

BANNER

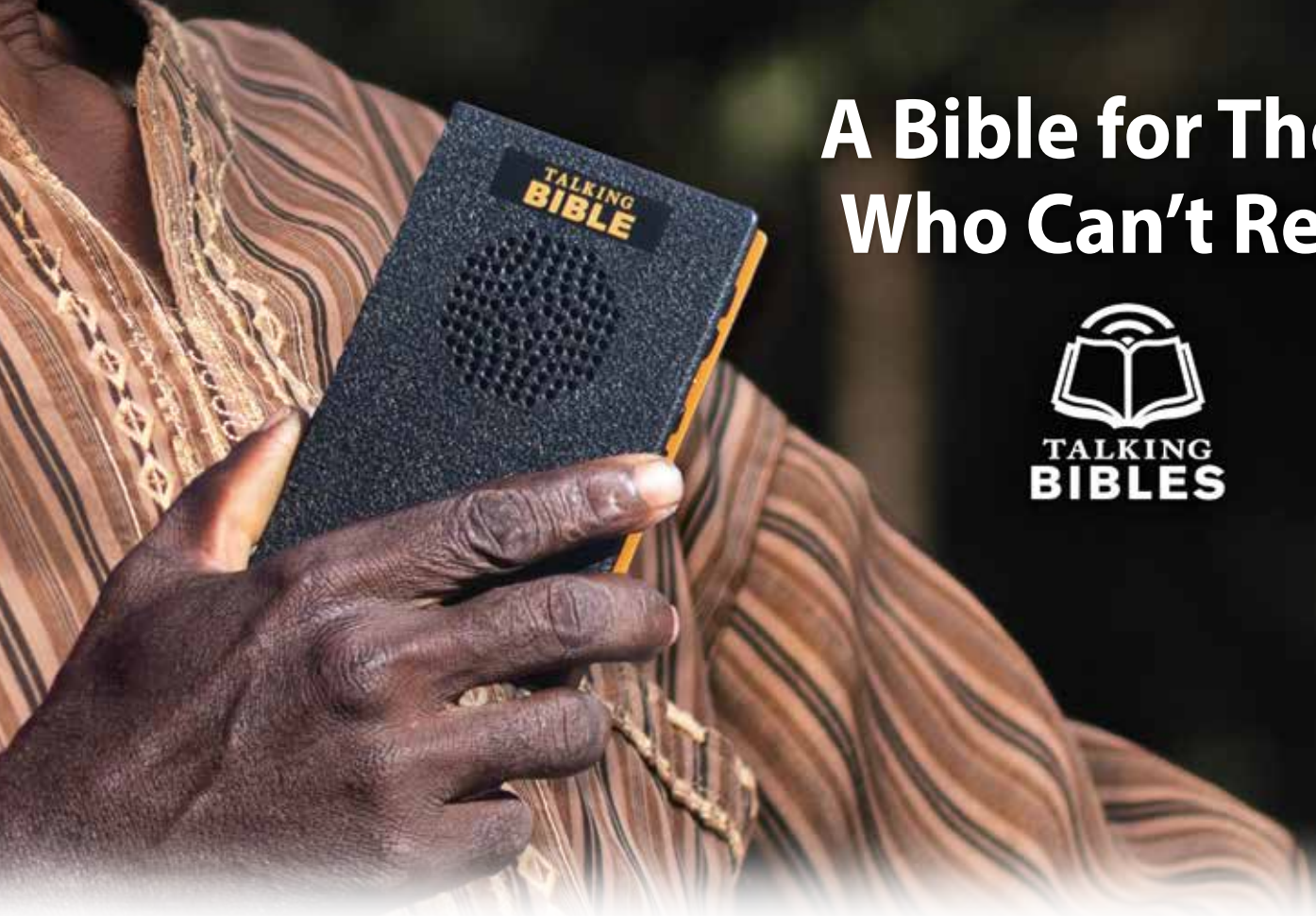
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A Lonely World

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John started smoking at 13, a habit he copied from his late father. Learning how to puff a cigarette was not easy at the start, but his desire to act tough and mature drove him deeper into the habit, and eventually, he immersed himself in drinking alcohol as well.

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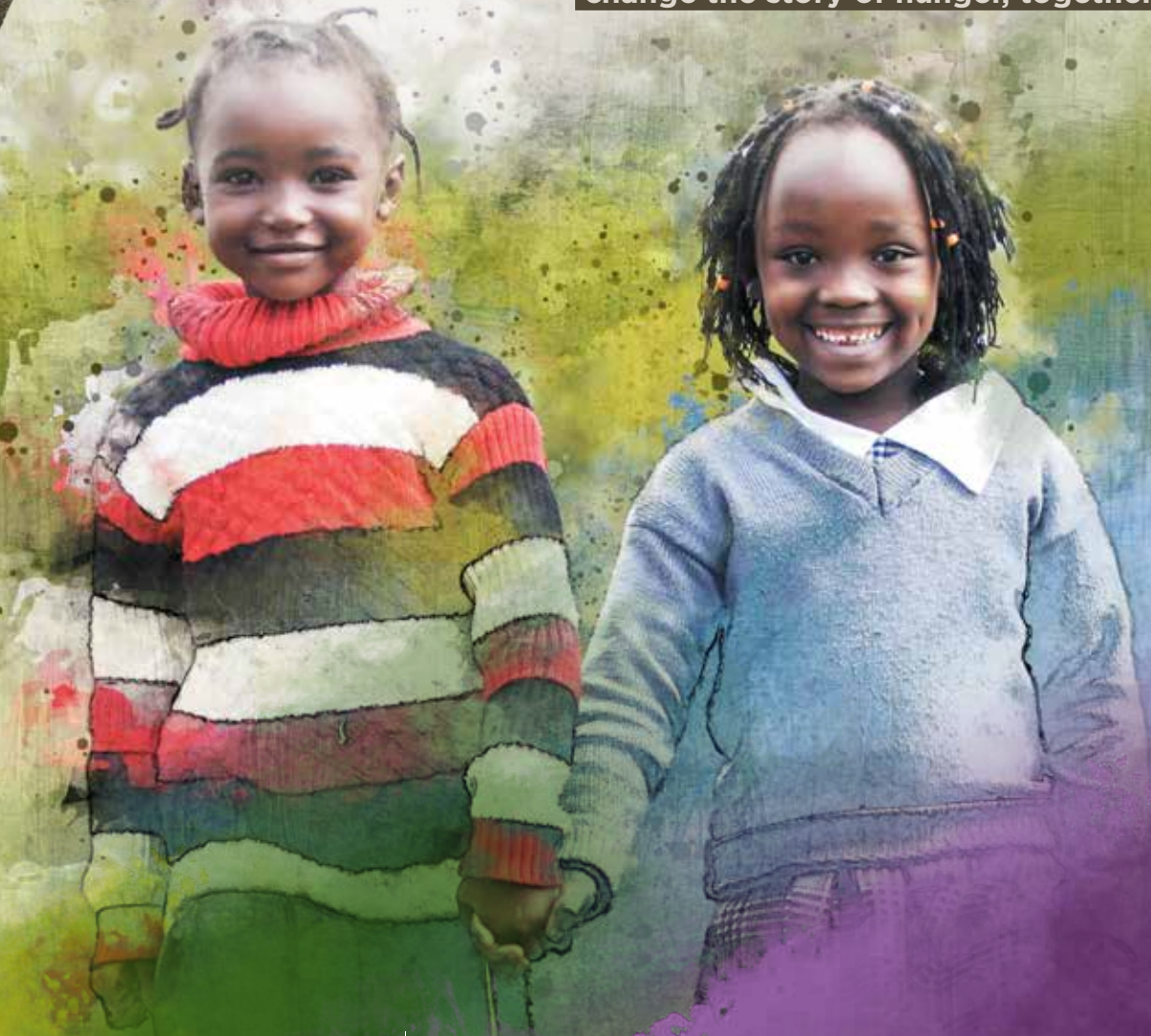
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BY THE NUMBERS

September 30 is the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in Canada, first commemorated in 2021. The day recognizes “the tragic legacy of (state-run Indigenous) residential schools, the missing children, the families left behind, and the survivors of these institutions” (Government of Canada). Christian Reformed ministries in Canada have a co-learning project called Hearts Exchanged that “models the sacred journey of reconciliation,” equipping Reformed Christians “to engage with Indigenous people as neighbours and fellow image bearers.”

Hearts Exchanged

First conceived: **2000** in a report from a cross-cultural ministry forum // First cohort: **Fall 2020** with groups in Alberta and Eastern Canada // Cohorts to date: **2** (plus another starting now) // Canadian classes to participate: **12** (100%) // Participants to date: **250+**

Source: crcna.org/hearts-exchanged

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: Illinois Pastor Leads Effort to Reduce Gun Violence
- » News: Community Food Sharing Project Supports New Entrepreneurs
- » Book: *Between Silk and Wool*, by Lena Scholman
- » Music: *Denim & Rhinestones*, by Carrie Underwood
- » Podcast: *So I Married a Film Critic*

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The Rise of a Lonely World

Judy Cook // COVID, social media, and more have caused an uptick in loneliness.



What Gives You Hope?

Ruth Ann Bos and Michelle VanderMeer // Read the winning essays for this year's Young Adults Writing Contest.



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Dementia: Love Thy Stranger

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Clarification

In the article “More Steps Toward Racial Justice” (July/August 2022, p. 29), a paraphrase introducing a quotation from delegate Jeffery Hough attributed to him a conclusion that he did not specifically say. See the story on *thebanner.org* for a link to Hough’s full speech.

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Signs of Hope

I am here because
I felt called, even
compelled, by God.



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

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

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

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

CONGRATULATIONS to the winners of our Young Adults Writing Contest sponsored by Multiplication Network Ministries (p. 32)! This year's theme is "What Gives You Hope?" We can always use a reminder of our hope in God.

I need that reminder because, honestly, I have been feeling discouraged lately. Most of you already know that I have a tough job. I didn't seek out this job. It wasn't a dream job that I aspired to when growing up. Becoming an editor of a Christian magazine never crossed my mind as a youth. I am here because I felt called, even compelled, by God.

Back in October 2015, I was in my 15th year as a Christian Reformed campus minister at York University in Toronto. It was difficult work; York's systems and culture were not friendly to Christian ministry. It took patience, graciousness, and years to build trust, relationships, and connections to build up the ministry. Then the Holy Spirit nudged me.

Well, physically, it was my wife. As she read the bulletin in my sister-in-law's church in Ottawa, where we were visiting for Canadian Thanksgiving, my wife drew attention to a job announcement for the *Banner* editor. Referring to the qualifications, she half-jokingly said to me, "Even you can apply, honey."

Then the Spirit nudged again. We traveled home to Toronto the very next day—and there was an email from my mentor, who knew me well. He copied me on the email he sent to the *Banner* editor search committee, saying that they would do well to consider me for the job. I was surprised.

The Spirit nudged a third time. The very next evening, I received an email from a friend whom I respect and admire. He too encouraged me to apply for the editor role. Three nudges in three days! At that point, I felt God was calling me. So I applied, and here I am.

But I was scared. Although the job did fit my gifts, I knew it would be tough. I had no delusions about the storms brewing in the CRC. I felt called to a posture of peacemaking. But such a posture doesn't always square with a journalist's responsibilities.

I feel like someone stuck on a boat between people at either end who are angry at each other. I am trying to ask them to "play nice" despite our disagreements, but more importantly I'm pointing out that the boat is leaking. The leaking hole, I believe, is spiritual pride. Unfortunately, it seems that both sides only have grown louder and more intent on tearing each other apart, blaming each other for the leak. One side says the other is bowing to culture; the other side criticizes the first for being judgmental. Yet the hole still is not plugged.

I am discouraged because it seems like a losing cause. But, as our contest writers remind me, I serve a risen Savior, a living God of hope. And I saw a sign of hope at Synod 2022.

On the last day of synod, a delegate who supported the human sexuality report publicly apologized for hurtful words he said. On his way back to his seat, he was hugged by two different delegates. One of those delegates opposed the report, but she embraced him as an act of forgiveness. The sight of that embrace gives me hope. We need more of such moments of humility and grace from all sides.

I believe that was the Holy Spirit working in their hearts. Let us strive to discern and follow the Spirit's leading. **B**

Clarification

Last month's editorial should have said, "The zeal for orthodoxy (correct beliefs) can lull us into thinking we can pat ourselves on the back for obeying God and loving God's truths."



REPLY ALL

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

Synod 2022

Editor's Note: Because we have received so many letters to the editor about Synod 2022 and the decisions made there, we have decided to devote this month's "Reply All" to this topic.

As I watched synod's decision on the human sexuality report, I cried for those who identify as different with the hope for affirmation ("Synod 2022 Upholds Traditional Stance on Same-sex Relationships," July/August 2022) and for the anguish of synod in guiding an unruly flock. The report on human sexuality includes the many ways we sadly may hinder God's love living in and through us. Jesus said we would suffer in following him. When tempted he simply quoted Scripture. Some today seem to read into the text for a way out. Thank you, synod, for staying true to God's Word and guiding us in the Christian Reformed Church that I love.

» Alice De Hooge // Mississauga, Ont.

The Banner editor warned members of the Christian Reformed Church about "loveless orthodoxy" in his recent editorial ("Beware Loveless Orthodoxy," July/August 2022). The timing of it leaves an

underlying insinuation, and the insinuation is that the recent decision by synod approving the sexuality report was not "loving orthodoxy" ... while other organizations have praised the CRC for staying biblical and orthodox. I thank God for the delegates who voted for the pastoral sexuality report and who also will continue to humbly minister to all church members.

» Marion D. Van Soelen // Hull, Iowa

In its treatment of human sexuality, Synod 2022 has settled for simplicity *before* complexity instead of pressing for simplicity *beyond* complexity, which is what Reformed thinking does best.

» Rev. Phil Apol // Eaton Rapids, Mich.

Synod's recent decision regarding human sexuality seemed to clearly place its delegates' understanding of this issue—about which there is legitimate disagreement among faithful followers of Christ—over the love and unity which Christ commanded (John 13:34-35) and for which he prayed (John 17:3, 20-21). Commenting on these passages in *The Mark of the Christian*, Francis Schaeffer observed, "Love—and the unity it attests to—is the mark Christ gave Christians to wear before the world. Only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians and that Jesus was sent by the Father."

» Jack Kooyman // Grand Rapids, Mich.

After reading much of the large *Banner* yesterday, I feel heavy with some of the burden of decision making that obviously weighed on the delegates from the time they were appointed. I express deep gratitude to those who struggled through those weighty choices and did come through with a decision. As individuals, our hearts go back and forth with conflicting stories and facts, but with so many prayers of so many Christians, God did guide synod to a decision right for this time. Thank you to you all! Also to the *Banner* staff for such excellent reporting—of feelings, conflicts, and joys along with the facts. You deserve the awards you receive!

» Dawn Gebben // Grand Rapids, Mich.

Synod's decision is unacceptable and regrettable to me and to many others. I've been a member of the CRC for 74 years, but this is a step way too far. I'm not sure which version of the Bible you are reading, but my version talks about a God with unconditional love even for such reprobates as lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors (meaning swindlers, cheaters, etc.), and sinners (probably all the unclean people of that day). To move into the direction of exclusivity is not acceptable to me and obviously to God either. ... Let's not judge, lest we be judged.

» Joel Veldheer // Grand Rapids, Mich.

I read the recent synodical report on human sexuality with sadness. After much thought, prayer, and speaking with a CRC minister friend, my prime concerns are: 1. If the pagan lifestyle the apostle Paul describes in Romans 1 and in other New Testament verses was applicable to the Neland Ave. CRC couple, there is no way the congregation/council would have voted to add one of them to their diaconate. Clearly, the couple exemplifies a long-lasting, loving, Christian relationship. I think God is pleased with them (I have seen agreement from notable theologians on this point) and with Neland Ave. CRC ministering to the LGBTQ+

The First Step Is Acknowledging the Problem

community. I suggest we give Neland Ave. CRC the benefit of the doubt and support them in prayer. 2. I'm appalled that synod voted to gag the CRC leadership through the confessional route. If you are that fearful of any criticism or other viewpoints, you should have tabled or voted down the motion.

