to encourage women to create that space for themselves and own the space and use the space to further the needs of the women themselves, but also the other women who are waiting to get inspired by them."

There's a role for everyone in building gender justice. Most women know what it's like to escape notice, and Bremer-Bennett is no exception.

"It happens in meetings all the time where female voices can say something, and it's not until a male voice says it that it becomes a good idea, or true, or something to act on. So you do have to be aware," she said. "There are so many male allies out there that I've encountered who will make sure that those things get corrected. They have become mentors to me, because I see how they lead and how they honor female leadership." 

#### **Suggested Additional Reading**

*Creating Cultures of Belonging: Cultivating Organizations Where Women and Men Thrive*, by Beth Birmingham and Eeva Sallinen Simard

Learn more about World Renew's work:

U.S.: [worldrenew.net/gender-justice](http://worldrenew.net/gender-justice)

Canada: [worldrenew.ca/gender-justice](http://worldrenew.ca/gender-justice)

# The Lifelong Pursuit of Curiosity

**CURIOSITY FUELS** the human heart.

It's what drives the future exploration of Mars and led to the moon landing. It inspires people to climb mountains and dive into the depths of the sea.

From children to the most aged among us, many people consider themselves inquisitive. Others say they're lifelong learners. Curiosity promotes learning at any age and prompts personal growth and heart change.

"I hope people remember that it's easy to learn," said Ken Jennings, co-host of *Jeopardy!* "You could be learning something new almost every hour of the day, and it's a shame not to. That's what builds us as people."

The popular game show host spoke to a crowd of participants earlier this year at Calvin University's January Series, a free 15-day series of lectures on a variety of subjects. This year's topics included staying curious, racial healing, disability awareness, and climate change from a Christian perspective. For more than 30 years January Series lectures have inspired cultural renewal and shaped participants into better global citizens in God's world. And listening to viewpoints sometimes different from their own spurs creative thinking, critical discernment, and heightened curiosity among attendees.

Sylvia Day is in her late 80s. She strove to attend as many of the January Series lectures as possible over the past 10 years, purchasing speaker books as gifts and watching videos of certain talks multiple times. When she finds a talk that piques her curiosity, she shares it with her friends so they can discuss it later, thus continuing the learning.



Both the January Series and the Calvin Academy for Lifelong Learning offer lifelong learning opportunities to students of any age. The CALL program allows participants to sign up for six-week classes on a variety of subjects, such as the art of Indigenous people, fashion theology, or the writer Virginia Woolf. The program also offers weekly clubs and numerous travel opportunities around the country and the world.

When we have curious minds, there is no age cap on learning and discovering. Whether you're young or old, curiosity has notable benefits, including memory boosts, idea linking, and heightened engagement. Recent research even shows that curiosity about a subject makes facts more deeply encoded and more accessible when needed later on.

Calvin University prioritizes curiosity among its students, alumni, faculty, and staff, and students are prepared for a lifetime of learning and being Christ's agents of renewal in this world.

"The goal of a Calvin education, whether as a young adult, middle-aged person, or senior citizen, is to teach students how to think, not what to think," said January Series director

Michael Wildschut. "The fun of the lifelong learner is that students come to campus and approach the world with an open mind. They try on ideas they haven't considered, balancing their convictions and curiosity in a way that encourages them to consider another perspective or viewpoint. The curious student is willing to hear things he or she may have not already been listening for."

The National Institute on Aging suggests that keeping one's mind engaged through learning new skills and hobbies actually improves cognitive health, especially among older adults. "People who engage in personally meaningful and productive activities with others tend to live longer, boost their mood, and have a sense of purpose," the NIA blog says.

"Like children discovering something new," Wildschut said, "let's resolve to stay inquisitive. Commit to the hard work of asking questions. Most importantly, as Christians let's resolve to explore with curiosity God's creation every day. We can each commit to being lifelong learners at every age and stage of our lives." **B**

—Calvin University staff

## The View From Here

# Completing the Image of God

**THERE IS MUCH** we can learn about God as we contemplate this beautiful and diverse universe God has created. Scripture tells us that the best windows into God's divine being are God's image bearers—and about half of those image bearers in the world today are women.

Genesis 1:27 says, "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (NLT). Women complete the image of God in humanity and immeasurably enrich the church.

Many of Jesus' most faithful disciples were women (Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, etc.) who risked their lives to stay with him during his crucifixion. They were the first ones to witness his resurrection and the first to share this good news with others. In the early church, God-fearing women such as Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia provided leadership and support for the first congregations.

The same has been true in more recent history. As has been true of women throughout much of history, women in the Christian Reformed Church who were denied positions of leadership in established churches courageously found other ways to lead. They often undertook mission work, sometimes at great risk to themselves. In fact, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, there was a movement of young, female missionaries.

One example is Johanna Veenstra. More than 100 years ago, Veenstra voyaged to Nigeria as one of the first Christian Reformed missionaries and helped lay the foundation for the most successful church-planting work our denomination has been a part of. Unfortunately, it took many years before Veenstra was recognized by her

Scripture tells us that the best windows into God's divine being are God's image bearers—and about half of those image bearers are women.

own denomination as a missionary called by God.

Looking at the global church today, we can see similar stories. In Latin America, Africa, South Asia, and other regions, women often play an outsized role in the ministry and mission of churches. Their deep spirituality, passion, consistency, and rootedness in their communities and families anchor their churches in societies and cultures that are often hostile and even closed to the gospel.

What is even more amazing is that many of these women do all of this without the benefit of access to education, employment, and the civil rights that we take for granted. God has truly poured out his Spirit extravagantly on so many Christian women who give selflessly for gospel ministry.

As we think about the Christian Reformed Church today, we give thanks to God for our many sisters

who have faithfully contended for the gospel in Canada, the United States, and around the world. Several of their stories are on the pages in this section.

Whether we consider ourselves egalitarian or complementarian, whether we are men or women ourselves, we all share in gratitude for the women in our midst. We also share in lament that we have too often hindered girls and women from sharing their gifts.

This month I'd like to encourage us all to think about the opportunities we might have to encourage women and girls in our communities. Mentoring can be a powerful tool for faith formation in girls and younger women, helping them to recognize and follow God's call on their lives. Inviting feedback and spiritual insights from girls and young women can also make space for their faith to flourish.

For our churches to truly display the image of God, women and men must worship and work together for God's glory. This is what it means to be the body of Christ in a world where brokenness characterizes the relationships between men and women. May we all live into this more fully. 



Rev. Zachary King is the general secretary of the CRCNA. He is a member of Fuller Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

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

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## After School in Indonesia

**EVERY SCHOOL MORNING** in Central Java, Indonesia, Teresia rides behind her mother on the back of the family's motorcycle. If she's lucky, she'll be able to catch a similar ride from a classmate's parent on the way home, but she usually walks. Teresia's parents don't get home from work for several more hours, and like many teenagers, Teresia admits, she's often used this time after school poorly.

"I was always very easy for my classmates to influence," Teresia said.

Early last year, Teresia found a new after-school activity. As COVID-19 restrictions in Indonesia began to lift, ReFrame Ministries' partners there launched several new discipleship groups. While some of these groups existed before the pandemic, many had disbanded or needed to be re-established.



Teresia recently joined a small group that watches biblical videos and reads devotions from ReFrame's Indonesian ministry partners.

Most of these groups meet in homes, but a leader at Teresia's school decided to start one for young people right at the school. About 25 students got together to watch YouTube videos produced by ReFrame.

"The videos were really useful for my personal journey with Jesus," said Teresia.

With her small group, Teresia discusses the lessons with help from the group's leader. They also discuss daily devotions for teenagers that are also produced by ReFrame.

"Before I joined the group, I really just heard the gospel at church or during school lessons," Teresia said. "But now I have learned how to do daily

devotions, and I've learned how to live according to God's will."

Now, instead of being negatively influenced by her peers, Teresia hopes that some of her friends will accept her invitation to attend the group with her.

