

# BANNER

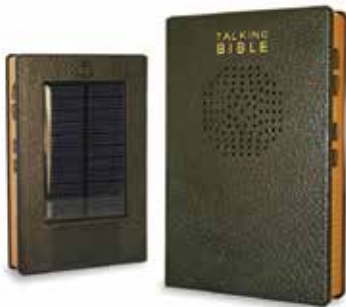
JANUARY 2023

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Knots, and  
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## BY THE NUMBERS

The 25 most-accessed articles on *thebanner.org* between January and December 2022, in order of most views to fewer. Find the list with links at [thebanner.org/2022-top-25](https://thebanner.org/2022-top-25).

## Most-Read Articles Online

- 1 Synod 2022 Upholds Traditional Stance on Same-sex Relationships
- 2 How Do We Know Christianity Is the Only True Religion? (2020)
- 3 Synod Declares Stance on Homosexual Sex 'Confessional'
- 4 The Spiritual Significance of Trees (2020)
- 5 Neland Avenue CRC Ordered to Comply with Denominational Position on Same-Sex Marriage
- 6 Delegate Loses Right to Speak
- 7 Everyone's Talking about the Human Sexuality Report
- 8 Synod 2022: In Person, But Not Together
- 9 We Need to Talk about the Christian Reformed Church
- 10 Beware Loveless Orthodoxy
- 11 LGBTQ Allies Lament at Synod
- 12 Synod 2022 Delegates Find Crowd of LGBTQ Allies Outside Their Session

## WHAT'S ONLINE

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

- » Church Worldwide: Declining Church Aims for Reinvention With Coffee Shop, Services Over Dinner
- » Podcast review: *A Slight Change of Plans*
- » Book review: *Interpreting Your World*
- » TV review: *Alaska Daily*

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**BANNER**

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# Starting on the Right Foot



As we celebrate another year of God's faithfulness, many people are looking for new ways to improve themselves, both physically and spiritually. More people will be online looking for audio programs, devotions, and other web resources to improve their spiritual well-being.

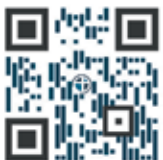
As CRC congregations and individuals partner with ReFrame, seekers find what they are looking for in the New Year with your help. God can use this time of goal setting and habit forming to bring more people to him. People like Naoko in Japan.

"Happy New Year," Naoko writes. "I am looking forward to your Bible-related talks this year. Your questions and answers are very helpful to me.

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# Gentleness Is Not Optional

Our culture today seems to valorize harshness, bullying tactics, and even meanness.



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

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

이 기사의 한글번역은 [TheBanner.org/korean](http://TheBanner.org/korean) 에서 보실 수 있습니다.

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

**IN JUNE 2022**, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a ruling that had legalized induced abortion throughout the United States. As a result, each individual U.S. state can now determine its own abortion laws. Abortion became a hot topic in the recent U.S. midterm elections, with five states having abortion referendums on the ballot.

As a Canadian, I do not want to comment too much on U.S. politics. I echo the denomination's statement online: "We are thankful for increased protection of the lives of unborn babies, and we pray that (the Supreme Court decision) will ultimately reduce the number of abortions in the United States." The statement reminds us, however, that the denomination's official synodical position on abortion goes beyond focusing on laws to protect the unborn. It also calls us to care for women: "The denomination expressed deep pastoral concern not only for children but also for women who have had an abortion and for women who have an unwanted pregnancy. These women are also God's children and require our care and concern." Synod 1972 called us to be compassionate rather than judgmental to such women. Our feature article this month, "Abortion: Seeing the Trees for the Forest," is in that same spirit (p. 10).

I believe Christians need to go beyond the political framing of pro-life vs. pro-choice. We need to be Christ's channels of grace and compassion to all in need. Staff from the CRC's Office of Social Justice note in a *Do Justice* blog, "Four out of 10 women who have abortions are regular church goers, but only 7 percent of them talk to anyone at their church before making their decision." Why is that? Is it because most of them are afraid of judgmental attitudes from fellow Christians? Why

are we not known more for compassionate grace?

According to Matthew 12:17-21, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1-4. I am struck by the gentleness inherent in Isaiah's description of the Messiah who won't break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick (v. 3). Are we equally as gentle in our approach to those in (or out of) our churches who are emotionally bruised?

Our culture today seems to valorize harshness, bullying tactics, and even meanness. A noble goal is all it takes, it seems, to justify harsh words, whether the goal is ending racism or ending abortion. Labels of "racist" or "baby killer" are quickly thrown about. Thankfully, I know many proliferators and anti-racists who are gracious and kind. But the harsh, bullying few tarnish their movements.

"Speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) is not license to be mean or judgmental. It does not mean to simply speak the harsh truth out of loving intent. Yes, love rejoices in the truth, but love also is not rude, but patient and kind (1 Cor. 13:4-6).

Gentleness is not optional. It is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Even when we are engaged in urgent matters, such as protecting unborn lives or eliminating racism, gentleness is not optional for Christians. God's chosen servant in Isaiah 42 was gentle even in seeking justice: "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, *till he has brought justice through to victory*" (Matt. 12:20, emphasis mine). In God's countercultural kingdom, we must, whenever possible, pursue justice with gentleness.

In my next editorial, I will tackle the rare exceptions to this rule. **B**



## REPLY ALL

To send letters to the editor, please see our guidelines at [thebanner.org/letters](http://thebanner.org/letters).

### CRCNA in the News

It was a bad day. Two news sources we regularly read featured stories of the Christian Reformed Church. The first reported the public pro-abortion position of a deacon running for political office, while the second reported (the) Calvin University board of trustees' decision allowing faculty members' dissent on so-called LGBTQ matters ("Calvin's Board Votes to Retain Faculty Members Dissenting from Synodical Decisions," December 2022). Differences of opinion can be respected. However, the official denominational status of those holding positions contrary to the church's doctrinal declarations is inappropriate. I've learned, in a wide variety of ministry settings both inside and outside the CRC, the catastrophic effect of compromise with the world. Let it not be so!

» Rev. Don Belanus, Ph.D. //  
Gainesville, Va.

### Listening to Pastors

A major source of divisions in our congregations is surely the lockdown as it stopped us from having our usual conversations, and we all had to develop opinions on our own. But I take issue with the article expressing the matter as a question of trust in authority ("And Still," October 2022). "Social distancing was necessary" is not in the Bible; the creeds don't advocate "it is not safe to gather

in person," the catechism doesn't tell us "wearing masks saves lives." So it doesn't make sense for pastors to put this out as authoritative words from them. It's not their domain of expertise. It's not their mission. Pastors should teach about how God calls us to respond to the government. They should teach about love and caring and respect for one another. They should teach about the grace of God and bringing that grace to each other. These matters pertain to how we should behave toward each other and relative to government mandates. But that is not how the article expressed the matter, and inasmuch as pastors did or did not speak likewise, this is part of the problem.

» Alan Baljeu // Windsor, Ont.

### Response to Synod 2022

In the wake of synod, I have had several members and officebearers complain to me about or express disappointment with some of the coverage and commentary on this past synod from *The Banner*. Thus when I read Aaron Vriesman's latest submission ("Synod 2022 Did the Loving Thing," online), it felt to me like a healthy and kind corrective voice. While I know many of the "As I Was Saying" articles do not usually make the print edition (which is all at least three of my commenters read), I think it would be very important, help some feel heard, and give a sense of balance to find space for "Synod 2022 Did the Loving Thing" in the next print edition of *The Banner*.

» Rev. Lloyd Hemstreet //  
Coopersville, Mich.

In the recent article "Synod 2022 Did the Loving Thing," Rev. Aaron Vriesman seems to misunderstand the actual stance on homosexuality that the

denomination held before Synod 2022: that of a position statement. Pastors and officebearers were taught that we must respect the official position statements of the church, but that we could disagree with them. ... The shift from position statements to confessionality is a shift away from love. The status of position statement was one of trust—trust that officebearers would respect the position statement, trust that they were doing their best in their own ministry situations to speak the gospel into the realm of sexuality with truth and love and creativity. Now, instead, we have distrust. ... So there is a difference in the understanding of love between Vriesman and me, and many others. We see trust and respect as essential to love, and Synod 2022 has loved us very poorly indeed.

» Rev. Nicholas Baas //  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

### Banner editorials

Thank you, Shiao Chong, for your service to all of us in the CRC as editor of *The Banner*. I am sorry that it has to be so hard and admire your ability to find hope in the midst of division. Please continue to challenge us, because none of us is free from pride, fear, bad habits, and even cruelty. I know I need constant wake-up calls to reflect on what I am doing and why, and I will never be too old or too knowledgeable to not need thoughtful and direct counsel on how to live the gospel, as a person and as the church.

» Bev Harkema // Hudsonville, Mich.

The intentionality we, the pastoral committee of Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alta., see throughout *The Banner* each month to make the history, stories, and doctrinal issues of the CRC more understandable to a wider and increasingly diverse population is deeply appreciated. The insight you bring as editor to the struggles in our denomination and the Spirit-filled wisdom in your approach to difficult and tension-erupting subjects make us



members ponder our stances and attitudes toward those members who think differently than us. You encourage us to listen to others, breathe deeply, recognize our “opponents” as fellow citizens in the kingdom, and pray earnestly for the church.

» Evelyn Martin // Edmonton, Alta.

### The Upside of Failure

I recently read “The Upside of Failure” in the June 2022 *Banner*. I have never written a letter to the editor before, but this article was so excellent that I wanted to commend the author, Michael Schuitema, for such an honest view of what happened in his life and also the spiritual lesson he gleaned from it. My late husband was an addiction medicine physician, and he educated so many people about the disease. I felt this article did that and more. The reminder that failure can be used by God to draw us to him was so important.

» Judy Doot // Oak Brook, Ill.



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

- » Praying Before Meals Like the Men of Gondor
- » Persistent Issues
- » The Colors of Grace
- » Why Church Leaders Can—and Must—Address Their Own Mental Health

## Sketching a Different Future

*Editor's note: This article is the opinion of the author and is not to be taken as the opinion of The Banner or the Christian Reformed Church in North America.*

**AS I READ THE** *Agenda for Synod 2022*, my heart sank with a deepening sense that the Christian Reformed Church was entering a moment of unique crisis. Differing understandings of sexual chastity are tearing the CRC apart, but perhaps a realignment of the Reformed Church in America and the CRC could offset our inevitable divisions.

The Lord of the church might lead the CRC through this critical moment in a way that none of us expects or imagines possible. Yet the recent history of other denominations does not offer much encouragement. No denomination that came to this point (with a significant minority advocating change) has not eventually changed its stance, which is bad news for traditional folks. Also, no such church has made a quick transition, which is bad news for the affirming crowd. Finally, no such church has avoided a painful split, which is bad news for the peace-and-unity people. So must the CRC follow the same self-destructive path that other denominations have? Perhaps not.


Other parts of the body of Christ are struggling with the same issues, including our closest sister denomination, the RCA. At the Synod of Pella in 2014, our two denominations pledged to work together. Perhaps now is the moment to do so in a way that we didn't imagine eight years ago.

The deepened relationship that was envisioned in 2014 came from a recognition that the issues of 1857 are no longer conflictual. Hymn singing, catechism preaching, and evening services aren't hot topics today. But how to respond to the reality of same-sex

## What if ... we saw ourselves as part of the larger community of Reformed churches?

marriage is conflictual in both denominations. The likely result is that the two denominations will become at least four. In fact, that process is well underway. The Alliance of Reformed Churches was born out of the RCA in 2021 and already has at least 66 member congregations.

What if, instead of following the “natural” course of division, we saw ourselves as part of the larger community of Reformed churches? What if we pursued a realignment within that community that recognizes not only that the issues of 1857 are no longer sufficient to keep us apart, but also that the issues of 2022, unfortunately, are not likely to be resolved in a way that can keep us together? Perhaps instead of divorce in each denomination, the CRC and RCA could creatively reunite, with affirming CRC people shifting to the RCA while some traditional RCA people become CRC. In this way old divisions are overcome, and maybe the two denominations could remain in respectful relationship with each other.

This might sound naively optimistic, and perhaps it is. Certainly this is not the best option. But perhaps this is the best possibility for a bunch of sinners like us. 



Steve Van Zanen is chair of the theology department at LCC International University in Klaipeda, Lithuania, where his colleagues are from dozens of denominations and his students come from dozens of countries.



# Abortion: Seeing the Trees for the Forest

By Diana Zondag

I can be a sucker for YouTube videos that document people experiencing a new perspective for the first time: a color-blind groom whose new spouse offers him special glasses to expand his vision of the beauty of the world on their wedding day, or infants whose cochlear implants make them able to hear their parents sing a lullaby for the first time. I admit to shedding a tear or two witnessing these potentially life-changing moments of people finding joy in the details of life.

You might be familiar with the idiom “You can’t see the forest for the trees.” There is a definite danger when a person gets so preoccupied or overwhelmed by the details that they lose sight of the bigger picture. But I think that it is equally problematic to focus on an overarching issue to the point that we forget to give time and space to the individual in a situation.

I have to wonder if this is a trap we fall into when we think about abortion. Whether we identify as pro-life or pro-choice or are labeled as “pro-birth” or “pro-abortion,” we might have very strong views on this topic. The freedom to have these views is protected in North America, yet I would suggest that we have a responsibility not to let the forest of this issue blind us to the individual facing an unintended pregnancy decision. This person does not need to hear our views on abortion or a discourse on the current laws surrounding it. If they approach you about it, what they are looking for is care and support.