» Frank De Haan // Escondido, Calif.

Approximately 23 years ago our daughter Stephanie sat us down and told us she was a lesbian. Know that our entire family loves our daughter unconditionally. Stephanie is fully aware of the dilemma Synod 2022 had to deal with. We have discussed the possible ramifications of the decision. She has one opinion to share: "Please don't let *whatever* decision is made divide this church! In a world where division is now more prevalent and hateful than ever, please remain a united church that believes Jesus died for my sins. Please don't let Satan win by tearing this church of God apart. The world needs a united church that believes in Christ's love, now more than ever!"

» Sylvia Hooft // Edmonton, Alta.

IN 1988 MY HUSBAND and I began attending Al-Anon meetings. Every meeting began with introductions, with each person saying, "My name is ... , and I am codependent." Codependency is an imbalanced relationship in which one person enables another person's self-destructive behaviors. I hated the word, and I hated identifying myself as being codependent. It attacked my ego, my sense of who I am.

I learned at the meetings and in reading codependency literature that one cannot solve a problem if one does not admit the problem exists. Acknowledging my problem was key to begin making the changes I needed to make, but educating myself about the root causes of the problem had to come first. I could not address my problem or make changes until I took an honest look at myself and educated myself with the support of others. This was painful. I didn't want to know or acknowledge this truth. However, it was necessary.

Some Americans do not want to acknowledge the truth of American history. It is painful truth. They do not want to acknowledge that our nation was founded on the assumption that white people should hold the power and the wealth in America. They do not want to acknowledge that the systems that were designed from the founding of America and still operate today are an attempt to keep white people in power. They do not want their children to learn this truth either. (Note: As an American, I can only speak to what I see in the U.S. I don't know if Canadians might notice similar trends in their country.)

Biblical justice, in contrast to American history, requires us to see every person as made in the image of God and worthy of equal rights. Civil rights lawyer and activist Bryan Stevenson

I could not address my problem or make changes until I took an honest look at myself.

says there can be no reconciliation or restoration between racially diverse people without knowing and acknowledging the truth of the history behind those relationships. In an effort to move beyond ignoring or denying the truth of the history against people of color, our churches could encourage members to commit to meeting regularly and starting each meeting with "My name is ... , and I want to walk the talk for biblical justice."

This commitment should include learning about the experiences of Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, people representing Jewish culture, and African Americans. It should include dialogue and listening that moves members to acknowledge the truth of our history with the support of others. Together we could become a denomination known for embracing biblical justice and giving tangible and visible evidence of working toward it, giving integrity to the gospel we preach. **B**



Barbara Van Enk is a member of Los Angeles Community Christian Reformed Church and a retired elementary teacher. Her 23 family members represent 9 ethnicities.



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

» Love Like Jesus

» Old Testament Windows on Christ and Salvation

» I Don't Know



The Rise of a Lonely World

By Judy Cook

One area of social life during the COVID-19 pandemic that might have created as much suffering, pain, loss, and helplessness as premature death is the experience of loneliness. Some scientists even claim that loneliness kills more people than any other known health concerns. Some medical researchers are trying to develop medication that could be given to sufferers of loneliness to relieve their emotional pain. What has become abundantly clear is that, at least in the Western world, we've probably all experienced some degree of loneliness during the pandemic.

Many of us also experienced the emotional stress created when close family members could not be hugged for weeks and months on end. We felt the emotional anguish of not being allowed to sit beside a parent at the funeral of a spouse. We could not visit children and grandchildren who lived too far away or who were behind a border that could not be crossed. In

short, we have been lonely and long for the closeness that we took for granted before the pandemic. We experienced the same loneliness we feel when someone dear to us has died and can no longer be touched, hugged, or held but only yearned for. When there is unwanted separation, our yearning for closeness takes on added meaning, much like the yearning for food when we are starving. The felt need becomes all-consuming because it is a created need. We cannot live without community, and therefore loneliness can kill us.

The "new normal" created by modern social media has also increased our loneliness. The exploding number of social media platforms enables us to communicate with a large group of "friends" with whom we can have superficial relationships online.

Though our cellphones create many opportunities for connections, those connections lack intimacy because we are completely in charge of what we reveal about ourselves online, and

very few of us choose to reveal who we really are, warts and all. This is entirely normal. Revealing on social media our deepest desires, hopes, cares, and beliefs as well as our faults, fears, and dark thoughts isn't safe. Safety can be achieved only when we experience nonjudgment, acceptance, and love from close companions in a communal setting, such as our marriage, family, church, social club, or friendship group. Healthy people seek and find in-person community opportunities in addition to online relationships.

So how can Reformed Christians respond to this "new normal"? Should we simply accept that loneliness will continue to be a growing problem in our technological age and that new medications, carefully developed at accredited universities and reliable pharmaceutical companies, provide the best God-given response to address loneliness?

As Reformed Christians, we believe that "the earth is the Lord's," and

we also confess that the cultural mandate—the belief that humanity is tasked to fill the earth and develop (rule over) the earth’s potential as described in Gen. 1:26-28—is still our responsibility and calling in this world. Through this Reformed lens, then, we understand that God has commanded us to faithfully engage with social media too by lauding its potential for good and flagging its potential for harm.

The belief that medication is the best tool for minimizing the experience of loneliness is based on a fallacy. If loneliness is treated with medication, then it stands to reason that the root causes of loneliness are not likely to be examined or changed. Loneliness is a response to the circumstances of one’s life, not a medical condition to which we are genetically predisposed. This is both good news and bad news. The good news is that I can be in charge of healing from the loneliness that now overwhelms me. The bad news is that only I can be in charge of my healing. Medication would simply maintain the status quo, but understanding what in my life causes this awful feeling of separation from God, from others, and from myself can help me change.


Another part of the difficulty of understanding the epidemic of loneliness is that the emotional pain it causes—feeling isolated, bereft, sad, and listless; feeling a loss of hope, optimism, and joy; feeling useless and aimless; and feeling alone—is associated more often with depression. Though depression and loneliness might feel the same, it is important to be clear about the differences. Depression is an illness; loneliness is a state of being. Clinical depression usually will require treatment of some kind, including medication, but loneliness requires a change in behavior.

The first step
is choosing to
believe you are
not alone.

At first, the task of understanding why loneliness has robbed you of connection and joy will feel impossible. Because of this, the first step is choosing to believe you are not alone. If you are serious about finding the roots of your own loneliness, find someone you trust to walk this journey with you. Failing that, try reading the following two books by two authors who can become trustworthy guides: *The Path Out of Loneliness*, by Mark Mayfield, and *Transforming Loneliness*, by Ruth Graham. These books can help you explore the roots of your loneliness and point you to the light in the distance and a new hope for your future.

Meeting others in their loneliness also can help. Nancy, a pastor of two small, rural churches, discovered that there were about 15 elderly church members who were especially lonely because of divorce or the death of a spouse. These senior singles told Nancy that meal times were the hardest. This was the beginning of a new ministry through which members of the congregations signed on to host a monthly meal at the churches for the seniors. This initiative was a huge success. It helped

seniors create new friendships with each other, provided a social activity once a month, and gave purpose to those preparing the meals—a win for everybody.

Yet loneliness should not be confused with solitude. Solitude is something we sometimes choose to seek closeness to God and the quieting of our own souls. Jesus regularly sought solitude to spend time with his Father. Loneliness, however, is a negative and painful state of being. If you are lonely, you might ask, “How can I be the agent of my own cure when I feel so helpless?” This is the time to remind yourself that Jesus told his disciples they would never be alone. Read Revelation 3:20 and think of these words being addressed to each of us personally. Jesus knocks at the doors of our hearts, waiting to be let in so he can share a meal with us and dwell with us. When we answer that knock and invite the Holy Spirit’s presence, and when we do the work with the help of insightful friends or books, we can trust that the loneliness we still feel will soon give way to new feelings of connection and well-being. 



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

1. Did you experience any emotional stress during the COVID-19 pandemic? How did you cope?
2. How big of a problem do you think loneliness is in our culture? Why?

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

BIG QUESTIONS

Bible/Doctrine

People often say we should read the Bible to know what God is saying. But how do we read the Bible to make decisions that don't necessarily have a moral answer?

The first answer is that what God is saying in the Bible is this: Jesus (Heb. 1:1-3). The Bible is not meant to be an exhaustive answer sheet or a manual for life, but the true story of how God is healing creation through Jesus Christ.

Second, Scripture orients us for decision making by getting to the heart of things. As you note, it doesn't give specific directions like "Take this job" or "Play this sport." But although we are not given details about the what, where, or how, what is crystal clear in the pages of Scripture is the why. *Why* take this job? *Why* play this sport? *Why* get out of bed in the morning? "Whatever you do," Paul writes, "do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). This means that the world is wide open for you to explore within God's loving limits, loving your neighbor through your work and seeking "to make imperfect models of the good world to come" (Lewis B. Smedes, *My God and I*).

Finally, because it is the authoritative story of the world, we don't just look *at* Scripture. We look *at* our lives *through* Scripture. It is our lens for interpreting the world and living fruitfully in it. We try to understand what sort of a life makes sense if the world is the way the Bible describes it—created for good, broken by sin, and being redeemed for better. If Jesus invites me to share in his life, how shall I live? This means our Bible reading must move from basic knowledge (what the Bible says) to principled understanding



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisela Bohórquez

(articulating the biblical vision for human life) to embodied wisdom (our everyday decisions reflecting our faith).

We face decisions every day; many of them can be made with ordinary deliberation. When the decisions are difficult, we require additional resources, such as the counsel of wise friends and pastoral guides. But all our decisions should be made with humility, in a spirit of gratitude and dependence, and not taking ourselves too seriously.

Justin Ariel Bailey is an assistant professor of theology at Dordt University. He, his wife, and their two children are members of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa.

Church Matters

What do confessing members and officebearers who have previously signed the Covenant for Officebearers do when the Christian Reformed Church changes its confessions and they no longer agree with them?

This question represents many CRC members and officebearers who are struggling with the decision of Synod 2022 regarding human sexuality, either because they disagree that same-sex sexual activity within marriage is sinful or because they disagree with giving the CRC position on sexuality confessional status. What should these people do?

Officebearers can submit a gravamen either to express difficulty with a confessional matter or to ask for

revision of synod's decision. A confessional-difficulty gravamen can be accepted by their council, allowing officebearers to continue serving, or not be accepted, which could lead to discipline and eventual deposition. A confessional-revision gravamen would be forwarded to classis and to synod because it would affect all CRCNA officebearers. (See guidelines for gravamina in Church Order Supplement, Art. 5.)

Confessing members do not file gravamina, but they can write communications or overtures to their councils that councils can submit to classis and then classis to synod. These communications and overtures could protest synod's decision or ask for it to be changed. Meanwhile, any members who disagree with synod's decision can certainly explain their quandary to their elders and ask for grace as they and the CRCNA sort out what Synod 2022's decision means. Elders always practice discernment in their pastoral care and discipling of members, even if discipline may be needed. But these are matters for the local consistory to engage personally in each individual situation. Because these are difficult and complex issues that affect many people and their families in deeply personal ways, elders need to be exceedingly careful and prayerful.

The human sexuality report itself acknowledged the complexity of the topic and the care needed in approaching these matters when it noted that "even if a teaching has confessional status, that does not mean there is no room for disagreement within the bounds of that teaching. In addition,

the church sometimes allows for pastoral accommodations. For example, our confessions say that the children of believers should be baptized. Yet some congregations are willing to allow members not to baptize their children” (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, 457). While Synod 2022 made no declaration regarding this statement in the human sexuality report, the report does provide a helpful reference to past decisions of synod and to the nature of discipleship, which is the responsibility of the local church.

Rev. Kathy Smith is senior associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, adjunct professor of church polity at Calvin Theological Seminary, and adjunct professor of congregational and ministry studies at Calvin University. She is a member of First CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Vocation/Calling

How do I know if God is calling me to Christian ministry or study?

When you love God and want to follow God faithfully, you are likely to ask if God might be calling you to be a pastor, missionary, or teacher. These are wonderful vocations to aspire to, even though one job is not holier than another. While God calls all of us to share God’s love with others and talk about our faith, a Christian ministry job may or may not be the best way for you to do that. God has given each of us different strengths and weaknesses; some fit well with ministry and some don’t.

When considering how God is calling you, it’s helpful to talk to people about which gifts and skills they’ve found necessary in their specific position and what they’ve found most challenging. Following God and leading others takes wisdom, courage, and self-awareness. The Bible warns that those who teach will be judged more strictly

(James 3:1). A lot of damage can be done by well-meaning people who focus only on their gifts and are unaware of how their weaknesses might get in the way of caring for others.

This has been a hard season for the church, and it would be a blessing for more people to serve the church. Some words of caution as you consider: God doesn’t need us, whatever our role, to save the church. God is already taking care of the church. God works in and through us and sometimes even despite us. You can trust that if you are committed to the gospel and the love of God, God will use you.

Perhaps God is inviting you into an official ministry role. But perhaps God is inviting you to share God’s love in a different way, entering places and meeting people that wouldn’t normally visit a church. People within the church and outside the church are hurting and struggling. I pray that God would use all of us, young or old, ordained or not, to be part of bringing hope and love to all those who are hurting.

Brenda Kronemeijer-Heyink is the Christian Reformed chaplain at the University of Toronto. She attends Willowdale CRC in Toronto, Ont.

Digital Life

What can we do to make the digital world more accessible for people with disabilities?

As churches reopen after the pandemic, it’s been encouraging to hear that some of the technological steps taken to make worship or meetings more accessible are planned to continue. That’s good news for people who for one reason or another couldn’t attend in person even before the pandemic.

Universal design—the idea that making spaces or products or experiences more accessible is good for all of us—embarrasses me a little. Why should something have to be better for

me before I support improving it for someone else?

Technology by itself can do wonders—and has. If you want to read a good story, *The Verge* has written about the evolution of screen readers—the devices that allow a person with a visual impairment to read web pages (“The Hidden History of Screen Readers,” bit.ly/3oPjvgH).

However, like a ramp that allows someone to get into our churches, full accessibility requires more. I suggest starting by talking to people who might not enjoy full accessibility. (A maxim used by many marginalized groups, “Nothing about us without us,” is helpful here. That is, decisions about practices and policies affecting any group of people should not be made without fully including those people in the decision making process.) These conversations might be awkward to initiate, but I guarantee that if you listen well you will walk away with a better understanding of what works and what’s a waste of time and money—and you might even make a new friend.

The CRC’s Office of Disability Concerns has provided a video of one such conversation in which Cara Milne, chair of the executive committee of Disability Concerns Canada, has a delightful conversation with Debbie Karambowich, an elder at River Park CRC (Calgary, Alta.), about her experiences attending meetings via technology (bit.ly/3BBOvs7).

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. Wondering about any part of the digital side of your life? Tell him about it at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.



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

Parishioner Needed a Kidney; Pastor Was a Match

NEWS

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In June 2021 Pastor Joel Ringma put out a video request to his Terrace (B.C.) Christian Reformed Church community: consider registering as a living donor for a congregant who needs a kidney. One year later congregation member Chad MacDonald, 22, had his match. It was Pastor Ringma.

The surgeries took place June 20, 2022, at St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver, B.C., almost 840 miles (1,350 kilometers) from Terrace.

“I found it was letting everything fall into God’s hand to protect Pastor Joel and me,” MacDonald said. “God put us in the best surgeons’ and doctors’ hands and told me to have no worries, (that) he had it all under control and to focus on rest and feeling better.”

Ringma and MacDonald have known each other since Ringma became pastor of Terrace CRC in 2003. He baptized 4-year-old MacDonald with the rest of MacDonald’s family in 2004. MacDonald was diagnosed with a kidney disease in the spring of 2021. Because he’d become dependent on dialysis, he needed a transplant. Ringma had started shooting mid-week video messages to connect with his congregation during COVID-19 and interviewed MacDonald for one of them. Their conversation, and Ringma’s appeal for donor registration, was viewed about 1,000 times—many more than the typical weekly view count of 75.