"Please pray for Teresia so that she continues to grow in God and can be an example in giving good influence to her peers," said Rev. Arliyanus Larosa, ReFrame's Indonesian ministry leader.

— Brian Clark,  
ReFrame Ministries

## Calvin Theological Seminary Approves Masters in Clinical Counseling

**CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY** will add a Master of Clinical Mental Health Counseling degree program to its academic offerings, with courses beginning in the fall of 2023.

The 60-credit program, approved by the board of trustees in February, will include coursework in religious and theological foundations, clinical counseling, and clinical practice.

"This master's degree is unique in its potential for customization," said program director Danjuma Gibson, Ph.D., an experienced scholar, theologian, and psychotherapist. "From foundational coursework to clinical placement, this curriculum is designed to help students meet their goals and fulfill their callings with excellence."

"Calvin Theological Seminary is pleased to begin our search for the inaugural class of the Master of Clinical Mental Health Counseling program," said President Jul Medenblik. "Here students can expect to discover the depths of God's love for his people and to grow in sharing compassion with fellow humans through best practices in counseling."

Students from around the world are invited to participate through flexible learning formats: residential, fully remote, or hybrid.

The new master's program will help meet the demand for licensed mental health counselors, which is currently robust in the United States and Canada. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that employment for mental health therapists and counselors, as well as for addiction and behavioral counselors, will far outpace the employment average in all other labor categories by 2031.

"This is a situation where the clear and growing needs of the church and society meet the central feature of our mission to equip biblically faithful and contextually effective ministry leaders with the skills needed to provide counseling and mental health services to this hurting world that God still so loves," Medenblik said.

— Annie Mas-Smith,  
Calvin Theological Seminary

# Young Leader Wants the Church to Provide Better Mental Health Support

**WHAT IS THE INTERSECTION** between mental health and faith? Jacqueline Tams, a fourth-year student studying psychology at the University of British Columbia–Okanagan, is passionate about understanding that intersection and exploring how churches can provide better support for people who are struggling.

“Anxiety and depression rates continue to rise, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19,” Tams said. “I believe mental wellness and spiritual health are intrinsically linked together, and the Bible is full of wisdom for Christians struggling with their mental health.”

According to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, in any given year one in five Canadians experiences a mental illness. The National Institute of Mental Health reports the same statistic for the United States.

“I think it definitely hits the university age group the hardest since so many people are moving away and their support system isn’t necessarily there,” Tams said. “That’s such an important role that the church has—not necessarily being worried about taking massive steps of professional counseling, but to take simple steps in forming support and community.”

Recently Tams took it upon herself to provide that support and community for students and young professionals by leading a small group exploring mental health topics. An Emerging Leader grant from Resonate Global Mission helped make it possible.

In partnership with Christian Reformed campus ministries, the Emerging Leaders program equips young adults for ministry, both for right now and in the future, by



Every year, Resonate Global Mission partners with campus ministries to equip young female leaders for ministry. Jacqueline Tams is passionate about discovering how the church can provide better support for people’s mental health.

providing financial support, mentorship, and an opportunity for hands-on ministry experience.

“Jacqueline is ... devout, hardworking, ambitious, and deeply concerned with the mental health of her peers,” said Todd Statham, a Resonate partner campus minister at the University of British Columbia–Okanagan.

As part of the Emerging Leader process, Statham mentored Tams. Reading books and discussing them together, they explored the intersection of faith, psychology, and mental health. Then Tams partnered with a local church

called The House to lead a small group covering various mental health topics.

Students from the university campus and a few young professionals from the community showed up each week. Tams followed God’s lead in the purpose for this group. It became a space where students could not only learn about mental health, but where they could open up and talk about their experiences. Tams leaned into that.

“We had a discussion on where we were all at and the strategies we use, and we kind of just built that community together,” she said.

Tams said she found the experience as an Emerging Leader to be valuable for living out her faith as well as for her future career.

“It was great to be in both roles—being mentored, and then mentoring in a small group role and connecting with people who were younger than me on campus—being that friendly face,” she said.

Tams expects to graduate this spring. She plans to take a gap year and apply to graduate schools to continue her study of psychology.

—Cassie Westrate,  
Resonate Global Mission

## Living Out Our Baptismal Promise

**“DO YOU PROMISE** to love, encourage, and support these brothers and sisters by teaching the gospel of God’s love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving the strong support of God’s family in fellowship, prayer, and service?”

“We do, God helping us.”

When a baby is baptized, their siblings in faith make vows to God and to one another to aid in the child’s faith formation. With God helping us, we promise to teach, lead, pray, and love.

Goshen (N.Y.) Christian Reformed Church is a “loving community church in the Hudson Valley” about an hour and a half north of New York City. This church opened its doors in 1934 and became a worshiping home for those seeking a spiritual and physical community of Christians around them. Goshen CRC sees community as a means of spiritual care and seeks neighborhood engagement. During the week, the building is bustling with multiple Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups, a free health clinic for people who are uninsured, and a special needs nonprofit organization. The congregation has also recently planted a Spanish-speaking church.

On Sundays, Goshen CRC is an active and vibrant community of faith gathered for worship and Word. Years ago it began regularly incorporating youth into its services, using teens’ budding musical talents to help lead worship.



Henry Doller helps facilitate worship at his church by caring for the children of praise team and tech members during weekly rehearsals.

These teams of musicians, now adults, gather to practice at 8:45 Sunday mornings, and their young children come too.

Henry Doller is an elder at Goshen CRC who saw a need, remembered the promises he made at those children’s baptisms, and quietly stepped in to fill the gap. Most weeks Doller shows up to offer childcare while parents rehearse. There is no official program, and until recently most in the church did not know he was doing it. But Doller saw

a concrete way to serve, and he did so faithfully.

“This almost unseen gift is one glimpse of God’s grace,” said Rev. Samuel Sutter, Goshen CRC’s pastor. “Henry is living out his baptismal promises through nurturing the young and equipping parents to participate in meaningful leadership. His actions embody our church’s mission to ‘show God’s love to people by building a diverse community, raise healthy families, and see his glory transform lives.’”

—Katie Roelofs,  
Congregational Ministries

# The Art of Creation

**MANY FAMOUS ARTISTS** and photographers have spent countless hours capturing the beauty of wild landscapes. Whether it is the colors of autumn, white fluffy snow draped over branches or piled on high mountain peaks, the bright colors of wildflowers in fields or forests, or the desert following a storm, the beauty can take your breath away. Wildflowers decorate scenes with a multitude of colors, standing out brightly from green backdrops.

Not only do flowers look pretty, but as with everything in God's creation they were made with purpose. Flowers come in all sorts of shapes and colors and act as a food source for many insects, birds, and all sorts of other

animals. God designed different flowers to come out at different times so there are flowers available throughout the seasons. But that is not all. As their time to be beautiful comes to an end, flowers are transformed into fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds, which continue to decorate the landscape in bright reds, oranges, yellows, and even blues and purples, and act as tasty treats and an important food source for a wide variety of wildlife (and people too).

In Matthew, while talking about how God provides for all of creation, Jesus comments on the beauty of wildflowers: "See how the flowers of the field grow. ... (N)ot even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these" (Matt. 6:28-29). Flowers were created to be beautiful. Our Creator has infused the world with beauty—a beauty that inspires us.

Genesis tells us we are created in the image of God, so it makes sense that because God is creative, we are creative too. Creativity can be shown through art, writing, music, drama, dance, and many other ways that help us celebrate the beauty of God shown through his creation and express the joy and wonder it makes us feel.

## **Dig Deeper**

Read Exodus 35:30-35. God gives many skills to the people he has chosen, but God also gives them the skill of teaching others. What do you think that tells us about what we should do with our talents?

## **Try This!**

Capture the beauty of flowers by taking pictures of as many different flowers as you can find. How many colors did you find? How many shapes?



