

BANNER

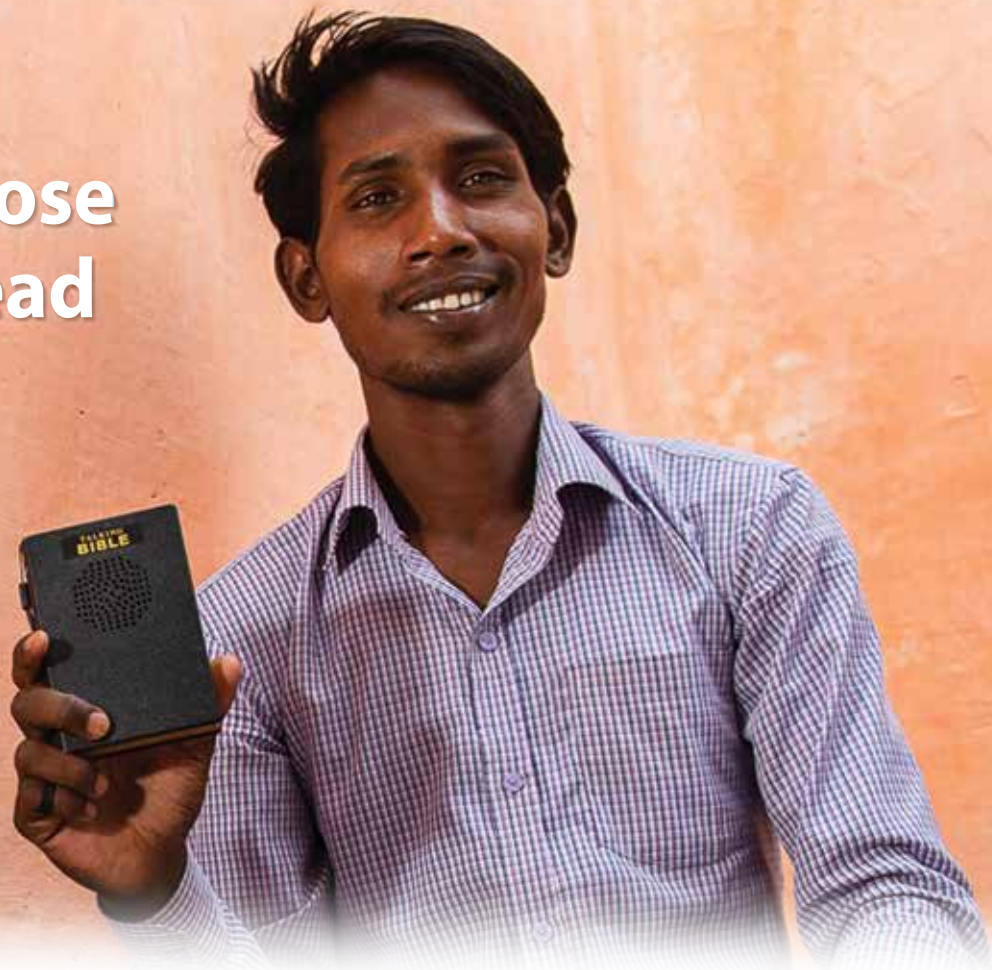
JANUARY 2024

THE BANNER.ORG

A photograph showing a person from behind, driving a car on a road during sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The car's interior, including the steering wheel and dashboard, is visible. The driver's hand is on the steering wheel. The road ahead is slightly blurred, suggesting motion.

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IN CELEBRATION OF MLK DAY**
Soul Force: The Challenge of
Martin Luther King Jr.

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and Khan & Liza Nedd*

16 Tuesday

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17 Wednesday

**ROBERT GEORGE
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19 Friday

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22 Monday

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Table Conversations:
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DR. LYDIA DUGDALE
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Lessons I've Learned
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TOMMY CALDWELL
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1 Thursday

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BANNER

BY THE NUMBERS

These were the 10 most-accessed articles on *thebanner.org* between January and December 2023, in order of most views to fewer. For links and 15 more of our most popular articles from the past year, visit thebanner.org/2023-top-25.

Most-Read Articles Online

- 1 Delegate Leaves Synod in Protest
- 2 Synod 2023 Rejects Neland Avenue CRC's Appeal
- 3 How Do We Know Christianity Is the Only True Religion? (2020)
- 4 Synod Says 'No' to Delaying Action on Human Sexuality Report
- 5 Synod 2023's Discussion of 'Confessional Difficulties' Cut Short; Delegates Protest; Matter Pushed to Synod 2024
- 6 Synod Upholds 'Confessional Status' on Interpretation of Unchastity
- 7 PA District Attorney Announces Arrest in 1975 Murder Case; Accused Is a Retired CRC Pastor
- 8 Synod 2023: Incomplete and Broken (In Our View)
- 9 Why I'm Not a Christian Zionist (2019)
- 10 Synod Upholds Appeal of Michigan Consistory (Classis Holland)

Pageviews as counted by Google Analytics, referenced Dec. 1, 2023.

WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » News: International Indigenous Band Comes Home for a Concert Organized by CRC Members
- » Podcast review: *Bare Marriage*
- » Book review: *The Unfortunate Life of Genevieve Ryder*
- » YouTube: *Tasting History with Max Miller*

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Editor Kristen deRoo VanderBerg,
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Corrections:

December 2023: The memorial for Rev. Jack Matheis was missing the dates 1924-2023; “Word Play” clues 14 and 15 Down were missing. 14: It’s a blend of two Japanese words meaning “picture” and “letter” and 15: TENx10 wants to reach 10 ____ young people in 10 years.

BANNER

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Clarifying the Clarity of Scripture

We cannot use
this doctrine to
suppress debate
or to demonize
anyone who
disagrees with us.



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

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

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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

IN MY ARTICLE “Misreading Scripture Cross-culturally” (October 2023), I mentioned the doctrine of the clarity, or perspicuity, of Scripture. I think there may be confusion over what this doctrine means. Some people cite this doctrine as a way to challenge those who have different biblical interpretations. Often the challenge carries an implied accusation that the other person is disrespecting the Bible’s authority.

The Reformed doctrine of the clarity of Scripture teaches that what is necessary for salvation is clear in Scripture. It does not teach that everything in Scripture is clear and easy to understand. An old Reformed confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), made this explicitly clear: “The meanings of all the passages in the Bible are not equally obvious, nor is any individual passage equally clear to everyone. However, everything which we have to know, believe, and observe in order to be saved is so clearly presented and revealed somewhere in the Bible that the uneducated as well as the educated can sufficiently understand it by the proper use of the ordinary means of grace” (Chapter 1.VII, Modern English version).


Scripture itself implies that it has parts that are not easy to understand: “(Paul’s) letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16). And the Ethiopian eunuch needed Philip’s help to understand the prophet Isaiah (Acts 8:26-40).

Confessing the clarity of Scripture, therefore, does not prevent us from using careful interpretive methods to study and interpret the Bible. The CRC’s 1972 synodical report “The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority (Report 44)” noted, “The Reformers, while confessing the perspicuity of Scripture, never

intended to suggest that there were no problems encountered in interpreting the Bible, problems requiring the application of grammatical and historical exegesis” (*Acts of Synod 1972*, p. 514). Neither does the doctrine suggest that Christians who use such careful interpretive methods cannot come to different conclusions or interpretations of Scripture.

Of course, we must prayerfully ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in interpreting Scripture. Indeed, without the Holy Spirit’s illumination, we may not even be able to understand its central message of salvation. As the synodical report says, “Under the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit the Bible is an open Book, which in its central and comprehensive message is readily accessible and unmistakably clear to the believing heart and mind. ... Indispensable for understanding the central and comprehensive message of Scripture is a Spirit-led faith.” (*Acts of Synod 1972*, p. 541) However, note that the emphasis here is on understanding the central message of salvation through the Holy Spirit’s help. It does not mean that the Holy Spirit will open all biblical mysteries to us. Interpretive tools such as historical and linguistic resources are still necessary.

I am not trying to say that there are no clear passages at all in the Bible. But I do believe that we cannot use the doctrine of clarity to suppress debate or to demonize anyone who disagrees with a particular biblical interpretation as disrespecting biblical authority itself.

Let us disagree graciously and respectfully, assuming the best of each other rather than the worst. 

P.S. Thank you for all your support! As of early December 2023, we have received over \$424,000 in donations. Thank you!



REPLY ALL

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

Insider Language

Melissa Kuipers' article ("Being Missional Means Avoiding Insider Language," Sept. 2023) reminded me of a discussion I had with an unsaved friend many years ago. She raised her irritation that someone had called her a pagan. I asked her if she knew what a pagan was, and she didn't. We looked it up together, and the definition we found was "a person who is not a Christian, a Jew, or Muslim." I then asked her if she was a Christian. "No." A Jew? "No." A Muslim? Again, no. We concluded that she was indeed a pagan. I hope that our conversation through her challenge with the word "pagan" helped her realize she needed to look more closely at her spiritual beliefs. Words have meanings.
» Marilou Richardson // Merritt Island, Fla.

Division

Reflecting sadly on recent divisive issues in our denomination, I find it interesting that God knew from all eternity that women in office would be a contentious issue, so he saw to it that there were examples in Scripture of women in leadership roles, including Deborah, the lead judge of God's people; Esther, who saved God's people; prophetesses Huldah (Old Testament) and Anna (New Testament); and Lydia in Philippi. God also knew that same-sex marriage would be a major divisive issue in the church, so why is there not one instance in Scripture of a same-sex marital relationship? Is that significant?
» Laurie Deters // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Is Love a Salvation Matter?

First comes a knowledge of our sins, then knowledge that our only deliverance from our bondage is Christ's sacrifice for those sins, leading to trusting in him to deliver us. Faith is then put into action. We believe, leading to our justification, our release, our freedom, which then leads to showing thankfulness to God for that deliverance, which leads to obedience to Christ's commands: love, which is a result of salvation and obedience. 1 John 3:14-15 tells us, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." So yes, love is a salvation issue ("Is Love a Salvation Matter?," Sept. 2023). We can't have salvation without love.
» Allan A. Stonehouse Jr. // Englewood, Fla.

Middle East Peace

The (online) news article "Churches for Middle East Peace Watch Conflict, Urge End to War" (Nov. 2023) referenced the statements published by Churches for Middle East Peace since the Hamas attacks of Oct. 7. I was disappointed to discover that this organization makes no attempt at impartiality, which made me wonder why the Christian Reformed Church is a member of this group. For brevity, I'll only list three examples of bias shown in recent CMEP statements:

- 1) Blaming Israel for the attack on al-Ahli hospital even after strong evidence, supported by official statements from the Canadian and U.S. governments, came out that contradicts this claim.

- 2) Listing many specific atrocities committed by Israel, but avoiding mention of the rape, kidnapping, indiscriminate killing of civilians, and use of human shields committed by Hamas.

- 3) Calling Israel's response "ethnic cleansing," which is simply inaccurate and unhelpful hyperbole.

Is it appropriate for the CRCNA to have membership in a group that claims to work for justice and peace while displaying such obvious bias?

» Daniel Harder // Edmonton, Alta.

Denominations

The Apostles' Creed is intimately familiar to members of the Christian Reformed denomination and requires us to profess belief in "the holy catholic church," the universal church that is the same throughout all time and in all places. This seems counter to Rev. Aaron Vriesman's support for keeping the Christian church broken up into denominations ("Is Nondenominational the Better Option?," Nov. 13, 2023, online). One of Vriesman's core arguments is that denominations provide more accountability, writing, "If my preaching goes off the rails or my actions become officially unchristian, my church council has authority to hold me accountable." But he neglects to deal with the question of which rails—universal church [rails] or denominational rails? Denominational doctrine has in the past divided us (disagreement about issues like infant baptism has led to Christians burning at the stake other Christians) and continues to keep us apart. Even such close cousins as the CRC and the Reformed Church in America cannot come together. So, are all denominations part of the universal church, [so that] compliance with doctrinal differences becomes optional, or is only one the true church, leaving all others following false teachings?

» Frank Barefield // Holland, Mich.

What Does Purity Mean for Christians Today?

Reading Scripture

I read the article “Misreading Scripture Cross-culturally” (October 2023) and was disappointed. I agree that having cultural and historical knowledge can provide comprehension of a certain Bible passage. I have also personally found that referencing the original Greek and Hebrew language can provide even deeper insight. But, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16, reading the Bible is foolishness to anyone who does not have the Spirit of God inside them. The Holy Spirit gives us knowledge and understanding. If we truly desire to know God’s intended meaning in Scripture, our first act, before opening God’s Word, should be to pray for the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom, discernment, and understanding. After all, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:11), so why not go directly to the source of understanding (Prov. 2).

» Nicole Strampel // Sarnia, Ont.

As I Was Saying

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

- » On Love and Unconscious Bias
- » Is Nondenominational the Better Option?
- » A Good Pastor Is Hard to Find
- » War in Israel and the Words of Christ

YOU’VE PROBABLY NOTICED IT.

- » Your youth pastor recommends an R-rated movie because “it has a good redemption arc.”
- » You overhear a group of Christians discussing a new show that’s full of obscenities and nudity.
- » You watch a comedy filled with dirty jokes because you “just need a laugh.”

Purity seems to have been reduced to something optional in our modern idea of Christianity. But is it?

When you think about purity in the Bible, your mind might jump straight to sexual purity. However, the Bible has a lot to say about the purity God calls us to in our hearts, minds, and lives, too:

- » “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving” (Eph. 5:3-4).
- » “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).
- » “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

Think back over the podcasts, songs, YouTube videos, shows, and movies you consumed this past week. Were they characterized by what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8)? Or was there “even a hint” of sexual immorality, impurity, greed,

obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking (Eph. 5:3-4)?

Are you feeling uncomfortable yet? I am.


My hope in writing this is to remind us that Jesus wants to transform every area of our lives—including what we allow into our minds and hearts through media.

You might be thinking, “Well, the shows I watch are relatively clean.”

Sadly, many of us have been desensitized to sin through our many previous exposures to it in various media. Let’s strive to be sensitive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and correction from the Bible.

“But isn’t this legalism?” you might be asking. I am not suggesting that watching an R-rated movie is going to jeopardize your salvation. But it is an important issue generally overlooked in modern Christianity.

Let’s measure the media we consume against God’s Word. I invite us all to be radical about giving God access to all spheres of our lives, including what we watch or listen to for entertainment.

My prayer is that each of us will be intentional about living a life of purity before God. 



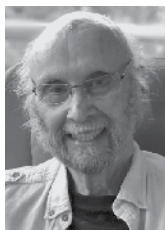
Laurel Dykema lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends Westend Christian Reformed Church. She has a bachelor’s degree in Bible and theology from Kuyper College. Laurel has more than nine years of experience as a professional nonprofit writer.

Being Hospitable to Angels in Disguise

You say every child is special, but Patrick is especially special.

EARLY IN 1971, my wife, Celia, and I received a call from our social worker asking if we would be willing to come by the hospital to look at a child no one knew what to do with. Over the years, Celia has been a caregiver to the many mentally and physically challenged foster children who have passed through our home, taking classes and earning certifications during four years of night classes in addition to running a busy family. In 1979, Canadian government authorities would award her a prestigious B.C. Family Achievement Award for her work. So the phone call in 1971 wasn't particularly surprising. Knowing nothing more about this child, we said we would come.