Ringma felt compelled to sign up with the donor program himself. After a series of tests and bloodwork, doctors determined that he was not only a good match, but in optimal health to be a donor. “When I realized I was both a viable match and declared by my own team of doctors to be healthy enough to donate a kidney, I was a bit overwhelmed,” Ringma said.

Recognizing God’s provision, MacDonald’s mother, Carla, said, “We are still stuck for words for this most incredible gift. Joel interviewed Chad so as to



Chad MacDonald (left) and Pastor Joel Ringma one day after the donor and recipient surgeries at St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver, B.C.

have a video to reach out to others as no family (member) was a match—but our brother in Christ was the match! That’s all God!”

MacDonald stayed near the hospital after the surgery in June to receive regular monitoring as his body recovered and adjusted to medications that promote integration of the new kidney. He returned home in late August.

Ringma, 49, returned home a week after surgery and recovered through July. “I’ve been back at work since near the beginning of August, when I had a ‘soft’ re-entry into various tasks,” Ringma said, noting that “recovery has gone quite well.” Ringma said MacDonald “was greeted by applause when he returned to church for the first time on August 21.”

The living donor program with which Ringma registered is transplant.bc.ca. In the U.S., kidneyfund.org has a similar registration program.

—Jenny deGroot

Juneteenth Celebrations Lead to Community Welcome

For the past two years, Calvary Christian Reformed Church in Wyoming, Mich., has hosted its city's observance of Juneteenth, the June 19 commemoration of the day enslaved people in the state of Texas learned they had been freed, two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation and nearly six months after the slavery-abolishing 13th Amendment had been ratified.

Juneteenth became a U.S. federal holiday in 2021. Dana Knight, a member of the cultural enrichment committee for the city of Wyoming, was looking for a place for the city to host a celebration. She ended up finding a venue and her new home church in the same place.

After not being able to find an available venue within the Black business-owner community in Wyoming, Knight began to seek out churches who might fit the bill. She called four different churches, including Calvary, a majority-white congregation.



A child paints at the Juneteenth celebration in Wyoming, Mich.

“(They) said yes, automatically, with no restrictions or anything,” Knight said.

Knight said she was impressed by Calvary's outreach to the Wyoming community. She also took notice when she saw on the church's website a statement in response to the death of George Floyd in May 2020, where the church

acknowledged that racism is a sin and that “any thought, word, action, or system that oppresses one people group, to the advantage of another, is both sinful and unjust.”

The focus of Wyoming's Juneteenth observance is twofold, Knight said.

“It was to educate people on what Juneteenth is, but also that our fight (as Black people) is still alive, with us trying to be recognized as human beings and have freedom for self-determination,” she said.

In 2022 some church members volunteered to help with the observance, and Knight says she wants to hold the event at Calvary again in 2023.

“It was the perfect space for us to do it,” she said.

Knight's experience with Calvary led her to begin attending services there shortly after the first Juneteenth event.

“I decided I wanted to join the church because of its sense of community,” she said. “When I started learning about the different programs they had and went on their Facebook page and saw some of the different (activities they offered) ... I thought, ‘This is the church I've been looking for most of my life.’”

—Greg Chandler

Summer Service Trips Return



Photo by Kristi Vugteveen

SERVE participants from Twin Cities SERVE paint the entryway to a farmhouse at a local organic farm in July 2022.

After two years of encouraging and equipping congregations to SERVE@Home, ThereforeGo Ministries went back to offering cross-border and intercity youth mission trips in 2022.

Over 600 participants from 53 congregations and more than 250 host team volunteers participated in SERVE across 13 sites—about half of the pre-pandemic number of participants and host churches.

ThereforeGo Ministries (formerly Youth Unlimited) is a North American mission organization closely associated with the Christian Reformed Church that organizes SERVE trips as part of its ministry. Participating students (mostly high schoolers) and their leaders are hosted at base churches and spend a week volunteering at various community worksites while participating in worship, Bible study, and small-group sharing about a given theme. In 2020 and 2021, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were restricted to SERVE@Home, a reduced program offered through students' home churches.

SERVE director Amanda Roozeboom said the 2022 season was “definitely a relaunch after a very long pandemic pause.” She is optimistic that, as COVID protocols continue to relax, more churches and students will participate in SERVE in future seasons.

The 2022 season's theme was “Grateful.”

Fourteen sites for SERVE 2023 were announced Sept. 1, and the 2023 theme was to be announced Oct. 1. Registration for churches opens Nov. 1.

—Kristen Parker

Canadian Military Report Recommends 'Redefining Chaplaincy'; Christian Think Tank Responds

After Canada's minister of National Defence received a report from an advisory panel on systemic racism and discrimination on April 25, Cardus, a Christian nonpartisan policy review and research group, issued a brief with concerns about the panel's recommendations to "redefine chaplaincy."

Brian Dijkema, Cardus' vice president for external affairs, said not only are there "profound implications for Canadian soldiers," but "the panel's recommendations have implications for religious freedom more broadly and represent a profound shift away from pluralism and toward illiberalism in the government's relationship with religious communities."

The Cardus brief said commentary in the panel's report "demonstrates thinly veiled hostility to a number of Abrahamic religions including adherents of Islam, Judaism, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. It shows gross ignorance of the teachings of these faiths and presents caricatures of their adherents as violators of equality and social justice. This defamatory language goes so far as to equate adherents of monotheistic religions with racism. In a constitutional democracy, it is wholly outside the scope of the state to make judgments on the truth claims of any religion or the attitudes of their adherents."

Cardus supports the panel's recommendation to "select chaplains representative of many faiths" but rejects an earlier recommendation to "not consider for employment as spiritual guides or multi-faith representatives Chaplaincy applicants affiliated with religious groups

"The panel's recommendations ... represent a profound shift away from pluralism and toward illiberalism in the government's relationship with religious communities."

—Brian Dijkema, Cardus

whose values are not aligned with those of the Defence Team."

Daniel Minden, senior communications adviser to National Defence Minister Anita Anand, provided statements by email.

"For many decades, chaplains from a wide range of faiths have served the members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and will continue to do so in the years to come," one statement said. "Minister Anand believes that the chaplaincy should represent Canada's diversity, uphold the values and principles of the military, and provide CAF members with access to spiritual or religious guidance if they seek it, regardless of their faith."

Minister Anand "strongly believes in the importance of building a more inclusive military free from racism and discrimination," Minden said.

Christian Reformed chaplain Gerald Van Smeedyk said to that end, chaplains are not a detriment but an asset. Van Smeedyk retired as a chaplain with the Canadian Armed Forces in June 2021 and now serves as a chaplain in a long-term care facility in Surrey, B.C. In his former role of staff officer to the 3rd Canadian Division (the division that covers western Canada) he was involved in recruiting chaplains from all faiths and is very familiar with the process used in identifying suitable candidates. "If members of the advisory panel had been aware of that process, they wouldn't have singled out Canadian Armed Forces chaplains," Van Smeedyk said.

He thinks Cardus is correct to point out the religious discrimination present in the committee's recommendation.

Van Smeedyk expects this recommendation, which he sees as an attempt to deepen Canada's secularism to the point where religious bodies are not welcome in the public arena, will not be implemented as written because automatically ruling out employment consideration based on affiliation with a religious group is in itself discriminatory.

The Department of National Defence said it will establish "a cross-sectional working group ... to address the report's recommendations, including by developing an implementation Framework and Action Plan." The minister's office did not address how it will communicate to Canadians which parts of the recommendations will be implemented.

Dijkema said Cardus has engaged with a variety of religious communities in Canada to highlight its concerns. "It's important for Canadians—including those who are not religious—to work toward an open, pluralist secularism and to resist efforts to have the government act as the arbiter of what is and what is not acceptable to believe," Dijkema said.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Noteworthy



Laurie Hiemstra, an orthopedic surgeon in Banff, Alta., who grew up in the Christian Reformed Church, is the 77th person and first woman appointed as **president of the Canadian Orthopaedic Association**.

She began serving as association president in June. There are 1,760 orthopedic surgeons in Canada; 13.6% of them are women and 80% are members of the association. "It is my hope that this is an icebreaker for more women to seek out and be accepted into leadership roles," Hiemstra said. "I think it signals a change in thinking and hopefully brings about a culture change that is long overdue in medicine and especially in the surgical specialties."



Monica Schaap Pierce, formerly the ecumenical associate for the Reformed Church in America, **has been appointed executive director of Christian Churches Together**. The ecumenical organization comprises 33 churches and communions in the U.S., including the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

Appointed to the position July 24, Schaap Pierce had been serving as interim executive director since October 2021. "I am honored to lead this unique and holy communion of Christians," she said in a news release. "The intentional focus on relationship building and mutual understanding that defines CCT is as important as ever given the urgency of unity in our divided world."



Frederick Buechner, a popular Christian author and theologian, died Aug. 15 at age 96. Over the course of his life, Buechner wrote nearly 40 books across a number of genres: fiction, autobiography, theology, essays, and sermons. He held lectureships at Harvard and Yale universities and was a guest at

the 1992 and 2004 Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin College (now University).

—Janet A. Greidanus
and Religion News Service

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. James Robert Kok

1931-2022

Jim Kok loved being a pastor and touched many lives in his 65 years of ministry. As a boy soprano, Jim sang at church, for family weddings, and even on the radio several times. Up until the last days of his life, he took great delight in singing hymns, always leading with his strong voice. Jim, 90, died July 3.

After graduating from Calvin College (now University), Jim studied at Calvin and Westminster seminaries. Ordained in the Protestant Reformed Church in 1956, he served churches in Chino, Calif., and Manhattan, Minn., before being ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in 1961.

He pastored Bethel CRC in Manhattan, Minn., and Prospect Park (N.J.) CRC before serving Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. Then, for almost 19 years, he pastored Third CRC (now Hope Fellowship) in Denver, Colo., during which time he enjoyed two sabbaticals in Scotland and England. He served as an interim pastor in northern and central California before retiring in 1997 and continued to minister to others in the retirement communities where he lived.

Predeceased in 2012 by his wife, Eleanor, Jim is survived by six children and their spouses, 18 grandchildren, and 24 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. John George
Van Ryn*

1931-2022

Patient, humble, gracious, open-minded, and a good listener, John Van Ryn had a ready smile and a quick wit and was eager to see the humor in life. He was a peacemaker and able to stay calm in difficult situations—something that served him well in ministry. John, 90, died July 1.

After graduating from Calvin College (now University) and Seminary and ordination in 1956, John served Long Beach (Calif.) Christian Reformed Church; Second CRC, Paterson, N.J.; and First CRC, South Holland, Ill., before serving 13 years as executive secretary of the CRC Board of Home Missions (now part of Resonate Global Mission). He then pastored Fellowship CRC, Big Rapids, Mich., and Providence CRC, Grand Rapids, Mich. After retirement in 1996 he joined Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, where he was an active member and associate pastor for more than 20 years.

John found joy in traveling, camping, attending grandchildren's sporting events, telling stories, and being with family.

Predeceased by Elizabeth, his first wife of 33 years, John is survived by Margaret, his second wife of 31 years, and their large and beautiful combined family of eight children and their spouses, 23 grandchildren and their spouses, and 10 great-grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Abide Project's Convention Emphasizes Confessionalism, Talks Next Steps



From video on abideproject.org

About 120 people from 22 different classes (regional groups of Christian Reformed churches) met Aug. 2-3 for the Convention of Confessional Christian Reformed Churches in Oak Lawn, Ill. Those gathered heard speakers, nominated a new steering committee, and discussed what might be next for the group formed by CRC members who supported the denomination's 2020 human sexuality report. Registration was limited to those who expressed agreement with the mission of the convention's organizer, the Abide Project, whose mission statement is, "For the sake of the true Gospel, the faithfulness of Christ's Church, the glory of God, and the good of His people, we strive for the Christian Reformed Church to uphold the historic, beautiful, Biblical understanding of human sexuality in doctrine, discipleship, and discipline." (*The Banner* requested but was not welcome to send a reporter to the convention, invited instead to interview organizers afterward.)

Participants of the Convention of Confessional Christian Reformed Churches at Calvary Church of Oak Lawn (Ill.).

Chad Steenwyk, pastor of Central Avenue Church in Holland, Mich., and chair of the Abide Project's steering committee, said the restriction was to foster fruitful conversation. "We were saying, 'If you're in agreement with the mission, this is a conversation we want to have together,'" Steenwyk told *The Banner*. "We were supporting each other in how to live into ministry in a confessional way."

Abide formed in 2021 out of a group that had initially come together to discuss the human sexuality report commissioned by Synod 2016 and recommended to the churches as a useful biblical summary by Synod 2022. The report calls Christians to live chastely in their sexual lives and encourages pastoral care of all members. It maintains the distinction expressed in the CRC's 1973 Report from the Committee to Study Homosexuality that "there is no sin in being attracted to the same sex. We only sin if we act on

our sexual attractions" (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 405), and it concludes, from an examination of biblical texts, that "homosexual acts of any kind are sinful and not in agreement with God's will for his covenant people" (*Agenda for Synod 2022*, p. 424).

What's Next

"The Abide Project was formed to see the HSR (human sexuality report) pass," said Lloyd Hemstreet, pastor of Coopersville (Mich.) CRC, in an online video recap-ping the first day of the convention. "We praise God that's exactly what happened. The question is, now what? What do we do next?"

That wasn't immediately public. Steenwyk said conventiongoers heard a presentation of a core principles document and provided feedback. That document might at some point be shared as a resource on the Abide Project website,

but it's "not something that will be complete in a month or two," Steenwyk said. It was meant "to keep the project in the right frame of reference," he explained, clarifying that Abide Project participants are concerned not just about differences in the denomination about human sexuality, "but also the nature of the gospel; foundational aspects of what it means to be the church of Jesus Christ; of what it means to follow Jesus faithfully."

Shouldn't articulations of what it means to follow Jesus faithfully take place with the whole church? "We're not the first group to focus in on one aspect of what that means," Steenwyk said. He listed a number of affinity groups associated with the denomination, such as Consejo Latino or Black and Reformed; All One Body, a group advocating for full inclusion of LGBTQ believers in the CRC regardless of relationship status; and groups focused on particular ministry contexts such as urban settings. "All of these groups have seen a gap or a dearth within the denomination on providing specifics to one aspect," Steenwyk said. "We were not hearing a lot that is supporting or promoting the historic, biblical understanding of human sexuality. We formed to do that."

"Confessional" was included in the convention name to indicate the seriousness that Abide Project participants have about the confessions of the church—"that we are 'confessional' regarding our doctrine, discipleship, and discipline," Steenwyk said. But the Abide Project is not really an organization, he explained: "There is no membership; it has no ecclesiastical standing, no place in the CRC structure except that it is made up of CRC members and was started by CRC members. ... It's just some pastors and officebearers living into their ministry and helping each other to do that in a biblical way."

Asked specifically if the group seeks to revisit the CRC's 1995 Synod decision to

recognize two biblically defensible positions on women called to serve in offices of the church, Steenwyk said "That's not in our mission." He said, "When you have a loose group, there are different things that people might want to address, but I've said let's focus in—we're not talking about everything."

Not Settled?

While the Abide Project expresses praise for the passing of the human sexuality report, others in the CRC have lamented some of the decisions made at Synod 2022, including one to enact discipline toward Neland Avenue CRC, a congregation in Grand Rapids, Mich., that in 2020 ordained as deacon a woman in a same-sex marriage. Synod assigned an *in loco* committee to meet with Neland to oversee the congregation's compliance with synod's rulings and to report to Synod 2023. In statements, Neland's council has said it welcomes the work of the committee, but it intends to appeal synod's decision.

"Most feel that this isn't settled yet," Steenwyk said. "Communications from our institutions and the denomination indicate that we still have to figure out the implications of synod's decisions." He said conventiongoers will take what they learned from roundtable discussions and determine "what is the role for Abide now, if there is one."