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

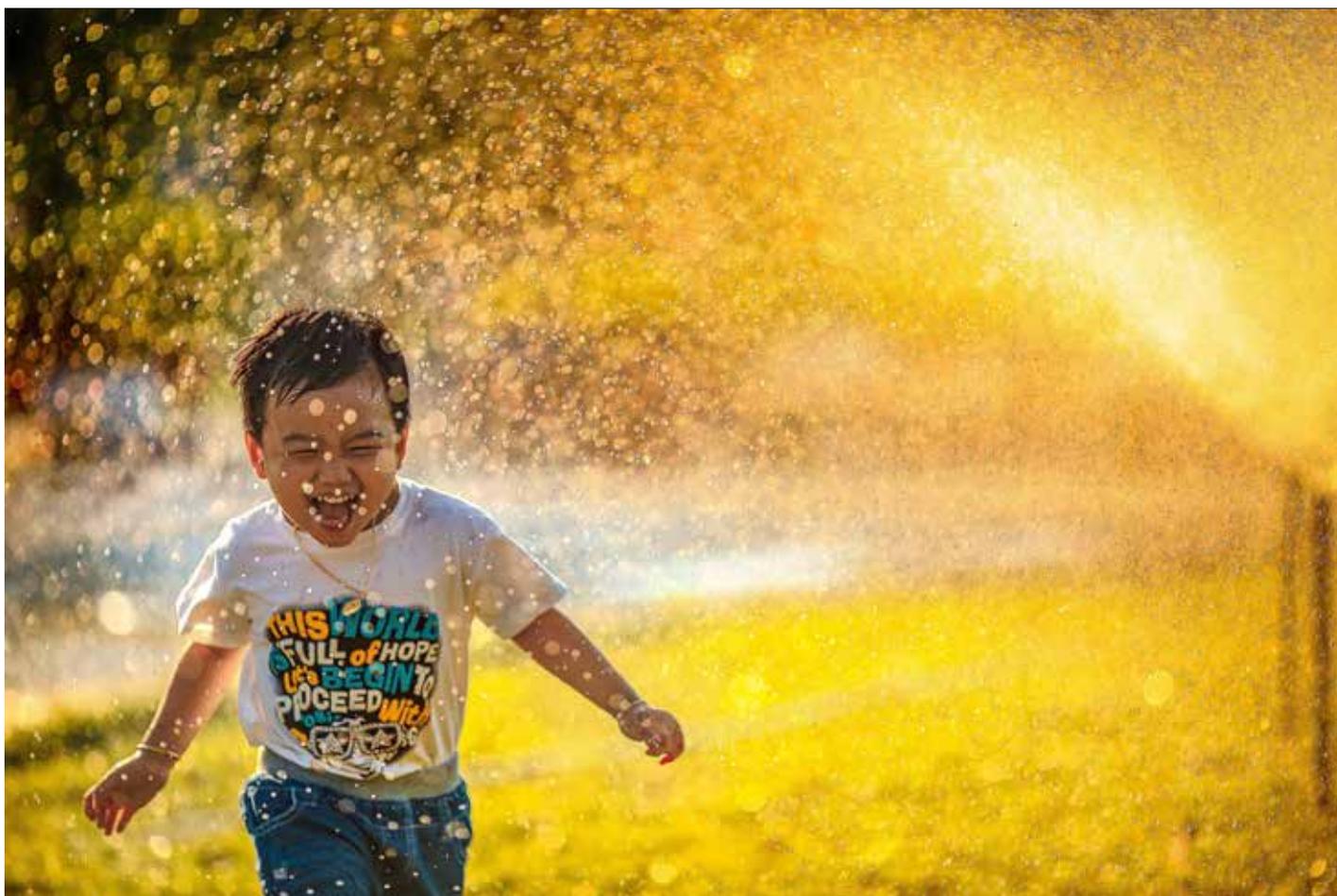


Photo by Mi Pham/Unsplash

# Jesus Came to Bring Joy

By Daniel Denk

*Note: This article is adapted from Denk's book An Invitation to Joy: The Divine Journey to Human Flourishing, published in April 2023.*

**M**y journey with joy began when my oldest daughter was visiting—my Reformed charismatic daughter, my missionary midwife daughter who delivers babies for fun. She is one of the gentlest people I know. As we sat around the breakfast table, just the two of us, she said, “Dad, you seem to have lost some of your joy lately.” It was an understatement. And God gave me the grace to hear it and to say, “OK, tell me more.”

Some of you are no doubt more naturally joyful than I am. I am skeptical

by nature, blessed (and sometimes afflicted) with an analytical mind. True, I am not easily depressed or discouraged, but I am not easily impressed either. And I am not easily pleased. Yet an overriding sense of joy has begun to permeate my life.

We were made for joy, and we are destined for joy. As Frederick Buechner says, “God’s joy is in our blood” (*The Longing for Home*). We have both the capacity for joy and a deep yearning for joy. “I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” So said the angel upon the arrival of Jesus in this world. Jesus clearly came to offer people a joyful, abundant life, both in his earthly ministry and his death. Yet as it was in the first century, so it is today: most people continue to follow their familiar, dreary,

humdrum grind of existence that they mistake for life rather than respond to Jesus’ open invitation to a life of joy. Even so, during each Christmas season I sense a wide-ranging spirit of longing for joy, for something greater just out of reach, that comes from deep within the spirits of so many.

The reason joy seems out of reach is because so many foes are battling against it—worry, fear, doubt, grief, deceit, weariness, and pervasive evil. All of these have the potential to rob us of our joy, and they often succeed. So many people in our culture live with deep regret and defeat rather than hope and contentment and joy.

## What Is Joy?

Joy might be difficult to define, but you know it when you see it—and

you certainly know it when you feel it. Clearly, joy is a feeling, though it is not simply that. Feelings tend to be fleeting. Joy, on the contrary, is a steady disposition about life. We might say that joy is a hopeful and peaceful outlook on life, a deep-seated sense of well-being. Unlike happiness, joy is not dependent on circumstances or chance. We can experience joy even in times of trouble and hardship.

As C.S. Lewis explained in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, you don't find joy by pursuing joy. Joy is a byproduct. Joy is always a surprise. We are always joyful *over* something that we perceive as very good. But if it is a byproduct, a complement to something else, we might ask: What is the product? What is that other thing we need to know or have so that a deep sense of joy will flow over us?

Certainly loving another human being and being loved by someone bring us immense joy. Many people find joy in doing work they love. But, as Lewis found, the greatest and most enduring joy comes from knowing God through Jesus Christ and being a part of his joyful kingdom.

### Joy in the Presence of Suffering

No doubt many of you, if you are like me, are beginning to feel uncomfortable and wary about this narrow focus on joy. You are possibly thinking, "Well, yes, but what about when we are in physical and emotional pain? What about my friend who is chronically depressed?" What about the rampant injustice, genocide, civil wars, millions of refugees and displaced people, and children starving? The world is in such a mess. How can we be joyfully imperious to all these crying needs? Will we go about our merry way while the world goes to hell in a handbasket?

But joy does not close our eyes to the pressing needs around us. In fact, it

Joy might be  
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and you certainly  
know it when  
you feel it.

is the joy in our lives that gives us the strength and motivation to reach out to others in need. In George MacDonald's novel *Adela Cathcart*, Adela expresses it this way: "Take from me my joy and I am powerless to help others."

As I write these words, I have undergone four surgeries and regular treatments for bladder cancer. My wife has been battling breast cancer. So I am not exactly in a Pollyannaish mood in coming to this topic.

But the call to joy in Scripture occurs right in the presence of suffering (James 1:2-4). Each day that we live in gloomy despondency, in a dismal state of blah-ness, or in worry, fear, and anxiety, we are missing out on the full and abundant life Jesus intends for us. Jesus came into this world that we might have life in all its fullness (John 10:10). Jesus himself was a joyful person, and to his disciples he said, "These things I have spoken to you, that

my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11, ESV).

### Joy in Scripture

The Old Testament is bursting with joy. Biblical Hebrew has thirteen roots for words for joy that express the exuberance of life of the people of God in response to God's greatness and goodness toward them. These Hebrew words are often translated into English as "merriment," "gladness," "happy," "laughter," "wonder," "exuberance," "exulting," "praise," "worship," "shout," "sing," "delight," and "blessed." Even "dancing" becomes a legitimate expression for joy, as in "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy" (Ps. 30:11).