Once we arrived at the hospital, we were led to a large, dark, mostly empty room, where against the wall on a small rug a little Indigenous boy sat rocking back and forth. His name was Patrick, and he was 14 months old. Patrick had small dark-rimmed glasses on his little nose, and he paid no attention to anything around him. The problem, we were told, was that he did not want to have anything to do with anyone in the hospital. Apparently he had come from somewhere up north, had a head injury, and had undergone brain surgery. Now he was here.



Frank DeVries is a past principal of Christian schools in Wyoming, Ont., Houston, B.C., and Vancouver, B.C. He and his wife, Celia, attend Fleetwood Christian Reformed Church in Surrey, B.C.

The social worker, a nurse, and we watched him for a little while before Celia walked up to him, trying to establish some contact. He did not react to her at all and just kept rocking. I tried too, but the result was the same. Slightly bored and not knowing what to do, I looked around and noticed in a dark corner a brown, forlorn-looking piano that clearly had not been played for some time. I went to it, lifted the cover, and played a chord. The instrument was out of tune. Going to the boy, I picked him up and carried him to it; he weighed little. I pulled up a

nearby chair, sat the boy on my left knee, put his small hands on mine, and slowly began to play something. As my hands moved over the keys, the double-handed duet composed harmonies that bridged our hearts. He sat, mesmerized, and his eyes dropped. I continued to play, noting the coolness of his little hands as they lay on mine, motionless, like two small animals that after a long time away had finally come home. As the minutes passed and the music flowed, he visibly relaxed, and with his little body leaning against mine it all became an otherworldly experience, and I began to feel very strange and mellow.

Following the visit, the social worker told us that government authorities had been unable to locate his parents to give adoption assent, so Patrick had to remain in institutional care. But she then expressed the hope we would "take him in." Having just adopted two children, we were not ready for another one, but when we learned he was not adoptable and would need a home "for only a little while," we agreed.

Patrick was in our home for 22 years. The brain surgery had left him hemiplegic, blind in one eye with only donut (peripheral) vision in the other one. Already then it was thought he was going to be severely mentally handicapped and when grown would have only limited speech.

Those 22 years were delightful years. Our teenaged son Irwin, now Dr. DeVries, was of great help in raising Pat, feeding him and then teaching him how to feed himself. Of course there were obstacles, like the pesky task of Patrick learning how to put on his pants. We'd all just howl when, after he'd put them on backwards for the umpteenth time, we would ask him to put his hands in his pockets, and he would reward us with the most



residents are given the opportunity to love, learn, work, and play in an all-inclusive family atmosphere rarely seen elsewhere.

Pat, now 53, is special. You say every child is special, but Patrick is especially special. We have known him from early childhood and found him to be a thoughtful, caring, and kind child. Whenever we'd take him out for lunch, it was perfectly normal for him to follow a waitress into the aisle, pat her on the back, and say, "Good coffee, good coffee!" Or he'd step up to a girl in a wheelchair and, with a light pat on her shoulder, tell her, "Nice coat!" Yet in his own way he was smart, too. Whenever we'd pick him up from home or work, he would always stand aside to gallantly open the car door for his mom—but always the rear door, so that he could sit

incredible sheepish grin you've ever seen. Then we'd all whoop it up and dance around when finally he could do it properly!

We all did our best to raise Patrick. The little Indigenous boy grew well and was liked by everyone who knew him—so much so that when he "graduated" from Killarney Secondary School and this handsome young man walked up to the podium to receive his diploma, the entire student body rose to its feet and gave him an ovation!

At age 24, in small steps, he was moved into a residence for adult care, the Shekinah Homes Society in Victoria, B.C. Shekinah (meaning "God's dwelling place") operates homes where

in front and push the buttons on the car radio!

Due to distance, talking with him now only happens by phone. His speech remains limited, but he has interesting ways of coping. For instance, at the end of a talk we usually share our love for each other, and when I ask him how much he loves me, he usually will say a number under 100, such as 42 or 91. Sometimes, however, if I am lucky, he

gives me the number 62. And 62, I'll have you know, represents the utmost expression of his love for me!

Acts 12 tells us that, after the resurrection of Christ, stories about angels ranged far and wide. Already then angels often took on the appearance of actual people who could be heard and seen. Meanwhile, we read again Paul's caution in Hebrews 13:2: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."

But where do you find these angels in disguise? How do you identify them? Well, that isn't always so easy. Often, like Patrick, they are hidden between "the least of these" Jesus speaks of in Matthew 25. But somehow, in some curious, unexplainable, mysterious way, you just know when you meet them—perhaps metaphorically speaking. And when you do, and when you become personally involved with them and care for them, a wonderful surprise awaits you. For when your time on earth is up and you have faithfully walked with the Lord and done these things, you will be given the top, the best, the greatest, the most wonderful number 62 of all! B

BIG QUESTIONS

Relationships

Is it OK to charge my adult children rent as a means of teaching responsibility?

Young adults now live at home longer, requiring discernment on living well together under one roof. Parents can be frustrated with their adult children's struggles, knowing the responsibilities they already carried at that age. Yet the opportunities for young adults have changed. They face a grim financial reality and often struggle to find work that allows them to live independently.

While Scripture does not spell out how parents should manage life with young adults under their roof, there are guiding principles. Treat others as you wish to be treated. In all interactions, be honest, loving, fair, and direct. Parents are not to exasperate their children (Eph. 6:4). When we have concerns we are to come together and address them (Matt. 18:15-20). For younger children, home should be a safe place where they gain skills for independence. Children should be on a trajectory to leave their parents while also experiencing their home as a place of cultivating love. As children develop into adults, the parent's role changes from decision maker to advising coach.

Parents should negotiate graciously with adult kids living at home, laying out clear expectations and fostering ownership of responsibilities. Establish clear expectations for life together, such as schooling, employment, church, household chores, and caring for their living space. Negotiate what expenses your child can reasonably manage with their income, including phone, car insurance, and health expenses, so they are



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

learning to carry their load (Gal. 6:5). Parents may choose to collect rent to help their kids acclimate to independent living. Rent should not be punitive; be careful the money doesn't disrupt a loving, connected relationship. When love leads, charging rent might be a blessing that sets a child up for success. Parents might set aside all or some of the rent money to bless their child with later. Be prayerful to discern the best course for your child in this season.

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.

Faith Formation

How should we read and find meaning in highly technical parts of the Bible, such as the laws presented in Leviticus or the censuses and lists of Numbers or 1 Chronicles?

Reading the Bible is an important faith practice. Some passages, however, are just hard to get through and don't seem to give us much to think about. This means that reading them devotionally can be a real challenge.

The Bible is one coherent story made up of many different parts. Not only are there many human writers involved (although all of it is "God-breathed"), these writers come from many different times and different places and write to different audiences. Every part of the Bible was

written at a particular time and place but speaks to all times and places.

This means that, just as with anything we read, we have to read differently depending on the type of literature we are encountering. Recognizing that not all passages are trying to do the same thing will help us adjust how we approach each passage we read. But all of the Bible was written to help us know and understand how God is working in the lives of his people.

The passages in Leviticus, for example, tell us that God cared for his people to the point that he even gave them detailed instructions on how to live and how to construct the tabernacle. As we read it we see that God's holiness is something that God wanted his people to be reminded of continually. We also learn that the people, being sinful, needed to be cleansed of their sin over and over again. All of this points to the work that Jesus did once and for all to remove that sin from us.

As you read, try asking yourself questions like these: What can we learn about God from this passage? What is God telling us about his relationship with his people? To whom was this passage (or book) originally written? Don't feel as if you have to do it all alone. Finding a good study Bible or some commentaries can help us notice things we might otherwise miss.

Laura Keeley is a Great Lakes regional connector for Thrive, the ministry agency of the Christian Reformed Church. Robert Keeley is a professor emeritus of education at Calvin University. The Keeleys recently retired after 31 years as directors of children's ministries at 14th St. CRC in Holland, Mich.

Missional Living**What does “going to church” have to do with being missional?**

I have put the phrase “going to church” in quotation marks because on the one hand, we all know that we don’t go to church—we are the church! “Being the church” is a way of life we embody 24/7 that bears witness to God’s loving reign (sometimes very well, and other times not so much).

On the other hand, what we mean when we say we’re “going to church” is important. Moving toward being missional changes our understanding and practice of “going to church.” If we’re honest, most of us go to church to “get something out of it,” and we complain when we don’t. We grade the music, the message, the ministries. And when we’re busy, don’t feel we need church, or don’t feel it’s meeting our needs, we skip it. Gone are the days, in most contexts, when guilt or legalism may have obliged us to attend.

But what if we gathered for worship to be equipped, encouraged, and sent? What if “going to church” was about acknowledging and yielding to God’s bigger plan, God’s greater ways? What if Sunday morning was our “missional training station” where we are (re)oriented again and again and shaped more and more into people who are discovering and cooperating with what God is already doing in our neighborhoods and communities for the sake of God’s kingdom?

When we go to church with the first perspective—to get something out of it—it is the main, and perhaps only, specifically Christian act in our week. When we go to church with the second (missional) posture, we come to offer ourselves as followers of Jesus, to discern what God is saying, to be nourished for the daily journey of

participating in God’s work of renewing and reconciling the whole world.

This understanding of “going to church” is about formation into the reality of what God is doing in the world. Our missional posture then arises out of and is expressed in living every day as those who have received and want to point to the One who gave his life for the world.

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.

Ethics**Should Christians support Israel no matter what it does to the Palestinians?**

Only God deserves our unconditional support. Nothing in creation, whether a person or a nation, can command our allegiance or loyalty no matter what they do. Even God did not support Old Testament Israel when it disobeyed God’s laws and acted unjustly. God even exiled Israel. Some Christians with a specific end-times theology might view this differently, but Reformed theology does not support that perspective.

We must avoid two extremes. On one hand, we cannot discriminate against Israel, ignore antisemitism, and blame Israel for everything. We cannot justify Hamas’ atrocities. On the other hand, we cannot pretend that Israel can do no wrong and defend everything they do. We need to understand the long history of this conflict and separate true information from false.

We must also distinguish between civilians—both Israelis and Palestinians—from their governments and leaders. All people, including Palestinians and Israelis, are in the image of God and deserve our

compassion. Their sufferings and deaths are cause for lament and action. Remember that also caught in the crossfire are Palestinian Christians, whom Christians in the West have often ignored or forgotten.

When it comes to the Israel-Hamas war—or any war—Christian just war theory can be a helpful framework. For a war to be just, it requires not only just causes for going to war, but also just means of conducting war. These rules include that the response must be proportional to the offense and that innocent bystanders must not be intentionally harmed (“Just-War Theory,” *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, p. 521). These rules apply to all parties.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, encouraged us to be peacemakers (Matt. 5:9) rather than taking sides in any conflict. As naive or even impossible as that might seem, it should be a Christian’s fundamental posture.

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



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

Record Attendance at Eastern Canada Youth Conference

NEWS

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The western part of Classis Eastern Canada of the Christian Reformed Church, which has held an annual youth retreat for more than 20 years, was pleasantly surprised by record attendance in 2023.

"Youth want to engage more and more, especially after living through the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic years," classis youth ministry team member Ron Hosmar said.

Hosmar, the youth pastor at Calvin CRC in Ottawa, Ont., said the conference format serves organizers and teens well. "We invite a speaker, we invite one of the local churches to send a worship team, we fill the weekend with the many activities provided within the camp facilities, and we have the Christian improv group The Fidgets," who have been an integral part of the past 13 retreats, Hosmar said. Having a central location is also beneficial, Hosmar said. They camp at Circle Square Ranch in Arden, Ont., within a two-hour drive of five Eastern Canada



Worship at the October 2023 retreat.

churches and a couple of congregations from Classis Quinte.

Hosmar is passionate about how retreats, conferences, and mission trips can "give our kids a chance to get away to build relationships with each other" and is encouraged by the event's growth. There were 80 retreat attendees in 2022 (the first after a two-year COVID hiatus) and 131 in 2023. Forty percent of 2023 attendees were first-time registrants.

—Ron Rupke

Michigan Church Joins Neighbors in Restoring Native Tree Species



Volunteer Paul MacNellis shows others how to plant a sapling in the Kleinstuck Preserve near Third CRC in Kalamazoo, Mich.

With the help of a church-funded grant, the Stewards of Kleinstuck and volunteers from Third Christian Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Mich., planted 23 trees Oct. 21 in the 48-acre nature preserve the group is named for.

Owned and managed by Western Michigan University, the preserve is just 1.5 miles (2.4 km) from the church. The Stewards of Kleinstuck, a group that supervises activities in the preserve, applied for one of the church's Winchell Neighborhood Grants for the project.

"The Winchell Grant is designed to develop our neighborhood, involve our church in Winchell, and participate in residents' public-good (not for-profit or personal use) projects," said pastor Agshin Jafarov, director of outreach and adult ministry at Third CRC.

Jafarov also lives in Kalamazoo's Winchell neighborhood, where the church has been developing relationships with neighborhood organizations. He helped to coordinate the logistics and tools for the Kleinstuck planting. About 15 volunteers from Third CRC showed up to help plant.

Another recent grant application came from someone wanting to improve a roadside art box offering free crafts and artwork in front of her house.

"Our hope is that our actions will speak louder about Christ's saving work than our words," Jafarov said, "so involvement is a way of living out our faith and our hope in the redeeming work of our Savior."

—Callie Feyen

Indigenous Christian Fellowship Opens Ceremonial Gardens for Healing and Reconciliation



Artist Jamie M. Reynolds works on a mural on the fence enclosing Indigenous Christian Fellowship's ceremonial gardens.

Indigenous Christian Fellowship, a Christian Reformed urban ministry center in Regina, Sask., remade a vacant lot into an enclosed outdoor gathering space. The ceremonial gardens opened with a celebration in late September.

About 130 people, including performers, politicians, artists, and guest speakers, gathered for the dedication, which took many donors, supporters, and volunteer hours to bring to fruition. ICF purchased the neglected lot next to its building in December 2021. The lot was then cleared of rubble and contaminated soil and prepared to support benches, a fire pit, and plant boxes, all closed in by protective fences decorated with beautiful murals.

Pastor Bert Adema, ICF's executive director, said there is more to come. "We look forward to the completion of additional murals on the inside walls, outdoor cooking facilities, and planting materials in the coming year," he said. He hopes to see vegetables, native plants, and berries growing in the raised garden beds.

Al Postma, transitional executive director (Canada) of the CRCNA, was one of several speakers at the Sept. 29 event. He said it was an honor to be invited. "Being there gave me a sense of the richness of the ministry and the impact it is having," he said. "This ministry is a testimony to the CRC's longstanding commitment to Indigenous justice and reconciliation, and I'm grateful for new and fresh ways to live into that commitment together."

Participating performers included Falynn Baptiste, a Cree-Metis singer and songwriter, with George Tilsley; Rev. Dennis Hendricksen of Christ Lutheran Church in Regina; Preston Littleton and the Eagle Claw Drum Group; and Nathan Ottenson and Pamela Meunch. ICF hosted the evening in place of its annual fundraising gala.