I believe that almost everyone on any side of this debate could agree that it would be wonderful if terminating a pregnancy was never necessary or desired, yet in our fallen world it has always been so. I have heard and read many times that no woman *wants* to have an abortion. It is hard for me to

believe, on this side of heaven, that there will be a time when when people facing unplanned pregnancy will not consider abortion as an option (legal or not). Societal views on autonomy, poverty, unequal access to health care, and abuse are some of the weighty issues that make many feel that abortion is their only option. As Christ followers, we can continue to act justly in these areas through our gifts of finances, time, and talents to remove circumstances that make a person feel that abortion is their best and/or only option.

Let us also consider what we can do when our child, our neighbor, our co-worker, or our fellow believer faces an unexpected pregnancy. When statistics state that over half of pregnancies in North America are unplanned, this is a real possibility. It is my prayer that such a person would go to the Christ-follower in their life for support—and that person could

be you. When they come to you, my suggestion is to “go low.” Fight any temptation to stay at a bird’s-eye view of the forest (the “abortion issue”); go low and be with the struggling tree (the individual).

Isn’t this what Jesus did? Yes, there were times when he addressed crowds and talked about the bigger issues of the day. But many times he got low, figuratively and literally, to focus on an individual. Most Jews in Jesus’ time would say that when he talked with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), he spoke to someone beneath him, someone “unclean.” Yet in that conversation Jesus did not focus on the societal issues of the day. He addressed the woman’s individual situation and need. When Jesus brought children into his arms (Mark 10:13-16), either he had to lift them up to his level or he had to go down to theirs, his actions showing how important these individual children were in the kingdom of God even if society did not recognize their value. And as part of his great redemption story, Jesus made himself a lowly human to offer us the opportunity to live in relationship with him for eternity.

In following Christ’s example, let’s go “L.O.W.” when we interact with people facing unexpected pregnancy:

**Listen.** The first thing you can do is listen. Give them a safe space to share the range of emotions they are grappling with. Whether they express fear, numbness, grief, or joy (and don’t be surprised if they feel a combination), respond without judgment. In fact, a response outside of “I am so sorry you have to go through this” or “I can understand why this is overwhelming” might not even be necessary. The focus should be on your listening, not your response.

**Offer support.** After they share about their situation and feelings, they might


Your aim  
is to build  
relationships, not  
change minds.

be open to you suggesting options for the next step. This is again a time to “get low” and remember the individual, not the larger issue. This is not the time to give pregnancy options with an agenda in mind. This is when you ask what they need. What will help them get to a point when they can be confident in their decision? Education about the options? Financial support? Spiritual guidance? Your aim is to build relationships, not change minds. Changing minds and spirits is the work of the Holy Spirit; stay humble and know that the help you can offer comes in the forms of knowledge and of physical and spiritual support.

**Worth.** Always remind them of their worth. There are times and places where the worth of the unborn child can and should be discussed. Yet from years of experience working in a pregnancy center, narrowing our focus onto the unborn child during a pregnancy-options discussion rarely builds relationships. Your discussion with this person might be the one time in their decision-making process that someone tells them they are worthy of love, compassion, and hope. Too often I have sat across from individuals who thought that their life choices (even surrounding this pregnancy) and life experiences made them unworthy of hope for the future. A person without hope cannot imagine a life other than

the one they are living; they cannot imagine an alternative in which they could offer love to a child through parenting or adoption. As you build a relationship with them, their sense of worth will be encouraged and, Lord willing, there will come a point when you can remind them of—or introduce them to—the worth they have as a child of God.

Whatever their pregnancy decision is, remember to “stay low.” You are not responsible for someone else’s decision. All people have access to God’s intervention and forgiveness and the free will to accept them as they choose. Keep in mind that our own sins put Jesus on the cross as much as anyone else’s, and each of us is offered the same grace and mercy. Even as our hearts cry out for the lives lost to abortion, we must not get in the way of a person’s access to God’s grace and mercy.

I encourage those who are trying to support someone through an unexpected pregnancy to see the person—the “tree”—and be someone who helps that tree as it struggles through a dark forest to reach up to the Son. 



Diana Zondag is executive director of Dawn Centre, a pregnancy care center in Cambridge, Ont. She and her family attend Community Christian Reformed Church in Kitchener, Ont.

## BIG QUESTIONS

### Relationships

**Should I reconsider retirement if I am concerned about having too much time with my husband? I love him but am worried we'll annoy each other.**

Retirement can be a big change and adventure, and sometimes there are growing pains. This new season does not mean you must spend all of your time together. You and your spouse are each individuals, each uniquely gifted to serve God—sometimes as partners, sometimes on your own. Consider what unique passions God has placed on each of your hearts. Let retirement be an opportunity for each of you to explore gifts, pursue passions, and try new avenues of kingdom service, even as you continue as partners.

Having space and time that is your own offers you both opportunities to focus on passions and recharge your hearts so that you have the physical, emotional, and spiritual refreshment for the opportunities you choose to take on together. Consider what boundaries you'll set to allow yourself time that is your own—perhaps a space where you can have quiet to write or craft, or time set aside for mentoring others or coffee with friends. Choose to make time for the activities that feed your soul. Likewise, plan times together for adventures as a couple.

More time at home without the normal rhythms of work life will undoubtedly be an adjustment. Talking to your spouse about your concerns can help alleviate your anxiety. Plan together trips you want to take and ministry activities to do as a couple. If you are anxious about too much time with your spouse, consider talking with a counselor to help you process and make a plan for moving forward.



Illustration for The Banner by Gisela Bohórquez

Some anxiety about a life transition as big as retirement is expected. There are many factors in planning for retirement, including health, finances, family needs, bucket list plans, and opportunities for serving, but fear and worry should not hinder your decisions. Discuss your concerns with your spouse and bathe your decision making in prayer as you discern how to use your gifts in God's service.

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

### Ethics

**Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek and love our enemies. So why does the CRC allow its members to go to war?**

While lamenting war as the result of sin, the CRC has indeed encouraged its members to be willing to serve in the U.S. or Canadian military. As you note, this position stands in some tension with the face value of Jesus' words.

The CRC affirms the traditional "just war" approach of Christianity. The just war tradition affirms that when a nation is confronted with serious aggression, its lawful sovereign may wage war to restore a just peace. This teaching also insists that restraints are needed for fighting to be consistent with justice. This requires using weapons and tactics that target only

combatants and avoiding hatred and demonization of the enemy.

Christianity's full embrace of the just war approach happened when Christianity had gained a position of power in the Roman Empire. Some have suspected that the church's hunger for worldly influence led it away from faithful adherence to the peaceable way of Christ.

But there were also serious reasons given. For example, Jesus never tells the soldiers who come to faith to leave their profession. And in Romans 13 Paul speaks of God ordaining the "sword" of the state for the common good. Just war thinking rests upon the intuitive idea that serious aggression threatens the good of ordinary life that God intends for the world. And in situations of aggression, it is the vulnerable who are most at risk.

The Reformed tradition has usually seen the words of Jesus as applying primarily to the individual Christian and to the life of the church, not as a general prohibition against the state using force to protect the common good and international peace. If someone attacks me, the call is to respond peaceably. But if someone else (or a whole nation) is attacked, that's a different matter. Think of Ukraine in the face of Russia's invasion and subsequent atrocities. What does love of neighbor look like in such a situation?

Recently the CRC has encouraged its members and congregations to take an

active role in creating conditions for peace, locally and globally. Only from such a position of active engagement toward a just peace can we wage war as a last resort.

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

### Faith Formation

## My kids want to go to a youth group at another church with their friends. Is it OK to hand our kids to another group?

Kids attend another church's youth group for a variety of reasons. It might be about where their friends are, a close connection to that church's youth leader, or something else. Whatever the reason, it is a way for teens to find a space where they feel like they belong to the body of Christ. In the vast majority of cases, the leaders of the groups receiving these kids are happy to have them.

Youth group is only one part of a multi-dimensional approach to youth ministry. There are—or at least should be—many other ways for youth to connect to their home church and their congregation. These can be programmatic, such as a Sunday school class, or casual, such as conversations over a meal, in the back of church, or even in the parking lot. So if a teen attends another church's youth group, there are other places where they and adults in their home congregation can interact and build relationships. Find a time to talk to the leader of the other youth group so you can be on the same page in supporting your child's faith and rejoice that your kids have found a place where their faith can be supported and encouraged.

If a church's ministry to teens consists only of youth group meetings, then

that is probably a bigger issue. The ultimate goal is not for kids to go to youth groups; it is for the teens to be lifelong Christ followers and church attenders. This has more to do with parents modeling a commitment to their faith and to church attendance than with their teen's attendance in a youth group. (We've often wondered if teens sometimes build more commitment to their youth group than to their church, which can leave them without a church home after high school.)

So encourage your teens to keep up their connections to their home church. A church is one of the few places in today's culture that puts unrelated adults into contact with kids from birth to adulthood. The deep relationships formed with adults in the church they grow up in can remain for many years.

Laura Keeley is a regional catalyzer for Faith Formation Ministries and director of children's ministries at 14th Street CRC in Holland, Mich. Robert J. Keeley is a professor of education at Calvin College and director of distance education at Calvin Seminary.

### Missional Living

## Could joining God's mission begin with recognizing God already at work?

The other day I was out gardening and was startled by the unexpected movement of a jackrabbit on the lawn. It had clearly been there watching me since I had ventured outside, but I was totally unaware of its presence. Perhaps you also have had the experience of suddenly realizing that something was there all along. What if, amid the crises and chaos of our postmodern, post-Christian world, something—the presence and activity of God—has been there all along? Could paying attention to God in our midst (again for the first time)—be it right next door, in our lives, our communities, and our

world—help us discern how to participate in God's mission more fully?

Many missional thinkers affirm that this is exactly where we need to start. That it's about deferring to God's agency first and not our own. That in the midst of what has been called "The Great Unraveling" there is an opportunity for God's people to turn aside and see the "burning bush" we might have walked by a hundred times before and never noticed (Ex. 3:3-5). Perhaps if we have the courage to step outside our comfort zones, like Peter with Cornelius (Acts 9-10) and Paul and Luke with the women at the river (Acts 16), we will discover God at work in unexpected people and places—in the subversive, small, and seed-like ways of God's kingdom.

"God's kingdom has come near" was the good news that Jesus embodied, taught in Word and deed, and died to secure for all time and all people. Yet it turns out that God's kingdom is quite different from how we have often framed or packaged it—and quite contrary to our own "kingdoms."

God's kingdom, for example, is not about the love of law, but about the law of love. Waking up to this contrary, counterintuitive kingdom-come-near is not only an invitation, but our calling and mission. The journey begins as we begin to discern God at work—out ahead of us, here and now, doing a new thing on the way to the redemption of all things—and join in!

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



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

# Venezuelan Churches Affiliate Through California Classis

## NEWS

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Thirty-eight Venezuelan churches are in the process of joining the Christian Reformed Church in North America via Classis California South. They’re drawn by the denomination’s doctrine and theology, said Mirtha Villafane, pastor of Latin American CRC in Anaheim, Calif., and an initial connection point for the Venezuelan churches.

Villafane is a board member of the Hispanic ministry network Consejo Latino. Three years ago she met a pastor friend from Venezuela over coffee in Los Angeles. José Piñero pastors el Centro Cristiano de Los Tegues in Venezuela and holds many positions of Christian leadership, including director of the Latin Evangelical Alliance. Piñero quizzed Villafane on the CRCNA and found himself agreeing with all her answers. “He was thrilled,” Villafane said. “He was looking for a denomination with the same (Reformed) beliefs to affiliate with. And here we are: after three long years, they are with us.”

### New Territory

“We have never done anything like this before,” Classis California South stated

clerk Cor Pool said of the international affiliation. “This is a first—a dream, which is becoming a reality!”

Villafane and Consejo Latino president Harold Caicedo, two pastors within Classis California South, facilitated the affiliation requests of the Venezuelan churches, first talking to Colin Watson Sr., who was then executive director of the CRCNA, before making a formal request to the classis vision team in the fall of 2021. In the March 3 classis meeting, Villafane recalled, “One of our pastors suggested (that we) receive them (the Venezuelan churches) with full membership. Of course it changed everything. Our classis voted, and the motion passed. We were thrilled for this decision, and Colin Watson was there to give us full support.” Now a subcommittee from the classis vision team (on which Villafane serves) is handling the logistics. Pool said some things are still in discussion: Will they require extra classis meetings? Which host churches have sufficient internet to host classis meetings over video conferencing apps? What about joint projects and finances? And there



**Together in November 2021: Venezuelan pastor José Piñero, Harold Caicedo, Zachary King (at that time director of Resonate Global Mission), and Mirtha Villafane.**



**At the Regional Conference of the Consejo Latino in Holland, Mich., in November 2021, pastor José Piñero (right) signed a memorandum of understanding with the CRCNA, on behalf of the churches he represents in Venezuela. Then-CRCNA executive director Colin Watson Sr. (center) signed the memorandum on behalf of the denomination. They are joined by Harold Caicedo of Consejo Latino.**

is still much administrative work to do, including “translation of forms, formal affiliation requests from (each of) the Venezuelan churches and pastors, and (the) credentialing process and training for pastors either as minister of the Word or commissioned pastor,” Pool said.