The poetry of the Hebrew Scriptures represents the whole of creation as already caught up in the dance of joy and wonder at the Creator. The earth is full of praising and rejoicing. The mountains and the hills burst forth with joy. The water in the brook is bubbling with laughter. The trees of the forest are clapping their hands. It is all a marvelous invitation for us to join the created world in this procession of gladness and praise. It is as though the whole creation is saying, "What are you waiting for? Don't you get it? You people of faith, you children of God, surely you would want to join in the dance as well!" The psalmist proclaims it best:

Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad;  
let the sea resound,  
and all that is in it.

Let the fields be jubilant,  
and everything in them;  
let all the trees of the forest  
sing for joy.

Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes (Ps. 96:11-13a).

In the New Testament, Jesus' arrival on earth is announced by expressions of joy. We have the familiar message of the angel to the shepherds: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). We are also told that the wise men were "overjoyed" when they saw the guiding star (Matt. 2:10). The coming of Jesus into this world is a joyful occasion, and the central characters are caught up in the celebration. In Mary's Magnificat, she declares, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47).

"The New Testament is the most buoyant, exhilarating, and joyful book in the world," says the Scottish theologian James Denney (*Studies in Theology*). Jesus promised to give his joy to his disciples along with his peace and his love (John 15:11). Jesus' followers are brought to a new outlook or attitude toward life, as were the multitudes who were fed, healed, delivered, and touched by Jesus' teaching and his offer of the kingdom of heaven.

The most common New Testament word for "joy" is the Greek word *chara*, which appears 146 times and is typically translated "joy," "joyful," "delight," or "gladness." In its verb form, we often see it as a command: Rejoice! *Chara* is closely related to the word *charis*, which means "grace." God's grace in our lives and in the world is the occasion for joy. The beauty of creation, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of Jesus, the new, abundant life we are offered in Christ, and the promise of our own resurrection—these are all grounds for Christian joy.

### **The Kingdom of Joy**

Jesus invites us into his joyful kingdom. In his parables, Jesus repeatedly declares the joy of finding the

kingdom and being found by God. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matt. 13:44). In Luke 15, Jesus shares the three "lost" parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (or the two lost sons). All three are full of rejoicing:

»"Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep" (Luke 15:6).

»"Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin" (Luke 15:9).

»"We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32).

In each of these three parables there is great joy. There is joy on the part of Jesus, who does the finding, and of the Father who welcomes home his lost son. There is joy on the part of the angels in heaven "over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7, 10). There is certainly joy on the part of the prodigal son who was lost but now is found.

In my own conversion experience at age 18, I was seeking something more. But in another sense, it felt more like I was found by God. I was ready to discard my childhood faith, but then God brought people into my life who really knew God with overflowing joy, and I was undone. After a period of resisting and wrestling, I finally surrendered, and sheer joy flooded my life.

### **Nurturing Joy**

Jesus came to bring joy to the world. What happened? Many have never tasted that joy or responded to God's gracious invitation. Many believers have lost the joy they once had. As believers, we face enemies that can steal our joy—enemies such as worry and fear, despair, and sloth. Slipping

into legalism with its constant striving to prove ourselves will chip away at our joy.

In our broken world, we need to nurture joy. We can practice the presence of joy in our lives with the spiritual disciplines of Sabbath rest, remembering God's great promises and his gracious work in our lives. A posture of gratitude does wonders for restoring our joy. We must follow repentance of sin to the ultimate fruit of restored joy, as in David's ultimate request: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation" (Ps. 51:12).

Joy is God's gracious gift to us, the fruit of the Spirit. It is the distinguishing mark of the Christian. Our churches are called to be joyful communities in a world desperately in need of abundant, flourishing life. **B**



Daniel J. Denckla is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America. Dan has directed ministry with university students in the United States as well as in 19 countries in Eastern Europe, and he has ministered in 45 countries

around the world. He also served as theological director with InterVarsity. He now mentors younger men and stays young himself with the help of his grandchildren.

1. How would you define joy?
2. Recount a time when you experienced true joy. What was the occasion, and why were you joyful?

**READ MORE ONLINE**

# The Bible and Cognitive Dissonance

Judgment of another person is God's domain.

**OUR LIVES ARE** mysteriously complex. There is so little in life that we have any control over. Our birth, our sex, our sense of gender, our mental, physical, or psychological make-up, our place in history, our name, our parents, our race, our ethnicity, and more are all beyond our control yet so deeply shape the person each of us develops into. Yet we are often inclined to judge others about how they deal with their “makeup” simply because they are not made up the way we are.

Judgment of another person is God's domain. Why? Because only God knows what we are made of—better than we know even ourselves. None of us has the wisdom to dictate to others how they should live their lives with what they have been divinely endowed, and to resolutely want to do so with our limited human understanding of Scripture can get us to commit grievous sin.

One phenomenon that plays an outsized role in how we understand the Bible and God's will is cognitive dissonance. Anglican Bishop N.T. Wright refers to it in his book *Surprised by Hope*: “Cognitive dissonance is what happens when people who badly want something to be true but are faced with strong evidence to the contrary manage to leap over the data that point the wrong way and become even more strident in announcing their claims.”

I believe we all suffer from cognitive dissonance to some degree. It clearly influences the political and religious views we tend to tenaciously commit to. Furthermore, it influences how we Christians try to understand the Bible and strive to apply that understanding to ourselves and to our neighbors.

John Polkinghorne was a world-renowned physicist and a bishop in the Anglican Church. In his 2011 book *Science and Religion in Quest of Truth*, Polkinghorne cautioned that “finite

minds will never be able to capture the Infinite adequately in their logical nets. There is a tradition in theology, called apophaticism, which warns against the hubris of claiming exact knowledge of deity.” This does not mean theology cannot give us true knowledge; rather it is “simply a caution about the degree of success that theology can expect to attain.”

“Religious knowledge is much more ‘dangerous’ than scientific knowledge,” Polkinghorne also said, “for it can imply consequences for the way we live our lives, requiring not only the assent of the intellect but also the assent of the will.”

Let's do our utmost to avoid the spiritual pride of claiming exact knowledge of God's will on any subject under consideration in our religious deliberations with a divine sense of certainty. Certainty is God's domain, not ours. Jesus taught us to pray to our Father in heaven, “Your will be done.” If we are not very careful in our deliberations concerning God's will, we might be mimicking what the Pharisees in Jesus' time did with the very best of intentions.

There are many passages in the Bible that lend themselves to cognitive dissonance. I don't throw any of these passages out. Instead, when I reflect on them I ask myself three questions: What does it say? What does it mean? And how does it apply to my life or our lives? To properly read the Bible requires us to be prayerfully humble and guard our hearts against misunderstanding and what Polkinghorne called “the hubris of claiming exact knowledge of deity.” 

1. Do you agree that “judgment of another person is God's domain”? Why or why not?

[READ MORE](#) [ONLINE](#)



Jake Masselink is a longtime member of the Victoria (B.C.) Christian Reformed Church. He was employed for 32 years by the provincial government of British Columbia.

# The Golden Record

Launched in 1977, the Voyager 1 spacecraft was commissioned to explore the outer regions of our solar system.



Sam Gutierrez is the Associate Director at the Eugene Peterson Center for the Christian Imagination at Western Theological Seminary. More of his creative work can be found at [printandpoem.com](http://printandpoem.com)

**AS YOU READ** this sentence, a human-made object journeys alone in the darkness of interstellar space at a blazing 38,000 miles per hour.

Launched in 1977, the Voyager 1 spacecraft was commissioned to explore the outer regions of our solar system. Flying past Jupiter and Saturn, the spacecraft captured provocative images of these strange and relatively unknown planets and their moons. For the first time, human beings were able to see these planets up close rather than through the lens of an Earth-based telescope.