—Janet A. Greidanus

California CRC Hosts Korean Church Disability Conference

All Nations Church, a Korean congregation of the Christian Reformed Church in Lake View Terrace, Calif., hosted "Made to Belong," the 2023 Korean Church Disability Conference, in October.

Designed to equip the next generation of leaders in disability ministry in Korean American churches, All Nations partnered with AM1190 KGBN, a local radio station of the Korean American Gospel Broadcasting Network, to plan, co-sponsor, and host the event.

Organizers said this is the first conference of its kind in the Korean American Christian community, showing that Korean churches are becoming more aware of the need to focus on disability ministry for their churches to truly be places where everyone is welcome to join the body of Christ.

About 270 people from over 50 different churches and organizations attended to hear speakers Kay Warren, who co-founded Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., with her husband, Rick, and ministers in the areas of mental health and suicide prevention; Erik Carter, executive director of the Baylor University Center on Developmental Disabilities; and Christina Kimm, professor in the Division of Special Education and Counseling at California State University, Los Angeles. Another 10 leaders in disability ministry from Korean American churches also participated.

"Through this conference I believe we took a big step forward in ensuring that our churches will continue to be places where individuals and families with disabilities are welcomed and embraced as part of the body of Christ," said Sean Lee, an evangelist who leads All Nation Church's disability ministry and spoke at the conference.

—Jonathan Kim



Participants of the 2023 Korean Church Disabilities Conference at All Nations Church in Lake View Terrace, Calif.

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. Dale W.
Vander Veen*

1943-2023

Dale Vander Veen, a campus pastor, preacher, pianist, organist, and writer, died Oct. 25, 2023. He was 80.

After graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1969, Dale and his wife joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ (now called Cru). He was “so important in our lives as college students,” said one couple upon hearing of his death. “We learned by word and deed as new believers how to walk and grow in Jesus Christ.” Dale went on to pastor Calvary Christian Reformed Church, Seattle, Wash.; Brookside CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Bethany CRC, Bellflower, Calif.; and Georgetown CRC, Hudsonville, Mich. In retirement he became associate pastor at Bauer CRC in Hudsonville, occasionally preaching, playing the piano, and visiting older members. In 2020, he “re-retired” due to failing health.

From 2000 to 2020, Dale wrote and emailed daily devotions to family and friends who in turn sent them to others. In 2011, he self-published a book of 365 devotions called *Dear Friends: Seeing Our Best Friend in His Word and World*. He loved music, reading, and playing word games.

Dale is survived by Edith, his wife of 58 years; three children and their spouses; and six grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Former Leader of Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada Dies

Arie Gideon Van Eek, 1932-2023



Rev. Arie Van Eek, former executive secretary of the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, died Nov. 7. He was 91.

After 20 years of pastoring churches in three Canadian provinces, Van Eek became the first executive secretary of the CCRCC and served until that council was absorbed into a different denominational structure. His ministry has been described as broad, courageous, persistent, and creative. In his role with CCRCC, Van Eek reported to and expedited the work of a number of committees, including the Committee for Contact with the Government (now part of the Centre for Public Dialogue).

Rev. Bob De Moor, a longtime chair of that committee, remembers Van Eek as a gifted, visionary, and humble leader who worked passionately to promote CRC ministry in Canada. “Arie had a real heart for those treated unjustly within Canada and around the world, and that motivated much of his work,” De Moor said.

Following graduation from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary, Van Eek studied for another year at Westminster Theological Seminary. Ordained in 1958, he pastored Exeter (Ont.) CRC; First CRC, Thunder Bay, Ont.; River Park CRC, Calgary, Alta.; and Kildonan CRC, Winnipeg, Man. He served the CCRCC from 1978 to 1998.

“Stepping forth and reaching out characterized so much of what this man did,” said pastor Mike Abma, Van Eek’s son-in-law, at Arie’s memorial service. “Whether it was in ecumenical relations with other faith communities; whether it was reaching out to what was then called the Indian and Metis community and the development of urban native friendship centers in Winnipeg, Regina, and Edmonton; whether it was orchestrating refugee sponsorships in churches or bolstering support for Christian education—Arie was a man who stepped forth and reached out.”

Affectionately called “a raging extrovert” by his family, Van Eek was a born connector who was also theologically motivated to reach out. “For Arie,” Abma said, “the gospel was all about God himself daring to step into that space, our human space, so that God himself could reach out to us and welcome us.”

In 1985 Van Eek was a founding member of Beginnings Family Services, a ministry based in Hamilton, Ont., that supports and counsels pregnant women and adoptive parents. After retirement, he continued to support this ministry and also continued to assist Crossroads Bible Studies among people who are incarcerated. In 2019, Van Eek received a Distinguished Alumni Award from Calvin Theological Seminary.

As a seminary student he sang in what was then The Back to God Hour Choir. He went on to sing for more than 40 years with the Ambassadors Christian Male Chorus and was a member of the Liberation Choir. He enjoyed woodworking, fishing, and going to concerts. He had an extensive record collection and loved cars, especially Volkswagens.

Predeceased in 2018 by Ellen, his wife of 64 years, and by daughter Jane in May 2023, Van Eek is survived by four children and their spouses, 15 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

'One Family Conversation' Aims to Support Diversity of Leadership at Classis



Classis Central California, meeting in October 2023 at Escalon (Calif.) CRC.

The Christian Reformed Church's One Family Conversation initiative intends to create space at classis meetings for ethnic and diaspora leaders to share their experiences as leaders within the CRCNA. Gil Suh, pastor of San Jose (Calif.) CRC, was one of the first to lead a classis listening circle at the meeting of Classis Central California in October.

Reggie Smith, a leader in the CRC's Thrive ministry agency, had proposed the initiative after hearing stories from ethnic and diaspora leaders expressing feelings of isolation at classis meetings.

The denomination's Council of Delegates, recognizing the need to promote welcome and belonging at classis, approved pursuing One Family Conversation and mandated general secretary Zachary King to implement the project.

"I truly believe that one of the most important matters that we have before us as a denomination is how we will respond to God's calling to be a church that embodies the vision of Revelation 7," King wrote in a message to classical clerks. "John sees a great multitude 'from every nation, tribe, people and language' gathered at the throne of Christ in worship. ... I am encouraging our CRCNA classes to

embrace this vision by engaging in One Family Conversation."

In leading the circle, Suh invited participants to share their experiences of being in a setting where they were a minority—ethnically, culturally, or socially—and describe how those experiences were stretching, enriching, stressful, or formative. Suh believes the circle hardly scratched the surface of what must be done for leaders to understand each other. "This conversation needs to be ongoing and requires regional advocates or champions," Suh said.

Smith said the Central California conversation could serve as a template for other classes. He believes Central California was the only classis to hold a circle last fall. Classis leaders seeking support or assistance for their own One Family Conversation can contact Thrive's regional catalyzers.

—Jenny deGroot

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Gerrit Groen

1930-2023

Described as a caring pastor and towering evangelist, John Groen was a man of deep convictions who touched hundreds of lives. He died Oct. 3 at age 93 following complications from a hip fracture.

John earned a bachelor's degree in education in the Netherlands before his market-gardening family emigrated to Canada in 1950. After completing his studies at Amsterdam's Free University and Calvin Theological Seminary, where he later served as a trustee, John was ordained in 1959.

He was a seminary instructor and missionary in Mexico City and served Christian Reformed congregations in Wallaceburg, Ont.; Kentville, N.S.; Owen Sound, Ont.; Waterdown, Ont.; Burnaby, B.C.; and Kingston, Ont. Congregations John served generally flourished through outreach and openness to the working of the Holy Spirit.

John served as an interim pastor well into his 70s before retiring to Holland Homes in Brampton, Ont. There he enjoyed playing piano, maintaining foreign language skills, and corresponding with inmates through Prison Fellowship Canada.

A devoted husband and father, he is remembered by his family for backyard horseplay and annual camping pilgrimages with children and grandchildren.

Predeceased in 2022 by Nell, his wife of 66 years, John is survived by his two children, their spouses, and five grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Groups Suggesting Pathways for Separation, Unity in the CRCNA

With stark disagreements over the 2022 and 2023 synodical decisions that reaffirmed the church's prohibition on same-sex sexual relationships and declared it to be confessional, plus unsettledness over binationality, there are groups making cases for either separation or unity within the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Is Separation Inevitable?

Some, like the council of River Park Church in Calgary, Alta., believe that the denomination has reached a point of separation. River Park sent a communication to the Oct. 27 meeting of Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan saying, "We have now arrived at a point of irreconcilable difference: we disagree on God's will for human sexuality that leads to flourishing; we also disagree on the necessity of officebearers' agreement, without exception, to the entirety of our denomination's historic confessions and synod's interpretations thereof."

Pastor Adrian de Lange, sharing with *The Banner* on behalf of the church's council, said they were "hoping to spark meaningful conversation about the many factors contributing to denominational dysfunction ... (and) to propose a path forward that highlights Christ's call to humility and to die to ourselves, especially to control."

River Park's council proposed suggestions for "facilitating (the CRC's) separation into three new groups of churches," but decided to downgrade what had been an overture (formal request) to a "communication for discussion." A classis committee advising on a response ahead of the meeting wrote, "We believe the 'overture in principle' (at that point a communication) circumvents Synod 2023's call to all classes, councils and officebearers to comply with the CRCNA's



beliefs and teachings concerning human sexuality. ... Councils and office-bearers are free to remain in covenant following that path set forth by Synods 2022 and 2023. ... Asking a subsequent synod to ignore the work of previous synods and to dissolve the CRCNA denies the Holy Spirit's leading in those synods and disrespects the people and local congregations represented by the delegates to Synods 2022 and 2023."

After the meeting, de Lange said, "At this point, there is no timeline for further action, though certainly our council and congregation—and, we trust, others in our classis and denomination—are earnestly seeking God's wisdom and leading."

Unity That Allows for Disagreement?

Others, such as the steering committee of the group Better Together, express belief that unity across differences in the CRCNA is still possible.

Saying "the actions of Synod 2023 continue to lead us down a path toward greater division, not less," the group released a communication template to encourage churches, individuals, or groups of individuals to use it to identify themselves as a church "in protest"—a church that disagrees with Synod 2022's confessional status declaration but nonetheless wants to continue participating in the CRC "because we love the CRCNA and seek God's blessing upon our denomination."

Nate DeJong McCarron, pastor of Fuller Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich., said a focus of Better Together is to preserve what they see as a means to retaining unity.

"Our recognition is that, in our current Church Order, we have a tool—a means by which people, officebearers, elders, and deacons can disagree in a respectful way with some of the confessional positions held up by the denomination. That means—the gravamen process—seems important to us so as to continue united in mission together," DeJong McCarron said.

Church Order Supplement for Article 5 includes the Covenant for Officebearers and the denomination's guidelines and regulations for gravamina (the means by which officebearers can communicate a difficulty with part of a confession of the CRCNA or petition for a change to the confessions).

Understanding of the purpose and use of confessional-difficulty gravamina is disputed. Some, including in overtures to Synod 2023, say confessional-difficulty gravamina were "never intended to be long-standing, perpetual ways for an individual to take exception to a doctrine or teaching of the church confessions"

(*Agenda for Synod 2023*, p. 532). There have been proposals to formalize this interpretation by including a timeline for resolving difficulties in order for an officebearer to continue serving.

DeJong McCarron said Better Together doesn't deny the dispute over interpretation. "We also don't feel like we need to defend the position that gravamina have been used in the past to express confessional difficulties that have been ongoing and have not been time-bound or have had 'sunset clauses' imposed upon them."

Synod 2024 will deliberate on the matter when it meets in June, taking up deferred overtures from 2023. Synod 2023 was unable to reach a conclusion on the matter before officers of that synod determined they had run out of time.

Denominational Response

Before synod convenes to take up these matters anew, the denomination's Office of General Secretary has worked to ensure that churches and classes have accurate information on what synod decided and what that means. It published a Synod 2023 Frequently Asked Questions document in August and in late November distributed a video from general secretary Zachary King offering a "brief and concise and pastoral discussion on what the CRCNA's position is on homosexuality." King also, in response to Synod 2023's request, pointed to resources to "equip congregations for pastoral ministry with and to our LGBTQ members and neighbors."

Leadership is also focused again on prayer, inviting classes to pray together with CRCNA leaders via video conference once a month, a practice begun in the months before Synod 2022.

Separation on Another Front?

Besides the reality of non-uniformity across the denomination's member churches on the human sexuality decisions of synods 2022 and 2023, there is

also a group in Canada seeking greater independence for the Canadian churches of the denomination. This group is pressing, as their name says, "Towards CRC Canada."

Having met informally for several months by video conference, those behind the effort hosted what they called "Canada's Kitchen Table" conversations at the end of November to hear from members across Canada about their hopes for the future of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada.

Those conversations, while open for anyone to join, required participants to agree not to share details about the conversation with others. Organizers said they would use anonymous notes gathered from the facilitators to gain understanding of the best way forward, communicating next steps through a website and a Facebook page.

Rita Klein-Geltink, who chairs Towards CRC Canada's communications committee, said she doesn't consider the proposed route to independence "a divorce, but more like a child that has grown up and is now ready to leave the family home. While there's always something hard about that, it's a natural and exciting time full of potential and new opportunities."

Towards CRC Canada had presented its cause to the CRCNA Canada Ministry Board by way of a letter in October and later participated in video dialogue sessions with members of the board. The board declined to have the group involved in its planned January Canada-wide conversation focused on church planting.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Noteworthy



Pastor Eric Sarwar (left) and his family.

Eric Sarwar, a Christian Reformed church planter in Artesia, Calif., received a placement in Princeton Theological Seminary's Overseas Mission Study Center's Residential Study Program. Sarwar—a pastor, songwriter, and author of Pakistani descent—is **writing a history of the North Indian Punjab Mission** starting in 1856. He said his work "will explore the historical practices of Presbyterian missions in pre- and post-partition (1947) North India and Pakistan, the perils and pathos of the local leadership, and the future of missions in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Indo-Pak diaspora globally." Sarwar is the first global research partner of Pakistani descent in the Center's 100-year history. He began to explore the idea of separate research into the history of the Punjab mission while completing a doctoral dissertation on the Punjabi Psalms at Fuller Theological Seminary. He applied to the OMSC residential program in November 2022 with the research topic "Practices of Presbyterian Missions in Pakistan: Decolonizing Missiology in the 21st-Century Muslim Context." His ten-month study program ends in June.

Classis Watch: Late Fall 2023

Two or three times each year, Christian Reformed churches send representatives to their classis, or regional assembly. The following are actions taken by classes, guided by articles of Church Order, in the last few months.

Candidates **examined and approved for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church** (Arts. 6 and 10):

Blake Philips, Jenn Richards, Josephine Wong, and Jonathan Hwang. **From other denominations** (Art. 8): Revs. Eun J. Park and D'Vante Rolle.

Ministerial loans extended for: Revs. David Shin to Cornerstone Community Church in Redwood City, Calif., and Dawei (David) Shao to the Chinese Church of Farmington Hills, Mich.

Eligibility of call extended for: Revs. Daniel Vos and Youngjo Choi.

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.

Ryan Hoekstra was **honorably released**.