The convention's themes, described in online video recaps by Hemstreet and Tyler Wagenmaker, pastor of Beaverdam (Mich.) CRC, included what it means to abide in Christ (John 15:1-17) and the three marks of the church described in the Belgic Confession (preaching of the Word, worship and administration of the sacraments, and discipline).

Shaun Furniss, a pastor of Trinity CRC in Sparta, Mich., took part in a convention discussion on discipleship, discipline, and pastoral care. "The overall climate of the Q&A time was very inquisitive, desiring

to know how to care for people from a biblical perspective, and there was great desire for there to be compassion and kindness without forgoing biblical truth," he said.

Moving Forward

Ten people are on the Abide Project's new steering committee, including Steenwyk remaining as chair, one pastor serving a Canadian church, and one woman who is a pastor.

Convention attendees paid a \$75 registration fee. Hemstreet, the Abide Project's treasurer, said that covered expenses—facility, food, programs, and paying three support staff. "We could have charged everyone \$4 less a person to truly break even," he said. The four main speakers received no honoraria. "We believe that all CRC pastors are in this project together," Hemstreet said, "so in our lecture series we only gave honorariums/speaking fees to those outside the denomination who shared with us. Everything else is all volunteer to this point."

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

The online version of this story (Aug. 26, 2022) includes longer quotes and more context, including links to views from other Christian Reformed pastors.

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Nine Director Positions Eliminated in Ministries Reorg

Looking to better serve congregations, break down “ministry silos,” and reduce overall financial costs, the Christian Reformed Church shared news of a reorganization of its congregational ministries Sept. 7. The changes eliminate nine director-level positions by shifting former directors of individual ministries to different roles and by not filling the positions of recently retired directors. “A few part-time positions have been eliminated, and those staff have been thanked for their years of service,” the announcement said. Other staff across the ministry areas of race relations, diversity, chaplaincy, disability concerns, faith formation, pastor church resources, safe church, social justice, and worship have been assigned to new cross-ministry teams.

“The intent will be to operate as one congregation-focused ministry rather than nine individual organizations,” the announcement said. Staff will continue to carry out the mandates and tasks called for by synod (the CRC’s broadest annual assembly) but in collaboration with each other, sharing resources such as staff time, communications, and fundraising, said U.S. director of congregational ministries Lis Van Harten. Van Harten and Lesli van Milligen (Canada) will co-lead the reorganized ministry. Canadian-specific ministries such as the Center for Public Dialogue, the Canadian Indigenous Ministry Committee and the Canadian Advisory Committee on Antiracism are not impacted by the reorganization.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

Church Worldwide: Pope Francis’s Apology to Indigenous Peoples in Canada is ‘First Step’

The Banner has a subscription to republish articles from Religion News Service. The first four paragraphs of this article include reporting from an RNS article published July 25.

At the beginning of a July visit to Canada Pope Francis issued an apology to Indigenous peoples for the Catholic Church’s role in administering residential schools that robbed many of their families and culture.

“I am here because the first step of my penitential pilgrimage among you is that of again asking forgiveness, of telling you once more that I am deeply sorry,” the pope said July 25 to a crowd that included thousands of Indigenous gathered at Maskwacis, a traditional ceremonial site of the Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, Saulteaux, and Nakota Sioux people located just south of Edmonton, Alta.

The pope asked for forgiveness for the role church members played “in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time.” Residential schools often forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families and communities. Last year, thousands of unnamed remains were found on the properties of residential schools in Canada and the United States, sparking renewed outcry over the mistreatment and alienation of Indigenous people.

“I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous peoples,” Francis said in one speech given not far from the now-closed Ermineskin (Alta.) Indian Residential School.

Mike Hogeterp, director of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, in a reflection on the CPD and Office of Social Justice’s *Do Justice* blog, called the visit “historic and important.”



Photo by AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia

At Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Catholic Church in Maskwacis, near Edmonton, Alta., July 25, Pope Francis met with people from Indigenous communities.

“It is encouraging that Pope Francis noted the Declaration (of the United Nations on the rights of Indigenous Peoples) as an important foundation of Catholic efforts to support Indigenous cultures and languages. Meaningful long-term commitments to the support of Indigenous cultural resilience by Settler communities and leaders are an important (albeit imperfect) antidote to cultural genocide,” Hogeterp wrote.

“Apologies, such as brought by Pope Francis on this pilgrimage, are important gestures that must be followed up by actions,” he continued. “It is easy to speak noble words and harder to live them—this is as true for the Catholic Church as it is for other churches or Settler institutions.”

Noting that the CRC “has made some gestures of reconciliation” by calling the Doctrine of Discovery heresy and affirming the U.N. Declaration as a framework for reconciliation, Hogeterp said those are not sufficient. “The injustices of colonialism are rooted in broken relationships and broken treaties/covenants,” he wrote, “so turning away from the evil (so aptly named by the pope) and toward right relationship is critical if statements for reconciliation are to have any meaning.”

—Religion News Service
and Alissa Vernon, News Editor



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Leading with Strength

Promoting Confidence in Nigeria Instead of Creating Dependency

By Cassie Westrate, Resonate Global Mission, and Adele Konyndyk, World Renew

In 1919, the first overseas missionary from the Christian Reformed Church landed in Nigeria.

“I thank God for richly blessing the work of the CRC in Nigeria over many years,” said Mike Van Der Dyke, Resonate Global Mission’s field leader for the country today. Van Der Dyke has served in Nigeria for 40 years.

“Hundreds of churches have been planted,” he said.

“Resonate missionaries and those supporting the work with prayers and gifts have been used by God to train thousands of pastors, evangelists, and Christian teachers.”

But Van Der Dyke also acknowledges what many people lament: Western missionaries in Nigeria have often created unhealthy dependence on mission staff and funding or have started programs that do not have the full support of local believers. Sometimes staff control programs for too long; other times, staff hand over full responsibility too soon. And sadly, some missionaries can be racist or have negative views of Nigerian culture.

Patterns like these can cause people to doubt their own God-given potential and prevent them from being effectively strengthened in their capacity to follow God on mission.

That’s why what people do in their ministry is not the only important factor. How we work in a country is important too.

Working Alongside Local Leaders

From the beginning, Resonate missionaries worked alongside (and with approval from) local leaders in evangelism, education, and medical care. The work was not without its challenges, but the missionaries strived to frame Bible stories in ways that resonated with Nigerians and celebrated Nigerian culture. As more Nigerians chose to follow Christ, missionaries laid the groundwork for elevating local leaders and preparing them to continue being solid witnesses beyond missionaries’ time of direct support.

Today, working alongside local leaders for mission is central to Resonate’s work in Nigeria and throughout the world. This approach is a strategic way to encourage leaders who are confident in the gifts, skills, and resources that they and their community members have to offer in carrying out kingdom work.

While Nigeria once received missionaries, the country now sends missionaries to nearly every country. Nigeria

During the COVID-19 pandemic, World Renew training helped Nvuo Gyang focus on regular handwashing and other important practices to protect her family’s health.

Evangelical Missions Association boasts more than 15,000 missionaries in its network.

Recently, NEMA director Andrew Gwaivangmin worked with Van Der Dyke to organize Timothy Leadership Training for several of his staff members. TLT is a curriculum of Raise Up Global Ministries used by missionaries like Van Der Dyke to equip Christian leaders to live out the gospel in their churches and communities.

TLT involves seven training sessions that Gwaivangmin and his team recently completed. For each session, participants created action plans to help them apply what they learned and work toward a change they wanted to see in their community.

“The TLT training was a great blessing to us at NEMA,” Gwaivangmin said. “We are now well-equipped to serve our Lord, family, church, and community. All of our staff have served in one way or another in the church and community.”

The staff have targeted spiritual, relational, and economic challenges.

One of Gwaivangmin’s team members visited two of NEMA’s missionaries living in a remote community to provide encouragement for their work. While he was there, he spoke in the church, and 16 children decided to follow Christ as a result.

Gwaivangmin and his wife noticed that many young people in their community were unemployed. Two young women they knew wanted to become seamstresses so they could earn money, but they had no way to pay for training.

Gwaivangmin and his wife paid for 14 weeks of tailoring training for these two young women—a fixed period of support designed to equip them with the skills they needed for successful livelihoods.

“They are now working to set up their sewing shops to grow their businesses and also getting income to meet their personal needs,” said Gwaivangmin. “These girls are now encouraged to train other girls in tailoring so that they can also earn income.”

God works in powerful ways when missionaries work with local leaders, and Resonate continues to learn how best to work cross-culturally and share resources. Listening and fostering relationships with humility remain priorities for Resonate missionaries as they build God’s church together with men, women, and children in Nigeria.

“We see each other as colleagues working in ministry together,” Van Der Dyke said. “The initiative and direction

are usually from the church to the mission rather than the other way around.”

Pillars in Community

World Renew has been working in Nigeria since 1969 in the same location as Resonate.

Walking alongside local leaders is also key to World Renew’s strategy of avoiding unhealthy dependency while offering knowledge and support to individuals and communities that desire to be agents of change in their country. This rewarding process requires patience, mutual trust, and a passion for justice and mercy.

As a widow and a single mother of four sons in rural Nigeria, Nvou Gyang faced many obstacles to becoming any kind of a leader in her community. When she first connected with World Renew program staff, she was living a life of isolation and hopelessness.

In 2014, Gyang’s husband was murdered by armed intruders, and the family’s farm was stolen when violence erupted between farmers and herders in their community. Without a steady income or partner, Gyang faced many day-to-day struggles—parenting alone, feeding her children, falling behind on school fees, and trying to find shelter in a new community.

When World Renew staff learned of Gyang’s situation, they recognized she had many short-term needs, but a hand-out was not the solution. She needed assistance that would allow her to take ownership in her own transformation so she could be stronger for the long term, even if her support systems and circumstances changed.

“Both World Renew and Resonate are CRCNA ministries that intentionally use the bottom-to-top approach, where participants are encouraged to lead in decision making and in the process of driving change (and) problem solving,” said Grace Garnvwa, World Renew’s country director for Nigeria.

“This makes them accountable and active drivers of the process,” she explained. “Most of our participants become pillars in their communities—role models who are providing support to vulnerable people to become stronger and better each day.”

Gyang’s journey to new strength involved World Renew programs that did not merely focus on what she lacked but instead highlighted the resources and skills she could build on to help create a more stable present and a more hopeful future for her family.

Through World Renew’s local partner, Beacon of Hope Initiative, she joined Free A Family® programs such as a trauma healing group that connected her to fellow widows in her community. She also joined a Village Savings and Loans (VSL) group with other mothers and took part in economic empowerment training that taught her to keep

good business records and refined her skills in connecting with customers.

Slowly but surely, Gyang began to thrive.

She was able to grow her banana-selling business, pay for weekly school fees, and continue saving. Neighbors started to seek her for her trusted business services, giving her a further bridge out of the isolation she had experienced for so long. What’s more, she could confidently share what she had learned with others so that they too could improve their livelihoods.

By the time the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were being felt in Nigeria, Gyang had made great strides in her journey out of poverty, but with all the unforeseen challenges and uncertainties, her fear of sinking back into destitution became very real.

Thankfully, through the training the VSL group received, Gyang had learned to set aside savings, which carried her family through the early days of the pandemic when the markets were shut down. Once the markets reopened, Gyang found sales had slowed while the cost of essentials had increased, but she still has been able to provide for her family’s basic needs.

“I don’t know what would have become of us if not for this support,” she said. “Even though things are hard, I trust God to make a way just as he used World Renew to bring us hope. It can only be the love of God that brought help our way, especially from people we never knew.”

As Gyang has learned, life can change quickly. Her current involvement in World Renew programs is one of the tangible ways she is deepening her understanding of God’s love. The hope is that all she is learning now will equip her to carry on with confidence, no matter what the future holds.

Resonate and World Renew cannot know exactly what challenges might come as they set about the work of sharing God’s grace in places where many are struggling with poverty and other injustice. The potential to create dependency is always there and must be consistently navigated with wisdom and transparency.

As these CRCNA ministries encourage more of God’s children to lead with strength and assert their inherent dignity, they are committed to continuing to learn from the very people they are walking alongside—people like Gyang, whose steadfast faith shines on.

“I am determined to serve God as long as I live,” she said, “because he is our hope for tomorrow.” **B**

Not Alone in Kaya

CLEMENTE* had been hearing the horrifying stories for years—stories of kidnappings, murders, and in some cases the complete destruction of villages by a few different Muslim extremist groups in Burkina Faso.

The attacks were getting closer and closer to Clemente's home, and she was faced with a heartbreaking decision: wait for an attack to come to her or flee along the dangerous path to the large city of Kaya, where many others had already fled.

Clemente and her sister decided to flee. Despite the great risk of being caught by militant groups or other dangerous people along the way, the two young women made it safely to Kaya.

While the sisters felt a sense of relief on arriving safely, they feared for their family back home and felt anxious about their futures in a new city that was quickly filling up with other displaced people.

Answering God's Call in Kaya

As the number of displaced people in Kaya exploded over the past few years, ReFrame Ministries' French ministry partners in Burkina Faso took action.

"We began partnering with new radio stations in Kaya," said Marc Nabie, ReFrame's French ministry leader. "We're sharing the good news of Jesus with a growing group of people who were longing for hope."

As the number of radio listeners in Kaya grew, more people wanted to know about the Christian faith. So ReFrame's partners decided to relocate David*, one of their follow-up team



About 100 people are attending a new church plant in Kaya, Burkina Faso, where ReFrame has three radio station partners, including Radio Zama FM. Pictured above is Marc Nabie, ReFrame's French ministry leader in Burkina Faso.

members, to Kaya so he could talk to listeners directly and organize a time for discipleship and worship.

"Clemente was among those who were moved by God's Word through the radio program," said Nabie. "She contacted David to learn more about the radio programs."

As of August 2022, David has about 50 adult listeners with whom he meets regularly, and he has officially begun a new church plant in Kaya with this group. The listeners have about 50 children in their families who also attend the church plant.

Clemente visited the church and recently came to faith in Christ too.

"Even with such a burden, meeting Christ has made a huge difference for Clemente," David said. "Clemente and her sister feel they are not alone. They are even so bold that they share their faith with others." **B**

**Last names have been withheld for privacy and security reasons.*

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries

The View from Here

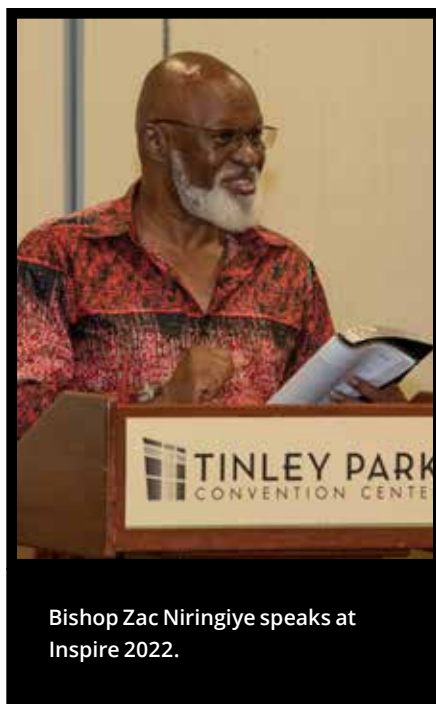
United in Common Witness

WHEN I WROTE THIS, I had just returned from Inspire 2022 at the Tinley Park Convention Center in Tinley Park, Ill. What a blessing it was to be together with more than 420 Christian Reformed brothers and sisters from all across North America! We sang together, prayed together, learned from one another, laughed together, and were challenged to return to our local communities with a renewed sense of passion and commitment for ministry.

If you were there, I hope you were as blessed by the experience as I was. If you weren't there, I encourage you to check out the stories, photos, and audio recordings at crcna.org/Inspire and consider joining us the next time an Inspire event takes place.

One of Inspire 2022's plenary speakers was Zac Niringiye, a retired bishop in the Anglican Church of Uganda. His words have really stuck with me. My wife and I spent 18 years in Central America as missionaries with Resonate Global Mission. Yet Niringiye challenged us to rethink our approach to mission.