Three years after liftoff, Voyager 1 completed its primary mission. But those involved in the development of the space probe had something more in mind. They knew Voyager was on a one-way trip. Once it flew past Pluto, there was no possibility of return. So they had given Voyager a secondary mission: to reach out into the mystery of the unknown with a snapshot of human life.

The Voyager team commissioned the creation of a 12-inch golden phonograph record containing curated information about Earth, encased it in a protective aluminum jacket, and attached it to the outside of the spacecraft along with a cartridge and a needle that would allow the record to be played. They etched a diagram of a hydrogen atom to establish a base unit of measurement and symbols showing how to play the glimmering disc. To show where Earth is, they drew a map of our planet's position in relation to 14 flickering stars called pulsars. Finally, the team included an ultra-pure sample of uranium-238, which decays at a predictable rate, to function as a radioactive clock so that anyone intercepting the spacecraft could decipher how long Voyager 1 had been traveling.

A small team supervised by famed astronomer Carl Sagan decided what the golden record would include. Due to technology constraints, the record could hold only "impressions" of Earth. So the team recorded 55 spoken greetings in different languages. They embedded a written message from U.S. President Jimmy Carter and United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim. They also included musical selections from different cultures around the world, including Bach compositions, a wedding song from Peru, Aboriginal Australian music, and Chuck Berry's rock classic "Johnny B. Goode."

Finally, they added 116 images of Earth and its inhabitants.

With such a limited number of images, the team tried to represent a vast and diverse array of life on planet Earth, including diagrams of human anatomy, DNA structure, cell division, the color spectrum, animals, plants, insects, landscapes, and varied examples of human culture, including food, architecture, and day-to-day activities. (Some of the images can be found online at [voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/whats-on-the-record/images/](http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/golden-record/whats-on-the-record/images/).)

Just as interesting as the images themselves is what they didn't include. The team decided to leave out all depictions of war, poverty, disease, crime, and ideology.

This wasn't meant as a calculated deception. Knowing Voyager would take 40,000 years to reach the nearest star with possible habitable planets, the team was hopeful that the version of humanity depicted on the golden record could someday be reality. Also, because this would likely be our first contact with alien life, the team wanted to make the best impression possible. Just like someone on a first date shouldn't detail their worst

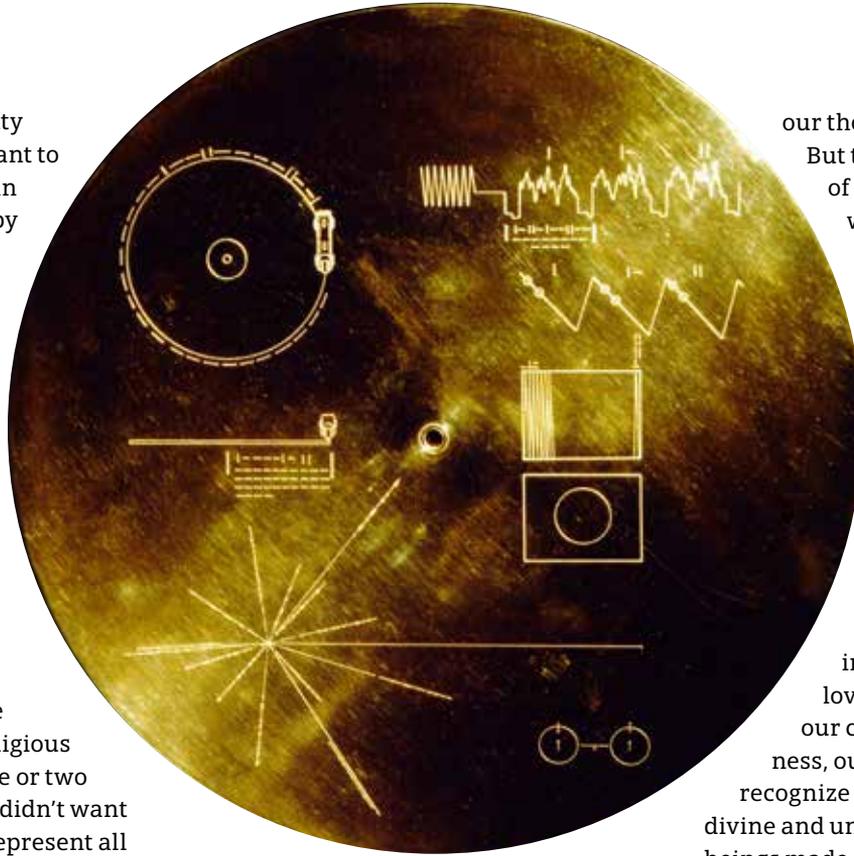
attributes and personality traits, the team didn't want to introduce humanity to an advanced alien species by showing the ugly side of humanity.

But they also left out any depictions of religion.

If this sounds like a scientific conspiracy to undermine belief in the supernatural, it was not. The reason was simple (and more boring). Because of limited space, it was too difficult to depict the immense diversity of religious belief and practice in one or two images. In the end, they didn't want one or two religions to represent all religious beliefs on planet Earth.

Unknowingly, however, they subtly embedded into the golden record their own belief system: a belief in the human spirit. Through hard work, determination, and science, the team had faith and hope that humanity might someday solve the problems that have chronically plagued us. This human-centered, optimistic vision of the future is summarized in a letter written by President Jimmy Carter (though himself a devout Christian) and placed inside the spacecraft:

This is a present from a small, distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings. We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilizations. This record represents our hope and our determination, and our good will in a vast and awesome universe.



Christians, too, are hopeful for a better future. Rather than centering their belief on human strength or ingenuity, however, Christians point to a loving God who will save the world through grace. Revelation 21:4-6a says:

“(God) will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new! ... I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.”

Maybe one day far into the future, an advanced civilization will intercept Voyager 1. They will discover the golden record, decipher the instructions, and sift through the encoded images. The impression they'll get of humanity will be beautiful, fragile, and rich in diversity—as President Carter said, “a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music,

our thoughts and our feelings.”

But they will know nothing of our sad divisions. They will have no sense of the complexity of the human heart, bent toward selfishness but capable of so much sacrifice and beauty. They will have no indication of the addiction, pride, fear, and greed that persistently afflict every generation.

But maybe in those 116 images they'll see our love. Maybe they will see our creativity, our uniqueness, our intellect. Maybe they'll recognize in us something of the divine and understand that we are beings made in the image of God. As humanity reaches out toward the stars, the book of Revelation pulls back the curtain on reality and shows us a God who is bigger than Earth and its inhabitants, bigger than the solar system, bigger than the Milky Way galaxy. This God is the King of the whole universe, from start to finish. No depictions of religion were included on the golden record, but maybe one day aliens will see our sights and sounds, our world and our love, and say to themselves that they too know “the One who sits on the throne.”

Maybe one day we will have overcome the problems we face—not because we were smart and hardworking, but because “the Alpha and the Omega” came in humility as a human being and healed our world and our hearts from the inside out. Then the whole universe will see this pale blue dot aglow with the divine light of God's love and grace, a world beaming with gratitude and joy, a twinkle of glorious light in the darkness of space. B

# Everything Everywhere All at Once: 'Our Story, Told by Our People'

**"HAVE YOU SEEN** *Everything Everywhere All at Once*?"

"No, what's it about?"

This is a hard question for some to answer, but not for me.

When my wife and I sat down to watch the movie, which won four of the top five Academy Awards in March, including Best Picture, we shared a viewing experience like no other—not because of the chaotic pace or the absurd multiverse storylines, but because of how much its plot hit home with our own experiences growing up in an Asian immigrant household. We laughed. We cried. We laughed so hard we cried. We cried so hard we laughed. And when the end credits rolled, we looked at each other and knew that this movie had spoken to us in a way that no movie has before and perhaps rarely will again. Because of this experience, any misrepresentation or outside criticism of it feels a little like a criticism against me personally. It's hard for me to differentiate between the two.