Kwan Yong Chae was **released**.

Paul Yu was released in the status of one **dismissed**.

Ministers retiring (Art. 18): Revs. Pete VanderBeek (effective June 24, 2023), Bokjin Kim, Gerrit Besteman, Karl Van Harn (effective May 1), and Peter De Vries (effective Aug. 7).

Commissioned Pastors

Approved as **commissioned pastors called to specific roles within their classes** (Art. 23): Chad Boorsma (Grand Rapids South), Mike Gafa (Muskegon), and Dan Schultz, Victor Chua, and Dai Shi (B.C. North-West).

Randy Green (B.C. North-West) was **honorably released** from ministry as a commissioned pastor (Art. 24-d).

Commissioned pastor emeritus status (Art. 24-e) was granted to Liz Tolkamp (B.C. South-East).

Other Matters

Classis Grand Rapids East sustained an appeal from Matthew Tuininga objecting to a decision of the council of Grace CRC in Grand Rapids. The appeal, dated Jan. 4, 2023, relates to a September 2022 decision of Grace's council to adopt a statement that Tuininga said "violates and undermines the confessional teachings of the CRC as defined by Synod 2022 (specifically the teaching that homosexual intercourse is unchaste)" (parentheses original). In a response, the council of Grace CRC recommended sustaining the appeal, saying, "We acknowledge that we currently hold to a policy that is not in line with the current standards of the CRCNA and submit ourselves to discipline under Classis." It also said, "Grace Church remains committed to our statement. ... Rescinding our statement would have a catastrophic effect on our congregational integrity and be contrary to our understanding of God's Word."

Classis Grand Rapids East voted to have its executive team establish a committee to help classis address confessional alignment issues, including matters related to the sustained Tuininga appeal and "alignment-related mandates received from Synod 2023."

Classis Grand Rapids East hosted an executive-session classis meeting October 26 "with the intention of speaking and listening with the above issues in mind." Public minutes say input from the listening circles facilitated at that meeting will be provided to the Creative Next Steps committee, a committee of classis working to find "the best paths forward that allow our global ministry to flourish."

Classis Alberta South/Saskatchewan voted to end the current University of Calgary Campus Ministry effective December 31, 2024, tasking the current Campus Ministry committee with enabling the closing of the classis-supported ministry and transitioning to one that would operate independently of classis.

Classis B.C. North-West received a disaffiliation request from Christ Community Church in Nanaimo, B.C., and appointed classis representatives to meet with the church's council.

The classis minutes note, "CCC Nanaimo shared their report and that the primary reason council is recommending disaffiliation is because of the confessional status piece of synod's approval of the Human Sexuality Report."

Synod

Classes may direct requests or communications to synod according to the Rules of Synodical Procedure.

Classis Atlantic Northeast is asking Synod 2024 not to adopt the Church Order changes proposed by Synod 2023 regarding the addition of the CRCNA Code of Conduct for Ministry Leaders.

It instead suggests referencing the Code of Conduct in supplements to the Church Order.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

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FAITH
»————»
PRACTICES



HOLY HABITS THAT HELP US
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LISTEN TO THE SPIRIT,
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Who We Are and What We Do

By Kristen deRoos VanderBerg,
CRC Communications

The Christian Reformed Church in North America includes just over 1,000 congregations across the United States and Canada—1,015 worshipping communities, to be exact. This includes a small church of about 60 members that has been part of Truro, N.S., since 1954; a church of 110 Spanish-speaking people in the border town of McAllen, Texas; an established congregation that has been a fixture of Zeeland, Mich., since 1862; a Korean-speaking church in Lake View Terrace, Calif., that has around 3,000 attendees each week; a multicampus, multiethnic congregation of about 1,000 in Richmond, B.C.; and everything in between.

Almost 200,000 people belong to the CRCNA. We speak and worship in dozens of languages. We are rural, urban, and suburban. We include children, youth, young adults, middle-aged adults, and seniors. Some of us are single; some are married. Some have children, and some even have great-great-grandchildren.

Though 200,000 people may not seem like a large number when you consider the populations of the United States and Canada, by God's grace we have been able to accomplish a lot by working together.

Over our nearly 170-year history as a denomination, we've started several ministries to help us follow God's call and serve as God's ambassadors in the world. For those who want to know more—and those who sometimes forget which ministry does what—here is a helpful guide.

The CRCNA supports four agencies:

1. ReFrame Ministries

Relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, ReFrame Ministries (formerly known as Back to God Ministries International) creates contextual media resources that proclaim the gospel, disciple believers, and strengthen the church throughout the world in 10 major languages.

Take Japanese, for example. Japan's tech-savvy society offers a unique opportunity to expand the reach of the gospel. Partnering with the Reformed Church in Japan, ReFrame plans to tap into this high-tech environment to help build God's kingdom. Together, they plan to launch a mobile-friendly website and a dedicated smartphone app similar to the CRC's Bridge app that many congregations across Canada use.

Founded: ReFrame Ministries was founded by synod in 1939. Although the CRC was excited about the possibility of denominational radio ministry after a few pilot projects in 1928, they had to halt further progress until 1939 due to the cost burden of a new media ministry during the Great Depression. In 1938, the CRC appointed a Radio Committee to begin a media ministry, and in 1939, The Back to God Hour broadcast its first radio message from Chicago.

Vision: ReFrame's vision is that the lives and worldviews of all people around the globe will be transformed by God's gospel message.

Program summary: ReFrame produces daily devotionals (*Today*), podcasts, videos, and other media ministry in 10 of our world's major languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Something you might not know: Although The Back to God Hour officially changed its name to ReFrame in 2020, more than half a million people—most of whom are outside of the CRC—already knew them by that name. ReFrame has been the name of our English language ministry since 2008.

2. Resonate Global Mission

Compelled by God's mission to save the lost and renew all things, Resonate Global Mission exists to engage more and more people in the Spirit's call to live out this mission in their neighborhoods and in the world.

With support from CRC churches and classes, Resonate was able to send more than 30 new missionaries to the field in the past two years. This includes staff members who came through traditional avenues, such as long-time family ties to the CRC, but also new missionaries who came through



collaboration and partnerships with staff on the ground. As a result, Resonate missionaries spread the gospel in more than 40 countries throughout the world.

Founded: On June 18, 1888, synod appointed a five-member committee to lead the denomination in cross-cultural missions. For a Dutch-speaking church that was barely thirty years old, with just 10,000 members, this was a big step. God blessed the work of this new movement, known then as Christian Reformed World Missions. The CRC went on to build a reputation of passion for mission around the world. For much of this time, the domestic and international work was divided between two different agencies: Christian Reformed Home Missions and Christian Reformed World Missions. In 2017, these two agencies joined to form Resonate Global Mission, a single agency with a global focus.

Vision: Resonate wants to see communities of disciples joining in God's mission as they faithfully proclaim and live out the good news of Jesus in their neighborhoods and around the world.

Program Summary: Resonate Global Mission is an extension of your own church. It exists to walk with you on mission in your own community and around the world. In more than 40 countries, Resonate supports missionaries, church planters, campus chaplains, and other ministry leaders—all of them trained, supported, and sent by you.

Something you might not know: Resonate believes that young adults are not only the leaders of the future, but leaders today. While there's evidence that young adults are leaving the church, Resonate has found that many are still passionate about following Jesus and sharing their faith. In many places where Resonate works, they are getting young adults involved in innovative, mission-focused ministry, including church planting, missionary ministry, congregational ministry, and more.



3. Thrive

The mandate Synod 2023 gave Thrive was “to provide expertise, wisdom, and compassionate support to congregations while remaining attentive to a wide range of opportunities and challenges facing the church today.”

Rev. Dave Den Haan is one of Thrive’s many consultants. His special focus is on pastors; however, his years of experience make him tuned in to the overall needs of a congregation.

“The work of supporting pastors and churches in times of challenge, transition, and growth is one of the many ways that Thrive serves the congregations of the CRC,” Den Haan said. “We also bring expertise in conflict management, transitional ministry, and leadership development as well as faith formation, worship, justice, and mercy—all so that our pastors and congregations flourish.”

Founded: Thrive was launched as an official agency of the CRCNA in July 2023. It comprises nine smaller ministries that had been started by synods over the previous decades. Previously classified as “Congregational Ministries,” these nine agencies were united as a single agency under the Thrive name to better encourage and equip the churches of the CRCNA. The consolidation allows the ministries to be more accessible, more integrated, and more responsive in their engagement with Christian Reformed congregations and ministry leaders.

Program Summary: Thrive provides resources and advises churches in the areas of faith formation, abuse prevention, disability inclusion, racial reconciliation and diversity, pastors and church support, chaplaincy, justice, and worship.

Something you might not know: Thrive desires to build relationships and walk alongside local congregations in any and all circumstances they may be encountering. Working from the “Thrive Hive,” the staff want their interactions and general posture with churches to be one of curious listening.

4. World Renew

Compelled by God’s deep passion for justice and mercy, World Renew joins communities around the world to renew hope, reconcile lives, and restore creation.

For more than 60 years, World Renew has fulfilled this mandate, reaching out in Christ’s name to support vulnerable people around the world. In its essence and existence, World Renew works to respond to God’s call to live justly and love mercy as the global community faces extreme poverty, hunger, displacement, and disaster. Because we serve a God whose heart is most concerned with those who are oppressed, we seek to help renew hope where there is despair, contributing to a world where every one of God’s people can flourish.

Founded: Twelve years after synod was formally asked to “consider the advisability of appointing a Synodical Diaconal Committee” (*Acts of Synod*, 1950, p. 63), Synod 1962 approved the formation of the denomination’s diaconal agency, then known as the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee. Its mandate was “to minister in the name of our Lord to those distressed by reason of the violence of nature, the carnage of war, or other calamities of life, and to relieve the suffering of the needy in the world.” CRWRC changed its name to World Renew in 2012.

Vision: World Renew envisions a world where people experience and extend Christ’s compassion and live together in hope as God’s community.




Program Summary: In 2022, World Renew had the great joy of celebrating its 60-year anniversary with supporting communities across the United States and Canada. Looking back at the faithfulness God has shown, World Renew was also able to look forward as they imagine what God may have in store. To continue fulfilling its mandate, World Renew believes that working with communities in the areas of food security, economic opportunity, disaster response, community health, and peace and justice is the key to opening doors for the Spirit to change lives in amazing ways.

In the last year, through community development programs in 1,200 communities, 221,652 participants were reached in the key areas of food security, economic opportunity, community health, and peace and justice. They were able to build new health, agriculture, livelihood, and leadership skills that improved their lives for the long term. Additionally, 256,852 survivors of violence, drought, flooding, and storms benefited from World Renew's disaster response programs in 2023.

Something you might not know:

World Renew hosts the *Do Justice* podcast, and 2023's theme was reconciliation. Listen in to hear some familiar names, get to know some new ones, and think about how God works to fully reconcile lives.

In addition to these four agencies, the CRCNA also supports two educational institutions (Calvin University and Calvin Theological Seminary) and several Canada-specific justice ministries (the Centre for Public Dialogue, Canadian Indigenous Ministries, and the Decolonization and Anti-Racism Collective). Stories about what God is doing with and through the Christian Reformed Church as a result of these shared ministries will be told throughout the year in this section of *The Banner*. Thank you for your ongoing prayers and support. 

Promoting the Welfare of the City Through the 49507 Initiative

THIS FALL, DOZENS OF RESIDENTS of the 49507 ZIP code in Grand Rapids, Mich., attended several focus groups sponsored by Calvin University to help researchers understand what people living in that area felt were their biggest needs. What they found was that several attendees had not finished high school or a GED program. Still, several wanted to achieve college degrees, but they faced barriers to that goal, including childcare and funding.



In 2024, Calvin will respond to this need by launching the 49507 Initiative, a program to help make post-secondary education accessible to adult learners living in this part of the city with services such as free childcare, bus passes, meals, and scholarships.

"Until now, higher education opportunities were difficult to come by in this area," explained Abbie Lipsker, director of continuing studies at Calvin and one of the program's creators. "But for years Calvin has prioritized and been impassioned by serving the greater Grand Rapids community by actively and humbly listening, taking initiative where needed."

Beginning in the summer of 2024, Calvin will pilot a free academic transition program called Wayfinder in the 49507 area. Partnering with local organizations and Calvin faculty and staff, the program will prepare adult learners who may have stepped away from the classroom due to circumstances such as the birth of a child or lack of resources. Wayfinder's courses will be geared toward students who never completed high school or a GED program and will provide a pathway to eventually completing a bachelor's degree from Calvin.

"The goal of this initiative is for Calvin to bridge the gap as it pertains to access to higher education in the local community while living into our mission and vision of being a trusted partner with a commitment to lifelong learning and the welfare of the city," explained Shaq Anthony, Calvin's director of strategic partnerships. "We imagine this initiative as a vehicle to a better quality of life."

Currently, less than a quarter of people living in the 49507 area have a bachelor's degree, compared to about 39% in Grand Rapids as a whole.

Calvin University's mission statement is to equip students "to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world." The 49507 Initiative "embodies those words and gives us the opportunity to create systemic change in our community," Anthony said.

The new program is just one of many Calvin has created to contribute to the welfare of its city. "From community nursing students offering health care to the Plaster Creek Stewards restoring the Plaster Creek Watershed, Calvin has had a long-standing presence in the city of Grand Rapids," Associate Provost Kevin den Dulk said, "but until now, it hasn't all been connected to a broader vision. The 49507 Initiative brings all these programs together under one umbrella and allows us to have a bigger footprint and more focused presence in the city."

—Calvin University Communications

The View From Here

A Life of Grateful Service

IN MY TEENS, I was confused about the place of good works in the life of Christians. I could articulate the truths of Ephesians 2:8-9—that I was saved by grace through faith and not by good deeds. After all, I sang “Amazing Grace” every other Sunday! I knew this truth in my heart, but when confronted with the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments, and other scriptural commands, I experienced a deep sense of guilt and inadequacy. Maybe you do too.

One of the things that most attracted me to the Reformed faith when I was in my early twenties was its understanding of good deeds as acts of thanksgiving to God.

Q&A 86 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why then should we do good works?” The answer: “Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image, so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits.”

In fact, according to Paul, God *created* us for lives full of grateful good deeds. What a relief! Instead of facing the guilty tyranny of “should haves,” grace empowers Christians for thankful acts of joyful obedience.

This attitude of thankfulness is especially important when it comes to service. Jesus tells us some sobering things about serving God:


Instead of facing the guilty tyranny of “should haves,” grace empowers Christians for thankful acts of joyful obedience.

- » To the one who, after being called by Jesus, asks to first go back and bury his dead father or say goodbye to his family, Jesus says, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).
- » A metaphor Jesus often uses for service is cross-bearing: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).
- » Jesus warns his disciples that serving him will be costly: “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20).
- » Don’t forget Luke 17:7-10, which says in part, “So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

How does gratitude connect to this kind of gritty and costly service?

I had a few tough bosses in my younger years, and I’ll tell you that serving egotistical, selfish, and arbitrary people is tough and thankless work. Thankfully, this is not so with our master. First, Jesus gave up his own life to save us. Second, our master doesn’t ask us to do anything he himself hasn’t already done. He also doesn’t send us alone. He sends us with his Holy Spirit to guide and sustain us. Finally, he doesn’t send us as servants, but as his own beloved children, heirs to his kingdom.