## ‘Mission From Everywhere to Everywhere’

Zachary King, now general secretary for the CRC and formerly director of Resonate Global Mission, confirmed this is new not just for Classis California South but for the denomination. “I am not aware that this has ever happened

before in this way,” he said. It’s true that congregations outside of North America have been interested in joining the CRCNA before, but “with a few exceptions, churches outside North America were encouraged to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRC and affiliate with a national church body.”

But something new is happening as leaders from other countries plant CRC churches in North America while staying connected to their home countries: “They (those pastors resettled in North America) can often have a huge impact in their country of origin for mission,” King said. “We call this ‘mission from everywhere to everywhere,’ and that is why we merged Christian Reformed Home and World Missions in 2017.”

There will be challenges in this process, King said. CRCNA leaders must avoid paternalism and encourage congregations outside the U.S. or Canada to still connect with their national church peers. “Governance and ministry systems must adapt, and we must grow in our cultural intelligence and love for diverse people,” King said.

## ‘Develop the Affiliation Processes as We Go’

Susan LaClear, who shepherds the process of preparing pastors for ministry in the CRC, explained some of those system adaptations: “All of our pathways for ministerial affiliation in the CRC (Arts. 6, 8, 23, and 24 of Church Order) were designed with Americans and Canadians in mind, so the unique contexts and learning objectives of people from other countries were not considered in the design.” There are some obvious changes

to make, such as translating all the forms, training, and processes of candidacy into Spanish. But beyond that, LaClear said, the denomination needs to remain attentive to the experience and learning objectives of the incoming pastors and to voices like Villafane, who is both deeply Reformed and Venezuelan and therefore can be a bridge between the denomination and the Venezuelan churches. “We trust her to keep us aware of the needs that surface and help us tweak and develop the affiliation processes as we go so that our pathways can flex in appropriate ways to best equip these affiliating pastors,” LaClear said. It’s not yet clear when the 38 Venezuelan churches might fully join the CRC.

King said it’s probable that more requests for affiliation will come from outside North America. “Immigration, globalization, and the internet have shrunk our world so that it is easier to connect with and support each other,” he said, and at the same time North America is receiving more missionaries from diverse nations who will keep the churches they plant here connected to their home countries. “This movement could strengthen the CRC by helping us to become a more ethnically diverse, biblically rooted, and spiritually engaged denomination,” King said.

—Maia VanderMeer

# Noteworthy

Several Christian schools achieved state championship wins in their respective divisions for various sports this fall.

Photo by Sean Bacaam



**Western Christian High School** in Hull, Iowa, won the **Class 2A state championship for girls volleyball** Nov. 3.

Photo by Michigan High School Athletic Association



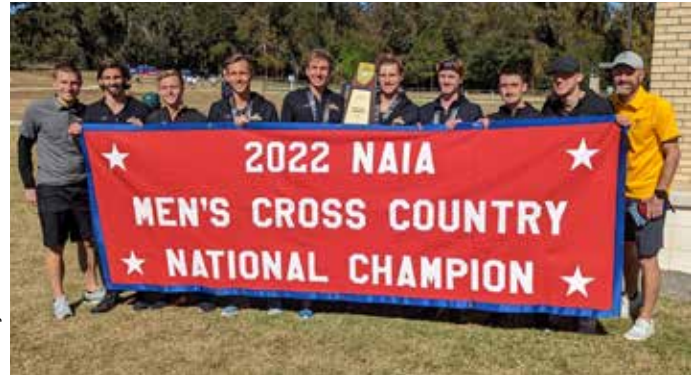
**Holland (Mich.) Christian High School** won **Michigan High School Athletic Association's boys soccer Division 3 championship** Nov. 5.

Photo by Randy Riksen Photography



**Western Michigan Christian High School** (Norton Shores, Mich.) won the **Michigan High School Athletic Association Division 4 title in boys soccer** Nov. 5.

Photo by Matt Bos



**Dordt University's men's cross country team** won the **National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics championship** Nov. 18 in Tallahassee, Fla. It was the **first NAIA championship for the school in any sport**. The accomplishment earned the team's coach, **Nate Wolf, NAIA Men's Cross Country Coach of the Year**. Wolf has been coaching men's and women's cross country teams at Dordt since 2015.

Photo by Geoff Kimmerly, MHSAA



**South Christian High School** in Byron Center, Mich., completed its undefeated football season by winning the **Division 4 State Championship** Nov. 25.

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**Chaplain (Col.) Herman Keizer Jr. (1938-2017) was inducted into the Michigan Military and Veterans Hall of Honor** Nov. 18. Keizer, an ordained Christian Reformed minister, spent 34 years as a chaplain in the U.S. Army and was director of the CRC's Chaplaincy and Care Ministry from 2002 to 2009. Representatives from the Hall of Honor presented Keizer's widow, Ardis (pictured, second from left), with a medallion and a letter of tribute. Paul J. Ryan, retired captain, U.S. Navy Reserve, and vice chair of the Hall of Honor, said, "Herm's accomplishments merit a place in either the 'military' or the 'veteran' category because his lifelong efforts to increase awareness of post-traumatic stress and 'moral injury in war' and to assist veterans suffering from it took place both in and out of uniform."



Archway Community Services recognized **Gateway Christian Reformed Church** in Abbotsford, B.C., with a **Flood Hero Award** at its annual Community Builders Awards presentation Nov. 3. The church was honored for its flood relief efforts after the devastating flooding in the Fraser Valley in November 2021. "More than 75 volunteers poured countless hours into helping the community recover and rebuild," Archway said of the church. "They started the Abbotsford Disaster Response Coalition, which has raised more than \$1.3 million to help meet gaps for flooding victims, and they continue to operate a crisis response center."

## Dee Recker, Director of Synodical Services for 16 Years, Retires

A 23-year career with the Christian Reformed Church comes to a close Jan. 13 for Dee Recker, first hired as an administrative assistant to then-general secretary David Englehard in 2000. Her role expanded into that of office manager and, in the midst of various unexpected senior leadership transitions, developed again into that of director of synodical services, a role to which she was appointed in 2007.

Recker, 64, announced her intentions in December 2021. The Council of Delegates appointed Scott DeVries to the job in November. (See "De Vries and DeVries are CRC's New CAO and Director of Synodical Services," p. 18.)

Over her time with the CRC, Recker has worked for eight different senior leaders (at various points called general secretary, executive director, and now again general secretary) and helped administer 23 synods, including those that ended up being canceled during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her retirement comes seven months after those of chief financial officer John Bolt and executive director Colin Watson Sr.—a large senior leadership turnover in one year. Recker said choosing January as the time to leave allowed the general secretary appointed by Synod 2022, Zachary King, to begin his era of service with a new director. Recker said she's excited about DeVries' appointment: "He's eager to do this role, he's a church order geek, and he loves synod, so that's great."

DeVries told the Council in his November interview that hearing stories about Recker's encouragement of some search committee members gave him a glimpse of how he might fit into the role. "I just saw myself kind of through Dee in that—that is how I like to lead," DeVries said. "I like to be an encourager, to walk alongside people and help them to understand our system, and to feel really good about living in that system."

The director of synodical services administers all matters pertaining to synod and the Council of Delegates and is the liaison



between the Office of General Secretary and the classes of the CRCNA in Canada and the U.S. That's the part of the job Recker loved most.

"I'm so grateful for the people I've gotten to know," Recker said. "All these years I've had the opportunity to have what I would call a front-row seat (to denominational matters)—and what an opportunity that has been! To work with people who volunteer—board members and delegates—they're giving of their time to serve the church in this way. What a blessing to know people that give like that and have such a passion and love for the church."

Recker said many of those people have become good friends, some of whom will join her in California for a retirement dinner just after she runs her final stated clerks gathering there Jan. 11-13.

And after that? True to her reputation for attention to detail and organization, Recker's retirement plans are sketched out in a list including repotting plants, designing a cabin for some family land, and spending more time with her five grandchildren, ages 6 to 17. Also high on the list is driving synod delegates around the Calvin University campus in a golf cart.

Recker and her husband, Mark, attend Alger Park CRC in Grand Rapids, Mich. Before working for the denomination, Recker had a 20-year career running an educational supply store.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## De Vries and DeVries Are CRC's New CAO and Director of Synodical Services

Shirley De Vries, formerly director of information and technology for the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and Scott DeVries, a project manager for building congregational connection, accepted the roles of chief administrative officer and director of synodical services in November.

Search committees overseen by the Office of General Secretary presented the two candidates to the denomination's Council of Delegates Nov. 16, and after interviews, delegates voted to make the appointments.

Scott DeVries, most recently a customer service manager with the CRCNA, is replacing retiring synodical services director Dee Recker. (See "Dee Recker, Director of Synodical Services for 16 Years, Retires," p. 17.)

Shirley De Vries was hired as CAO, a new position created last June by synod, the broadest general assembly of the CRCNA, as part of a denominational restructuring. Lloyd Vanderkwaak was interim chief administrative officer, concluding his work Dec. 24.

"This is a new position, and there are a lot of unknowns," said Andy de Ruyter, chair of the Council of Delegates, in congratulating De Vries on her successful interview. "We've heard you make a good account of yourself, and we endorse that and offer you our blessings and our prayers as you move forward in this position."



**Scott DeVries (left), newly appointed director of synodical services, and Shirley De Vries, the CRCNA's new chief administrative officer.**

De Vries, 63, served for five months as director of administrative operations—U.S., while continuing as IT director, and was encouraged to apply for the CAO role. She started in the U.S.-specific role in July and was formally appointed in October. She told the search team, "During this time, my understanding of the vision of the SALT (structure and leadership task force) report has been clarified, and I have had the opportunity to understand the role that joint ministry agreements play in creating partnerships across the Canadian and U.S. ministries. Although paths for partnering will still have to be made sustainable, I am excited about the new way forward." Responsibilities of the CAO include bringing "administrative and ministry leaders and partners together to ensure consistent implementation of synodical and COD policy decisions in Canada and the United States," operating "an administrative and ministry leadership system that builds staff capacity, engagement, satisfaction, and succession," and overseeing "the joint ministry agreement process, including governance, ecumenical, administrative, and ministry agreements."

### Steady Presence

De Vries has worked within the CRCNA for four decades—as an administrative assistant, internal technology trainer, business analyst and programmer, network administrator, and, since 1999, as IT director. In that role, she said, "I am constantly engaged across Canadian and U.S. staff, agencies, and departments ... and have experience contextualizing our approach because of the differences in laws." The search team told the Council, "We met with and interviewed some very gifted candidates throughout the 2.0 Search process (a previous process at the end of 2021 ended unsuccessfully in April). It became more and more clear that this position required someone with not only the skill set, but also the ability to understand and lead organizationally in a time of change. De Vries' deep commitment and longevity in the CRCNA brings a thoughtful and steady presence in a time of change."

## Synodical Services Director

Scott DeVries, 46, is an ordained minister in the CRCNA and has held positions in denominational ministry since 2018, managing the Connections Project and coordinating the Thriving Congregations project. He's also served as pastor in two Michigan congregations and was ministries coordinator in Classis Holland from 2016 to 2018.

Zachary King, general secretary for the CRCNA, told the delegates that the search team "joyfully agrees that Scott would serve the denomination well in this position."

The director of synodical services serves as a liaison between the Office of General Secretary and the classes of the CRCNA in Canada and the U.S. and acts as the meeting officer for synod and the Council of Delegates. The role was created in 2007.

In the November interview DeVries addressed delegates' questions and shared a personal story about a moving time he experienced as a delegate to Synod 2015. Connecting deeply with delegates brought memories "flooding back that it was the church that introduced me to Jesus in Scripture and demonstrated Christ," he said. The rekindling of his love for the church through that experience is significant enough that he keeps two souvenirs from that synod in his office. "The thought of being able now to help set the stage for moments like that, where delegates can talk deep into the night and for people to interact, rekindle old relationships, and build new ones all centered around a love for Jesus," inspires him.

## Evident Emotion

Both candidates showed emotion in responding to questions, particularly about how their personal faith would inform their work. Looking over the past 40 years, Shirley De Vries said the word that came to the surface is "gratitude."

"I never imagined doing any of the jobs I've done here," De Vries said. "I want to carry that with me. I will be grateful, and I will do my best." Scott DeVries spoke of listening to the Spirit and attending to God, seeing celebration of what God is doing as an important practice to rekindle.

Tyler Wagenmaker, Classis Zeeland, asked Scott DeVries about the Reformed confessions and whether he has difficulty with any parts of them. "I've studied the confessions thoroughly and haven't found a place of exception yet," DeVries said.

Michael Ten Haaken, Classis Lake Superior, one of two appointed interviewers for the role of chief administrative officer, asked Shirley De Vries to talk to delegates about synod's decisions in 2022 about the human sexuality report. She said, "I deeply understand that this job has the responsibility to implement the decisions of synod" with the general secretary. Noting that she's been to 20 synods in her roles serving the denomination, "I do not see that there is a decision that synod has made that has ever caused me to think that I need to leave the employment of the denomination. If

there is a difference of opinion that I have personally, I don't think I have any problem implementing what synod wanted to do and doing that with integrity."

Harold Caicedo, Classis California South, remarked that the two candidates appointed to significant positions are both named De Vries. (They are not related.) Caicedo said he didn't have a problem with this because of the people they are, but he questioned whether including discussion about diversity is actually integral to the denomination or just a required but inconsequential part of the discussion.

"I think it is real for the denomination," Shirley De Vries said, noting that even recent experience shows it's difficult. "But I think that if we can't live into that more, we will be harming ourselves and not really living how God wants us to live." She said seriously looking at how to get diverse candidates would be built into succession planning and leadership training.