All too often, he said, witness to the gospel has been mixed with patterns of economic and cultural congregation. When Jeannie and I first went to Nicaragua we worked with a small local Christian Reformed congregation that had been negatively affected by this reality. We were never able to get past the patterns of dependence that had been ingrained in that congregation's leadership. The result was that this congregation never flourished.



Bishop Zac Niringiye speaks at Inspire 2022.

Niringiye encouraged us to think of ourselves as being united in common witness—not just the witness of North Americans to the world, but the witness of all of God's children about the work that the Holy Spirit is up to among and through us. Foundational to that witness are intercultural relationships that embody the equality and mutual respect shown in the gospel.

As a denomination, the CRCNA is not exempt from the paternalism of mission in the past. We have made mistakes, and for this we lament. Yet we are also striving to be better witnesses. In this section there are a few stories from CRCNA organizations, including Resonate Global Mission and World Renew, that show how we are walking alongside Christians in other countries, learning with and from them for God's glory.

Niringiye concluded his talk by walking us through the Lord's Prayer. He pointed out that this is not an

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individual prayer, but a corporate one, with phrases such as "Our Father," "give us this day our daily bread," and "deliver us from evil." What's more, it is a prayer that focuses on submitting to the will of the Father and joining the Holy Spirit who is already at work in the world.

Whether you were at Inspire or not, I pray that you will join me in that prayer. Together with our brothers and sisters around the world, may we be one in common witness. May we seek together to do God's will and work for his kingdom. **B**



Joel Huyser is serving as the interim director of Resonate Global Mission and director of Ministry Operations U.S. for the CRCNA.

Becoming a Safe Church: A Case Study

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of those who call the Safe Church office, we offer this story as a composite of actual situations we have helped Christian Reformed congregations with in the past six months. While the individual names and the congregation are fictional, they reflect common trends we are noticing and the type of assistance that Safe Church can provide.

CONSIDER the following scenario: John, an elder of Atown CRC, calls the staff at Safe Church Ministry. “We need your help,” he says, his voice tentative and uncertain. “We have a situation, and we are not sure how to handle it.”

As I chat with John, he shares with me how a year and a half ago, the church had hired a second staff person, Michael, to expand the ministry of the church. The congregation and the council loved Michael. He was charismatic, gregarious, and gifted. People were clearly drawn to him. But a couple of months ago, Michael’s wife, Nancy, had met with John and shared with him that things were not going well in their marriage. Michael seemed increasingly angry, frustrated, and even violent. He frequently belittled her and made her feel bad. She no longer felt safe.

At first John had chalked it up to a lovers’ spat—a rough patch in Michael and Nancy’s marriage—but it became increasingly clear that this was something different. Each time John saw Nancy, he noticed that she was growing more and more skittish, guarded, and withdrawn. It was clear that Michael was the cause.

“The situation seems to be escalating quickly,” John notes. “This is clearly abuse. What do we do?”

After chatting with John and praying with him, Safe Church connects him with his classis Safe Church coordinator. The Safe Church coordinator



follows up with Nancy, spends time talking to her, listening to her story, and discerning with her how to go forward. The Safe Church coordinator also works with John to find Nancy an advocate, someone who can support her and guide her through the next steps in reporting the escalating abuse to the authorities and in helping the church council understand and attend to the needs of Nancy and her kids.

Fortunately, the classis has a counseling fund available for those victimized by abuse. As a result, the classis Safe Church coordinator is able to secure funds for Nancy to get the counseling she needs to support her journey toward healing.

Additionally, the Safe Church coordinator works with the church council to discern how to follow up with Michael. The council decides to suspend Michael’s employment temporarily with pay and without prejudice until they have a clearer understanding of what is taking place between Michael and Nancy. A few weeks after Michael is suspended, several female volunteers who had worked with him came forward with complaints about Michael, citing concerns about

controlling behavior and demeaning interactions with them. Soon afterward, Michael is let go from his role in the church.

Several months later, John calls Safe Church again. The experience with Michael had been grueling and hard. It had taken its toll on the congregation. Michael did not take his dismissal well. He had threatened to sue the church for wrongful termination, and he bad-mouthed members of the council, accusing them of lying.

The congregation didn’t know whom to believe. Some had sided with Michael and others with the council, creating enormous tension within the congregation. John knows that the church will be dealing with the fallout for months, perhaps even years to come. He wants to know how to safeguard the church from this happening again.

Staff from Safe Church Ministry work with the church to establish better hiring, screening, and accountability practices, including implementing a code of conduct that staff are required to sign. They also make a number of recommendations about revising the safe church policy, putting literature about domestic violence in the women’s restroom, and identifying a safe person in the congregation to whom people can report abuse.

Today, Atown CRC is on its way to becoming a safe and healthier church thanks to the commitment of the council, the work of the classis Safe Church coordinator, and the resources of Safe Church Ministry.

This month is domestic violence awareness month. If you suspect that someone in your congregation is being victimized by abuse or if you yourself are being abused, don’t hesitate to reach out to safechurchministry@crcna.org for help.

—Amanda Benckhuysen,
Safe Church

Dante Venegas Awards Given During Inspire

On Friday, Aug. 5, during the dinner break of Inspire 2022, Rev. Sheila Holmes and Michelle Loyd-Paige, Ph.D., each received the Dante Venegas Award in recognition of their work in racial reconciliation.

The Dante Venegas Award is given by the Office of Race Relations to honor distinguished leadership in diversity and racial justice work in the Christian Reformed Church.

The award is named after Rev. Dante Venegas, a Black Puerto Rican co-pastor at Madison Square CRC (Grand Rapids, Mich.) who died in 2007 after a long struggle with cancer. In recognition of the Office of Race Relations's 50th anniversary, organizers decided to present two awards: one in the area of pastoral and congregational work and the other for work in a community setting.

Holmes received the pastoral award. "When I was in fourth grade," she recalled, "my mother and stepfather moved to Paterson, N.J., where I felt disconnected and all alone. It was God's grace that finally directed my family to move up the hill from a new church, Northside Community Chapel CRC. It was a SWIM (Summer Workshop in Ministry) Team walking through my neighborhood that invited me to church."

A few years later, Holmes was an active part of the church youth group and was excited to begin attending Christian school. "This was probably my first face-to-face experience of systemic racism and bias," she said. "What I thought was a loving, Christian environment became challenging and disappointing. The only saving grace was that the teachers and staff were

wonderful—not only academically, but also relationally. Through this experience there was a drive empowered by the Holy Spirit within me to make a difference in this world of injustice."

As a young adult, Holmes remained involved in leadership roles in her church and the broader community. She mentored young people, was on the Synodical Committee on Race Relations, and participated in the CRCNA's multiethnic conference, and she's been a member of the CRCNA's Black and Reformed Leadership group.

When God called her to ministry, she was certain it would not be with the Christian Reformed Church. "God in his sense of humor had other plans," she joked. She was ordained as a minister of the word in the CRCNA in 1998.

"As the first African-American female minister of the Word in the CRCNA, I've had the opportunity to encourage other minority groups to see the importance of actively participating and making a difference in this denomination," she said.

Loyd-Paige received the community award. At Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., Loyd-Paige serves as the executive associate to the president for diversity and inclusion and is a professor of sociology.

"Recently, someone asked how long I had been involved in diversity work," she said. "My tongue-in-cheek response: 'Well, I have been Black all my life, so I guess just over 60 years.' I was born two years after the Montgomery bus boycott. My childhood, adolescence, and adult life is a narrative of living with at least two targets on my back: Black and female. The stories I could tell of microaggressions, blatant discrimination,

"As the first African-American female minister of the Word in the CRCNA, I've had the opportunity to encourage other minority groups to see the importance of actively participating and making a difference in this denomination,"

—Rev. Sheila Holmes



Rev. Sheila Holmes received the Dante Venegas award in recognition of their work in racial reconciliation.



Michelle Loyd-Paige, Ph.D., received the Dante Venegas award in recognition of their work in racial reconciliation.

struggles with racial identity and self-esteem, and unpacking systemic racism are many. I have the scars that show that I have not been sitting on the sidelines.”

Indeed, Loyd-Paige has been actively working for racial justice. She earned her Ph.D. from Purdue University and served as a teaching faculty member, chair of the sociology and social work department, and dean of multicultural affairs at Calvin University before taking on her current role. She is often sought as a consultant and speaker on matters of diversity and inclusion and in 2019 joined *The Antioch Podcast* as a regular contributor.

“I won’t lie—there have been moments and seasons that I felt like the work was too hard and too emotionally wounding,” Loyd-Paige recalled. “And then my favorite passage from Lamentations 3:19-24 would come to mind: ‘I remember my affliction and my wandering, ... yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him.”’”

In her waiting on the Lord, Loyd-Paige said, she has found the courage and confidence to fight for justice within every sphere of her influence.

Each Dante Venegas Award comes with an engraved crystal trophy and a monetary prize of \$1,000.

—Kristen deRoo VanderBerg

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Smile!

FIND A MIRROR and smile at yourself—your best and biggest toothy grin. You probably don't spend much time thinking about your teeth unless you have to go to the dentist. But teeth are just as interesting as they are important. Your teeth aren't just for chewing your food. They also help you form sounds when you speak and make your smile uniquely yours!

Types of Teeth

Your first set of 20 teeth are called primary or baby teeth. These fall out as your permanent set of 32 teeth grows in. Whatever age you are, you will notice that the teeth in your smile don't all look the same. We have four different types of teeth designed to do different jobs.

The middle front teeth (four on the top and four on the bottom) are incisors. These are for biting and cutting. Next to the incisors you'll see longer, more pointed teeth that are used for tearing food. These are called canines because they look a bit like a dog's fangs. The next teeth are premolars, which are used for crushing. The teeth at the back of the mouth are molars. Their name comes from the Latin word *mola*, meaning "millstone." Molars grind food like millstones grind wheat.

Now That's a Smile!

Here are just a few examples of the amazing teeth found in the animal world:

- » An opossum has 50 teeth, including 18 incisors.
- » Many plant-eating animals, including cows, sheep, and giraffes, don't have upper incisors at all. They use their lips and tongues and their thick, hard gums to grab and tear grass, leaves, and twigs.
- » The teeth of the crabeater seal are shaped like Christmas trees! They

look rather scary but are used to filter krill out of seawater.

- » Sharks definitely have the toothiest smile. Their teeth are constantly being lost and replaced in a sort of tooth conveyor belt system. The requiem shark has a few hundred teeth at a time and might grow and shed an estimated 30,000 teeth over its lifetime!

Reason to Smile

The Bible tells of the Lord's goodness to his people throughout history and promises good things yet to come for those who trust in him.

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dreamed.
Our mouths were filled with laughter,
our tongues with songs of joy.
Then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

—Psalm 126:1-3

Those who call the Lord their God have good reason to smile! 📖



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



What Gives You Hope?

Editor's Note: With sponsorship from Multiplication Network, The Banner's 2022 Young Adults Writing Contest took place this summer, with 35 young adults submitting essays on the topic "What gives you hope?" Read the essays of the first- and second-place winners here. Online, you can also read the essays of third-place winner Kendy DeHaan and honorable mention winner Kelsey Bruinwood.

**First place:
"Silvery Blue,"
by Ruth Ann Bos**

A periwinkle blur brushed past my shirt.

I froze. It was a tiny butterfly weaving in and out of the tall grass. I held my breath and waited for it to land so I could take a closer look. It zigzagged through the air until it settled upon a blade of grass in the path in front of me.

The butterfly fluttered back into the air in alarm when I moved because I shifted my weight too quickly. When it landed again, I took one slow step forward. Then another. Then another. My muscles trembled from the effort of moving in slow motion. Then I crouched down bit by bit, hair falling forward. I winced as my knee, then my ankle cracked loudly, and I let out a

gentle sigh as I settled into a crouching position, craning my neck to see better.

The small butterfly almost disappeared when it was still, its wings folded neatly together. The periwinkle flash I had seen while it was in the air was now hidden. Dark dots were on its gray-fuzz-fringed wings.

Silvery blue is its name. *The silvery blue*. I looked it up when I got home and discovered that it's a common butterfly native to Canada. I smiled at the new friend I'd made, the soft and sly gossamer-winged insect that eats from bluebonnets.

Thinking about my new friend now, the silvery blue has gifted me with three realizations.

One, God created this butterfly even though there is so much brokenness in this world.

Two, the butterfly had to die to its caterpillar self to transform into a butterfly.

Three, there is a time to conceal beauty and a time for beauty to be revealed.

These three epiphanies are all woven together into the fabric of hope.

First, you and I know this world is broken. There are exploding bombs, bloodshed, abandoned children, natural disasters, and more. Even though all these tragedies happen beneath the same sky, our Creator has the thrilling audacity to breathe life into this delicate insect and to delight in its movement, waking, sleeping, and eating. It can give us awe at the Creator who spoke it into existence. It is a glimpse of heaven, an ethereal wink at you and me, a glimmer of the perfect delight that is to come. It reminds us of who our God is amid the turmoil, and that gives us hope that will never fail.

Second, when you were a child, you probably learned that butterflies aren't born with their wings. It's the same with the silvery blue. It had to "die" to its old caterpillar self in the chrysalis and then poke its head out of its cocoon, unfolding its gray-blue wings to dry in the sunlight. Similarly, those whose bodies are lying in the soil now will burst into flight in an explosion of color when Christ comes back again to restore this earth once and for all. It will be beautiful. Oh, it will be beautiful.

My mother is among those whose body is in the earth. Waiting. Waiting. Waiting. Her body is in decay while she is dancing in heaven. I wait, and her body waits; we all wait. Her grave is expectant, a kind of chrysalis, and she is simply waiting for Christ to transform her lowly body so that it will be like his glorious body. Waiting to burst into flight, into new life. And when she does, she will exude vibrant

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gold, azure, vermilion, evergreen, amethyst—and colors we can't even imagine here on earth. And we will all be beautiful. We will all be renewed through Christ and soar in the unhindered presence of God. This is a certain hope that will never fail.

Like my mom, we are all waiting for our bodies and for the beautiful work in our lives to be completed. That brings me to the third epiphany: there is a time for beauty to be concealed and a time for beauty to be revealed. And when we are in that in-between time, in the already-but-not-yet, we need the hope that God is working in us and will reveal our beauty.

When the butterfly had its wings folded, it was already beautiful in an understated way—with the dark dots and the fuzzy fringed edges and the silvery sheen—but it was almost unnoticeable in the landscape. When the butterfly had its wings folded together, it seemed that the unnoticeable gray was all there was to it. But when the time came for it to fly, God exposed the

entirety of what he had created it to be. That's when the blue became a streak across the landscape—it was stunning because its beauty was unveiled.

Are you frustrated with waiting to see how God will completely reveal your beauty and the beauty of this universe—beauty that isn't braided with brokenness, beauty wholly released? When the time comes for Jesus to come back and restore this earth, he will release all your beauty that you have been fighting to uncover.

Amidst all of this brokenness, be expectant for God to remind you of who he is.

What eventually scared away the silvery blue was an abrupt movement of my hand. I felt a bit forlorn, but I was joyful that God had tugged back the tattered fabric of this broken world to give me a taste of heaven. I was honored that this little creature had allowed me to observe it for so long, and now it fluttered into the air, transforming from camouflaged gray into periwinkle that flashed against the grass and eventually across the sky.

If you pay attention, you might just see the places where heaven meets earth—that's where hope is blazing. Look around. God is closer than you think. Perhaps he will send a silvery blue across your path to give you a taste of the beauty that is yet to come.



Ruth Ann Bos is majoring in English writing and art at Redeemer University. She attends Immanuel CRC in Hamilton, Ont.

Second place: “What Gives You Hope?” by Michelle VanderMeer

In a country of economic hardships and unrelenting rebel activity, a man had finally, *finally* scraped up enough money to build his dream home—a house with a tin roof. That shiny, silvery tin showed accomplishment, the fruit of long toil in the hot tropical sun. But his family didn’t even enjoy it for a month. A rebel group came, burning and killing all in their way. Cruel blades cut flesh—people felled as mercilessly as trees. Gardens and livelihoods were destroyed. And his home was burnt to the ground. He fled with his family and in a displaced-people camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All that covered them was a donated tarp. In that camp we—my missionary parents and I—listened to his story. And I wondered, how could he ever muster up the courage, the audacious hope to rebuild?