Gratitude, then, is the primary and default posture of serving in God’s kingdom. But that doesn’t mean it will be easy. In fact, Jesus cautions us that there will be times when serving is going to hurt. But at the end of it all is Jesus—our master, Lord, and brother—with his arms outstretched, welcoming us home and saying, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

It is a blessing and a pleasure for the staff, agencies, and institutions of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to serve all of you. It can have its tough moments, but serving Christian Reformed congregations and members is deeply meaningful and significant work that we are privileged to do. I hope you enjoy these stories of your denominational ministries serving you in the name of Christ Jesus. 



Rev. Zachary King is the general secretary of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He is a member of Fuller Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

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

이 기사의 한글번역은 TheBanner.org/korean에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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

Providing Support on the Path to Stability

EVERY WORKDAY, John Luth cycles the route to his ministry job in Edmonton, Alta. Each downward pedal is a steady pulse propelling him into the day ahead. He enjoys the time to think, reflect, and prepare his heart to extend unconditional welcome to whoever may cross his path.

Luth's work as a chaplain at the Salvation Army-Edmonton Centre of Hope puts him in daily contact with people in transition: individuals fighting addiction, navigating mental health struggles, escaping human trafficking, or reckoning with the long-term impacts of residential school experience. The common thread in each story is trauma. The common goal of Luth's chaplain team is to provide emotional and spiritual support to those on the path to stability.

Recently, Luth worked with an individual whose life has been severely impacted by alcohol use. The person described his childhood in an extremely rigid fundamentalist sect in which he and his siblings would be beaten after religious services if they had moved a muscle or perhaps fallen asleep even for a moment. This same community, including his parents and family, was now shunning him for leaving the sect. Others had told him simply to be thankful he got out of such a high-control environment. But Luth said his work in that moment "was to honor that the experience at present [was] also a deep experience of loss of family and community."

That person also shared that one of his parents was taken from home at the age of four and put in a residential school for Indigenous children, where they were beaten for speaking their mother tongue. They came home ten years later having lost both language and childhood. This is an iteration of generational trauma Luth sees often



John Luth is a chaplain at the Salvation Army-Edmonton Centre of Hope in Edmonton, Alta.

in his line of work, and he was able to connect this person with trauma therapy resources and share with him how God sees people with compassion and uses God's power only to empower.

With 166 beds in two transitional houses and a short-term stabilization program, the Salvation Army-Edmonton Centre of Hope allows Luth to bear witness to these stories and lived experiences regularly.

"Probably the most difficult thing in my role is to decenter myself and to find the center in the other person and in God's work in them," Luth notes. "I only have so much capacity to keep my heart and self open to others, so I am intentional to maintain a boundary between my work and personal life, see a therapist, stay physically active, and practice prayer alone and communally to attend to my holistic well-being. I really love my work and feel honored to be where I am."

In the Christian Reformed Church in North America, chaplains are well-equipped commissioned pastors or ministers of the Word who serve in specialized ministries outside the church. Chaplains are specially trained, called, and ordained by the church, and they are sent by Jesus Christ to provide spiritual care to people in pain or spiritual distress. They provide pastoral ministry in specialized settings to people who are hurting or in crisis, uprooted or dislocated. Through the very presence of chaplains, the settings in which they minister become places of surprising grace.

Thrive supports chaplains by bringing them together for fellowship, training, and networking. It also provides pastors with emotional and spiritual support so they can serve others.

"I love to bear witness to the change that is possible when another human feels welcomed, supported, and included," Luth said. "I am convinced that this is one of the manifestations of the Spirit. So many of those who come to stay with us briefly or for longer periods of time have been marginalized, demonized, and rejected by society. I love to welcome people and see light and hope restored to their eyes."

—Kristyn DeNooyer,
Thrive

Chinese Ministry Team Responds to Mental Health Crisis

AFTER A TRAGIC INCIDENT sent shockwaves through the Chinese-speaking community in North Carolina, ReFrame Ministries' Chinese ministry team stepped in for support.

On August 28, a Chinese doctoral student shot and killed his mentor, a professor of applied physical sciences at the University of North Carolina, before taking his own life.

"This heartbreaking event shed light on pressing issues that young Chinese speakers face," said Jerry An, ReFrame's Chinese ministry leader. "Many students, both in China and those studying abroad, face incredible academic pressure, stress, and mental health challenges."

In response to the tragedy, An and other members of ReFrame's Chinese ministry team partnered with a Chinese church in North Carolina to organize a special online event that included distinguished guests such as Xiangwu Zhang, a Chinese-American professor at North Carolina State University. Zhang discussed the pivotal relationship between students and advisors. Psychologist Lin Yin offered insights on preventing personal psychological crises, and pastor Harry Ma shared his wisdom on evangelization and pastoral ministry.

The event underscored the significance of creating a supportive community and providing resources that can help those grappling with academic pressure and personal crises.

The UNC shooting was not the first time that ReFrame's Chinese ministry team has offered a Christian perspective on mental health and academic pressure. In 2022 the team published a book of testimonies from alumni of the prestigious Peking University that highlight how faith and community support can support students during times of despair.

One of the testimonies came from Ling (not his real name.) He had always been a great student, but a devastating failure in his postgraduate exams shattered his self-esteem.

"After this failure," Ling wrote, "I felt that there is no more hope in life, no more fame, no more money, no more power, and I wanted to kill myself."

Ling was standing on the ledge of a building intending to jump when he received three back-to-back phone calls from a Christian friend of his inviting him to share a simple chicken dinner.

Ling recalls telling himself, "I'd like to be a full ghost rather than a hungry one. I'll jump after I've eaten."

"This act of kindness from Ling's friend reignited a spark of hope within him, reminding him of the hope he'd once found in the Bible and the importance of human connection," An said.

Ling's experience led him to dig deeper into the teachings of the Bible, where he found wisdom and guidance that touched his heart deeply and eventually led him to become a Christian himself. And the woman who offered him the chicken? Ling married her.

Ling's story illustrates the struggles that many Chinese students face: the overwhelming burden of academic pressure, personal crises, and a desperate need for hope.

"In the darkness of such moments," An added, "these students need a guiding light, a source of strength, and a message of love that can only be found in Christ."

With your generous support, ReFrame Ministries aims to ensure that more stories like Ling's emerge to bring hope and transformation to Chinese students.

—Brian Clark, ReFrame Ministries

Where We Serve

Here are all the places that we, as the Christian Reformed Church in North America, are serving and sharing the Gospel through our shared ministries.





Note: 21 countries have been excluded from the map for security reasons—please pray for our staff and partners working in closed countries.



Ask. Connect. Share.

The CRCNA is big. Since we can't always meet for coffee, let's meet at The Network to compare ministry notes.

Covering over 60 different ministry topics, you'll find blogs, discussion topics, ministry Q&As, and much more. Get involved by asking a ministry question, posting a blog, or sharing a resource today.

Visit crcna.org/network

Water: The Super Dissolver

LOOK IN YOUR FRIDGE for a carton of juice and read the list of ingredients. The first ingredient will probably be water. Now look at the ingredients on a can of soda. Water is first again! If you look at a bottle of window cleaner or dish soap, there too the first ingredient will be—you guessed it—water! Why is that?

Because God designed water to be a super dissolver! In fact, scientists call water a “universal solvent” because it can dissolve more things than any other kind of natural liquid. Even some metals, rocks, and plastics will break down in water given enough time.

Have you ever traveled somewhere and noticed that the water tastes different from the tap water at home? That’s because when water passes through different types of rocks or pipes, it dissolves tiny bits of minerals into the water, making the water taste different. If your house has a water softener, your tap water will have fewer of those dissolved minerals in it.

There are some really good things about water being able to dissolve so many things. If it didn’t, things like Febreze and Coca-Cola wouldn’t exist! Even more importantly, our bodies wouldn’t work right. Your body is about 60% water. God created you in this way because tears, stomach acid, blood, sweat, and urine are all made with water. Water dissolves salts, acids, and toxins so that your body can use them or get rid of them. This is why we have to make sure we drink lots of water. Water helps our bodies to work properly.

Because water is part of our sinful, broken world, its ability to break down or dissolve certain things can sometimes cause problems. When water mixes with toxins, such as sulfur dioxide or mercury, we get dangerous

pollution. Sulfur dioxide goes into the air, mixes with water droplets, and creates acid rain. Mercury that runs into lake water harms the fish. Particles of plastic and metal that water has broken down get into our drinking water. All of these examples are a good reminder to be so very careful of what we put into our rivers, lakes, and sewers. Whatever we pour down the drain, throw in the lake, or even toss on the side of the road will be dissolved by water and eventually be consumed by wildlife—or even us!

God created water so that it can dissolve many things. We can thank God for the wonderful gift of water as a super dissolver by taking care of it!

And maybe the next time you have to do the dishes, you can just leave them in a sink full of water and tell your caregiver that you’re simply using God’s gift of water, the super dissolver, to get them clean! 🍷



Albert Kok teaches eighth grade at Beacon Christian School in St. Catharines, Ont. He loves teaching science and exploring God’s order in creation as he hikes the Bruce Trail with his family.





The Journey to Healing After Abuse

By Amanda W. Benckhuysen

Each time Casey drove near the church, she could feel her body involuntarily tense up and her breathing quicken. Fear and rage would course through her veins against her will. Though she hadn't been to the church in several years, her circle of friends and some family still attended, which made her feel both too close for comfort and unbearably lonely. Three years prior, Casey had been groomed and sexually assaulted by an adult volunteer at her church's youth group. The horror of the assault shattered Casey's idyllic world and rattled her to the very core of her being. But the ongoing trauma, confusion, shame, and loss made healing elusive.

Over the years, Casey wondered whether she would ever feel normal again. She wondered when she would be able to drive around town or hang out with friends again without being triggered by a smell, a song, a place. When her night terrors would stop. When her paralyzing bouts of depression would end.

For Casey and others who have experienced sexual, emotional, or spiritual abuse, the harm is life-altering. Depending on the nature of the abuse and the support systems available, it can take every ounce of energy and courage just to navigate the emotional

challenges that each new day brings. Often it takes years, even decades, for survivors to find healing and wholeness.

When the one who causes the harm is a member of the church community, the survivor also commonly experiences profound disruption in their faith journey and life with God. The church community that once was a place of love and care becomes a place of fear and danger. The spiritual practices that draw us near to God in times of suffering or grief become, by their association with the abuser, a source of pain and disquietude. And to many survivors, God seems absent and ambivalent to their suffering. The result is that often survivors feel isolated from their church communities, abandoned by God, and disconnected from their faith.

So what is the pathway to healing for Casey and others? What will it take for Casey to feel whole again? To be free of the anxiety, fear, hurt, and self-loathing that eats away at her spirit? To feel safe enough to love and be loved again? And what role can the church and the Christian faith play in her healing?

What the Church Can Do

Every person's journey toward healing is different. But church communities can have a significant impact on how the trauma from abuse affects a survivor. There is a growing body of

research that shows that the impact of a given trauma, even the most egregious violation, is mitigated when a survivor is surrounded by a supportive community. While the impulse of survivors is to withdraw from others in their hurt and shame, survivors need people around them who accept them, who walk alongside them in their pain, and who communicate to them that they are loved and that what happened to them is not their fault. The apostle Paul encourages the Christians of his day to offer this kind of support to each other when he says, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). By coming alongside survivors in their confusion and grief, church communities ease the load that survivors carry and share in their journey toward healing.

But what does that look like practically? The list that follows is not exhaustive, but it provides some concrete ideas for how to share the burden of a survivor.

1. Take a survivor's testimony of abuse or harm seriously. It takes a great deal of courage for a survivor to come forward with an allegation of abuse. Reporting is emotionally exhausting because it requires the survivor to relive the incident often multiple times to multiple audiences with no assurance that their story will be believed. When a

survivor does come forward, then, it is important that the church honor the survivor and the risk they took by following up with some form of investigation and by holding the wrongdoer accountable for their actions if the violation happened at church or by someone who is a member of the congregation. This communicates to the survivor that the church respects them and cares about them and their well-being.

2. Assign a support team. Survivors need time to grieve and process their trauma—a task that, especially early in the healing process, can be all-consuming. The church community can support the healing of a survivor by having a couple of people check in with the survivor throughout the week to provide meals or attend to other day-to-day tasks. Providing this kind of practical support ensures that the survivor has the much-needed space to grieve and process their trauma without also having to worry about attending to their physical needs.
3. Implement/bolster abuse prevention measures. Those who have experienced abuse in the church need reassurance and evidence that the church is a safe place. When abuse happens in the church, trust in the safety of the community is broken and needs to be reestablished. One way the church does this is by making every effort to prevent abuse. A safe church policy, a code of conduct for ministry leaders and volunteers, and training go a long way toward accomplishing this and communicate to survivors that the church takes seriously its fiduciary and moral responsibility for the safety of its participants.
4. Communicate ahead of time what to expect. Survivors are commonly triggered by random things, not all of which can be avoided in church. However, if the worship service or church event includes something unexpected or out of the ordinary (for example, installation of elders

Every person's journey toward healing is different. But church communities can have a significant impact on how the trauma from abuse affects a survivor.

and deacons, baptism, communion, or a sermon on an especially violent or troubling text of Scripture), the church may want to inform members of the congregation ahead of time to avoid unnecessary triggering. A simple heads-up in an e-newsletter will suffice to empower survivors to determine whether to join in person or watch the livestream.

These are a few small but impactful things that church communities can do to support someone who is working through the ongoing effects of trauma related to abuse.

But What About Survivors?

Are there any common practices or postures that have helped survivors find emotional and spiritual healing after abuse? Where does a survivor turn when God feels far away and faith no longer feels like a safe or credible source of comfort?

Survivors of abuse are not alone in asking these questions. The people

of ancient Israel, for instance, knew what it was like to feel battered and beaten down and even abandoned by God in their hour of need. Throughout the book of Psalms, we have examples of God's people crying out to God in anger, pain, fear, and doubt and wondering in the midst of it all where God is. "Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" (Ps. 10:1). "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?" (Ps. 22:1).

The emotion in these psalms is palpable. We can feel the psalmists' profound confusion and hurt. But these psalms are not just attempts to blow off steam. Rather, they are courageous affirmations by the psalmists that they are beloved children of God even in a time when they felt anything but. In these psalms, the psalmists remind God of God's covenant relationship with them, and they call on God to be God—to attend to their cries and bring justice and healing and wholeness to their shattered selves. For survivors of abuse, the lament psalms are an important resource for processing anger and grief and hurt, and they model how to do this in healthy, productive, and even faith-filled ways. Consider the following features of the lament psalms:

» **Honest speech before God.** The lament psalms are charged with powerful emotions and unfiltered speech. Truly, nothing seems out of bounds—not even cursing one's enemies or blaming God for one's suffering. Honest speech about what is going on in our hearts and minds is an important part of processing our hurt in healthy ways. The psalmists believed the place to go with all that pent-up rage and chaos is God, for God is big enough, and God's steadfast love for God's people is strong enough to absorb our pain. For survivors, naming what they are feeling and being honest before God about their anger, their confusion, and their pain is an important and

meaningful way to work through what happened to them.