—Alissa Vernon, News Editor

## Pastor Commissioned for Ministry on First Nations Reserve

Sean Folkerts and his family have ministered with North America Indigenous Ministries in the Maskwacis community in Alberta since 2016. Supported by their congregation at Woody Nook Christian Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alta., the relationship has now been formalized with a call to Folkerts to be the minister of evangelism and discipleship in Maskwacis, a reserve about 47 kilometers (29 miles) from Lacombe that is home to the Montana, Samson, Louis Bull, and Ermineskin Cree Nations.

Folkerts was examined and approved as a commissioned pastor by Classis Alberta North in October. The church's rationale provided to classis said, "Creating this position causes us to be more intentional about our desire to connect with Maskwacis, and it also calls us to greater responsibility in the pursuit of reconciliation."

Folkerts' ministry is with two congregations in Maskwacis: Louis Bull All Nations Church and Maskwacis Bible Fellowship. He and his family began attending Louis Bull All Nations after attending a family reconciliation camp in August 2016. The camp came about at the invitation of Louis Bull All Nations leadership after Woody Nook's then-pastor Neil De Koning had conversations with Mario Swampy, band councilor with Samson Cree Nation and the pastor of Louis Bull All Nations Church. De Koning had been exploring how to begin conversations with Indigenous neighbors in the wake of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's public events in 2014. Folkerts was one of about 30 Woody Nook members who attended the family camp.

"It was here (at the camp) I met Mario," said Folkerts. "We spent an evening staying up real late talking about reconciliation and what that looks like in each of our communities." Hearing personal stories of intergenerational trauma and the lingering effects of residential schools "truly broke our hearts," Folkerts said.



**Pastors Mario Swampy (left) and Sean Folkerts baptize a 14-year-old at Louis Bull All Nations Church. It was one of 16 baptisms there in the past couple of years.**

One Sunday not long after that camp, Folkerts and his family decided to head to Maskwacis and worship with the Louis Bull congregation. "That was just over six years ago, and we haven't left," Folkerts said. "We did nothing for a long time, just attended church. We understood enough about First Nations culture to know to just be present. It was about three or four months before we were asked to be a part of a ministry such as Boys Group and Girls Group. From there, God opened doors to be able to do more," Folkerts said.

That Sean and Becky Folkerts have 11 children in their care has also opened numerous doors for their ministry in Maskwacis. Some are their biological children. Others are foster children and adopted children. "We have been foster parents for years and have permanent private guardianship of a sibling set of four children, the highest level of adoption (that is)

granted to a non-First Nation family of First Nation children," Folkerts explained. While Folkerts is the one called as commissioned pastor, he is quick to recognize that "we are a missional family, and we are all, including the children, involved in ministry at Maskwacis."

The Folkerts family continues to partner in mission with North America Indigenous Ministries, a nondenominational faith mission serving First Nations communities primarily across Western Canada, Washington State, and New Mexico. "We raise support to pay our salary and ministry expenses by talking to churches and visiting with people, and we love it," Folkerts said. "It is so amazing to be able to tell people how God is moving in Maskwacis."

—Janet Greidanus

# Dwell Flex Brings Kids Together



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# Forming Spiritual Habits Together

By Katie Ritsema-Roelofs and Megan Herrema, Congregational Ministries

**G**od calls the church to live a life grounded in Scripture, shaped by spiritual disciplines, and centered around intentional discernment. But what does it look like to be a congregation or a community that actively cultivates practices of prayer, Scripture reading, and other spiritual disciplines?

This is one of the questions that the Christian Reformed Church in North America has been exploring as part of its Our Journey 2025 ministry plan. The plan outlines four “milestones” or goals that CRC congregations identified as areas in which they’d like to grow. The first of these is a desire to become places that “cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline, transforming our lives and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

At the halfway point of this five-year plan, the CRC is seeing some great examples of this milestone being lived out.

You probably know someone who can take an idea, adjust it to fit their context, and then get the people around them excited about it. These are the kind of people helping people of all ages grow in faith by crafting their own services and events inspired by resources from the Faith Practices Project.

Initially launched as a set of online resources, the Faith Practices Project focused on 12 spiritual disciplines—actions that, when regularly repeated, can enrich our attentiveness to the Holy Spirit, cultivate the life and character of Jesus Christ in us, and strengthen our love for God and others.

These practices include prayer, Scripture reading, sabbath, service, remembering, wonder, celebrating, listening, hospitality, generosity, gratitude, and acts of justice and mercy. Each equips us to better serve God and our neighbor.

The Faith Practices Project recently expanded to offer a set of “build-your-own-service” guides for any type of gathering, from worship services to vacation Bible school alternatives.

From these resource starting points, here’s what church leaders across North America have put together to help their congregations develop lasting faith habits in creative and communal ways.

**Beginning on Pentecost, Grace Community CRC in Oak Lawn, Ill., framed 12 weeks of worship services around spiritual practices suggested by Faith Formation.**



Worshippers at Bethel CRC were invited to help create a “wonder board” one week as part of a spiritual practices journey.

#### **Bethel CRC, Brockville, Ont.**

When members at Bethel CRC in Brockville, Ont., gathered for worship one Sunday in October 2022, they found paper “thought bubble” cut-outs in their pews. As the service began, Pastor Jack Van de Hoef invited the congregation to write or draw on the pieces of paper to share how they were experiencing wonder. Then he pointed to a colorful board at the front of the sanctuary with the words “I WONDER” in big letters at the top.

“Now, this is not what we normally do in church,” Van de Hoef explained. “When you come to church, you usually sit in the pew, behave yourself, and you wait until you’re told to stand or walk around. You don’t just wander around in church. This morning, I am giving you permission to wander. Come up here during a song, during a prayer, while I’m talking—that’s fine—to put something on this wonder wall.”

Throughout the service, members of all ages walked up to the board to pin their thought bubbles to the board. “It was encouraging to see so many participating,” Van de Hoef said.

### *Prayer and Faith Practices Resources*

The ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America have several resources to help individuals and congregations in their cultivation of prayer and spiritual disciplines. Find links to many of them at [crcna.org/OurJourney/cultivate](https://crcna.org/OurJourney/cultivate).

These resources include:

- » The Faith Practices Project
- » A six-part podcast & Bible study series (companion e-book) from *Groundwork*
- » The *Today* daily devotional (daily Scripture reading, reflection, and prayer; available in English, Chinese, and Korean)
- » *Cada Dia* devotional (Spanish, Portuguese)
- » *Perspectives Reformées* devotional (French)
- » *RCJ* devotional (Japanese)
- » *YKB* devotional (Indonesian)
- » Kids Corner
- » Family Fire resources: “Spiritual Disciplines for Family Life,” “Spiritual Disciplines: Family Fasting,” and “Nurturing Faith from Infancy”
- » Advocacy as a spiritual discipline: Social Justice and Centre for Public Dialogue
- » *Discover Your Bible* series
- » *Reformed Worship*

“There have been some encouraging things happening when it comes to intentionally incorporating prayer into the lives of our congregations, classes, and denominations,” denominational prayer shepherd Rev. Jon Hoekema said, including the concentrated effort to surround Synod 2022 with prayer. Volunteers will be recruited to pray for Synod 2023 too.

Local and regional prayer initiatives are also happening. Classis Southeast U.S. had a day of prayer before its fall meeting, Hoekema said, and Classis Zeeland has a weekly pastors’ prayer gathering.

Hoekema holds a prayer time via video conference on the second Wednesday of every month. Those wishing to participate should email [prayer@crnapartners.org](mailto:prayer@crnapartners.org) for more information. Hoekema also encourages people to visit [crcna.org/pray](https://crcna.org/pray) to subscribe to daily, weekly, or monthly prayer requests.

### **Covenant CRC, Sioux Center, Iowa**

After its regular morning service one Sunday, Covenant CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, hosted an intergenerational lunch and “WE service” to explore the practice of wonder. Members received a color-coded name tag based on their age group and were encouraged to have no more than two people with the same color seated at the same table. After the meal, people watched a skit about faith practices and then worked through activities together. They used magnifying glasses to examine the details of objects at their tables and talked about what they noticed. Each age group had its own role in the conversation: adults explained to kids what the word “glimpse” meant, and kids explained—or demonstrated—what “surprise” means!



At an intergenerational lunch, members of Covenant CRC in Sioux Center found ways to explore and discuss the wonder of creation.





Beginning on Pentecost, Grace Community CRC in Oak Lawn, Ill., framed 12 weeks of worship services around spiritual practices suggested by Faith Formation.

#### Grace CRC, Oak Lawn, Ill.

Grace Community CRC in Oak Lawn, Ill., began a Pentecost series on faith practices. After using the first six practices in a “build your own” series, they decided to continue with the remaining six for a full 12-week series. Worship coordinator Diane Ritzema said the congregation loved how practical many of these faith practices are and how easily they can be integrated into daily living. During coffee fellowship after worship, members spent time around tables reflecting and asking questions with all generations.

During its worship service on the faith practice of hospitality, Grace Community CRC formally welcomed children to partake in the Lord’s Supper for the first time. Pastors Michael Kooi and Kelsey Jones met with children for several weeks leading up to the service. During the service, shaped around Luke 14:12-24, all ages gathered around the table to partake. The service closed with everyone singing “Jesus Loves Me,” now the church’s communion tradition.


#### Silver Spring CRC, Silver Spring, Md.

Silver Spring (Md.) CRC used the Faith Practices material as a starting point and then went in a new direction. Pastor Doug Bratt preached on the faith practices of listening, celebration, remembering, wonder, prayer, and sabbath, using the psalms to anchor these spiritual habits. Worship coordinator Bethany Besteman decided to use the familiar and well-loved words of Psalm 23 as the common thread throughout the sermon series.

Each week, the congregation learned a new section of the psalm in sign language until they could sign the entire psalm together. Artwork for bulletin covers and eventually a devotional were made each week by ninth-grader Lorelai Reiffer.

Weekly emails went out with prompts for journaling and reflection. They invited the congregation to engage through art, poetry, acts of service, and quiet meditation. The full worship series on Psalm 23 will be published in *Reformed Worship* in spring 2023.

#### Learn more

Historically, spiritual disciplines included practices such as prayer, reading the Bible, fasting, silence, solitude, and service, but the range of faith-formative practices actually encompasses a much larger set of activities. Find resources for your own intergenerational gathering or worship series on faith practices at [crcna.org/faithpracticesproject](https://crcna.org/faithpracticesproject). 



Lorelai Reiffer, a ninth-grade student, created artwork for bulletin covers and for a devotional booklet on Psalm 23 and spiritual practices.

## The View from Here

# Loving the Family We Have

**OUR FAMILY TOOK** an unexpected turn 10 years ago. Our fourth child was born with a rare genetic disorder resulting in cognitive and physical disabilities. We still don't know what sort of development milestones she will reach in her life. Every day is a journey full of joys and challenges.

This experience has taught me to love the family we have, not the family we expected to have. The sooner we were able to let go of our hopes, dreams, and expectations, the sooner we could simply be the parents she and the rest of our children deserve.

This is true for all relationships and communities, not just for parents. How do we love the neighbors, friends, church, or denomination we have instead of the ones we expected to have?

Loving our daughter also means working with her to realize her full potential—and I do mean work. We are supported by more than a handful of professionals to do this. It is painfully incremental. We delight in each developmental step. So does she.

In the same way, God is constantly at work in us. He loves us in our brokenness, but challenges us to grow. Our Journey 2025 lists four goals for the Christian Reformed Church that were

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developed from listening to churches and leaders across the denomination about where we felt God was asking us to do the hard work of growing into our full potential.

The first of these milestones is to “cultivate practices of prayer and spiritual discipline, transforming our lives and communities by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

We want to be a denomination anchored in God's love for us and propelled by God's desire to see us grow. We want to be transformed into Christlikeness and to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Spiritual disciplines are called “disciplines” because they take work. They almost always ask us to do something that feels unnatural to us. They ask us to stop eating when we are hungry, to be silent when we feel the need to talk, to submit when we want to feel in control, to confess when we are ashamed, to worship when we feel distant, and to celebrate together when we still feel the burden of brokenness.

This work can be difficult and painfully incremental. It takes individual and communal commitment.

A community's spiritual maturity is partially dependent on each person's spiritual maturity, so if our congregations want to grow in this area, a commitment to communal and individual spiritual practices is necessary. This takes effort and intentionality. It also takes grace, kindness, and hospitality as we grow in these practices at different rates. We need to remember to love the family we have and to walk alongside each other wherever we might be in our spiritual development.

Our denomination has gone through some incredibly painful experiences in the past few years, and this will continue to reverberate for the next few years as well. The need for spiritual maturity—for individuals and for congregations who demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit that result from strong faith practices—is greater than ever.

May we all continue to grow and challenge each other to grow in these areas. May we encourage each other when there are setbacks, recognize the Spirit at work, and celebrate with each other when we see each other, our congregations, and our whole denomination being transformed into Christlikeness. **B**



Rev. Al Postma is the transitional executive director (Canada) of the CRCNA. He is a member of and elder at Hope CRC in Brantford, Ont.

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

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

## ‘This Is the Way; Walk In It’

**“WHETHER YOU TURN** to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it” (Isa. 30:21).

While going for walks and talking with neighbors might not seem like spiritual practices, these rhythms are an important part of Resonate Global Mission’s Go Local process, and those involved in these walks are seeing God at work.

Go Local is a Resonate ministry that coaches believers through a process of learning how to discover where God is at work in their neighborhoods and joining that work themselves.