At the local hospital, a child lay bandaged up, the sole survivor on a truck fleeing the oncoming rebels. They were ambushed, and everyone was killed, the boy only escaping because the dead bodies of his companions covered his small frame. Beside him lay a girl, her head wound up in white gauze to hide a cruel gash on her skull from a machete. Next lies a man, staring at the world, at us, with dark eyes. Have you ever seen hopeless eyes? There is no light, no joy, no hope. It is like staring into a void, a pool of emptiness, a universe with no stars. A man with no life left but a beating heart and expanding lungs. His feet were missing toes. I gagged and fled the sight. In the face of such evil and suffering, where is God, and where is hope?

Fast-forward a couple of years.

The minutes dragged by slowly. My sister and I had given up on sleep and sat on the couch staring into the darkness, waiting. Our sister, who had excitedly announced her pregnancy nine months ago, now labored

long through the night to give birth to a child that the doctors said would not live. A rare condition called anencephaly meant that his little skull had not formed to protect his brain. But we hoped against hope. People prayed for healing, for isn’t that what a good God would do? At least he could grant the baby, affectionately named Jedidiah, enough heartbeats for us to meet him. And we waited. The suggestion of dawn began to creep into the living room. The text came. Jedidiah was born. Five minutes later the bomb dropped: he hadn’t survived. Tears blinded my eyes from the light streaking through the window. Joy did not come with the morning.

I have struggled deeply, and I have struggled long with hope. What is the purpose of living when what meets the eye and ear consists of such suffering and evil, when the power of the enemy and sin in this world wreaks such havoc, such pain? Any ideal of happiness and goodness is crushed under the weight of it, and I wonder: why hope?

Hopelessness. I see it in the averted eyes and stolen dignity of the homeless on our Canadian streets, in the questions of the man who digs through garbage cans for food and wonders what curse he is under, in the woman breaking down in tears in front of me because her wallet is empty, her kids are hungry, and she finds herself at our food bank. In the scrolling news headlines that tell of school shootings, famines, and strife. In the desire to give up because everything, wound up in one frightful load, is just too much to bear.

What gives hope? It feels so elusive in the darkest night, a cruel mockery in the face of suffering and evil. But hope, that simple four-letter word, refuses to be conquered. Because God is a God of hope.

In my struggle to understand, God showed how important the resurrection is to our hope. For those displaced by violence, justice may be denied.

They may never experience peace and prosperity. But one day, before the throne of God, every tribe, tongue, and nation will gather. Justice will be served, the wrongs made right, and the tears wiped away. And on that day, the King will say to my Congolese brothers and sisters in Christ, “Well done, my good and faithful servants,” for through the fire of tribulation and suffering their faith has been refined and made pure. Then it will be found that the suffering of this present time cannot compare with the glories to follow. That gives me hope.

Eternal hope is crucial. But what about here and now? If eternal hope is all we have, why not die and hasten heaven? In the dark night while we waited for news of the birth of my nephew, a verse came to mind: “I would have despaired unless I had believed I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of living” (Psalm 27:13, NASB). The goodness of God. Hope. Now and here.

What gives me hope in this life? It is believing that I will see the goodness of God. Indeed, it is all around me if I would only open my eyes. It is in the flower that blooms full of promise and the bird that heralds the morning in gusty song. It is in the loving word, kind smile, reaching arms, and touching hands of people. It is in the stories shared when hope conquered despair. It is in the song and dance of the displaced people in Congo on Easter Sunday. It is in the assurance that I will meet Jedidiah one day in heaven. Hope is everywhere because God’s goodness is everywhere. And not only will I see it, but I will be part of bringing it to a despairing world. And so we hope, for how can we not when we serve a risen King?



Michelle VanderMeer attends Zion Christian Reformed Church in Oshawa, Ont., where she also works part time.

'And Still ... ?'

The wounds inflicted will take years to heal, and some might never fully recover.



Scott Hoezee is the Director of the Center for Excellence in Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary.

AS PART OF MY WORK at Calvin Theological Seminary, I have the opportunity to hear from pastors who minister in a wide variety of contexts and denominations. Mostly this happens in the peer learning groups we convene. In June 2021 we met with two dozen pastors who have been leaders of our peer learning groups for the past three to four years. What they told us about ministry during the recent COVID-19 pandemic was, to put it mildly, startling.

Several pastors had left their congregations over tensions related to COVID. Several others were hanging on by their fingernails. Those who fared a bit better and did not leave their congregations nevertheless reported stress levels seldom if ever before experienced in their many years of ministry.

But as striking as anything was the wide-eyed wonder with which most of the pastors reported one particular aspect of their pandemic interactions with their congregations: a complete disbelief in what their pastors told them. These were pastors who had served and loved and ministered to people in these places for a long time. One pastor who moved on from his congregation had been their pastor for 18 years. Another had been in a congregation for 12 years, and still another eight years.

Yet when they assured their congregations that the pandemic was real, that masks were saving lives, that social distancing was necessary, and that it was not safe to gather in person for worship for a time, people accused them of lying. The most charitable would assert their pastor was simply misinformed. The less charitable seemed to believe their pastor was a willing part of some vast conspiracy to deceive the masses.

The pastors who had served for many years in these congregations were dumbfounded. One pastor said she told her people directly, "After all these years together, do you really

believe I would lie to you?" But some did. Unsurprisingly, this cut deeply into their souls. The wounds inflicted will take years to heal, and some might never fully recover.

These stories reminded me of John 14, in which Jesus says to Philip and the other disciples, "Have I been with you so long and still you do not know me?"

The COVID-19 pandemic is most certainly not the first time in church history when parishioners disagreed with a pastor on a given point. Surely there is more than enough room in Christ's church for people to disagree with a pastor's take on an issue. But much of what has happened to too many pastors these past two years feels different, more significant, perhaps even dire.

The information age has led to an explosion of sources of information. A lot of it is sound. A good bit of it is not. But somehow, some less credible sources of information have become more important to people than longtime pastors. "And still you do not know me?" these pastors have plaintively wanted to say.

Pastors are not perfect. We all make mistakes, and when we do, it's on us to apologize. But what my fellow pastors have reported points to troubled waters in the church for potentially a long while to come. I don't know how we can come back together and rebuild trust, but without a doubt, doing that is going to remain high on the list of ecclesiastical and pastoral priorities in the coming times. **B**

Editor's Note: The author adapted this from a post that originally appeared on the Reformed Journal blog "The Twelve."

1. When was the last time you strongly disagreed with your pastor? What did you do about it? What was the outcome?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

Dementia: Love Thy Stranger

Saying yes to the Spirit takes courage, but the Spirit promises to never let us visit alone.



Travis Jamieson is the pastor of Palo Alto Christian Reformed Church in Palo Alto, Calif. He serves alongside his wife, Annie, and together they have two children.

“THEY JUST AREN’T THE SAME person anymore. Dementia has changed the person I love.” I hear it time and again. The process of dementia can change personalities, vocabulary choice, and even interests. It can cause someone to forget the name of their spouse, child, or best friend. There is no sugarcoating it. Dementia is an awful and transformative disease. Those we know best can become complete strangers to us.

As his chaplain, I asked John, a lifelong pastor, how his spiritual life was while living with dementia. He lamented, “I can no longer officiate weddings or offer communion.” John expressed his struggle in knowing how to relate to God now. For years his parishioners had expected him to bring God’s Word to them, to pray for them, and to equip them in their spiritual journey, but things were different now. His journey with dementia had changed so much. Who was he now?

Meanwhile, John’s wife, Ruth, had her own struggles. Ruth was used to a husband who was decisive, a strong leader, and cared well for others. However, since the dementia began to take its toll on John, she wasn’t sure who her husband was becoming. Her role in the family took a sudden turn. Leadership was forced upon her, and it wasn’t what she wanted. Ruth wasn’t sure how to be the spouse that John needed. Loving John the pastor was what she knew, but loving John with dementia felt like a mountain she didn’t have the energy to climb.

Needless to say, this newfound identity crisis put John and Ruth at odds with each other. Arguments kept erupting. They didn’t know how to work together anymore. Dementia had taken over John’s life, and Ruth’s well-being was collateral damage. They weren’t the same people anymore, and they were struggling to love each other well.

An Emotional Journey

Journeying alongside people experiencing dementia can be emotionally exhausting. I serve as a chaplain in a retirement community, and I have walked alongside many people who notice their memory is slipping, receive a diagnosis for dementia, and slowly (or sometimes quickly) begin to experience significant changes in their daily lives. At times, it is draining because there are so many moments of hope followed by days of despair. One day I can have a conversation with one of my residents that is full of clarity and specificity, but the next day that person mistakes me for their son, or they wonder when they are going to get a ride to the home they moved away from years ago.

When family and friends hear of their loved one’s initial diagnosis, they usually rally and provide all kinds of support. They visit often and find creative ways to engage. Unfortunately, as the dementia progresses and the person they love becomes less like they used to be, many friends and family begin to fade away, and the one with dementia becomes isolated. This pattern of isolation doesn’t happen only with ordinary people. It affects even the most famous and popular around us. In his book *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*, John Swinton retells the story of Ronald Reagan’s experience of dementia. As Reagan found it more difficult to recognize his friends, those friends stopped showing up for visits. Swinton asks, “If someone who has been one of the most powerful men in the world has difficulties holding onto his network of friendships, what hope is there for ... ?” Fill in the blank. Isolation affects many who have dementia, and so often it is because those closest to them don’t feel known by them. And if someone doesn’t know you, do you really know them?



Photo by Eduardo Barrios/Unsplash

As Christians, Jesus calls us to love our neighbors, but what if loving our neighbor feels like we are loving a stranger? When your friend or family member is on the journey of dementia, it can often feel as if you don't know who they are. We often talk about how the one with dementia doesn't remember people's names, and that can deter visitors, but I suggest that what ultimately deters us from visiting is that we don't recognize *them*. In the midst of such a valley as this, how do we keep following in the way of Jesus and love those who have become strange to us?

Lean Into Love

Adam Young, therapist and host of *The Place We Find Ourselves* podcast, says in his 95th episode, "Love always disrupts the status quo." He says that if your relationship with your spouse, parent, or friend is the same as it was five years ago, then there is a good chance you haven't been loving that person well. Change in the way we relate to one another is inevitable when we are loving well because we

will be vulnerable enough to be honest about how we can better honor one another. Dementia forces the change upon us, whether we like it or not. Often we are running to catch up with the change, but if we can say that change is an opportunity to love and that love will contribute to further change, then we might be willing to keep visiting with our spouse, parent, grandparent, or old friend who has dementia. We might be willing to say no to our instinct to flee and say yes to the Spirit's whisper to lean into love.

Saying yes to the Spirit takes courage, but the Spirit promises to never let us visit alone. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God comes to visit with his people, even when they have changed. In Genesis 3, God visits the garden and calls out, "Where are you?" Of course, God knows that Adam and Eve have fallen after the ways of the serpent, but in grace he visits them, meets them in their shame, and provides them with clothing. That same God visits us today and goes with us as we visit his beloved children.

"Visitation," Swinton says, "is the embodiment of God's actions toward creation. As we come close to others, as we visit the sick, the prisoner, the poor, the broken, so we carry within us and reveal the God who visits. As we visit those with dementia and those who care for them, so we bring God with us, so to speak, in our friendship, our thoughtfulness, and our enduring presence. As we visit one another and allow others to visit us, so we can learn to see and to hold one another well."

God has made us for one another. May we go in courage to love those who have become strangers to us because of the God who knows us even when we don't know ourselves. **B**

Succession: Chasing After the Wind


SUCCESSION JUST COMPLETED its third season on HBO after taking a couple of years off during the pandemic. It was worth the wait.

Nominated this year for 25 Primetime Emmys (the most for any show this year), including Outstanding Drama Series, the show follows members of the Roy family as they manage patriarch Logan Roy's multibillion-dollar media conglomerate. On the surface, the storyline and the characters seem distant and unrelatable. How much can the average viewer relate to the power struggles that come with dividing a vast media empire? How much empathy can we have for the super-elite of society as they contend with their problems over \$1,000 dinners served on million-dollar private jets? The characters are, at face value, rich degenerates whose selfishness and arrogance cause negative ripple effects through all of society.

But the best TV shows, regardless of their storylines' absurdity, cause us to see the devil and angel that exist in all of us. It's why we relate to seemingly unrelatable characters and make such huge emotional investments in the leader of a North Jersey organized crime syndicate (*The Sopranos*) or an estranged princess/mother of dragons (*Game of Thrones*). Like *Succession*, these stories are far from the experiences of most people, yet at the core they speak to common themes of family, betrayal, heartbreak, and the never-ending pit of the human heart.

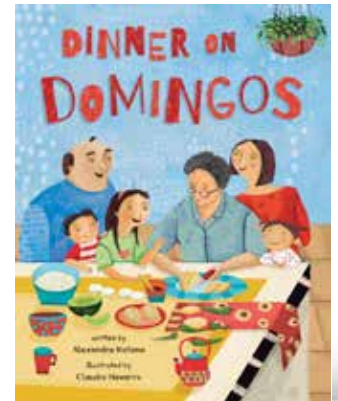
In one scene, the son of family servants is offered \$1 million to hit a home run at a meaningless family softball game. His hopeful parents look on as their son, who is barely old enough to understand this life-changing offer, fails the challenge. Though we might feel disgust as the family lawyer asks

the servants to sign a nondisclosure agreement, we can all relate to looking after our own selfish interests at the expense of others. The more I have watched, the more enveloped I have become. The Roy family's personal struggles, I realized, are just like mine, but on a much larger scale.

Succession is a continual reminder of the Old Testament wisdom book Ecclesiastes, in which the teacher reminds us that everything under the sun is meaningless, "a chasing after the wind" (Eccles. 1:14). No matter the wealth, influence, and power one family can wield, the basic depravity of humankind is inescapable. *Succession* offers the Christian viewer an extravagant reflection of the sandcastles of identity we all work furiously to create and sustain. I hope it also points us to our continual need for a Savior. (HBO; rated TV-MA for language and drug use) 



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



Dinner on Domingos

By Alexandra
Katona, illustrated
by Claudia Navarro

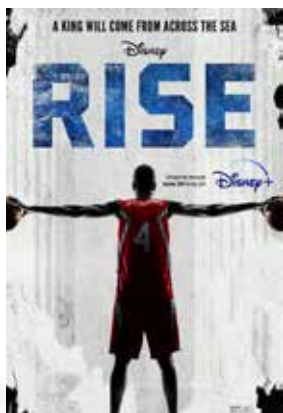
Reviewed by Sonya
VanderVeen Feddema

Every Sunday for lunch, a young girl goes to Abuelita's casa—her grandmother's house. The girl's aunts, uncles, and cousins join the family get-together, enjoying each other's company and helping out as Abuelita takes the lead in preparing traditional Ecuadorian locro, a soup made from potatoes, onion, garlic, milk, and spices.

Speaking Spanish, Abuelita tells her granddaughter, "*La comida siempre nos lleva a casa*," then translates: "Food always leads us home."

As the girl shares the joy of being with her family on Sunday—*Domingo*—she realizes that it's the best day of the week.

Dinner on Domingos is a celebration of families, culture, language, and traditions. A glossary of Spanish words and their English meanings is included at the end of the book. (Barefoot Books)



Rise

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

In 2021, at age 26, Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Milwaukee Bucks to their first NBA championship since 1971.

Rise describes Antetokounmpo's unlikely journey from Greece to the United States to play basketball at the highest level, but it is also a tension-filled story about immigration and the barriers Antetokounmpo and his Nigerian family face as they try to establish themselves in Greece.

Antetokounmpo played his first basketball game in 2007; just six years later he was drafted into the NBA draft. His ascent from undocumented immigrant to NBA Finals MVP is truly like a rocket ship blasting to the stars. A worthy film for basketball fans of all ages. (Disney+)



Climate Vigil Songs

By The Porter's Gate

Reviewed by Robert J. Keeley

In five years, the artist collective known as The Porter's Gate has released six albums of worship music. These albums have blessed the church while speaking prophetically as we grapple with how our theology and our lives as 21st-century believers should intersect.