That's why it's equally hard to hear how *EEAAO* has been described in some reviews. "What's it about?" Some correctly say it's a multiverse science-fiction movie. But it's more than that. Others miss the mark completely. One reviewer said that *EEAAO* should have highlighted how much parents have sacrificed for their children, but instead does the opposite. The reviewer said something along the lines of *EEAAO* being a "millennial parental apology fantasy." This misguided critique is a prime example of the need for diverse stories created by diverse storytellers for a diverse audience. As children of immigrant Asian parents, we do not need to be told how much our parents have sacrificed for us. That fact is not lost on us—ever. We haul it around with us all the time, sometimes like a badge of honor,

sometimes like a familial scarlet letter. For better or for worse, it's an integral part of our identity.

So what is this movie about?

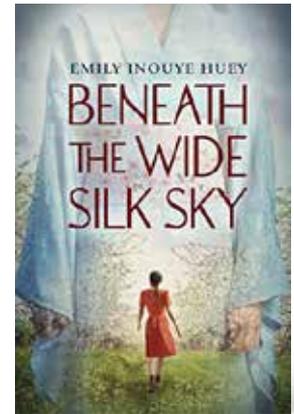
For Asian Americans, *EEAAO* is simply about our collective immigrant family journey. It's a movie that bridges generational divides in culture, language, values, and ideals and pushes our narrative toward healing, unity, self-awareness, and love. At its core, it's a common story, but *EEAAO* is our version of the story told by our people, but in a way that is accessible for everyone.

This movie might not be easy to explain, but it has definitely hit a nerve with critics and the Academy: Of the 10 awards for which it was nominated, the movie won seven, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, Best Supporting Actor for Vietnamese-born Ke Huy Quan, and Best Actress for Malaysian-born Michelle Yeoh, the first Asian woman to ever win in that category. (Paramount+, Hulu) 

*Editor's note: To read another review (by Patrick Haywood) that gives even more details about the film, visit [TheBanner.org](https://TheBanner.org) and type the title in the search box.*



Daniel Jung is a graduate of Calvin Seminary and lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, with his wife, Debbie, their two children, and their long-haired chihuahua. Together, they serve at HCPC Living Stones EM [livingstonesem.com](https://livingstonesem.com), a Korean-American multigenerational ministry located in the Upper Manoa Valley.



## Beneath the Wide Silk Sky

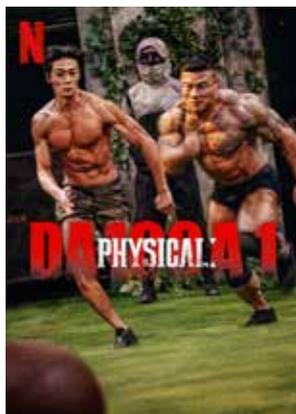
By Emily Inouye Huey

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Samantha Sakamoto is an amateur photographer and dreams of winning a photography contest and its prize money to help her dad make his final payment on their farm.

Little does Sam realize how perilous her dream will become. In the days following Dec. 7, 1941, discrimination against Japanese Americans intensifies, and their belongings, suddenly considered a threat to national security, are confiscated—including Sam's camera.

In the months ahead, as Sam experiences and witnesses the oppression of her Japanese American community, she begins to see her passion for photography and its power to document events as a means to fight oppression. At times searingly painful, unflinchingly honest, and achingly hopeful, *Beneath the Wide Silk Sky* is historical fiction at its best. (Scholastic Press)



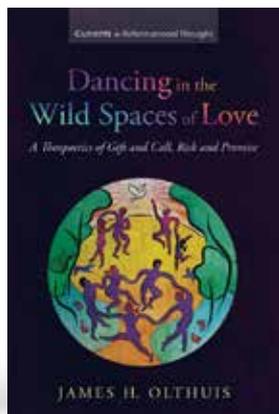
## Physical 100

Reviewed by Daniel Jung

The premise of the Korean TV import *Physical 100* is familiar: 100 contestants live together and compete in athletic challenges. The losers are eliminated until the last contestant standing wins 300 million won (roughly \$240,000 USD).

But instead of rooting for individual contestants, I found myself rooting for the best matchups, the truest sense of gameplay, and the most honorable competition.

*Physical 100* is refreshing because we see that for these contestants, virtues such as honor, fair play, and teamwork are more valuable than a pile of cash. In other words, we get a sense of the Beatitudes in real life. I hope that other reality competition shows will notice *Physical 100* and follow in its footsteps. (Netflix)



## Dancing in the Wild Spaces of Love: A Theopoetics of Gift and Call, Risk and Promise

By James H. Olthuis

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

James Olthuis explores the theme of love through a trifold lens. Chapters 1-4 focus on how God created love, not just *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), but *ex amore* (out of love). In Olthuis' words, "Creation was birthed in love."

Chapters 5-8 discuss the image bearers of a God who is love. "It is in loving (or not loving) that we show (or betray) our humanity," Olthuis says.

Finally, Olthuis presents an ethical treatise about human suffering when love is lost. As humans seek healthy relationships with each other and paths of healing from injustices, there ought to be a "radical politics of love." Olthuis, a psychotherapist, emphasizes the importance of personal growth and emotional healing as part of the journey. (Wipf and Stock)



## Extraordinary Attorney Woo

Reviewed by Sara Kyoungah White

*Extraordinary Attorney Woo* follows Woo Young-woo, a brilliant young attorney with autism. Though she graduates at the top of her law school class, she struggles to find a job because of her neurodivergence. After finally starting as an attorney at a large law firm in Seoul, her photographic memory and intelligence help her excel in a variety of difficult court cases. But she also struggles to find her way through office bullying and the assumptions made by her co-workers and friends. She navigates morally ambiguous cases and experiences her first budding romance—as well as the complications this causes.

Starring Park Eun-bin, Kang Tae-oh, and Kang Ki-young, *Extraordinary Attorney Woo* is Netflix's sixth-most popular non-English-language show of all time. (Netflix)

## The Lowdown

**From Pandemic to Renewal:** As Chris Rice examines eight inter-related crises exposed by the pandemic era, he provides pathways for followers of Christ to bring transformation and healing to their lives and communities. (May 23, IVP)

**Starring Priyanka Chopra Jones:** In *Love Again*, in dealing with the loss of her fiancé, Mira Ray sends a series of romantic texts to his old cell phone number, not realizing the number was reassigned to journalist Rob Burns' new work phone. (Sony Screen Gems, in theaters May 12)

**Action, Comedy, Drama, Adventure, Fantasy:** Jin Wang, an average teenager, juggles his high school social life with his home life. When he meets a new student on the first day of the school year, even more worlds collide as Jin is unwittingly entangled in a battle of Chinese mythological figures. *American Born Chinese* stars Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan. (Disney+, May 24)

**A Movie Version Is a Safe Bet:** Tom Hanks pens his debut novel, *The Making of Another Major Motion Picture Masterpiece*, about a humble comic book that inspires a multimillion-dollar superhero action film. (Knopf, May 9)

# Resonate™



I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;

I will sing of you among the peoples. ~ *Psalm 108:3*

Spread the gospel throughout the **world**  
and in your own **community**.

RESONATEGLOBALMISSION.ORG



A Ministry of the Christian Reformed Church

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

**Down**

1. Speak the \_\_\_\_\_ in love
2. *Extraordinary Attorney \_\_\_\_\_* follows a brilliant young attorney with autism
3. A tool to register concern on a point of a confession
6. Laura and Henry \_\_\_\_\_ are missionaries in Liberia
9. Campus \_\_\_\_\_ Fellowship at Michigan State University
11. "Be \_\_\_\_\_, Love Big."
12. *Beneath the Wide \_\_\_\_\_ Sky*, by Emily Inouye Henry
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Leaders program by Resonate and campus ministries
15. Michelle \_\_\_\_\_, the first Asian woman to win Best Actress
17. This kind of ice cream melted in a car trunk

**Across**

4. A golden record was sent into space on this spacecraft
5. Language classes at a Michigan church teach English and \_\_\_\_\_
7. Johanna \_\_\_\_\_, one of our first missionaries
8. Country where ReFrame's partners launched an after-school discipleship program
10. Cognitive \_\_\_\_\_
13. It's better to have a posture of \_\_\_\_\_ than a posture of mastery
16. Crimes driven by religious \_\_\_\_\_ are up in Canada
18. Joy is a \_\_\_\_\_, but it's more than that

Answers to the April 2023 puzzle



# What do people not know about your ministry job?

Hey church and ministry workers in the CRC!