When Grace Stolte learned about Go Local, it seemed like a natural fit for her lifestyle. “I’ve grown up with the motto ‘Bloom where you’re planted,’” she said.

Stolte lives in Calgary, Alta., and attends River Park Christian Reformed Church. She has lived in the same neighborhood for 45 years and has watched it grow and change. Many of the longtime residents in the neighborhood are in their 60s or older, but younger families with children and working parents are moving in too.

“Go Local encouraged me to be more intentional,” said Stolte. “It has helped me have a focus, ... to help make the neighborhood more elder-friendly, and to find ways to connect people.”

Stolte has been living out God’s mission by being intentional with her neighbors. She’ll often go for one-on-one walks with neighbors or visit them at home. She has organized several groups, including a coffee time, a book club, and a group to practice tai chi.

“We enjoy good fellowship together, and people feel better after a nice walk and talk,” she said. “I listen quite a bit—about their past experiences and their life. A lot of them don’t have



Going for walks is a spiritual practice encouraged by Go Local, a Resonate Global Mission ministry. For Neal Dekens, walking along this road has helped him get to know his neighbors.

people to talk to, and they just want a listening ear.”

Stolte trusts God is at work in each conversation and gathering. She has watched people connect with one another and start to form friendships.

“Go Local is a blessing to me,” she said. “I go for walks and I see so many people I’ve already connected with. It’s filled my life. It’s given me a purpose and a focus.”

Peggy and Neal Dekens have also grown in relationship with their neighbors through participating in the Go Local process and adopting the new spiritual practice of going for walks. They live along a gravel road just outside Lethbridge, Alta. Many of their neighbors live on small farms. Neal in particular has taken to walking several times a week along the road to Lethbridge.

“Usually he goes right after work, and often others returning home will stop and chat,” Peggy said. “Neal shares

things about himself very easily, so it opens people up to share their stuff: relationship troubles, financial struggles, job woes, farm problems, and of course talk about cars a bit.

“God works through the relationships by building trust. And God calls us to pray for them,” she added. “(I have come to) see my neighborhood as a place where God is already at work, and he is asking me to come alongside and participate with him.”

—Cassie Westrate,  
Resonate Global Mission

# Start a Spiritual Habit of Prayer with ReFrame

**IN LATE 2022**, Roger received an email with a simple question: “Are you a prayer warrior?”

Roger might delete many of his emails without thinking twice, but that one stuck with him.

“I honestly told myself, ‘No, not me,’” he said.

But the Holy Spirit nudged him to keep thinking about the email. He even came back to it a few more times, opening it and wondering if he should respond.

The email came from Emily Vanden Heuvel, ReFrame Ministries’ prayer coordinator. It invited Roger into ReFrame’s community of prayer partners who regularly pray for about 15 requests each week for English speakers from around the world. The requests come from people who read *Today* devotions, listen to ReFrame podcasts like *Groundwork* or *Think Christian*, or simply search the internet for a community to pray for them.

A few days later Roger decided to take a leap of faith and respond to the email.

“I believed I was ready for this new journey,” Roger said. “I believed that developing a consistent habit of being a prayer warrior would be good for others as well as myself.”



When ReFrame Ministries began more than 80 years ago, prayer requests came by mail, but thanks to the internet, it now receives hundreds of requests every week through email and the ReFrame website.

Roger is hardly alone in feeling this way. Vanden Heuvel hears every day from people like Roger who are praying for others and feeling blessed by the opportunity.

“On the other hand,” said Vanden Heuvel, “we also hear from people who have sent in painful requests because of struggles they are facing or bad habits they’ve fallen into.”

Often these people can sense that they are being lifted up in prayer, and they feel encouraged by the knowledge that they are being heard and prayed for daily.

Mark said he has felt lifted up by prayers from Roger and thousands of prayer warriors like him.

He recently requested prayers for an addiction that he’s been battling for most of his life that has caused his relationship with Christ and his family to crumble over the years.

“We have gotten far away from a regular church connection,” Mark said. “I know that we need to get back, but this addiction, and also struggling with social anxiety and depression, have made it tough.”

Mark hasn’t overcome his addiction, but he says that after submitting his prayer request and praying for other requests from fellow ReFrame prayer team members, he’s felt the support and strength that comes from this community of believers.

That encouragement has been significant for Mark and for the many others who share requests every week. If you’d like to join Roger in starting a new habit of prayer, or if you want to share your own requests, visit [prayer.reframeministries.org](http://prayer.reframeministries.org).

—Brian Clark,  
ReFrame Ministries

# Intentional, Missional, Communal Worship

**CALVIN UNIVERSITY'S MISSION** is to equip students to think deeply, to act justly, and to live wholeheartedly as Christ's agents of renewal in the world. To carry out this mission, Calvin has intentionally integrated faith and learning into every discipline across the university.

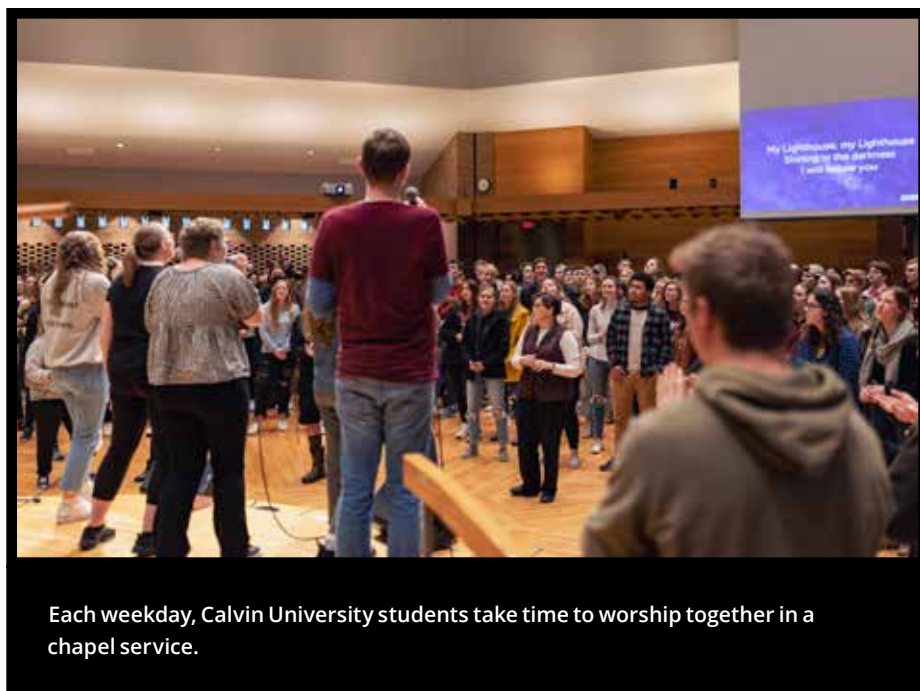
The establishment of the de Vries Institute for Global Faculty Development in 2019 only strengthened Calvin's commitment to equip its faculty to connect their Christian faith with their academic disciplines. This is modeled for students daily in classrooms throughout the university.

But at 10 a.m. each weekday, there's an intentional 20-minute pause from the academic enterprise: chapel.

"Short, daily worship provides a focused opportunity to pray and listen to God's Word within the busyness and activity of the day," university pastor Mary Hulst said. "Regular, daily participation in such a practice provides the greatest benefit to the worshiper to recenter their communal identity and vocation before God."

The daily chapel services are uniquely liturgical, focusing on communal practices of worship such as prayer, singing, listening to God's Word, and testimony. The services feature a multiplicity of styles and traditions and include many cultural, traditional, and contemporary expressions representing the diversity of Calvin's learning community.

In addition to the 20-minute chapels, students, faculty, and staff also engage in campus-wide Bible studies. This past fall, 16 groups met to study the gospel of Mark, which is also the book that Hulst has been preaching through on Wednesdays during chapel. The nine-week Bible study curriculum was written by Hulst and Sarah VerMerris, a student at Calvin Theological



Each weekday, Calvin University students take time to worship together in a chapel service.

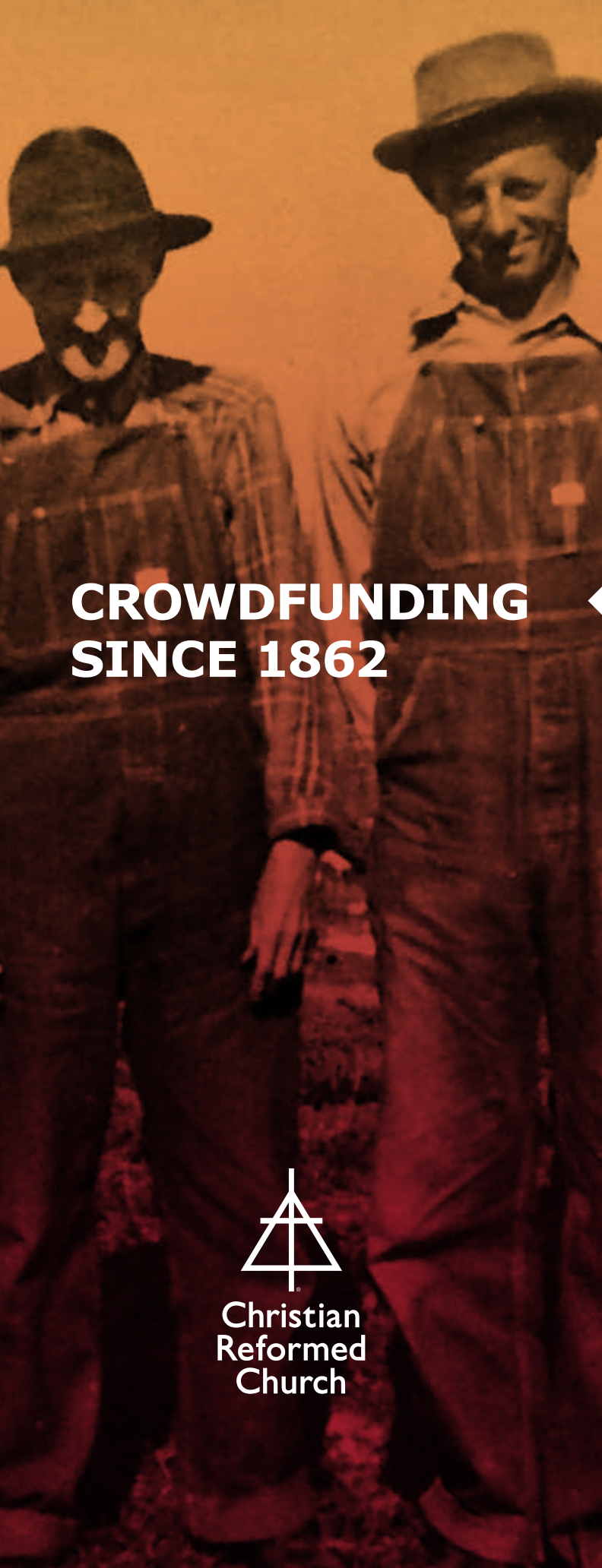
Seminary who also serves as Calvin's discipleship coordinator.

In that role, VerMerris leads the Barnabas Team, which provides spiritual programming for Calvin's residence halls. Each hall has a discipleship assistant who oversees a team of student leaders that plans programming related to spiritual disciplines, including Word, worship, prayer, and community. Each building offers at least one weekly Bible study as well as monthly dorm worship, prayer gatherings, and other spiritually focused community events.

The goal of these and other communal practices at Calvin is to help members of the community orient themselves to their triune God, the mission of the university, and to one another.

"I love the moment when a student realizes that a spiritual practice isn't some disconnected or mechanized habit, but that it has the potential to wrap itself within the daily, common patterns and routines of their life, creating space for them to encounter a God who is already present and active," VerMerris said. "When the intimacy of God meets the 'everydayness' of a student's life, it changes how they relate and embrace their life of discipleship. Being part of that process is one of the richest joys of my work."

—Matt Kucinski,  
Calvin University



**Have you noticed the trend? From Uber and Airbnb, to community-supported agriculture and Kickstarter, people value sharing and working together.**

As members of the Christian Reformed Church, it's something we've been doing for a long time. Since its earliest days, CRC congregations have pooled their funds to do shared ministry—such as global evangelism, curriculum development, and training of pastors—that would be impossible for any individual or congregation to do on our own.

This system is called *ministry shares* and it is a remarkably stewardly and cost-effective way to accomplish important ministry together. It works when we all participate.

Learn more at

**[crcna.org/MinistryShares](https://crcna.org/MinistryShares)**

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Reformed  
Church**

# Snake!

**IT SEEMS THAT NO MATTER** where I am led, I always end up working with snakes. Part of this is because in Canada many of our snakes are species at risk. This means they are in danger of going extinct if nothing is done to help protect them. But who wants to help a snake?

Snakes are icky, weird, and evil, aren't they? Maybe it's their lack of eyelids (snakes can't blink) or their being able to eat things larger than their head in one mouthful, but there is just something about snakes that many people don't like. Yet the more time I spend learning about snakes, the more I appreciate them.

It's amazing all the different forms creation takes. A snake, without arms or legs, can outclimb and outswim me. But what good is a snake? Would you believe me if I told you snakes are helper animals? It's true! They are important for controlling populations of things like insects, frogs, and rodents. They are also important as food for other animals. But many snakes are at risk because of habitats being destroyed, habitats divided by roadways, or people killing them just because they are snakes. It's important to remember that, like us, they are part of the creation God loves and asks us to take good care of (Gen. 1:26). Just like everything in God's creation, they are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14) and "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Just as we often judge animals such as snakes by how they look, we can also be very quick to judge people based on what they look like. James 2:1-13 reminds us that favoring people based on what they look like is wrong, and in 1 Samuel 16:7 God reminds us that he does not look at people's outsides, but their insides. Sometimes something (or someone) that looks different can seem scary or weird. But by taking

time to learn and try to understand them we can discover amazing things!