» **Your story is yours to tell.** In the lament psalms, the psalmists tell God their story: what happened to them, who hurt them, how they were hurt, and what the psalmists want God to do about it. Psalm 55 is an excellent example. One common effect on those who experience abuse is a fracturing of the sense of self and a loss of self-esteem. Narrating the story of what happened to them and the impact on their lives from their own perspective can be an empowering exercise that helps survivors recover their voice and their agency and reclaim control of their story.

» **Set healthy boundaries.** One way the psalmists protect their emotional boundaries is by naming those who harm them as enemies. In fact, the Hebrew words for “enemy” or “enemies” occur more than 100 times in the psalms. The use of this term isn’t just an exercise in hyperbole. Enemies were named such because they were people who attacked the well-being of the psalmists and compromised their flourishing. Identifying oppressors in this way created much-needed emotional distance between the psalmists and the ones who brought them harm. Survivors similarly need space and time away from the ones who harmed them and anything associated with the violations to allow themselves time to heal and to rediscover who they are outside the context of the harm done to them.

» **Surround yourself with people who support you.** We tend to think of the psalms as individual prayers prayed when the psalmists were alone. It seems more likely that many of the psalms were prayed in the assembly of God’s people. We get hints of this in Psalm 55:22, when, after pouring out his lament to the Lord, the psalmist addresses those who are gathered around with the words, “Cast your cares on the Lord,


and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.” The reality is that the psalmists did not believe they were alone in having to navigate painful experiences. Instead, they relied heavily on their community to share in their burdens, their pain, their grief, and their healing journey. The importance of community and connection in our lives cannot be underestimated, but all the more so when we are suffering. One of the most significant things a survivor can do is allow a community of care—friends, relatives, church members, mentors, and counselors—to support and encourage them in their journey toward healing. It really does take a village.

» **Give yourself grace.** The lament psalms generally move from lament to praise, mimicking the stages of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance). But many of them meander a good bit, moving back and forth among the stages. This journey of grief is different for everyone and tends not to follow a predictable path. Things that trigger memories of the abuse can set a survivor back significantly even after long periods of stability or wellness. The unpredictability of dealing with one’s trauma is hard and courageous work. The psalmists’ meandering shows us what it looks like to give oneself time and grace on this journey, trusting that God journeys with us through it all and upholds us in God’s steadfast love.

A couple of months ago, a survivor shared with me how surprised and disappointed she was that a sexual assault five years earlier continued to affect her as much as it did. “Why does this continue to be so hard?” she asked. “I’m a strong, competent, resilient woman. Why can’t I get over this?”

At the time, I simply shared with her words that I have found immensely comforting: God is here. God sees you. God cherishes you. God grieves what was done to you. You are a beloved

child of God. And while it may not feel like it, in Christ, God is making all things new. You will be whole again someday.

But I have continued to ponder her question—“Why can’t I get over this?” I think a large part of the answer is that we weren’t made for this. We weren’t made for a world in which we are violated and harmed. We weren’t made for a world of brokenness and sin. As such, we should never hope to get good at getting over oppression and violence and abuse and injustice. To simply “get over” the wrongs done to us is to acclimate to the brokenness and evil of the world and lull ourselves into believing this is OK. The hurt we feel when we are violated or mistreated, then, is not an indication of what’s wrong with us, but an indication of what’s wrong with the world. And this realization should inspire in all of us a deeper longing for Christ and Christ’s kingdom, a world where sexual assault and abuse and injustice will not be tolerated and sorrow and hurt will be no more. Until that day, may we join our hearts with all who groan under the weight of the injustices of this world and pray, “May your kingdom come, O Lord, on earth as it is in heaven.” 



Amanda Benckhuysen lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., where she serves as the Safe Church ministry consultant for Thrive.

1. Does your local church have a Safe Church Team that works to help prevent abuse in the church? What steps have been taken in your local church to help prevent abuse?
2. Have you ever felt like God is far away or has even abandoned you and therefore is not a source of comfort? . . .

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God and Telescopes

How far into the universe does fallen creation and loving salvation extend?



Ken Nydam is a retired Christian Reformed minister now working as licensed mental health counselor in his agency Hope Way Counseling Services in Byron Center and Allegan, Mich. He is a member of Cadillac CRC.

IMAGINE BEING GIVEN the task of going to an ocean beach to search for a single grain of blue sand. As this idea forms a picture in your mind, you are already feeling the folly of it. With the Hubble and Webb telescopes, astronomers are discovering that the universe is so enormous that our little blue planet is as numerically insignificant as is one grain of sand on an ocean beach. The question that haunts us now is this: How do we mesh this scientific truth with the significance of our beautiful, life-filled planet as it orbits in so much space—a space filled with more celestial bodies than grains of sand on the earth?

No doubt we believe that our existence as created beings living out a historical narrative on a living planet of magnificent beauty and complexity is significant. In fact, according to the Bible, it is so significant that, when Earth fell into the grip of sin and suffering, the God of the vast universe loved it so much that he sent his only Son to save it. Now, if God “so loved the world,” that is such a tiny, tiny speck in the universe, one cannot help but wonder what else out there in the vastness of God’s creation God loves sacrificially. How far into the universe does fallen creation and loving salvation extend?

Christians also trust that when our physical life is over, we will remain alive in spirit to continue in relationship with God and his children in heaven. We are also promised that we will be reestablished on a new Earth upon which we will live an everlasting life with new bodies. Will that new Earth be within the Milky Way galaxy? There is plenty of room for it!

Considering how numerically and spatially insignificant Earth is in the universe and yet also realizing how hugely significant it is to God, we cannot help but wonder how one reality fits into the other. Does the purpose

of our time-measured earthly existence in any way fulfill or fit into the purposes found in the unimaginably immense universe where other living beings possibly thrive? Or did God create all those stars just for better oceanic navigation or for romantic gazing at the night sky? Or is it God’s decree that God’s people on Earth will never be allowed to traverse the millions of light years to other worlds outside our solar system because there is enough of life, enough of suffering, and enough of salvation right here for a complete everlasting-life experience?

Skeptics of Christianity accusingly ask, “How can any religion be so presumptuous as to claim that their God and theology, formulated within such a limited time and space, has cosmic significance?” Atheists say that the universe is just scattered debris from a very big bang, that it has no purpose, that it just happened.

Our telescopes create more questions than answers. But they certainly elicit a response. Psalm 19 is one such response: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.” In other words, what telescopes can now show us is that God is worthy of even greater worship and awe because God’s creative and ruling power is more incredible than we can ever imagine. When we peer into space, it is reasonable to humbly fall prostrate before God while also being comforted that God’s essence is sacrificial love.

God knows exactly where that single grain of blue sand on the beach is located. And if there are any other blue grains on God’s cosmic beach, God knows them too. **B**



They Disagreed Well

What the CRC Can Learn From a Standout Synodical Committee

By Roxanne VanFarowe

At last year's synod of the Christian Reformed Church, a group of delegates tasked with advising on some of the more difficult questions being considered nonetheless spoke of being truly thankful to do that work alongside brothers and sisters with whom they disagreed.

Eighteen men and five women were assigned to Advisory Committee 7. The committee was charged with crafting a response to 34 overtures (formal requests from churches and groups of churches) and two communications about human sexuality, then bringing that response before the larger body of synod for a vote. Most of the overtures either spoke against or offered support for Synod 2022's decision to declare as confessional the inclusion of homosexual sex in the definition of unchastity in the Heidelberg Catechism.

These 23 people held varying personal opinions, and most were strangers to each other before synod. They knew that the topic of human sexuality had led to painful divisions in churches. They had firm opinions and were unlikely to be swayed. Yet in the three

days or so that they spent together, these strangers grew to care for one another. They listened attentively and compassionately, even when what they heard clashed with their convictions. Their work was intense and demanding, but they listened well and—according to many in the room—they followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Chair Willem Delleman, a pastor from Victoria, B.C., claimed that serving on Committee 7 was “one of the best experiences of my life in terms of feeling God's presence.”

As a *Banner* reporter to Synod 2023, I was permitted to sit in on their deliberations without reporting on the specifics. I was astonished by the atmosphere of cooperation in the room for the few hours that I sat with them.

I later interviewed eight people on the committee—Aaron Vriesman, Matthew Burns, Willem Delleman, Rita Klein-Geltink, Don Korthuis, Heather Strooboscher, Dave VanderMeulen, and Steve Zwart—to find out more about what worked so well in their committee. Because committee work at synod is not open, I cannot report on the details, but I want

to share the overall effect of their work because it was so encouraging.

The committee presented much of its work in a unified report, with Delleman telling synod that “for two full days of deliberations we were unified.” The committee did split into a majority and a minority on the matter of the CRC's position on homosexual sex as confessional, and once those differing reports came to the floor of synod, discussion was messy and painful. In the end, Synod 2023 voted in favor of the majority report that upheld the confessional stance.

Are there still things the Christian Reformed Church can learn from Committee 7? Here's what I learned:

1. There is beauty in listening across our differences.

To discuss the things that divide us is uncomfortable. It is work that few of us relish. But in Committee 7, “people chose to heed the Spirit's call to reach beyond what was familiar and think from someone else's point of view [and] consider ideas that were uncomfortable or unfamiliar,” said Matthew Burns, a pastor from Whitinsville, Mass. “There were many moments

when someone said, “Wow, I’m really glad you said that.”

“I was pleasantly surprised at how much compromise there was,” said Aaron Vriesman, a pastor from Coopersville, Mich. “I would call it answers to prayer. I had been praying about synod a lot, and many others had [been] too.”

“We were able to find our way through weighty, contentious matters with a spirit of truly desiring to hear each other’s heart—not just listen to opinions, but truly hear each other’s heart,” said Steve Zwart, a pastor from Prinsburg, Minn., who brought the majority report before synod.

“There was joy in just working together,” said Dave VanderMeulen, a pastor from Escala, Calif. “It is so easy to pigeonhole people. I recognized in conversation that there is far more nuance than just Category One and Category Two. That was joyful. It was encouraging to not only find people that think alike but recognize how much we can continue to talk over a number of issues.”

2. “The ‘left’ listened to the ‘right’” and encountered a different side of discipline.

According to several of the interviewees, people on both sides of the same-sex marriage issue heard things from the other group that surprised them.

“What really happened is that the ‘left’ listened to the ‘right’ and the ‘right’ listened to the ‘left,’ really listening, seeing their perspective,” said Don Korthuis, an elder delegate from Lynden, Wash., who himself surprised many by joining the minority report.

“The ‘left’ heard from the ‘right’ how they discipline people in their churches. Whenever you’re locked into a sin, there’s got to be discipline. It takes time—years. The ‘left’ thought discipline meant you kick them out of the church—boom, done.”

Delleman agreed that those who are affirming heard something unfamiliar: “Affirming folk needed a wake-up

**Their
conversation was
full of grace.**

call and needed to get a sense of perspective of these conservative guys.” Delleman, a self-described moderate, was amazed “by the pastor and congregation member relationships (the conservatives) described. The pastor would say this or that, and the congregation would submit to what they were saying. I marveled at that, because where I am ministering, if I were to tell someone ‘You have to have your child baptized,’ they would walk. In that setting, wow, I kind of miss that.”

3. “The ‘right’ listened to the ‘left’” and saw the need for grace.

According to Korthuis, “The right realized that people need a little bit of grace, that there’s this pain out there.”

Vander Meulen, who was on the majority side, said he felt “huge sympathy” for “those who wrestle with these issues.”

“Hearing from people, talking about this, recognizing the weight behind all of this—we felt the burden when we were together behind those doors,” Vander Meulen said.

Burns said the conservatives were “genuinely surprised and taken aback to learn that there might be churches in the denomination that would use this confessional language as a bludgeon. They were primarily concerned with the need for us to examine our own hearts in this, not the need to go out with a bigger stick. I saw that posture, and I believe it.”

Heather Strooboscher, a pastor from Grand Rapids, Mich., said, “It surprised me that some people in the room had no idea of the unrest that last year’s synod caused. Many believed that last year’s synod was a good thing and didn’t cause harm to the churches.” Delleman agreed: “Folks from the Midwest rural churches were genuinely surprised and confused” by what they were hearing, he said.

“I don’t think anyone in the room would deny that people have been hurt, that mistakes have been made,” said Vriesman, but “some amount of hurt and disagreement is going to happen because of the gospel.”

On the floor of synod, Zwart pleaded, “If you’re going to vote for this majority report, please don’t leave here and be a jerk about it.”

4. We can stick by each other even when we disagree.

Although Committee 7 was divided, they wanted to convey to the general assembly the oneness they had achieved: “This was one of the best experiences many of us have ever had,” Delleman told synod.

Still, a few minority committee members felt strongly enough to speak on the floor against the majority report. Rita Klein-Geltink, a pastor from Cobourg, Ont., supporting the minority report, addressed fellow Committee 7 member Steve Zwart, who was at the microphone for the majority. She asked a question fraught with emotion: “If my four sons and their wives who are all following Jesus ... fall into the category of unsure (about the permissibility of same-sex marriage), can the CRC still be their home?” As Zwart struggled with a slow, tearful response, another minority committee member, Katelyn Van Hove, a deacon from Surrey, B.C., walked to the front of the room and put her arm on Zwart’s shoulder in an expression of unity.

Strooboscher said that on the synod floor “some comments were made at the mic, some at the sidebar, some

muttered among the delegates, some from the gallery” that indicated there were some present “who did not respect the integrity and value of each and every person on the floor of synod.” But for her, “the integrity of Committee 7 carried through. Every time one of the committee members spoke, I was proud and felt affection for them. I was grateful for them and felt, ‘These are my people.’ I had a sense of family and unity.”

5. Some are still striving for unity in the CRC.

Jesus prayed that his church would be one as he and the Father are one (John 17:21). Committee members took that to heart.

“When we entered that committee room,” Zwart said, “I believe the Holy Spirit entered with us because the hearts of each person in that room were for what God wanted—unity. I believe each person genuinely wanted conclusions that declared ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism.’ And despite differences that surfaced in the conversations and deliberations, the Spirit anointed the conversations as we sought the heart of what God wanted for his church—to be one.”

Strooboscher said she was bothered when outside her committee she heard people who seemed to have given up on a unified church. “There is a denominational defeatism,” she said.

And Korthuis said, “I felt the Spirit saying, ‘Can we hold the CRC together? Can this committee be the beginning of not splitting the church?’”

6. Our conversations must end in a decision.

Days of healthy conversation in Committee 7 ended with a decision, one that felt painful but inevitable to many. “In the end, there was a heavy

weight to carry,” Vander Meulen said. “When the committee work was done, we sat and cried a bit. We felt the burden we had been carrying the whole time. We can’t carry the burden of trying to fix the denomination and hold it together. A lot of us would have loved to find that way.”

And as human sexuality was discussed on the floor of synod, “People were not making arguments for or against,” Burns noticed. “They were saying things like ‘I don’t recognize this church. I don’t know if I fit here anymore.’ These are identity things, nuances of belonging. It felt like some kind of divorce proceedings. People were acknowledging that they have some kind of irreconcilable difference. It felt like people on the floor were working out their grief over realizing that there are some pretty important things that they see differently.”