What do others not know about your ministry job?

Our *Banner* team is wondering about the work you do. Do you find fellow church members misunderstand what's involved in being a nursery coordinator, youth pastor, summer camp director, hospitality lead, senior pastor, head cadet counselor, or any other church or ministry function? Drop us a line at [info@thebanner.org](mailto:info@thebanner.org) to tell us what no one understands about your ministry job. Your response might be selected for an upcoming feature. Thanks for your help!

**DEADLINES:** Ads for the June issue are due May 8, 2023; July issue: June 12, 2023. Subject to availability. Details online at [thebanner.org/classifieds](http://thebanner.org/classifieds), or for display ads see [thebanner.org/ads](http://thebanner.org/ads). Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

**PRICES:** Most ads are \$0.45<sup>US</sup> per character (min. 150 characters including punctuation and spaces). A discounted rate of \$0.38<sup>US</sup> per character and \$65 per photo applies to Anniversaries, Birthdays, Obituaries, Denominational and Classical Announcements, and Congregational Announcements.

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### Congregational Announcements

**URGENT NEED FOR ENGLISH BIBLES!** In communities around the world, believers outnumber Bibles 300 to 1! You could be an answer to their prayer by donating Bibles today! We will accept any translation in any condition. English Bibles needed for English speaking believers. Please call/text Jess at Project Bible Runners: 217-273-9497 or email her at: [projectbible.runners@gmail.com](mailto:projectbible.runners@gmail.com) for more information.

### Denominational Announcements

**CALL TO SYNOD 2023** The council of Church of the Servant CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, calls all delegates to Synod 2023, elected by their respective classes, to meet in the chapel on the campus of Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Friday, June 9, at 8:30 a.m. All area CRC members are invited to join the delegates in worship at the synodical Service of Prayer and Praise on Sunday evening, June 11, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. at Church of the Servant CRC, 3835 Burton St SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan. All CRC churches across the continent are requested to remember the deliberations of synod in their intercessory prayers on Sunday, June 4, and Sunday, June 11.

Council of Church of the Servant CRC,  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

### Church Positions Available

**EBENEZER CRC** (Jarvis ON Canada) is prayerfully seeking a full time Pastor to partner with and lead in teaching, equipping and empowering us to share God's saving grace. Send your letter of interest to: [rayvmolen@gmail.com](mailto:rayvmolen@gmail.com)

**FIRST CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH IN CROWN POINT, IN** is seeking a full-time position Worship Leader who enjoys leading contemporary worship with traditional elements. The candidate will have a mature, personal walk with God, musical proficiency, and skill in developing individuals and teams. Visit [www.cpcrc.org](http://www.cpcrc.org) or contact [first@cpccrc.org](mailto:first@cpccrc.org) with cover letter and resume.

**FULL TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR:** Faith CRC in Sioux Center, IA is a growing and dynamic congregation looking to hire a full time Youth Director. This individual must be organized with attention to details and ability to articulate and exhibit strong genuine faith, hope and love in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Primary responsibility would be to provide vision and leadership for the youth group, Jr.

high students, and other youth education in the church. A full job description of the position can be located at [www.faith-crc.org](http://www.faith-crc.org). Send cover letter and resume to [office@faith-crc.org](mailto:office@faith-crc.org) or contact us for additional details.

**FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR** Modesto, CRC, Modesto, CA seeks an Associate Pastor to lead discipleship and disciple making ministries, administration and pastoral care. Contact in confidence [janiceviss@sbcglobal.net](mailto:janiceviss@sbcglobal.net)

**JAMESTOWN CRC** (Hudsonville, MI) seeks a full-time pastor to continue challenging us to grow in Christ and in outreach to our community, as Pastor Matt has been called to international missions. View a church profile and job description at [jamestowncrc.org](http://jamestowncrc.org). If interested, please submit a resume to Jeff DeVries, [jtdevries@charter.net](mailto:jtdevries@charter.net)

**LEAD PASTOR POSITION** Immanuel CRC located in the beautiful Hudson Valley of NY, seeks a Lead Pastor to take our growing congregation into the future. Please contact Michael Tooth, Secretary of the Search Committee, at (347) 415-4969 or email him at [mi.toth@yahoo.com](mailto:mi.toth@yahoo.com).

**MARANATHA CRC** in sunny Lethbridge, Alberta is excited to engage a new full-time pastor. We are seeking effective, knowledgeable spiritual leadership. We are an active, involved, mid-sized congregation on the west side of Lethbridge. Please contact the Pastor Search Team at [mrcrcpst23@gmail.com](mailto:mrcrcpst23@gmail.com) to apply, or see our Church Profile at <https://network.crcna.org/jobs>

**WORSHIP COORDINATOR** Lakeside Community Church is a healthy and growing church in Alto, MI searching for a gifted part-time worship coordinator. Guitar skills are preferred. For more info, contact Dave Bosscher at [pastordave@lakeside.church](mailto:pastordave@lakeside.church) or 616-821-4548

### Anniversary

#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 50 YEARS



**RITSEMA**, Gary and Kathy (Buikema) are celebrating 50 years of marriage on May 18. Their two children, Rebecca (Robert) and Craig (Kristin), and 5 grandchildren rejoice with them and give thanks for God's faithfulness throughout their marriage.

### Birthdays

#### BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

**JULIANA F STEENSMA** will be celebrating her centennial year on May 3 at her home in Freedom Village (145 Columbia #424 Holland MI). "A life well lived is the most exquisite work of art."

#### BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS

**JOHN ROLFFS** will celebrate 90 years on May 20th. To God be the glory. Send cards to 1015 SE Willmar Ave. Apt 222 Willmar, MN. 56201 or call 320-220-1900.

**MINNIE SIEGERS** of Midland Park, NJ celebrated her 90th birthday on April 12. Her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are grateful for her life of selfless devotion to family. To God be the glory!

### Obituaries

**BOS**, Abraham 90, of Sioux Center, IA, went to be with his Lord on February 3, 2023. Abe served at Dordt College for 35 years as professor, golf coach, and in administration. Grateful for having shared his life are four children: Dawn and Tim Goslinga of Lake Worth, FL, Jim and Glenda Bos of Sioux Center, IA, Mary and Roland Ritzema of Fond du Lac, WI, and Matt and Teri Bos of Orange City, IA; twelve grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; a brother-in-law, Bruce Klanderma, and a sister-in-law, Eunice (De Vries) Buning and her husband, Don. He was preceded in death by his wife Helen (De Vries), infant daughter Ruth, his brother Ralph Bos, and sister Alice Klanderma.



**HOEK**, Gladys (Smit) 1938 - 2023. Gladys passed away peacefully to be with the Lord on Feb 27. She is survived by her husband of 65 years, Dirk, her sons Allen (Robin) and Jeff (Rosie), 5 grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren, and her brother Leon Smit. She was predeceased by 2 brothers, John and Clarence Smit. Her family and friends are grateful for the many years of love and friendship and for her service to the community.