## Try This!

Is there a creature that makes you a little uncomfortable? Try learning more about it and how its uniqueness makes it a super creature specifically designed for God's intended purpose.

## Dig Deeper

Read Colossians 3:12, Luke 6:35-36, and 1 Corinthians 13. How do you think getting to know someone is related to these verses? **B**



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



Photo by Marek Pivnicki/Unsplash

# Just Do It!

By Henry Wildeboer

**A** 16-year-old high school student was told by his cancer specialist, “Isa, we’ve run out of chemo options; there is little we can do.” At school the student approached a fellow 10th-grader.

“I have cancer, and the doctor told me I am going to die,” Isa said. “I don’t want to die. I want to be baptized. Can I be baptized in your church?” We worked it out, and I baptized him in a Sunday morning service with about 300 worshippers looking on. I encouraged the church to pray for Isa’s healing during the coming week, asking those who committed to do so to stand. Most did.

As he stood before the congregation, I said, “Isa, God will heal you.” It was said before I could stop it. About five months later I received a call from his mother: “Preacher man, I got a call from Isa’s oncologist. They did an MRI, and Isa’s body is cancer free!” Now, six years later, Isa has graduated from university and still is cancer free. God still heals!

In John 14:12, Jesus says, “I tell you for certain that if you have faith in me, you will do the same things I am doing” (CEV). Did he mean we would participate in miracles? Do miracles occur to show us that God exists and is powerful? How does that affect the church’s spirituality? Jesus adds, “You will do even greater things, now that I am going back to the Father.”

In 1963 I stumbled into my first healing experience. As a seminary student I served a summer assignment in a young church plant in northern Alberta. As a single man, I was “adopted” by a couple active in the church. They’d been married 16 years and had painfully accepted that they would have no children; they no longer even talked about it. Evenings often saw us together when we discussed everything about the day past and planned for the day ahead. On such evenings we often ended with a snack—usually a very unhealthy one, such as bacon and eggs at midnight.

That night, with a plate of the usual goodies before us, we were sad because in the morning I would leave for Grand Rapids to start my second year at the seminary. Without thinking, I said, “I will miss you. You’ve been like wonderful parents to me.” It became painfully quiet, and I looked for a place to hide. I noted tears trickling down Ann’s usually jovial face. My intended compliment struck a sore spot, and trying to fix it made it worse when I said, “Have you prayed about this?” Of course they had! I responded, “Can I pray with both of you?” We joined hands as I pleaded with God—not for very long, but with urgency—that he would bless them with children. I acknowledged that though it seemed late on their calendar, it was not so on God’s, adding, “Nothing is impossible for him.”

We hugged and soon said our good-byes. I left the next morning. Rather surprisingly, 10 months later I received an announcement. The new father wrote, “It’s a miracle! Ann and son are fine. Thanks be to God!”



They later adopted another boy. They had children!

That first miracle opened the door for me to realize miracles still happen, and it aroused a hunger for more. Many times during my years of ministry I have prayed for miracles to occur. Since retiring I have reread the gospels and especially the book of Acts several times, asking God to make us Spirit-filled churches where “signs and wonders” regularly occur and result in conversions and growth.

### **Have Faith**

Jesus did many miracles, sometimes without comment. But “faith,” “belief,” or even “unbelief” is often mentioned when Jesus speaks about miracles. Healings were a primary teaching connection between Jesus and the disciples. They were to believe him and also do miracles, thus carrying on his mission. It’s after some healings that Jesus commissions them to do what he was doing (Matt. 10; Mark 6; Luke 10). He gave them power and authority to drive out demons, heal the sick, and preach the kingdom. They were to wait for the Holy Spirit and then carry on in Jesus’ absence, though he assured them he would be with them “to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

Healings and faith come together in a variety of miracles. Faith is essential to come to Christ, and we cannot nurture a meaningful relationship without faith in him. “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6).

In Luke 7-8, we see a centurion, a bleeding woman, and a man named Jairus each put their faith in Jesus for healing and receive it, regardless of their societal standing or expressed religion. These are examples of faith in action as described in Hebrews 11:1: “Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance of what we do not

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see.” Faith is not governed by feelings. It simply believes what God said is true because God said it. It is not so much what has been said as who said it. We believe God’s Word to be fully reliable truth because God himself is the truth and cannot lie. That’s all. No more, no less. Inner confirmations are nice—maybe even helpful—but not needed.

### **Making Disciples**

Miracles were a vibrant part of Jesus’ ministry. Why were they necessary? John Wimber, a charismatic pastor in the 1970s, saw miracles as “signs and wonders.”

“Signs and wonders, all Western evangelicals acknowledge, were necessary to authenticate Christ’s divinity,” he writes in his book *Power Evangelism*. “Further, signs and wonders were key

in establishing the apostolic authority of the twelve and Paul” (p. 108).

In the gospels, but especially in the book of Acts, ministries and miracles are mentioned more than 10 times as “signs” or “wonders” (John 4:48; 6:30; 20:30-31; Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:13; Heb. 2:4). There were miracles in the Old Testament with Moses and Pharaoh and in the New Testament with Jesus and the church. They were like preludes that opened doors to the minds and hearts of skeptical listeners, often leading to conversions to faith by the thousands after a miracle was witnessed (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 6:1, 7). That’s what I long to see!

What does this say to us as the church? I believe many now need a fresh touch of the Holy Spirit to be convinced that Jesus is alive, divine, and willing to surprise us with powerful miracles. In our hedonistic culture, are covenant youth losing firm childhood convictions built up through early family nurturing? Are they dazzled and mesmerized by secular explanations of creation and spirituality—maybe even entranced by the “many” ways to God and intrigued with the variety of gods? Is God challenging us to have showdowns as to who is truly God? I believe signs and wonders are still available, meant to convict people that God is alive and well. For those who question whether miracles are for today consider what Reformed theologian G.C. Berkouwer wrote in *The Providence of God* (p. 224-225):

We find nothing in the Scriptures to indicate a line that we can draw through a definite period to mark off a boundary between the time of miracles and the time of the absence of miracles. ... The many signs that still appear after Pentecost should make us the more careful not to set limits, in our enlightened era, to the miraculous

activity of God. There is not a single datum in the New Testament which makes it certain that God, in a period of strengthening and extending of the church in heathendom, will not confirm his message with signs, in holy resistance to the demonic influences of the kingdom of darkness.

Is this a time when we should be praying for and seeking signs and wonders so vivid that many are drawn to vibrant, saving faith? Yes! God healed in partnership with his Son, Jesus, who then empowered the apostles to heal with the Holy Spirit. Healing is now turned over to us, the church. In fact, Jesus doesn't call us his servants, but his friends, with whom he shares his work plans (John 15:15): teamwork at its finest.

### **Stories of Healing**

I witnessed one of my first miraculous healings about 50 years ago when a rural 19-year-old man was transferred to the large Calgary Foothills Hospital. He had been in a deep coma for some time due to a high fever. Doctors told us we should not expect him to live. At the urging of a saintly woman, we stood by his bed, believed, prayed, and spoke words of healing. Immediately the man jolted awake. He had a long period of recovery, but Jesus healed him completely.

In my experiences of healing I have often seen such an immediate change of condition followed by a period of recovery. That was the case during the pandemic when we received an early-morning text message from a friend about "Joe." Joe was in intensive care in a Chicago-area hospital, where CPR was administered three times. Joe was unconscious and in critical condition. When I read the text I became anxious and angry, sensing that this was the work of the devil.

I phoned Joe's father and asked, "What is happening to your son?" I will never forget his response: "Henry, I am so scared. I have never been so scared in all my life. I have one son, and I am afraid I am going to lose him today!" Without any hesitation I responded, "Are you ready to do battle?" Before he could answer I heard his wife immediately respond, "I am!" The following conversation ensued:

"Your son is a covenant child who wants to do God's will," I said, "and the devil doesn't like it. In fact, he hates it and obstructs with all his might in his battle to dethrone God. He is trespassing on property for which God has paid the title in full. Your son belongs to God, and in the name of Jesus, I order you, devil, to get off God's property now—and never come back!"

I meant it with every ounce of my being, and the devil must have known it. Within only a few hours Joe's condition totally changed. Though full recovery took some months, he is now well and fully back at work.

But not every healing is instantaneous. I remember a 51-year-old man in our Oshawa congregation who had multiple sclerosis so advanced that his company had released him with early disability eight years earlier. He could not walk more than 200 feet at a time, and then only with a cane. In 1984 he wrote our church elders a letter asking them to anoint him with oil, lay hands on him, and pray for healing (James 5:14-16). He was convinced God would heal him. Because it was the first time our elders had done this, some were skeptical. But other than the discomfort of doing something different, we saw no downside to his request. When we did it, there were no signs, no flashes, no thunder, no anything. But since that day, the man has had no further MS flare-ups. He healed slowly but steadily. About 20 years later, he

was hiking and biking all over Oshawa and regularly swimming laps. He died of old age in 2019—35 years after we prayed over him.

How can we carry on God's healing work today? With the help of the Holy Spirit in us as we do the "greater things." I continue to plead for the Holy Spirit to sweep through the entire Christian Reformed Church with the fulfillment of his promise. I urge pastors and others to step out of the boat of safety as Peter did and risk a water walk. Allow Jesus to take your hand and lift you up when you experience doubt, fear, and criticism. To minister in healing with faith, love, and obedience is exhilarating. Each time I participate in it, it leaves me weak but grateful. This is not a casual prayer ministry. It is a connection in faith with the God of all power as we seek his kingdom (Matt. 6:33). It flows into trust, obedience, and contentment. It gives perspective. Jesus has our back, and he asks us to believe and "just do it!"



Henry Wildeboer is a retired pastor in the CRC. After pastoring a church in Washington State and two churches in Canada, he taught leadership development at Tyndale Seminary. He has written two books, *Miraculous Healing and You* (1999), and *When God Shows Up: A Pastor's Journey* (2013). Henry and his wife, Jan, live in Bowmanville, Ont., and attend Rehoboth CRC.

1. Have you ever experienced a miracle, or do you know of someone who has? What was the story?
2. Do you believe God still does miracles like healing through Christians today? Why or why not?

**READ MORE ONLINE**

## The Reliability of Scripture

We receive  
the Scriptures  
through faith. But  
we can also see  
clear evidence  
of how the Holy  
Spirit directed the  
work of people.



Amanda W. Benckhuysen works for Congregational Ministries and attends Kelloggsville Church in Kentwood, Mich. She is the author of *The Gospel According to Eve* (IVP, 2019) and *Immigrants, the Bible, and You* (Calvin Press, 2020).

**WHEN I WAS A KID**, we often played the telephone game, whispering a message from one ear to another all the way down a line until the last person would announce what she heard. We often laughed at how mixed up the message eventually got. Given how likely it is for oral or written messages to become distorted as they are passed from one person to another or one generation to another, our modern Bibles are remarkably consistent and faithful to the earliest manuscripts. This shows how the Holy Spirit guided the process of the transmission and preservation of the Scriptures for our edification today.

Large parts of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, began as oral tradition. There is archaeological evidence to support events, places, and persons described in the Old Testament, and with each passing decade more is discovered. Moreover, the Old Testament literature's form, style, and shape is consistent with what we find in the ancient Near East at large, adding legitimacy to its antiquity.


The oral accounts were eventually written down, giving rise to manuscripts that were compiled, shaped, and edited over time. Scholars believe that different Jewish communities produced different manuscript traditions. While there are differences between these traditions, there also is a remarkable amount of congruence. The vast majority of the differences are grammatical or spelling variations. Although more substantial differences do exist, they don't significantly impact or challenge the theology reflected in the rest of the Old Testament.

There are over 5,800 Greek fragments of the New Testament, with over 500,000 variants between the various manuscripts. Again, while there are some significant variants (for instance, the inclusion of the story in John 8 of

the woman caught in adultery and the last 12 verses of the gospel of Mark), none of these variants affects a significant Christian teaching.

We have manuscript fragments of almost the entire Old Testament that date to between the third century B.C. and the first century A.D., as well as fragments of individual texts that date as far back as the seventh century B.C. For the New Testament, we have manuscript fragments that date to as early as the first century A.D. and full manuscripts from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. That the earliest manuscripts significantly agree with later manuscripts and that we have access to manuscripts that date relatively close to the time the authors wrote them suggest a high degree of reliability.

As they considered the source text sacred and not to be altered, the scribes took meticulous care in copying the words of Scripture onto new scrolls and codices. Each letter, word, and paragraph was counted to ensure that the source scroll was copied accurately. Even when the scribes believed the source text was grammatically or theologically wrong, they would preserve the text and add a note to the margins.

We confess with the Belgic Confession that "we believe the things contained in the Scriptures not so much because the church receives and approves them as such but above all because the Holy Spirit testifies in our hearts that they are from God" (Art. 5). In other words, we receive the Scriptures through faith. But we can also see clear evidence of how the Holy Spirit directed the work of people to ensure that the Word we have today is true to God's self-revelation to his people in days of old. So we can affirm with the apostle Paul that "all Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching" (2 Tim. 3:16). 