Its latest album, *Climate Vigil Songs*, celebrates the good creation God has given to us ("God of Grace and Mystery"), points to how things are not as they should be ("Keep, Watch and Pray"), and encourages us to action to set it right ("Bring In the Year of Jubilee (Psalm 37)"). The artists make this point subtly, putting our focus on praising God instead of the singers and players and placing creation care clearly in a worship context. (Integrity Music)



Thor: Love and Thunder

Reviewed by Darrell Delaney

At the outset of *Love and Thunder*, Thor has resolved to keep people at a distance so he is not hurt when he loses them, either by death or relationship breakups. He rejects people before they get a chance to reject him.

Only when Thor can name his loss and tell the people around him how he truly feels does he start to recover emotionally.

I applaud Marvel for using this theme to backdrop Thor's heart and actions. In doing so they touch our hearts as well. In truth, we are rooting for our own emotional healing as we root for Thor. (Marvel Studios)

The Lowdown

Centering Immigrants:

Guatemalan immigrant Karen González draws from the Bible and her own experiences in *Beyond Welcome*. She puts immigrants themselves at the center of the immigration conversation, helping readers grow in discipleship and recognize themselves in their new neighbors. (Brazos Press)

The Railway Children:

As life in Britain's cities becomes increasingly perilous during World War II, three evacuee children are sent by their mother from Salford to the Yorkshire village of Oakworth. This movie is based on the beloved children's classic by Edith Nesbit. (Limited release, Blue Fox Entertainment)

Masterpiece Murders:

In *Magpie Murders*, book editor Susan Ryeland (Leslie Manville) is given an unfinished manuscript by a best-selling mystery writer. When she attempts to get the final chapters from him, she finds herself in the middle of a shocking mystery case of her own. (October 16, PBS)

When We Had Wings:

Three bestselling historical fiction authors—Ariel Lawhon, Kristina McMorris, and Susan Meissner—team up to write the story of three nurses stationed in the Philippines who are forced into captivity as the first female prisoners of World War II. (Oct. 18, Harper Muse)

Should Christians Learn from Other Religions?

As we reflect on how the church handled these cultural issues, we can learn much.



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

AS CHRISTIANS, how do we know when we have crossed the line into syncretism? It is one thing to learn about other religions, but it is another thing to adopt practices from other religions and bring them into the church and one's personal life.

As it relates to religion, syncretism can be best defined as a "fusion of faiths." This fusion takes place when two separate religious systems are blended to form a new religion. A modern-day example can be found in the religion of Santeria, which is a combination of Roman Catholicism and the Yoruba religious tradition from West Africa. Santeria holds the saints and Christian symbols in Roman Catholicism in high regard while at the same time using spells, rituals, and animal sacrifices to divine the future and expel evil spirits. Although Santeria has its origins in Cuba, it has spread throughout Latin America and can even be found in the U.S.

While it is paramount for believers to avoid blending the practices of other religions with the Christian faith, it is important to make a distinction between the fusion of different religions and the blending of different cultures in the church. Understanding this distinction was a challenge for believers in the New Testament church, which was becoming increasingly Jewish and increasingly Gentile. They had to figure out what to do with the practice of circumcision from the Old Testament and with the food sacrificed to idols in their Greek context.

The church council in Acts 15 confirmed that the Old Testament practice of circumcision was not a prerequisite for becoming a Christian. Because the church now had baptism as the sign and seal of the covenant, circumcision had become simply a ritual. It did not matter if you were circumcised as long as you were part of the new creation in Christ.

Regarding food sacrificed to idols, at first the church in Acts 15 advised believers to abstain. However, as we continue to read the New Testament, we discover that the church became increasingly less restrictive regarding this issue. In 1 Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul said it was permissible to eat food sacrificed to idols. He reasoned that idols were not real and therefore eating this food did not have the power to bring someone closer or push someone further away from God. The only warning Paul gave was for believers not to misuse their freedom in Christ to exalt themselves over their weaker brothers and sisters.

As we reflect on how the church handled these cultural issues, we can learn much.

We must begin by recognizing that the church of Jesus Christ is composed of people from every tribe, language, and nation. This rich diversity should not only be acknowledged, but celebrated in the church. As with circumcision, the church must ask itself, "Are there any traditions that have become burdens that keep us from embracing who we are becoming as a community in Christ?" As with food sacrificed to idols, Christians must learn to be patient with one another and ask, "How do we become less restrictive with matters that are really culturally contextual expressions of faith rather than the fusion of different faiths?"

The church would do well to spend more time discovering what it means for our churches to become more African, Native American, Latino, Asian, and global at a local level. We should encourage these conversations not because we are becoming less biblical, but because we are seeking to become more biblical and Spirit-filled in our worship of Christ. **B**

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

Down

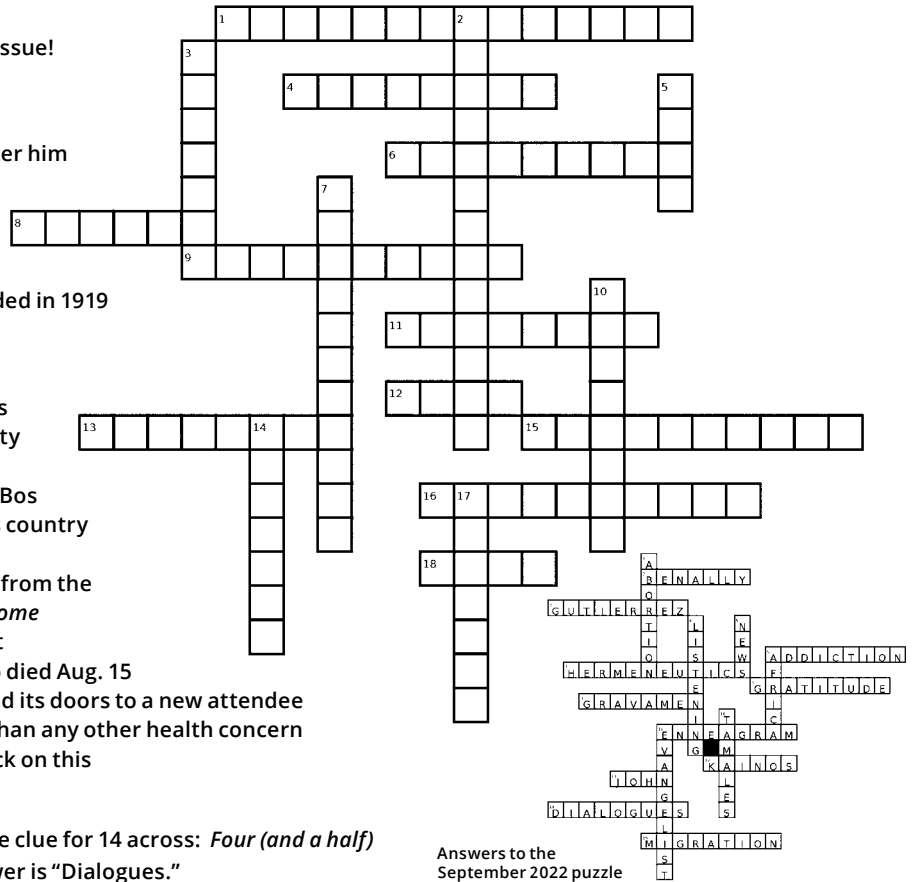
- 2. Last name of NBA star Giannis
- 3. An award for racial reconciliation is named after him
- 5. A city in Burkina Faso
- 7. This ministry offers SERVE summer mission trips
- 10. This disease can change our loved ones
- 14. Where the first overseas CRC missionary landed in 1919
- 17. An animal with 50 teeth

Across

- 1. The CRC has reorganized its _____ ministries
- 4. A B.C. pastor encouraged his church community to _____ as potential living organ donors
- 6. The silvery blue insect that inspired Ruth Ann Bos
- 8. Inspire 2022 speaker Zac Niringiye is from this country
- 9. HBO show nominated for 25 Emmy Awards
- 11. Guatemalan immigrant Karen _____ draws from the Bible and her own experiences in *Beyond Welcome*
- 12. The topic of our Young Adults Writing Contest
- 13. Popular Christian author and theologian who died Aug. 15
- 15. A church hosting this commemoration opened its doors to a new attendee
- 16. Some scientists claim this kills more people than any other health concern
- 18. *Banner* editor Shiao Chong feels like he is stuck on this

Correction

Last month's issue was missing the answer to the clue for 14 across: *Four (and a half)* on *Homosexuality and the Bible*. The answer is "Dialogues."



Answers to the September 2022 puzzle

Support CRC ministry with a direct gift from your IRA!

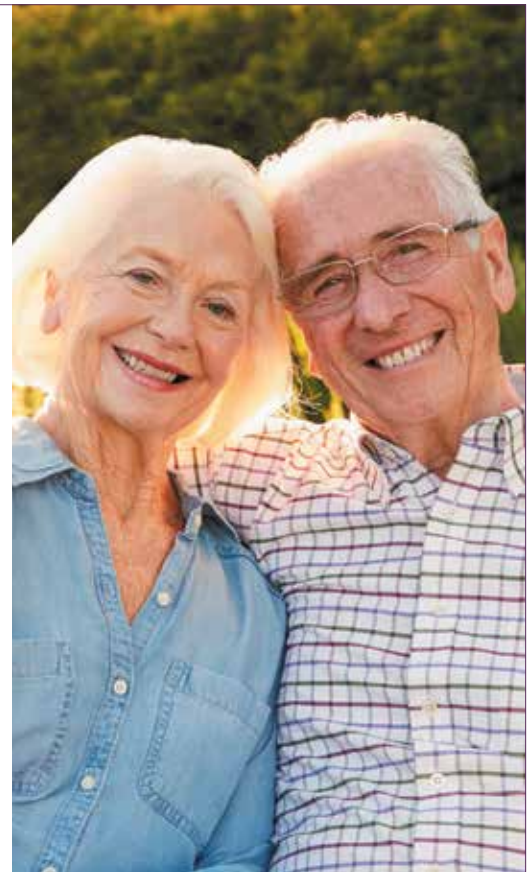
Benefits to you. . .

- It is an easy and tax-wise way to make a gift
- Charitable gifts from your IRA can fulfill your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)
- You benefit even if you don't itemize deductions on your tax returns since distributions made directly to the CRC and its ministries are not treated as taxable income
- IRA gifts can fulfill any charitable giving pledge you have already made

IRA Charitable Gift conditions. . .

- IRA holder must be age 70 1/2 or older
- Gifts must be made directly to a charity
- Gifts may be made from traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs
- You can give up to \$100,000 per year tax-free
- Your gift must be received before December 31 to qualify

Do you have questions about supporting the CRC ministries by giving from your IRA? We're here to help! Call 1-800-272-5125 or email advancement@crcna.org



DEADLINES: 10/10/22 November; 11/07/22 December. Subject to availability. Details online. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

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

Congregational Announcements

MARANATHA WELCOMES WINTER VISITORS Maranatha begins its winter season on Dec 4. Please note that we have changed our starting time and location. New time of worship: 10:45 am. New location: Church of the Master, 6659 E University, Mesa, AZ 85205.



REV. GEORGE DEJONG RETIRES Holland Heights CRC of Holland, MI is grateful to God for Pastor George's 32 years of faithful and rich ministry. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, he has discipled us as a congregation as well as

countless others on his Under the Fig Tree trips. His depth of study and insight have helped many "see with their eyes and hear with their ears" (Ezekiel 40:4) in the lands of the Bible, bringing scripture to life. Before accepting the call to HHCRC, George served Georgetown CRC for 4 years. We bless God for Pastor George, Beth, and their family, and we look forward to seeing what God will give as they move into this next season of life and ministry, with Under the Fig Tree and whatever else God has in store. underthefigtree.org

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

Church Positions Available

IMMANUEL CRC OF WAPPINGERS FALLS, NY SEEKS PASTOR full time or bi-vocational to lead our small dynamic small church in the heart of the scenic Hudson Valley. The pastor we are looking for should be devoted to preaching the word of God and be able to walk beside us in our faith journey. Please contact Mike Toth, Secretary of Search Committee at mi.toth@yahoo.com

INTERIM ASSOCIATE PASTOR Bethel CRC Lis-towel, Ontario is seeking a part time Interim Associate Pastor. Request job description or submit resume to council chair, Bill Los (cattlemaster@hotmail.com).

PASTOR: Hawarden CRC (Hawarden, IA) seeks a full-time Pastor to preach Biblical and engaging messages, provide congregational care, and promote fellowship. For more information contact Brian at 712-551-6860 or email hrcr@outlook.com

PASTOR OF CONGREGATIONAL CARE (GRANDVILLE, MI) Ivanrest Church is seeking an ordained CRC or RCA minister to provide pastoral care in coordination with the Senior Pastor in this important part-time position. To learn more about this opportunity or to apply, visit www.ivanrest.org/job-openings or email applications@ivanrestcrc.org.

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS

ELEANOR ELENBAAS of 2121 Raybrook St, #229, DeVos Center, Grand Rapids, MI 49546 will celebrate her 100th birthday on October 30. She was married to the late Jack Elenbaas for 67 years and is mother to Judy (Dan) Johnson, the late Marv Elenbaas, Doug (Gail) Elenbaas & Steve (Paula) Elenbaas. 11 grandchildren & 11 great-grandchildren. Family celebrations are planned to commemorate this milestone and to thank God for a much loved lady.

BIRTHDAY 95 YEARS

NEAL GERRIT VANDERWERFF celebrates his 95th birthday on October 17, 2022. His family is grateful for his life and invites you to send birthday greetings to his home at 19915 - 73rd Ave N.E. Kenmore, WA 98028

BIRTHDAY 90 YEARS



MARVIN DE BOER of Grand Rapids, MI, will celebrate his 90th birthday on October 18. He dedicated himself to a career in Christian Education. His wife, Merrie Lou, and children, Barb & John Buteyn, Carol (Bill) Buikema, and David & Jane De Boer, grandchildren and great grandchildren love him and look forward to celebrating together. Congratulations can be sent to Marvin De Boer at 725 Baldwin St. #B-25 Jenison, MI 49428.

Obituaries

BOSSCHER, James P. Bosscher, 97, passed away on Sunday, August 7, 2022. Jim was a pioneering faculty member in Calvin's Department of Engineering and a lifelong educator. He was an initiator of many endeavors including Grand Rapids' first recycling program—Recycle Unlimited, Camp Tall Turf, Safe Haven Ministries, and Hilltop University in Nigeria. Jim is survived by his wife, Angie; children, Jack and Joan (Sopjes) Bosscher,

Beth and Bob Terborg, David and Mary (Slotman) Bosscher, Marcia (Vermaire) Bosscher, Barb and Steve Timmermans, and honorary son, Wayne Nguyen Hung; 17 grandchildren; and 26 great-grandchildren. Preceding him in death were his son, Peter J. Bosscher, and sisters and their husbands Gerda and Al Walcott and Helen and Rich Zoodsma. Jim was a member of Shawnee Park CRC.

BOUMA, Margaretha "Margaret" Cornelia Geertruida (Loos), age 99, was joyfully greeted in heaven by her Lord and Savior on August 15, 2022. Waiting for her was her husband of 66 years, Gerard. Most important to Mom was her love for the Lord and her desire that her children, grands, and great grands would love the Lord also. As long as she was able, she got on her knees and prayed for them all every day. Her deep and abiding faith and her love for the Church is a real testament for her family to carry on. Mom was preceded in death by her husband Gerard in 2017, parents Martinus and Willemina Loos (VanderHoeven), her brother Martien as a POW in Indonesia. She is survived by her children; Micky and Tom Jelsema (Middleville MI), Martin and Brian Bouma-Quinn (Ann Arbor, MI), Keith and Laura Bouma (Denver), Joanne Bouma (Calgary), 10 grandchildren: Tim and Natalie, Derek and Megan, Jared and Melanie, Casey and Amanda Jelsema, Thomas, Leah Bouma-Quinn, Amy and Nate Segreto, Katie and Matt Hayes, Emily (fiancée Thomas), Laura Bouma, and 12 greats- Austin, Sydney, Dylan, Stella, Ellery, Kegan, Myla, Boyd, Lucas, Cole, Henry, Alex; also Brenda Bouma. She was a member of East Paris Christian Reformed Church.