**MEULINK**, Helen Ann, nee Hoogland of Grand Rapids, formerly of Ripon, CA, entered glory on November 22, 2022 at age 91. Children: Dave (deceased), Ken (Jane) Meulink, Susan (Mike) Hekstra, and Steve (Judie) Meulink. Grandchildren: Karen (Chris Neumair, Jana(Aaron) Ed-

ing, Susan (Nick) Vera Kristen (Jeff) Sherwood, Kelly (Josh) Rozema, Scott (Sarah) Hekstra, Kaitlyn (Henry) Higby, John (Ashley) Meulink, Megan (Tyler) Groenewold, Ben Meulink, and Jake Meulink. 21 great-grandchildren. Sister of the late John Hoogland, Ann Hoogland, the late Marvin Hoogland, sister-in-law Thelma Hoogland, Bernie (Helen) Hoogland, Nella Uitvlugt (deceased), Ruth (Bernie) DeHoog, Esther (Jim) Rehms, Bill (Grace) Hoogland, Dorothy VerKerk, and Mary (Ed) DeGroot. II Corinthians 3:12

**SCHAAP**, Luke, age 91, February 28, 2023; Homer Glen, IL. Preceded in death by wife Pauline. Father of Paul (Lori) Schaap, Ruth (David) Dykstra, Jean (Rodney) Korthals, Mary (Brent) Yurschak. Grandfather of 11. Great-grandfather of 3. Brother of the late Marjorie (late John) Verbeek and Richard (late Marcia) Schaap. Uncle and friend to many. Romans 8:18



**WERKEMA**, Gordon R., 86, of Grand Rapids, MI passed away on March 26, 2023. His devoted wife of 60+ years, Jacklyn (Brumels) died in January 2021. Gordon was also predeceased by daughter Susan Gwen Werkema and siblings Jack, Esther (Vanden Berg), Lorraine (Bawden), and Nelson. He is survived by daughter Nancy Lynn Haas and sons Gordon R.G. Werkema, Mark A. Werkema, and Joel Werkema; their spouses and children; great-grandchildren; sister Jeanne (Van Houten) and brother David; siblings-in-law; and nieces and nephews. Gordon attended Calvin College and the University of Denver, and spent most of his career in administration of Christian schools and colleges around the country before returning to Grand Rapids in 2001. The family respectfully suggests any memorial gifts be directed to [faithhospicecare.org/foundation/](http://faithhospicecare.org/foundation/)

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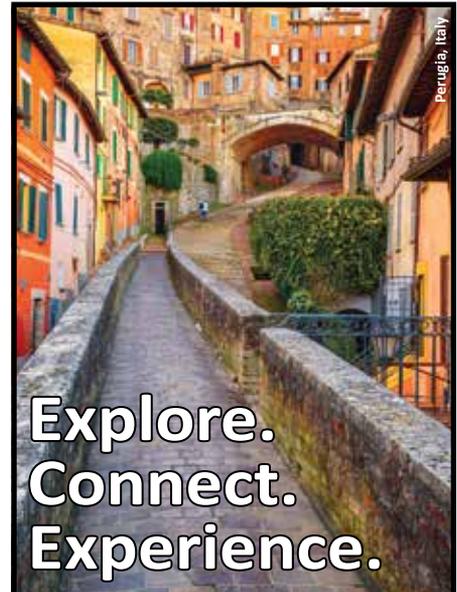
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## Identity in Christ Is Our Strength

The strength  
of knowing  
one's identity  
is a recurring  
theme in movies,  
literature,  
and music.

**IN THE MOVIE** *Black Panther* there is a scene where rival tribal leader M'Baku challenges T'Challa, the heir to the throne of Wakanda, to a fight for the crown. T'Challa is losing the fight until his mother Ramonda yells, "Show him who you are!" At once T'Challa finds strength to turn the fight, yelling, "I am Prince T'Challa, son of King T'Chaka!" That scene stuck with me because T'Challa found strength in remembering and calling out his identity. He named who he was—and whose son he was.

The strength of knowing one's identity is a recurring theme in movies, literature, and music. And identity is of absolute importance for every believer in Christ. That's why God spends much of the Bible explaining to God's people who they are. Christ teaches who his followers are to be (salt and light, e.g.). The apostle Paul describes our identity in many of his epistles.

It should go without saying that we should be listening to those voices, believing in and living out our true identity as children of our heavenly Father. Unfortunately, the world we live in tries to give us an alternate identity. The world would like us to think that we're shaped by what we achieve or by the things we accumulate, or that our identity is permanently marred by our mistakes or failures.

These traps lead us away from our true identity in Christ. Christ reminds us to listen to our Creator. God knows us best! That's a relief, because there are many temptations contending for our attention. Illusions of success, wealth, status, fame, and the like will not deliver on their promises to give us an identity. True identity in Jesus is the anchor keeping us tied to who God says we are.

So who does God say we are? Let's take a lesson from Jesus' baptism

(Matt. 3:13-17). John baptizes Jesus, an event that inaugurates Jesus' earthly ministry. When Jesus comes up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove, and he hears his Father's voice. His Father says, "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

The first thing Jesus heard was an affirmation from his Father (parents, don't miss that!) that established Jesus' identity—and ours! We are children of God. That's who we are.

Jesus was also told that he was loved. So are we.

Finally, Jesus is told that God is pleased with him—even before he begins his ministry! Likewise, the Father's pleasure in us is not wrapped up in our performance. When we make mistakes, we aren't disqualified from God's love (Rom. 8:37-39).

Once we believe who God says we are and live from that place, we are less susceptible to the traps of the enemy, and we are able to walk in the strength of God's love and total acceptance of us as his children. When we are accepted like Jesus was at his baptism, we are freed from the shackles of perfectionism, performance, and pretense. We don't need them because our identity is not in them. Thank God he loves us enough to spend time showing us who we are—and who we are not!

So in the words of Queen Mother Ramonda from *Black Panther*: "Show them who you are!" You are a child of God, one who is loved by God and in whom God is well pleased. Now live like it! **B**



Rev. Darrell Delaney lives in Allegan, Mich., and is the director of spiritual formation at Campus Ministry at Grand Valley State University. He and his wife of 18 years have three children.

## Peach Ice Cream

I saw the terror  
in her eyes. The  
desperate voice.

**I STOPPED AT THE SIGN** and waited for cross traffic to clear. The trunk was full of groceries, including some peach ice cream. In Arizona the race was on to get the groceries home as quickly as possible before the frozen things thawed.

Suddenly a young woman ran in front of my car and started beating on the hood. She ran to the passenger door, screaming, "Let me in! Let me in!"

I saw the terror in her eyes. The desperate voice. "He's going to kill me! For God's sake, let me in!"

For God's sake, I unlocked the door. I didn't want to.

She threw herself into the Buick. "Drive! Just drive!"

I checked my mirrors and saw a behemoth of a man striding across the parking lot toward us. More panic filled her voice. "Go! Just go!"

I accelerated through the intersection and headed down 23rd Avenue. I turned randomly and kept moving for a while before finally stopping in a strip mall parking lot.

Silence. Her slender shoulders shook. She clutched them as she rocked back and forth. Her black hair was wet and matted, plastered on her head and blotched with blood. She wore a dirty T-shirt and jeans, with no shoes on her feet.

"Where would you like me to take you?"

She shook her head and stared out the window.

"I could take you to the hospital if you're hurt. Or maybe the police could help you?"

More head shaking.

"Do you have family or friends I could call?"

Nothing. We sat in silence for what seemed like a lifetime.

Finally she blubbered, "I got nowhere. He knows all my family and friends. He'll hunt me down and drag me back. I got nowhere and nobody."

More sobs shook her frame.

I remembered the name of a lady who helped battered women. I wondered if she'd take my call on a Saturday afternoon. "Would you like me to call someone who helps women in your situation?"

The question hung in the air.

"I don't have any options." Tears streamed down her face.

I searched out the number and made the call. It went directly to voicemail. I left a message. To my surprise my phone buzzed almost immediately. "This is Megan. How can I help you?"

After I shared what happened, Megan asked if she could talk to the young woman. I handed her the phone and stepped out of the Buick so she could have a bit of privacy. The conversation took some time. I thought about my peach ice cream.

Eventually she waved the phone at me. I climbed back in. "Megan wants to talk to you."

"We'll let her come," Megan said. "Can you bring her to us?"

The ice cream was ruined. A few minutes more wouldn't make any difference. "Sure. Where do we go?"

Megan directed me to an intersection 20 minutes away.

I hung up, and we drove without speaking. There was no goodbye when I dropped her off with Megan. I never even learned her name.

The ice cream had turned to soup by the time I got home. I refroze it, but it never tasted right. It's been 25 years, and I still pray for her.

Jesus, come close—wherever she is. 



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

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