## Wormholes, Knots, and Imperfections

What I've learned during my time as a sawdust maker is that those imperfections are some of the most beautiful marks of opportunity.



Kelly Vander Woude is the pastor of Immanuel Christian Reformed Church in Fort Collins, Colo. He loves to smoke all kinds of food and hang out with his wife and kids, and he enjoys trying to build things on the side, which usually just means he has sore hands, lots of mistakes, and tons of sawdust.

**I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT HOLES,** knots, and imperfections in wood quite a bit lately. To be honest, I've been obsessed. And what I've come to realize is that while my obsession started because of my frustration with worms and diseases and wood growth, it has blossomed into joy.

I'm a pastor by calling, but I fell into woodworking because of a broken appliance. I was curing bacon, my fridge failed, and the curing bacon spoiled. After looking up ways to upcycle a refrigerator, I turned ours into a beautiful and functional outdoor cooler, complete with wood paneling, a spigot, and side shelves. I didn't want to pay to haul the fridge away, so BAM! I'm a woodworker too.

One of the joys I've found in woodworking is that as you study the wood, as you slowly sand along the grain, the wood begins to reveal its beautiful characteristics. Patterns emerge, colors pop, and movement in the growth markers mesmerize. But sometimes, after you plan your project, do your glue-ups, and run the wood through a planer to smooth and shape it, you suddenly see it: a wormhole, or perhaps a once-beautiful knot that falls out, leaving you with a giant hole. Even worse, sometimes there's a long, dark scar from a disease or insects, and you're left having to scrape away debris to get to the bottom of the scar. The imperfections of the wood have revealed themselves, and you're left staring at a lesser version of what could have been a perfect, beautiful piece of wood.

Oh, what could have been! Those lousy imperfections in the wood, those stupid diseases and bugs that harmed this beautiful creation, the weather damage that shaped the wood into something different from what it was supposed to be—I should just toss out the wood and start over, right?



Wait—are we still talking about wood, or are we talking about humans now?

Brokenness, sin, destruction, scars, holes, disease, imperfections—you name it, we have it. We're sinful. And in our brokenness, we do stupid things, say harmful words, speak lies, and allow that which is outside of us to invade us through the cracks we have. The lives we live simply scar us, on the inside and the outside. Disease leaves its mark internally, or something happens to us (whether we do it to ourselves or someone else does) that fundamentally changes who we are. I still hold onto some wounding words from the past that still give me pause. I have a scar running from my sternum to past my navel that reminds me of emergency surgery I had in 2020, plus other scars from stupid things I've done over the years (like being careless with a belt sander). When we strip away our clothes or our egos, it's like sanding away that top grain of wood: we see things we probably don't want revealed. One might even see oneself in the mirror and ask, "What am I supposed to do with this?!" But take



Photo by FWStudio/Pexels

a closer look; find the beauty of what was and what is still being done.

What I've learned during my time as a sawdust maker (I like to call it "beard glitter") is that those imperfections are some of the most beautiful marks of opportunity. I've found over the years that, when filled with clear epoxy, pieces with visible knots and holes are the very pieces people want to buy. Why? Because they're interesting, they're beautiful, and they're part of the story of the wood. The stress the tree was under, the infestations, and the diseases once brought harm but have so much potential today. Wait—are we still talking about wood, or are we talking about ourselves?

Yes ... and yes.

My scars tell a story. The words said to me out of harm and malice have helped shape me into the man I am today. Even the regrets I have for the things I've said and done mean something today: I've learned valuable lessons. Things that were once harmful have become reminders for me to reflect before speaking, to

choose my words with love and grace, to be quick to apologize and to seek someone's forgiveness when I fear my words have harmed. My health issues have given me an opportunity to understand other people's illnesses and given me space and permission to enter into their suffering—not in a "misery loves company" way, but in the comforting way that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. But even more than this, as a woodworker, I wonder about what God sees in me as I'm stripped down and my exterior is pulled back. Does God see the facade I've put up, or does he see me for who I am—holes, scars, burns, disease, infestations, and all?

He sees it all. And to him it's probably sad. Yet it doesn't stop him from using me in ways that become beautiful and a joy to others. In my brokenness and sin, God doesn't toss me away and declare me unusable, too broken, or a waste of a person. In our brokenness,

we are not who God originally intended us to be, yet when Christ enters our lives we (eventually and hopefully) find purpose in our meanings, hope in our brokenness, joy in the scars of our suffering, and beauty in the holes. When Christ enters our lives, our scars remain; we cannot ignore the brokenness of our past. Yet in a beautiful way Christ, by his sacrifice for us sinners, fills in those spaces that have left their mark. Just as a woodworker can use epoxy to fill in blemishes and secure them to use in a project, so too we are filled by Christ's love and the Holy Spirit's work. **B**

## Imagination and Generosity

Imagination,  
touched by God's  
Word, strengthens  
faith, and  
faith exercised  
strengthens  
imagination.



John Lee is an administrator at an independent school and an interim pastor of Newtown Reformed Church in Elmhurst, N.Y. His Ph.D. is in ancient history. He is the author of the book *On Generosity* ([stone-towerpress.com](http://stone-towerpress.com)).

**AS AN EDUCATOR**, I've been thinking about the importance of imagination for a few years, ever since I read the book *The Abolition of Man*, where C.S. Lewis writes: "The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts." The work of irrigation entails engaging imaginations. But if you are like me, you have never heard a sermon on imagination.

The world speaks about the importance of imagination more than the church does. In John Lennon's song "Imagine," he envisions a utopian world without boundaries, without religions, and without countries. The assumption is that boundaries are the cause of conflict. Lennon longs for an end to wars and strife and for the establishment of peace, and he asks his listeners to imagine with him. Here is the chorus:

You may say I'm a dreamer  
But I'm not the only one  
I hope someday you'll join us  
And the world will be as one.

When Lennon sings that he is "not the only one," he is right. His song has touched millions of people, and they sing along with him.

Imagination is one of the most powerful forces in the world. The evidence is all around us. Consider Elon Musk. One day he decided to create an electric car, believing Tesla would be better than every other auto manufacturer. There were many naysayers, but we must admit Musk changed the game. Now he wants to explore space, and the capabilities of his company SpaceX rival national programs. What is Musk's secret? The two keys to his success, he says, are taking risks and using his imagination.

Of course, imagination does not always produce beauty. In fact, if you search for the word "imagination" in the Bible, most instances are negative

(Ps. 73:7; Isa. 65:2; Ezek. 13:2; Ezek. 13:17). The picture that emerges is one of people following their evil inclinations through their wild imaginations. Psalm 73:7 says, "From their calloused hearts comes iniquity; their evil imaginations have no limits." The problem here is that people's imaginations are not tethered to God's Word, but to their own sinful desires. Our imaginations need a starting point, a soil in which to germinate, take root, and grow.

The starting point of our imaginations makes all the difference. If the grounding of our imagination is sinful, then creative sinfulness will emerge. If the grounding of our imagination is goodness, truth, and beauty—namely, God's own self—then creative goodness, creative truth, and creative beauty will surface. Imagination works best when it binds itself to God. In his essay "The Well and the Shallows," G.K. Chesterton makes this point when he says, "Those who leave the tradition of truth do not escape into something which we call Freedom. They only escape into something else, which we call Fashion."

Abraham, the patriarch, offers a different paradigm. God approaches Abram in Genesis 15 in a vision and reaffirms God's promises to him. It is significant that God comes to him at this point because Abram just engaged in combat with several kings to rescue his nephew, Lot. Not only is Abram's life in jeopardy, but he also is wondering whether he would ever have a son.

"Do not be afraid, Abram," God says. "I am your shield, your very great reward" (Gen. 15:1). God promises Abram that he will have a child and many other descendants. "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. ... So shall your offspring be" (Gen. 15:5). This was the turning point of Abram's life. God allowed him to use his physical eyes to



Graphic by Steve Johnson/Unsplash

see an invisible reality and make that invisible reality into a vision worth pursuing. This is what Paul calls faith:

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:18-21, ESV).

Abraham believed and walked in faith because his imagination, tethered to God's promises, fired his heart.


If this reading is correct, then imagination, touched by God's Word, strengthens faith, and faith exercised strengthens imagination. Imagination, therefore, gives spiritual

eyes, the ability to see what is not there, and the power to birth it into existence. Therefore, we neglect our imaginations to our peril, a danger that Walter Brueggemann, the great Old Testament professor, warns the church about.

Brueggemann reminds us that cultivating our imaginations will not be easy. He grounds his arguments in Israel's history. At one point, Israel lost its ability to imagine. It started during the reign of Israel's kings. The kings created an intellectual and social milieu that domesticated people and even temple worship. And under Solomon, Israel became like Canaan. The people, therefore, could only see what royal power wanted them to see. Other options became invisible, unthinkable, and even untruthful. Incrementally, Solomon re-enslaved his people. According to 1 Kings 5:13-15, he conscripted 30,000 men for his building projects. He also had 70,000 carriers and 80,000 stonemasons. Finally, exile came, and the lack of imagination continued.

This is why prophets are so important. They see the world through different eyes. In a word, they can *imagine*. Brueggemann argues that a prophet is one who can challenge even the dominant vision. The goal, therefore, is to imagine a better world, one that is different from the agenda set forth by the hegemonic forces that be.

The church must be an alternate voice, must offer an alternate vision, and must live an alternate life, one between heaven and earth. It must bring down heaven and lift earth heavenward. So how can it accomplish these feats? Let me borrow an illustration from N.T. Wright's article "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" Wright asks us to imagine the discovery of a Shakespearean play, but the play is missing the fifth act. What can be done? He suggests we allow experienced Shakespearean actors to drink in the play and make it their own. When the time comes for the final act, they improvise. They use their imaginations, which are tethered to the play and to Shakespeare's entire body of work.

The church should do the same. We should imbibe the Word of God, meditate on the character of God, and grow in the experience of the Holy Spirit. Then, like Abraham and Paul, we can walk out in faith to do, to serve, to build, and to love. If believers lived this kind of life, we would undoubtedly bring beauty down from heaven and plant it on earth, where it will grow. 

1. In your experience, how have Christians viewed imagination—positively, negatively, or both?
2. How do you feel about your imagination, and has it helped your spiritual life?

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

# What Come From Away Teaches Us About Hospitality

**MY HOMELAND, CANADA**, comes off really well in *Come From Away*, which is just one reason it is my favorite musical. The scene where Newfoundlanders respectfully stand quietly as the U.S. news broadcasts a moment of silence for victims of 9/11 made me choke up, and not for the last time. Bring your tissues to this one, folks!

*Come From Away* is a snapshot of Canadian/U.S. relations at their best, a tale that, like our own binational denomination, involves both countries in profound ways. The Broadway smash, now on tour all over North America, is set on Sept. 11, 2001, and the few days afterward. It opens at a Tim Hortons in small Gander, Newfoundland, with townsfolk chatting over their coffee and Timbits, oblivious to the fact that they are about to become world famous for their hospitality.

Based on true events, the musical depicts how 6,700 passengers on 38 airplanes were diverted from U.S. airspace after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon landed in Newfoundland. People from all ethnicities, cultures, and religions descend upon the good people of Gander, who must feed and shelter them and also tend to their fear and trauma. One character can't get ahold of her son, a New York City firefighter, and others are frantic to reach family members.

Gander's openheartedness beautifully lives into the Bible's Greek word for hospitality: *philoxenia*, meaning "love for the stranger or foreigner."

Hospitality is the antidote for another word with Greek roots: xenophobia, or dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries. Ali, an Egyptian Muslim, is wary around people who treat him as if he is a criminal, but the people of Gander accept him with kindness and grace. In one stirring scene,

a gay man sings a Christian hymn from his childhood faith tradition that he felt had spurned him. This hymn is blended with a Hebrew song about shalom, sung by a Jew, and a Muslim song sung by Ali. To me, this seemed less like universalism and more like a gracious example of people of different faiths harmonizing together as they live as fellow human beings.

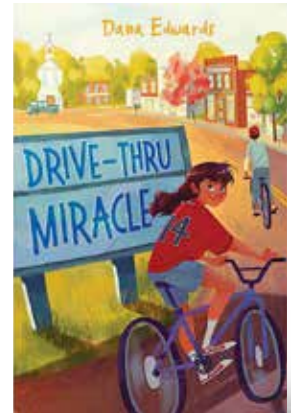
*Come From Away* is also one of the funniest, snappiest musicals I've ever seen (and I reviewed theater for 17 years for *The Grand Rapids Press*). One of the funniest lines comes when a friendly townspeople in a blue smock says to one of the newcomers, "Welcome to Walmart. Would you like to come to my house and take a shower?"

Whether crying or laughing, I was struck with the message of welcoming the stranger, whoever they might be and whenever they might appear. The word "hospital" is related to the word "hospitality," and the townspeople of Gander bind up the wounds of the lost and hurting in some of their worst moments.

We too can take a page from the residents of Gander, who invited strangers and foreigners into their homes and hearts just as Jesus asked us to do in Matthew 25:43. Like them, we can be a "hospital" for those God sends our way, whether they live next door or come from away. **B**



Lorilee Craker, a native of Winnipeg, Man., lives in Grand Rapids, Mich., in a 1924 house full of teenagers, pets, exchange students, and houseplants. The author of 15 books, including *Anne of Green Gables*, *My Daughter and Me*, she is the Mixed Media editor of *The Banner*. Find her on her podcast, *Eat Like a Heroine*, or on Instagram @thebooksellersdaughter.