GROEN, Betty (De Vries) went to be with Jesus on August 27, 2022. She is survived by her husband of 64 years, George, and her children, Eric, Mark, and Roann. Also survived by 8 grandchildren. We praise God for a wonderful wife, mother, and grandmother!

JONGSMA, Eleanor R. Jongsma, nee Stob, a resident of Wheaton, Illinois, age 92, passed away on Friday, September 2, 2022. Beloved wife for 67 years to the late Edward Jongsma, Sr. (2019). Loving mother of Edward Jr. (Ellen), Sandra (Dr. Bruce) VanDommelen, David, Elizabeth, the late Robert (Kim), Kimberly, Karen (Rod) Tos, & Anne (Matthew) VanderKooi. Sister to the late John (Elaine) Stob, the late Albert (the late Lee) Stob & Judy Gezon. Devoted grandmother to 14 grandchildren & 21 great-grandchildren.

KEEGSTRA, Robert D. Keegstra, aged 103, died on Friday, July 29, 2022. He was preceded in death by his wife, Angelyn and sister, Ruth Walton. He is survived by his daughters, Judith (Gary), Nancy (Earle) and son, James (Gwynne) Keegstra; 6 grandchildren, 7 great-children, 13 great-great-grandchildren, 1 great-great-great grandchild and sisters, June and Rose Hollemans. He was a member of Ridgewood CRC.

MULDER, Ethel (Kruithof) Class of '51, passed into the arms of Jesus on 8/10/22, preceded by Harry Mulder on 6/03/14, Class of '53, resident of Allendale MI.


POSTMA, Jane Ann was called home to Heaven on September 10, 2022. She is predeceased by her parents, husband, and her brother. Surviving are her 3 sons, and two daughters in laws, seven grandchildren, ten great grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. She is also survived by her nieces and nephews and friends. She was a member of Neland CRC of Grand Rapids for many years.

UBELS, John, 98, Jenison MI, died on August 31, 2022. Preceded in death by wife Nettie (Antoinette Schaa). Survived by children John (Jan) Ubels and Janine (Henry) Huisjen, 5 grandchildren and their spouses, 10 great-grandchildren, and many nieces and nephews.

VAN ZANTEN, Melvin J. died on September 4, 2022 at age 96. He is survived by his wife of 62

years, Jan (Kuiper) and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by all siblings, Jeanette, Dewey (Gladys), J.W. (Barb), Alice (Walt) Burgers, Nellie (John) Burgers, and Pierre.

VANDER WEIDE, John Vander Weide Jr, age 91, of Kentwood, died on August 17, 2022. He was preceded in death by his wife Joan Marie DeVoogd and son Daniel Mark. He is survived by his children Paul and Nancy Vander Weide, John and Julie Vander Weide, Rae Ann and Ed Kluitenber, Pete and Sue Vander Weide; 23 grandchildren; 20 great grandchildren; and 4 great great grandchildren. John was a member of East Paris Christian Reformed Church.



This novel will grip your soul as you walk through the years of Nazis occupation of the Netherlands.

The Dutch Winter is a journey inside the mind and heart of a young lad who experiences the loss of freedom, extreme hunger and the fear of death.

The stalwartness of the Dutch and the strength of faith are evident as they struggle against and survive the Democratic Socialism of the Third Reich.

The Dutch Winter is a story that will make you cry and exult with joy.

Your heart will exalt when you share in the victory over evil and read the tribute Herve' Van Bommel penned as a tribute to The Statue of Liberty.

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WASSINK, Paul A. a humble servant of the Lord, was healed from the earthly struggles of cancer on July 14, 2022, and now rejoices in the glory of God. A graduate of Holland Christian High School and Dordt College, Paul was a managing partner of The CPA Group PC in Grandville, MI. He provided wisdom and expertise in many positions over the years, volunteering as a Cadet counselor; catechism teacher; deacon, elder and chair of Ivanrest CRC's council; Treasurer and US Board President of World

Renew and Board President of the Barnabas Foundation. He also participated in a Synodical study committee and served as a church visitor for Classis Grandville. Paul will always be lovingly remembered by his wife of 41 years, Jan; his children Amy & Jason Flietstra and Jeff Wassink; his grandchildren Gavin & Bennett Flietstra. He remains the cherished son of Bob & Evie Wassink, brother to Steve (Robyn) Wassink and Lisa (Mark) Timmer; son-in-law of Ruth Rienstra and brother-in-law to Ruth (Larry) Spalink & Donald Rienstra. Paul was welcomed into heaven by his brother Kenneth Wassink and father-in-law Thys Rienstra.

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MEMMELAAR, Bern and Marion of Pfeiffer Woods Dr, GR, formerly of NJ celebrated their 72 anniversary with their 5 children and their spouses, 17 grandchildren and 23 great grandchildren on August 18. To God be the glory.

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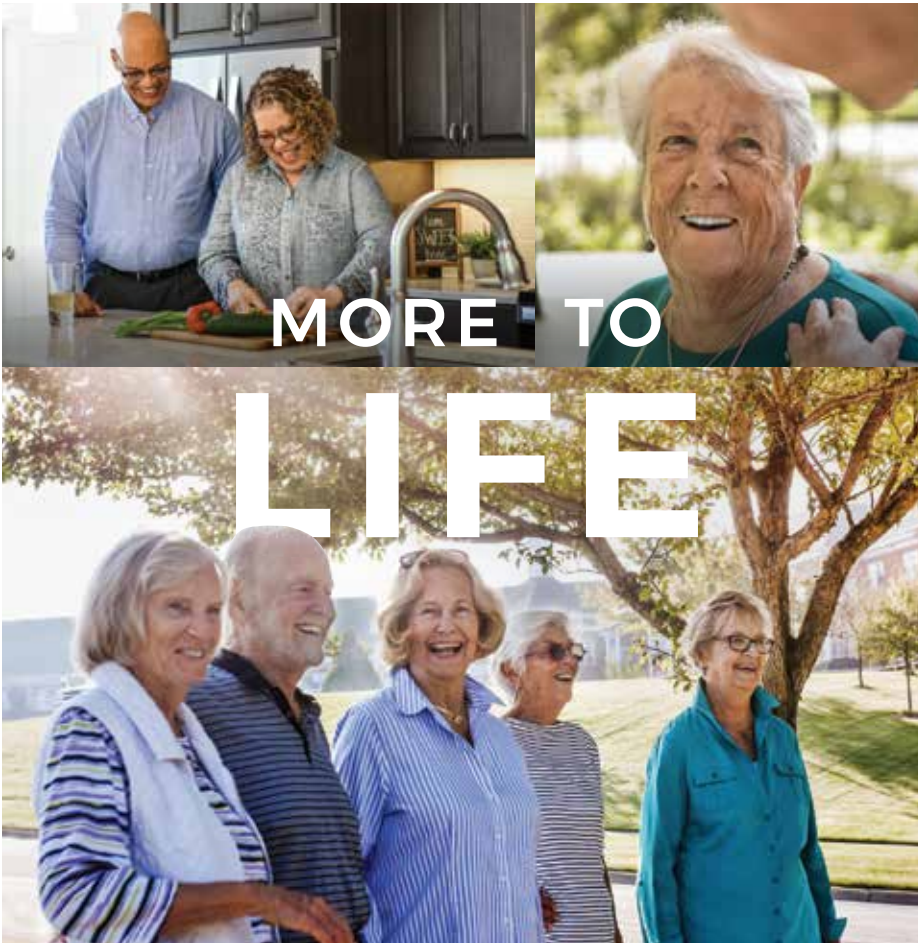
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Faith of Our Fathers, Vibing Still

Hymns call us
to confront the
hard, the real,
and the raw.



Emily Joy Stroble is a graduate of Calvin College, an art maker, a mocha drinker, and a reader of many books. A regular contributor to *The Banner* and a perpetual student of the world, she lives in Grand Rapids, Mich.

ONE EASTER, as the choir sang “Crown Him with Many Crowns,” my mom leaned down to whisper in my ear, “This was one of Grandpa’s favorites.”

For a moment, I felt close to the grandfather I never met but who prayed faithfully for me before I existed.

In the seasons when I have felt most abandoned by God or disillusioned with the church, hymns have drawn my heart back to Grandpa George and the rest of the cloud of witnesses.

Could hymns be what we need to call back a wandering generation?

It’s often assumed that my generation wants contemporary music. Perhaps this is because our advent coincided with the birth of the contemporary Christian music industry.

Relevance is a top priority for many churches. They fear traditional church music is too foreign for the young seeker.

In my more cynical moments, I wonder if this “seeker” is an imaginative invention of people who are concerned by the mass exodus of young adults from the church but too well insulated by their Christian bubble to have met the people they hope to attract. In a world that sees the church floundering in its attempt to engage important questions around racism and LGBT issues, whose principal concern is whether drums or an organ take center stage?

In my more honest moments, I recall that I picked my church largely because we sing hymns. Worship is how I evaluate what a congregation believes. Some theology is stated overtly in the lyrics; some is implied.

I recently attended a service of lament. Yet the worship consisted of extensively repeated choruses of general adoration and individual devotion. Where was the anger? Where was the grief?

Laments hinge on faith in a real and relational God. Laments are specific

because God is tangibly active. Laments are audacious because God draws near to the brokenhearted. A “lament” of vague praise is not a lament at all because it is missing the conversational elements that show a belief in a God who sees and cares and acts in deliberate, observable ways.

Hymns call us to confront the hard, the real, and the raw. Some versions of the hymn “Man of Sorrows—What a Name” describes humanity as “guilty, vile, and helpless.” Many hymns don’t shy away from the bald wretchedness of our sin. Contemporary songs often cloak it in the metaphor of a storm or focus entirely on the singer’s present wholehearted devotion, sidestepping in a single bound the gravity of sin and the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice. My generation has been saturated with shallow affirmation, and we can recognize the lie in it. We don’t need more spaces to practice myopia and relentlessly validated individual experiences. We need truth and a genuine, familial community.

The fundamental philosophical flaw in trading hymns for pop anthems dressed up in Christian lingo is that it divides our church family as secular schools and social clubs do: with different offerings for different age groups.

The church will only hold together by the same means any family weathers dispute, tragedy, or change: by a commitment to one another that outlasts pain and perpetually enfolds difference. Hymns teach us this commitment. Their hard truths help us practice embracing what pierces our hearts. They guide us in humble, raw confession. The old words teach us to study rather than scorn what we do not yet understand.

Church music should certainly grow with each generation, but our faith does not change to suit us. It consumes us. **B**

The Burial

She died
leaving no close
family behind.



John Groen is a retired Christian Reformed minister who served congregations in Trenton and Richmond Hill, Ont., and Ann Arbor, Mich. He currently resides in Pinckney, Mich.

I DIDN'T KNOW HER. She attended our Friday night dinner club, a ministry to seniors our congregation put on twice a month. I might have met her, but I can't remember. She died leaving no close family behind.

Her lawyer was someone I had gotten to know. I referred him to elderly people who needed estate work done. He often did the work pro bono. I got to know him as a gentleman who cared about what he was doing and for whom he was doing it.

The lawyer called Tom, one of the directors at the funeral home. They knew each other from past business together. The church, the lawyer's office, and the funeral home were all located within a block of each other. I had done many funerals with this particular home and was well acquainted with the staff. Tom called me: "John, could you do an interment service for the lady?" Sure, I could do that. I then learned some of the woman's history—husband deceased, no close family.

"Well, when the three of us can find a mutual date and time, we'll bury her," said Tom.

In the meantime, I had received a call to serve as pastor to the Ann Arbor Christian Reformed church. I accepted. The leaving date was finalized. I called the funeral home and the lawyer to set an interment date for the lady. We agreed on a date and time. At the last minute the lawyer had to excuse himself from attending. So the interment was left to the undertaker, Larry, and myself.

I arrived at the funeral home. The hearse was parked at the door. Tom and I were having coffee and catching up with each other when Larry came and asked for help loading the casket. Just as we were about to do so, the sun burst through the clouds and shone on the casket. The sunshine illuminated the dust that had collected.

Larry excused himself, went inside, and returned with some dusting spray and a cloth. He polished the casket. It gleamed.

I've often reflected on Larry's care for the deceased woman. Polishing her casket was one of his ways of showing respect and providing dignity. It set the tone for the rest of the afternoon.

I drove with Larry to the long-established cemetery in downtown Toronto. We found the plot. The gravediggers helped us unload the casket and place it above the grave. Then they disappeared into the trees.

Larry and I were alone. It was slightly windy. The sun came and went as the clouds traveled overhead. Being past midafternoon, the shadows were beginning to lengthen.

Larry stood on one side, I on the other.

We held a service—a full service—minus the hymns. We ended with a moment of silence.

Larry broke the silence. "Thank you, John."

"Thank you, Larry," I replied.

We walked slowly to the hearse.

Larry stopped. "This is how it's done. Everyone deserves a decent funeral and burial. Everyone deserves dignity and respect. And a prayer." Even though there was no one with us, we could bury her with a full liturgy. Being created in God's image, the sister we buried was given what we all deserve from each other: respect, dignity, and prayer.

I'm still humbled to have participated. **B**

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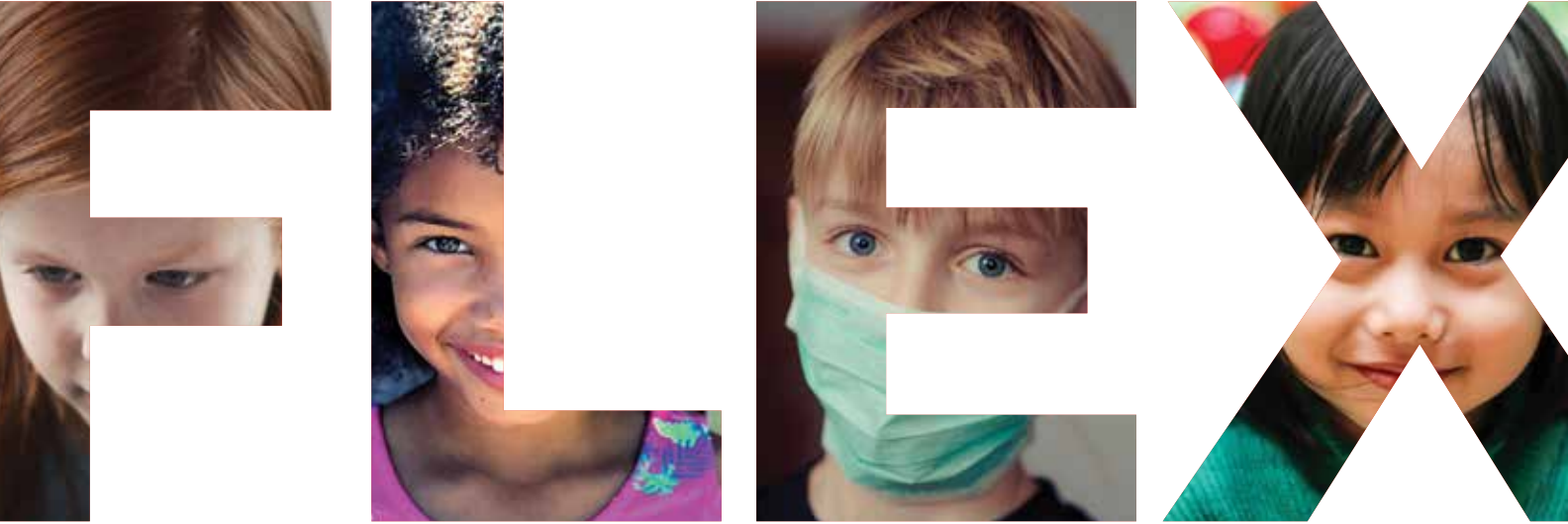
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