“I don’t see how unity can work out unless we don’t talk about (same-sex marriage) at all,” Vriesman said. “When trying to do ministry together, I don’t think you can do ‘unity at all costs.’ That’s why seven denominations have split over this, because on principle, staying together doesn’t work.” Vriesman said he felt sad and angry during the plenary discussions “because the reason we are here (at this point) is that we couldn’t be honest about our differences. ... We have to have an emotional bloodbath.”

But Klein-Geltink, who also felt deeply discouraged by the tension-filled close of Synod 2023, said, “We spent three days deliberating and wrestling, and we still weren’t done. To say it’s all done is really naive. God has a lot more for us to learn and discover.”

7. The church reflects Jesus when we are full of grace and truth.

Committee 7 showed me a picture of grace and truth. Their conversation

was full of grace. People listened to each other wholeheartedly and caringly. The truths of Scripture were applied to the church’s current situation as carefully as people knew how. Those in the majority saw how their churches could appear harsh and overbearing to those in the minority, and they recognized the need to soften their approach. Those in the minority realized that those in the majority did have tender, patient hearts that were willing to listen. They almost found a way to agree, and in the end they parted ways yet held each other in high esteem.

Committee 7 gave me a glimpse into a beautiful church: the Christian Reformed Church. These are people who hold a high view of Scripture and the confessions. These are people who love Jesus. They recognized that they have often failed to love as Jesus has called them to love, and, by God’s grace, they want to do better. They agree to abide by the decisions of the church even when those decisions are clearly at odds with the culture.

May tender, patient hearts and listening ears be the posture that the world sees as the beautiful, hurting Christian Reformed Church moves forward graciously and truthfully. The apostle John declared that Jesus Christ came from the Father “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). May we, the bride of Christ, reflect God’s glory by likewise speaking the truth in love. **B**



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Why Did Jesus Have to Die for Humans to Be Forgiven?

The only way back to Eden was through death.

A FRIEND OF MINE teaches first grade in a Christian school where few of her students know the Bible. As they approached Easter and were working their way through the Jesus stories, one student mentioned Jesus dies. With wide eyes, a little girl cried out in shock, “Jesus dies?!”

This man who is presented as kind and loving, a healer who has deep affection for the hurting, a man who welcomes little children and blesses them—he dies? Not only that, but he’s killed? On a cross? After being beaten?

It is shocking.

Why, really, did Jesus have to die? Couldn’t he have fixed things without dying? He healed people with words and touch, so couldn’t he just fix the planet by speaking to it? Couldn’t Jesus fix broken leaders and systems by touching them? Why is his death the solution to sin?

For those of us who (usually) drive the speed limit, pay our taxes, vote, volunteer, and generally try to live on the right side of the law, the idea that someone would need to die for us—that someone else would need to die because we have messed up so badly—seems extreme. Surely if we all agree to try harder to be good, then Jesus doesn’t need to die. I mean, we aren’t really that bad, are we?

The apostle Paul disagrees: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). That’s the standard. Not the speed limit. The standard is the glory of God.

If you know the story of Eden, you know that humans were offered a life lived in the presence of God. Our first parents turned down that offer and were ushered out of Eden, its entrance then guarded by cherubim (angels) with flaming swords. To get back to Eden, to get back to the glory of God,


would mean going through those swords. It would mean death.

The only way back to Eden was through death.

In God’s mercy, God gave rituals to God’s people that allowed them access to God, but the access still came through death—the sacrifice of animals. Access was not possible without death, and that death often involved swords and flames.

Through generations of sacrifices, God was teaching God’s people that the only way to be made right, the only way to get back into Edenic fellowship with God, was through death. And humans can’t do it for themselves or for each other. A sinful person can’t die for another sinful person. One muddy person can’t clean off another muddy person. The mud just spreads.

Instead, Jesus—the sinless Son of God—becomes sin for us, and when he dies, he goes through the ugliness of death to gain our entry back into the glory of God. As Paul explains it, “God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

My teacher friend was deeply moved by her student’s shock at Jesus’ death, and she was so glad she could say that Jesus’ death was not the end of his story. Death isn’t the end of our story either. Jesus’ death undoes death. The cherubim can stand down. Eden—and even God’s own self—are accessible once again. Thanks be to God. 



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Nourishing Narratives: The Power of Story to Shape Our Faith

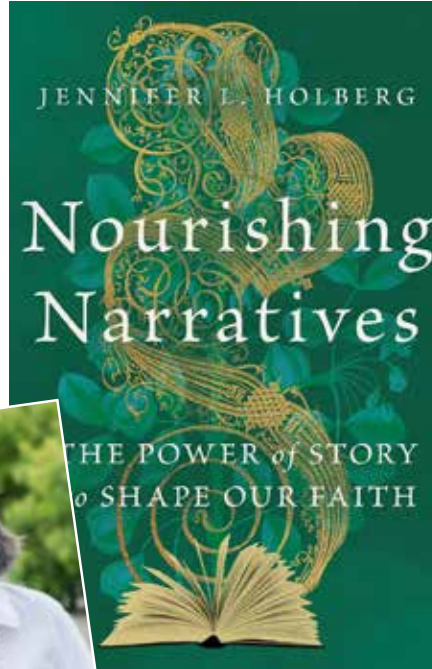
“DON’T TELL ME the moon is shining,” playwright Anton Chekhov once counseled; “show me the glint of light on broken glass.”

Show, don’t just tell, is a maxim to which every good writer tries to adhere. In her new book, Calvin University professor Jennifer L. Holberg provides a master class in the art of getting her points across by using good stories—what she calls “nourishing narratives.” What could have been an academic treatise reflecting on the importance of stories is elevated here by Holberg’s own life stories as well as those told in great literature, poetry, and, of course, the Bible. Scripture flows through this book as Holberg connects the stories that shape our lives with the greatest story ever told.

“We are all profoundly story-shaped people,” Holberg writes.

What are “nourishing narratives” as opposed to stories stuffed with empty calories, so to speak? The narrative of God’s abundance feeds us with faith and hope, while the scarcity mindset that plagues many people produces fear and angst.

That scarcity narrative that humans buy into has been around for a long time, Holberg says. “When the Israelites are in the desert,” she writes, “the story they tell themselves becomes one of lack, one in which God is failing them.” Both we and the Israelites must flip that skewed script and start believing the manna God sends each day is




enough—more than enough. “How then,” Holberg continues, “do we shift our mindset away from ‘going back to Egypt’ and being self-sufficient, and instead, find narrative models that are grounded in the conviction of God’s plenitude?”

Another strengthening story is that of being a good friend in a Christian culture that elevates the family unit above all else. “We still lack a robust way to talk about friendship,” Holberg says. One example is how obituaries tell the tale of “what relationships are included as essential.” Most obituaries list only family members and their spouses (a fact brought home to me when an aunt wouldn’t speak to me for a time after I went rogue when writing my dad’s obituary, mentioning his life rich in friendships and books and excluding the usual list of relatives).

“When was the last time you heard a sermon exhorting you to be a better friend?” Holberg asks. It’s a good

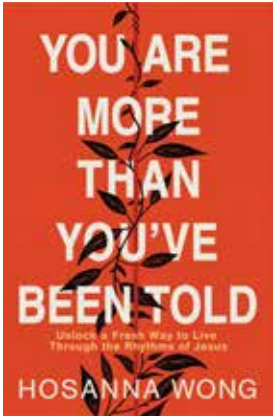
question, and I can’t remember. Yet we were created for friendship by the friend who “sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).

Bookish souls will love the glorious array of literature woven into the book, as befits a book written by an English professor passionate about teaching books, poetry, and stories. Holberg references poets and works as diverse in time and place as nineteenth-century English poet Christina Rossetti; Holberg’s colleague Jane Zwart, who in a poem describes the wind as being an “argon sarong”; the fourteenth-century Italian poet Dante Alighieri and his *Inferno*; and 2017’s *Pachinko* by Korean American author Min Jin Lee.

As readers close the book, they will begin to spot stories everywhere and be equipped to discern which ones are beneficial and nurturing and which ones are unhealthy. They will embrace the underlying idea of Holberg’s book: that a nourishing narrative is one that tells “all the desolation of the broken world but also the deep assurance of the God who redeems it all.” (IVP Academic). 



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You Are More Than You've Been Told: Unlock a Fresh Way to Live Through the Rhythms of Jesus

By Hosanna Wong

Reviewed by Mary Li Ma

Hosanna Wong guides readers on a journey of reflection, self-discovery, and communion with God with “a new rhythm that leads to a lighter, fuller, and more satisfying life.” Wong begins by exposing some of the lies we hear in life: you are not enough, you don’t do enough, and your past defines you. These lies often shape our perceptions of reality in a broken world. But God’s will for God’s followers is to embrace a new name and a new identity as a child of God.

This book has 13 short chapters, each ending with guided questions for reflection. Its format makes it perfect for study in a small group, especially among a diverse group of young professionals who can relate to the author’s life trajectory. (W Publishing Group)



Tasting History with Max Miller

Reviewed by Trevor Denning

Every recipe has a story.

Tasting History with Max Miller is a YouTube channel featuring recipes and the stories behind them. Each week Miller offers a video of around 20 minutes showcasing two of his great loves: food and history. First he introduces a drink or dish and tells us a little about its origins. Then he demonstrates its preparation in his 1950s-style kitchen.

While we imagine it baking, cooking, or fermenting, Miller shares the history of the food.

What did the soldiers of the Ottoman army eat? How did they cook it? Even if you don’t want to eat like a Roman gladiator (trust me, you don’t), or you get sick at the idea of Civil War sweet potato “coffee,” Miller makes learning about food history interesting and entertaining. (YouTube)



Chasing God’s Glory

By Dorina Lazo Gilmore-Young; illustrated by Alyssa De Asis

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

While Mama makes breakfast, she sings, “Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory!” Zayla asks, “Mama, we talk and sing about glory at church, but what exactly is glory?”

Mama invites Zayla to join her on a bike ride to hunt for glory. Zayla and Mama discover God’s glory in bright murals painted on alley walls, delicious aromas and tasty food sold at a farmers’ market, the love of an elderly couple sitting on a park bench, ducklings and their mama duck on a pond in a city park, and the unexpected assistance of a stranger.

Artist Alyssa De Asis’ bright, lively illustrations capture the glory of God’s amazing world through the eyes of an inquisitive girl and her insightful mother. (WaterBrook)

The Lowdown

Reckoning with Power: David Fitch unpacks the difference between worldly power, or power over others, and God’s power, which engages not with coercion but with love, reconciliation, grace, forgiveness, and healing. (Brazos)

Following the Events in Hawkeye:

In *Echo*, Maya Lopez (Alaqua Cox) returns to her hometown, where she must come to terms with her past, reconnect with her Native American roots, and embrace her family and community. (Jan. 10, Disney+)

From Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks:

In *Masters of the Air*, airmen of the 100th Bombardment Group risk their lives and forge a brotherhood during World War II. (Jan. 26, Apple TV+)

Wild and Distant Seas:

In this multigenerational saga by Tara Karr Roberts, Evangeline Hussey, an outsider on Nantucket, uses her unique ability to find her place in the declining whaling community after her husband’s disappearance at sea. Inspired by *Moby Dick*. (Norton)

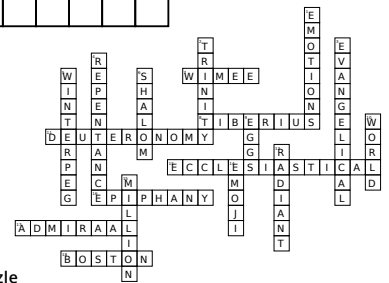
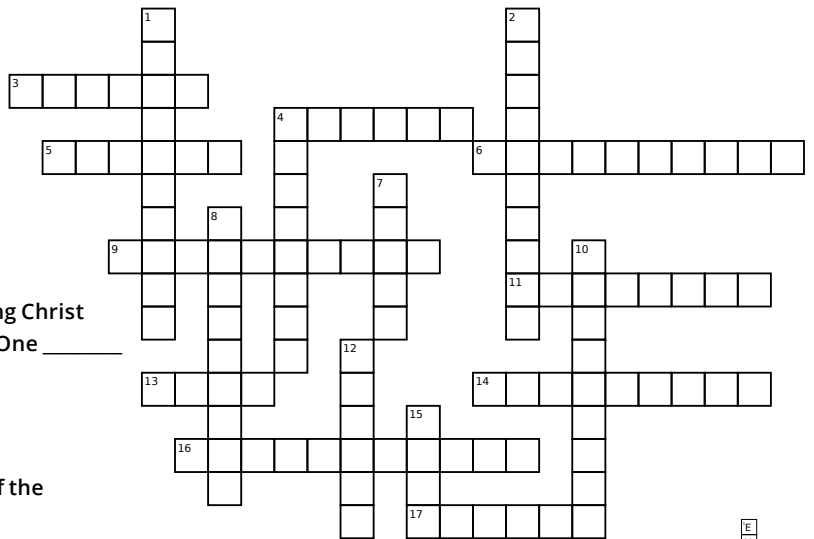
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!
(Word Play appears monthly except for the July/August issue.)

Down

- 1. _____ *Narratives* is a Calvin professor's new book
- 2. A preserve where members of a Kalamazoo, Mich., church planted trees
- 4. _____ means "God's dwelling place"
- 7. _____ is a super dissolver
- 8. A Calvin University academic transition program
- 10. The default posture of serving in God's kingdom
- 12. Inspired by the vision in Rev. 7 of a multitude worshipping Christ "from every nation, tribe, people and language," we are One _____
- 15. He works as a chaplain at the Centre of Hope

Across

- 3. _____ Cox plays Maya Lopez in the Disney+ series *Echo*
- 4. A Christian Reformed church planter writing a history of the North Indian Punjab Mission
- 5. This agency comprises nine smaller ministries
- 6. _____ Christian Fellowship in Regina, Sask., opened a ceremonial garden in September
- 9. The topic of a Korean church conference in October
- 11. University of North _____
- 13. Hosanna _____, the author of *You Are More Than You've Been Told*
- 14. One of the first five books in the Bible
- 16. A word for the clarity of Scripture
- 17. Name of a telescope scientists use to peer into space



Solution to the December 2023 puzzle

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DEADLINES: Ads for the February issue are due January 5, 2024; March issue: February 2, 2024. Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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

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

Congregational Announcements

WINTER WORSHIP IN BRADENTON, FL Bradenton Chapel invites you to join us for Sunday Worship and Wed. Bible Study. Visit our website at bradentonchapel.com

Eligible for Call

CLASSIS ALBERTA NORTH wishes to let the churches know that Rev. Dan Meyer, formerly of Edson-Peers CRC in Edson, Alberta, is eligible for a call. He can be reached at danmeijer@gmail.com and 780-728-8870.

Church Positions Available

COORDINATOR/YOUTH PASTOR- Calvary CRC in Orange City, Iowa, is seeking a coordinator or pastor to oversee youth ministries, enhance congregational life, and preach as educated/gifted. Duties may include, but are not limited to youth meetings, service trips, counseling, as well as leading worship services. For more information, please contact Wayne Huisman at wayne@huismanglobal.com.

FULL TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR First CRC in Lynden, Washington is seeking a full-time ordained associate pastor to provide general pastoral ministry in the congregation to support our senior pastor, including preaching, with specific focus on overseeing our ministry to youth, young adults and young families. Email resume and statement of faith to Brian VanderWoude at search@firstcrlcynden.org.

FULL TIME PASTOR Westside Fellowship CRC in Kingston, ON is prayerfully seeking an experienced, relational, passionate leader to shepherd our congregation as we seek to follow Christ. Please reach out to our search committee at searchteam@wfcrc.ca for more information.

FULL-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR Modesto CRC, Modesto, California seeks an Associate Pastor to lead discipleship and disciple-making ministries within the church and the broader Modesto community. Contact in confidence janiceviss@sbcglobal.net

FULL-TIME PASTOR Fresno CRC, Fresno, California seeks a Full-Time Pastor to lead our diverse and growing congregation. We are prayerfully seeking a Pastor who is called to an urban setting, with a passion for worship, fellowship and mission. God is calling us to be a community of servant hearted disciples with a passion for Jesus, People and Mission. If you feel God calling you to this community, please reach out to Matt Schuring mschuring@mac.com

FULL-TIME PASTOR POSITION Bethel CRC in DeMotte, IN is seeking a Pastor who is dynamic and passionately led by the Holy Spirit in preaching God's word to a multi-generational congregation with emphasis on youth, shepherding and growing our church. Please contact us if interested by reaching out to Russ Vander Molen at: vander5@embarqmail.com. Also visit bethelcrcdemotte.org for job description and church profile.

GGCRC (ggcrc.org) is seeking a FT Sr. Pastor to provide leadership, direction and vision. Must be a committed Christ follower to serve Him and His people. Qual: M.Div. accredited theological seminary. Min 5 yrs church pastor exp. Proficient in English; fluent in Mandarin or Cantonese. Authorized to work in the US. Inquire at srpastorsearch@ggcrc.org.

PASTOR INWOOD CRC, Inwood CRC, in Inwood IA is searching for our next pastor. Our congregation values a pastor that is distinctively reformed, eager to preach God's Word, and excited to build on over 100 years of God's faithful ministry at Inwood CRC. We ask those interested in shepherding our congregation to prayerfully consider ministering in Inwood, and to contact Nathan Nieuwendorp at nathan.nieuwendorp@gmail.com for more information and our church profile. www.inwoodcrc.org

Employment

ASSISTANCE NEEDED: Retired Missionary Physical Therapist to Bangladesh living in Jenison, Mi. seeks someone to aid him in writing his memoir/autobiography. Call him at 616 2171983 or e-mail him at larrygolin@aol.com

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS



LANINGA Roger & Thelma (née Brink), 6292 Melbourne Ct, Hudsonville MI 49426, celebrate 60 years married on January 8. Their children, the late CW4 David & Angela, Rev. Deb & Dr. Steven Koster, and Dan & Kim, with 6 grandchildren and spouses, give thanks to God for their legacy. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

MYERS, HARRY AND MARILYN - 60TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY - 60th Wedding Anniversary. Originally from Fair Lawn, NJ and now living in Byron Center, MI. Harry and Marilyn

(Eichhorn) Myers will celebrate their 60th Wedding Anniversary on January 29th, 2024. Their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren wish them a Happy Anniversary.

Birthday

90 YEARS



DE BOER, MERRIE LOU of Grand Rapids, MI, will celebrate her 90th birthday on January 27. Congratulations and much love from your family who has been richly blessed by you. Her husband, Marvin, and children, Barb & John Buteyn, Carol (Bill) Buikema, and David & Jane De Boer, grandchildren and great grandchildren love her and look forward to celebrating together. Congratulations can be sent to Merrie Lou De Boer at 725 Baldwin St. #B-25 Jenison, MI 49428.

Obituaries

DE JONG, PATRICIA JUNE (age 82) went to her heavenly home Nov. 3, 2023. Her childhood was on a farm near Peoria, Iowa; then moved to Grand Rapids, MI with her family in 1959. She lived most of her adult life in SLC, Utah, where she taught in a Christian school. She was predeceased by her parents, Herman A. & Catherine De Jong, & sister Arlene Nichols. She is survived by brother Marion (Linda) De Jong (Byron Center, MI) & sister Rose (Ken) Vander Ark (Tucson, AZ) & nieces and nephews in CA, NV, and MI. We thank God for her life and her service to Him.



HOEKMAN, STEVEN passed from this world on October 28, 2023 in Ripon, CA. He was 98 and had enjoyed 73 years of marriage with his loving wife Jeanne (Tebben), who survives him, as do their six children: Mark (Giny); Kent; Timothy (Carla Connors); Joel (Debra); Thomas; and Rebecca (Andrew Chiesa). He loved children and especially his 18 grandchildren and 27 great-grands. He is predeceased by all 7 of his siblings. Steve was born in New Holland, SD, served in the US Army, and then attended Calvin College. He served as an educator and administrator in Christian Schools in South Dakota; Denver, CO; Racine, WI; Kanawha, IA; and in Ripon, CA. After retirement Steve and Jeanne accepted several volunteer assignments with World Re-

new (CRWRC) and at Rehoboth School. They lived for the past 59 years in Ripon where they were members at Immanuel CRC.

POST, Sidney, age 99. Born in Sexbierum, Friesland, the Netherlands, Jan. 6, 1924; died in Grand Rapids, Mich., Nov. 24, 2023. In 1947, he married Jeanette Elgersma, who died in 1997. He is survived by their children Judy (Bob) Van Hoff, Rena Post, Grace (Jonathan) Bradford, Mary (the late David) Schuringa, Theda (Malcolm) McBryde, Arlene (David) Van Kley, Jo Ann (Richard) Cunningham, Anita (Stanley) Blom, Jerald (Mary) Post and Karen (Steve) Malestein, as well as stepchildren by his second wife, the late Shirley Bouma: Ann (Wouter) Schuurmans, Bill (Denise) Bouma and Reinder (Pam) Bouma. Sid had 26 grandchildren, 34 great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren. He served as an elder in First Christian Reformed Church of DeMotte, Indiana, and New Hope CRC, Sarnia, Ontario, and held numerous leadership roles in other Christian organizations. Always with joy in life and interest in others. Living and dying in God's grace.

PRINCE, CLIFFORD W age 94, of New Era, Michigan, passed away on October 17, 2023. He was preceded in death by his wife of 71 years Ellen D. (Andre). He is survived by sons Kenneth (Jane), James (Ruth), Michael (Carol); daughters Laura (Doug) Fessenden and Andrea (James) Karsten; 10 grandchildren; 16 great-grandchildren. He was a member of New Era CRC.

VAN DYKE, Tina (Buys) entered her eternal rest on October 27 at age 91. She was preceded in death by Louis, her husband of 67 years, and 12 of her 14 siblings. She is survived by her children, Steve (Vonnice), Alan (Cyndie), Joan Crull (Terry), Mike (Lillian) and Wayne, 9 grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren, and brothers Jim (Minnie) and Don (Leona). Her family thanks God for her long life of faithful service to Him.



VANDER PLOEG, DAVID 87, died peacefully 11-20-23 in St. Joseph, Michigan. Beloved husband to Sheryl (Kragt), his wife of 64 years, loving father to his children Dan (Dixie), Dawn (Jim) Hartwell, and Janice (Michael) Visser; proud grandfather to Rachel and Steve Taplin, Luke and Caleb Vander Ploeg, Esther and Hunter Anthony; Erin and Paul Genua, Ryan and Lauryn Hartwell, David and Audrey Hartwell, Sarah Hartwell; Abigail and Elizabeth Visser, As well as 9 Great-grandchildren. David was a St Joseph Attorney for 25 years. 1988-93 the Executive Director at Back to God Hour (Reframe Ministries). 1993-2000 Executive Director at Barnabas Foundation. Dave & Sheryl were charter members at St Joseph CRC in 1961. David was on many boards including Calvin University, Ministers Pension Fund for the CRC, Roseland Christian

Health Center, Eastern Ukraine Theological Seminary. He was active in his church, a faithful member of Bible Study Fellowship, and a Crossroads Prison Ministries mentor. He was fully committed to his Lord and Savior.



WIEGIERS Bernard "Bernie" Wiegiers, age 84, beloved husband for 60 years to Lynne Kay, nee Bandringa. Loving father of Brian, Craig (Deborah), Brett (Nancy), Tammy Marek, Trisha (Wayne) Boss and David (Torie). Cherished grandfather of Casey (Andrew) Kowitz, Abby (Alex) Freitag; Amanda (Nicolas) Novacek, Kadee (Simon) Summers, Nathan, Justin, Brandon, Daniel Wiegiers; Vincent and Joseph Marek; Liz (Derek) Boomsma, Brittany (Jeremy) Karr, Kylie (Zim) Rivas, Mickey (fiancé Colton DeJong) Boss and the late Zachary Boss. Proud great-grandfather of Zach, Maddie, Lily, Ivy, Levi and Daisy. Dearest brother Barbara (late John) Buursma, Theresa (late Robert) Wiltjer and the late Grace (late Art) Rosenwinkel, the late Dina (late Will) Wichers and the late Hilda (late Donald) Huisenga. Dear brother-in-law of Carol (late Dan) Beland and the late Raymond Bandringa Jr. Fond uncle of many nieces and nephews. For 35 years, Bernie served his community as co-owner of Beland & Wiegiers Auto Rebuilders.

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Position Opening
Executive Director
Canada

The Christian Reformed Church in North America's Canada Ministry Board is searching for a candidate to fill the full-time, permanent position of Executive Director-Canada. Might you be the right fit? Reporting to the Board of Directors of the CRCNA - Canada Corporation the Executive Director Canada will be responsible for communicating a clear and compelling vision that inspires ministry leaders and partners to advance the binational mission of the CRCNA in Canada. This person will embrace the responsibility of overseeing staff and others within the CRCNA Canadian Ministry Office as they lean into this vision each day. This position would be expected to work from the Burlington office at least part-time. Learn more and apply at: crcna.org/ExecutiveSearch.

 **Christian Reformed Church**

Is Love Enough?

My heart fought back when the instructor of our pre-adoption classes warned that love is not enough.



Jenna C. Hoff is a freelance writer and editor in Edmonton, Alta. She is a member of Inglewood Christian Reformed Church.

OUR 112-YEAR-OLD house has sheltered many families. I'm certain this house's sturdy walls have beheld everything from joyous laughter to desperate tears. Yet I suspect they've never known inhabitants quite like my family.

I'm not just referring to the usually cheerful cacophony from the moment our youngest boys awaken until night falls. Our home is also witness to the highs and lows of a family where we all live with a disability, neurodiversity, or diagnosis.

In our home, there is much joy—and struggle. Each child was between the ages of 9 and 20 when they joined the family, and the walls daily see God weaving together our erratic, beautiful, painful, warm, devastating, hopeful stories.

When I was first preparing to adopt 14 years ago, I cherished the idea that love was what was most needed. My heart fought back when the instructor of our pre-adoption classes warned that love is not enough.

We'd envelop our kids in love and safety, I thought. We'd take them to the best therapists and professionals, enroll them in specialized schools, and teach them daily of God. Surely Jesus would bring healing to erase years of hurt.

The ensuing years humbled me. While numerous aspects of our journey have been wonderful, I've learned through many a broken day that genuine healing takes a long time. It is rarely linear, often messy, sometimes tear-flooded.

Sometimes healing doesn't happen in our lifetimes. The effects of severe early childhood trauma, deprivation, and in utero alcohol and drug exposure have lifelong implications.

Our walls have collected stories of the beautiful and normal aspects of life—bedtime stories and cuddles, family game nights, and incremental growth.

But that collection of stories also includes some excruciating days in which years of hurt have begun to be processed and expressed.

Children's grief over being removed from the care of their birth parents and experiences of severe early childhood trauma, neglect, and maltreatment can manifest in angry outbursts, defiance, theft, lying, self-harm, and more.


I've now realized the truth in the instructor's words. If the definition of "enough" is the idealized healing I'd envisioned, then love is not enough. But God has gradually revealed to me a profound truth about love. Instead of providing healing, God walks beside us in our pain. God is near.

I've seen this in my own life since a life-altering accident. Having grown up in denominations emphasizing miraculous healing, I fully expected God to heal me too. Yet here I am, 24 years and thousands of prayers later, still living with significant disabilities. Severe chronic pain continues to wrack my body.

But, through it all, I've felt God beside me, loving me day in and out. In the words of Psalm 16:8 (NLT), "I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me."

God's love has become my parenting model. I still take my kids to therapies, enroll them in specialized schools, and do all I can to provide a healing home environment. But I understand now that just as God walks beside me, my role is to walk alongside them.

While I cannot erase the pain of their early years or their continuing effects, I can be beside my children, advocate hard for them, love them with all I am, and most of all hold tight to the God who goes before and beside us.

When I look at love in this light, then yes, love is enough. 

What Lies Are You Believing?

Adam and Eve

You reached, you picked, you ate, you hid.

What lies are you believing?

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, and Zebulun

You sold your brother and faked his death.

What lies are you believing?

King David

Your covetous lust brought death to you both.

What lies are you believing?

Judas Iscariot

You carry the pouch that jingles with coins.

What lies are you believing?

Roman Centurion

You hold the whip that drips my blood.

What lies are you believing?



Jen VanderBeek lives in Surrey, B.C., where she works as a librarian at Surrey Christian School's Fleetwood Elementary campus. She is a member of Hope Community Church. Having won awards for writing, VanderBeek now occasionally jots down poems, short reflective pieces, and various bits of brain spillage to try to make sense of things.

Peter, James, and John

You weep in sorrow, yet hide in shame.

What lies are you believing?

Christian, oh Christian

You pray. You read—yet cringe in fear.


What lies are you believing?

All humanity alive today

You live as if I didn't conquer death.

What lies are you believing?


B



“Just how closely are we called to engage with a broken world?”


“What do we really mean when we pray, ‘Not my will, but yours be done?’”

Find answers on the network.
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TheBanner.org/Classifieds

Position Opening
Loan Fund

The Christian Reformed Church Loan Fund Board is looking for a candidate to fill the full-time position of Director of the Loan Fund. This position reports to the board of the Loan Fund and is supervised by the Controller of the US Ministry Board. This person would be responsible for both the loan portfolio and the investments used to fund the loans. This person would interact with churches seeking to acquire a loan and to encourage individuals, churches and classes to invest in the loan fund. This position is monitoring interest rates both on the mortgage side and on the investment side. This position can be either a remote position or a hybrid position. Learn more and apply at:
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 Mar 25 – Apr 6 | *Dr. Jerry Bilkes & Dr. Joel Beeke*

IDYLIC IRELAND
 May 9 – May 18 | *Dan Hermen*

HIGHLIGHTS OF SOUTHERN ENGLAND
 May 22 – Jun 2 | *Tom & Cheryl Smith*

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS IN GREECE
 May 31 – Jun 11, 2024 | *Dr. Jeffrey A. D. Weima*

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 Aug 10 – Aug 21 | *Paul & Brenda Harris*

ENGLAND: HERITAGE & COUNTRYSIDE EXPLORATION
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