## Drive-Thru Miracle

By Dana Edwards

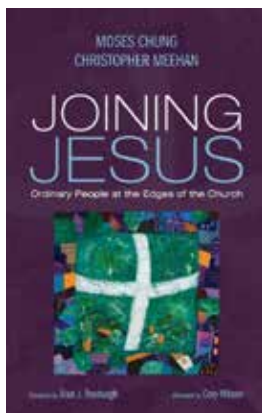
Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Eleven-year-old Mae Moore lives in Jessup, Ga., with her parents and her older sister, Shelby, who has a severe type of cerebral palsy.

When Hopewell Community Church offers an outdoor drive-thru prayer ministry for the community, Mae thinks about the unanswered prayers she's prayed asking God to heal her sister.

Humorous, hopeful, and realistic about the issues faced by children raised in families where a sibling is medically fragile, this novel for middle school readers points to our God of all hope, who meets his children in their needs. Author Dana Edwards also effectively explores the effects of bullying, poverty, and financial stress on children, and she offers a profoundly human portrait of a pastor who has experienced tragic loss and who cares for his community. (B&H Kids)





## Joining Jesus: Ordinary People at the Edges of the Church

By Moses Chung and Christopher Meehan

Reviewed by Agnes Mastin

This compilation of essays describes the efforts of Christians who model their ministries after the early church in Acts and Luke 10. The authors, both of whom have worked for the Christian Reformed Church, document the love Christians across North America have shown to their neighbors in out-of-the-ordinary outreach ministries.

They encourage readers to “join God in whatever he is already doing” and make the point that when churches fail to reach the people in ordinary ways, then it is time to do the unordinary and the simple things that convey the awe-inspiring magnificence of God’s love.

From coffee shop ministries to stone soup gatherings to just being a good neighbor, churches and individuals across Canada and the United States are finding what it means to join Jesus. (Cascade Books)



## The Desert Island Discs Podcast

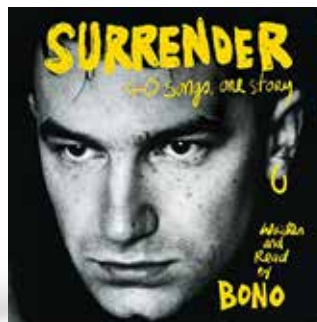
Reviewed by Adele Gallogly

On this BBC podcast, artists, politicians, musicians, and other high-profile “cast-aways” choose the eight musical tracks they would take with them to their mythical lonely isle. At the end of each episode they also get to pick one book and a “luxury item” to take along.

This show existed long before podcasts were popular; it began as a radio show in 1942. The hosts have changed over the years, as have some details of the format, but the fascinating depth of these conversations remains.

Spiritual beliefs and religious themes often arise in these music-inspired discussions, too.

Hymns and choral songs make regular appearances. In fact, a recent study revealed that the most chosen piece of music was Handel’s *Messiah*, selected by 119 cast-aways. (BBC)



## Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story (Audiobook)

By Bono

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

In his memoir, Bono writes the story of U2 by telling one complete story through the lens of 40 different songs. In the audiobook, Bono reads his own words and begins each chapter by singing acoustic/simplified versions of the songs. The chapters are also filled with sound effects that enhance the story telling, and Bono is fantastic at reading his own words with nuance and feeling.

For fans of U2, this book will give the behind-the-scenes look they have been waiting a long time for, and they will not be disappointed. They’ll get an inside look at band members, recording sessions, marriage and family dynamics, friends, family, death, God, humanitarian work, and a myriad of reflections on politics, fame, fatherhood, and everything in between. (Knopf)

### The Lowdown

**An Alternative School System:** *Education for Hope*, by John E. Hull, traces the little-known history of an alternative school system erected in Canada by post-WWII Dutch Neo-Calvinist immigrants. ([Johnehull.com](http://Johnehull.com))

**Based on the Beloved Books by Louise Penny:** *Three Pines* is a streaming series that follows Chief Inspector Armand Gamache as he investigates cases beneath the idyllic surface of the Quebec village, finding long-buried secrets and facing a few ghosts of his own. (Amazon Prime)

**What’s Love Got to Do With It?:** In this British romantic comedy, a filmmaker decides to document her best friend’s journey toward arranged marriage. Starring Emma Thompson, Lily James, and Shazad Latif. (January, Working Title Films)

**The Spare Speaks:** In his own words (including narrating the audiobook version), Prince Harry tells about his life as the one second in line for succession to the British monarchy and about his marriage to Meghan Markle in his explosive new memoir, *Spare*. (Jan. 10, Random House)

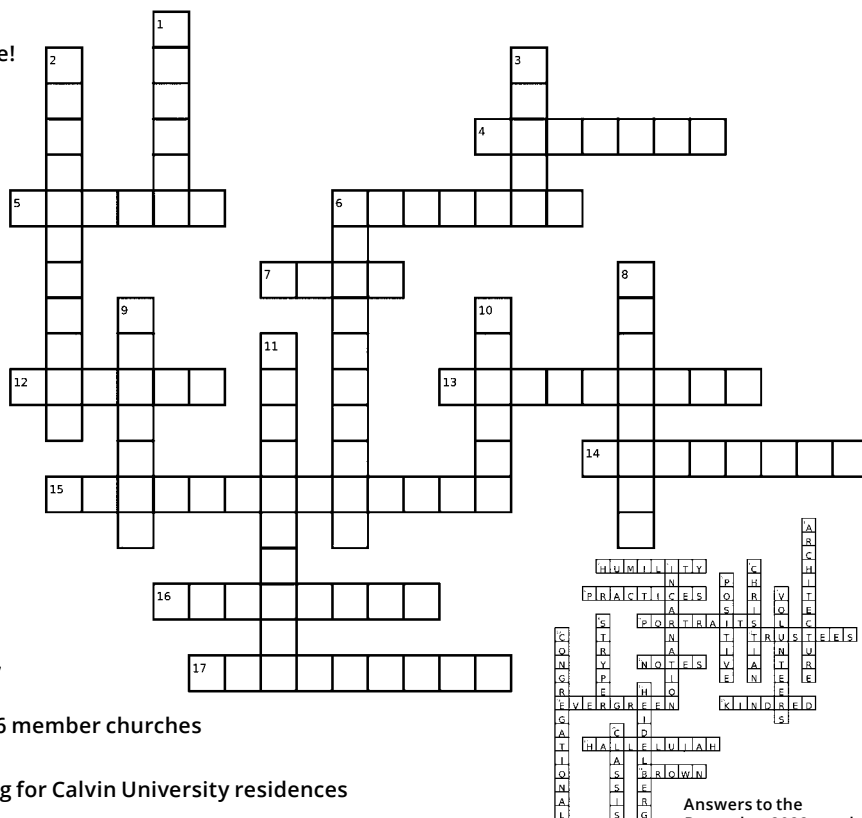
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!

**Down**

- 1. Director of Synodical Services since 2007
- 2. Doing God's will sometimes requires this
- 3. The title of Prince Harry's new memoir
- 6. Part of the fruit of the Spirit
- 8. With the help of the Holy Spirit, these still happen
- 9. This church received a "Flood Hero" award
- 10. They are important for controlling insect and rodent populations
- 11. The Greek word in the Bible for hospitality

**Across**

- 4. A "Prayer \_\_\_\_\_"
- 5. Pastor who is helping Venezuelan churches to affiliate with the CRCNA
- 6. "Beard \_\_\_\_\_" is another term for sawdust
- 7. Author of *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story*
- 12. Transitional executive director (Canada)
- 13. Alberta community that is home to the Montana, Samson, Louis Bull, and Ermineskin Cree Nations
- 14. The \_\_\_\_\_ of Reformed Churches already has 66 member churches
- 15. Several Christian schools won these in 2022
- 16. The \_\_\_\_\_ Team provides spiritual programming for Calvin University residences
- 17. The Faith \_\_\_\_\_ Project



Answers to the December 2022 puzzle

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### Church Positions Available

**FLEETWOOD CRC** in Surrey, British Columbia is seeking a full-time Lead Pastor. Our desire is to find a gifted preacher, caring shepherd, and someone with proven leadership abilities. Please contact in confidence John Bron at [john@bron.biz](mailto:john@bron.biz) or 778-246-2766. Visit our website [www.fleetwoodcrc.org](http://www.fleetwoodcrc.org) for a full job description and our Church Profile.

**FULL TIME PASTOR** Kanawha Christian Reformed Church is a small church in a small community which we believe is a blessed asset to the Lord's Kingdom in our area of Iowa. Our theology is traditional CRC yet is open, affirming and contemporary in spirit. We are seeking a full time Pastor. Interested? Please contact Pastoral Search Comm at [luppenlj@gmail.com](mailto:luppenlj@gmail.com).

**HIRING FULL-TIME SENIOR PASTOR** Tacoma Christian Reformed Community Church (TCRCC) is seeking a full-time Senior Pastor passionate about preaching the word of God and engaging a multi-generational congregation in pastoral care. Located in Tacoma, Washington of the Great Pacific Northwest—with views of the Puget Sound and Mt. Rainier—TCRCC emphasizes selfless service. This senior pastor will lead the TCRCC congregation in the Christian Reformed Church tradition. If interested in applying, visit [www.tacomacrc.org](http://www.tacomacrc.org).

**PART TIME PASTOR** Crossroads CRC in Madison, WI seeks a part time (20 hr/wk) pastor. Responsible for Sunday services, occasional church events, visitations, and meetings. Send resume to Council Chair, Brock Chalmers ([crossroads@crossroadscrc.org](mailto:crossroads@crossroadscrc.org)).

**SEEKING LEAD PASTOR** Community CRC in Roselawn Indiana seeks a lead pastor to serve through sound preaching, discipleship, and administration at our outreach oriented church. For information go to <https://communitychurchroselawn.com>

**SEEKING WORSHIP DIRECTOR IN DENVER** Hope Fellowship CRC is a warm, multi-generational church in Denver, CO. We enjoy both traditional & contemporary music and liturgy. We seek an individual who can help us cultivate a culture of worship that is Spirit-led, grace-filled, creative, and hospitable. Please email [Sheri@hopefellowshipcrc.org](mailto:Sheri@hopefellowshipcrc.org) if you are interested.

**SENIOR PASTOR REQUIRED** Hebron CRC requires an experienced pastor to lead and encourage our members in fulfilling the great commission in the fast growing multi-ethnic

community of Whitby, ON Canada. Please contact Phil Ralph at [phil@woundedwarriors.ca](mailto:phil@woundedwarriors.ca) for more information.

**TEACHING PASTOR** Bridge of Hope CRC in Sioux Center, IA, is prayerfully seeking our next pastor. This person will serve the congregation by preaching sermons while empowering others to lead. The primary function of this role is preaching/teaching and the position is designed to be half-time, flexible in nature, with potential for the candidate to be bi-vocational. We are searching for someone who can help us achieve our vision of becoming a church of joyful energy, a church of joyful order and accountability, and a church of joyful hospitality. Sioux Center is a growing community, home to Dordt University. Please contact in confidence [employment@bridgecrc.org](mailto:employment@bridgecrc.org) and visit our website for additional information (<https://www.bridgecrc.org/employment>). We look forward to meeting you!

### Birthdays

#### BIRTHDAY 80 YEARS

**MARVIN J. (JAY) TANS, JR.** celebrated his 80th birthday on December 10, 2022. We are blessed to have a servant teacher as our husband, dad, and grandpa. With much love: Sharlene, Annette, Abbey, Jared, Emma, Lynelle, and Tim.

### Obituaries



**DEKKER, Jacob Martin (Jack):** Passed peacefully on Thursday, November 17, 2022 in Whitby. Beloved husband of Ann Dekker. Loved father of David (Elizabeth) of Kitchener, The Rev. Dr. James (Christine) of Grand Rapids, Michigan and Ronald of Whitby. Cherished Grandfather of Jacob (Alicia), Andrew (Elissa), Hanna, Corinne, Rebekah (Kyle), and Erin. Great-Grandfather of Elise, Ana and Adaline. Cremation has taken place. Ann would like to express her appreciation for the love, prayers and support that she has received from her friends and family. As expressions of sympathy, donations to The Bancroft Pregnancy Care Centre would be appreciated by the family. Arrangements entrusted to M.G. Daly Funeral Home, Maynooth. (613) 338-3259 (Condolence messages may be e-mailed to [dalyfuneralhome@bellnet.ca](mailto:dalyfuneralhome@bellnet.ca) or visit [www.mgdalyfuneralhome.com](http://www.mgdalyfuneralhome.com)).

**DRAAYER, Gladys Jane (VanEerden)** died on November 17, 2022. She is survived by her husband of 71 years, Sidney Draayer; children Ronald Draayer, Thomas (Luci) Draayer, Janice (Richard Flanders) Draayer Holland, Sherrie Draayer, and Randall (Bonnie) Draayer; brothers and sisters-in-law Laura Van Eerden, Melvin Gezon, Arlene Brandt and James VanSingen; and numerous nieces and nephews. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her son, Kenneth Draayer in 2006; her sisters Annetta and Fred Vanden Berg, Winifred and Peter Post, Ruth and Mel Fryling, Joanne Gezon; and brother John Van Eerden.

**KWANTES, Dorothy Josephine (Bulk),** age 95, died November 13, 2022. Dorothy is survived by her daughter Joan (Patrick) Nagle, brother-in-law Ken (Irene) Kwantes, sister-in-law Patricia Bulk, nieces and nephews, and dear friends. She was preceded in death by her parents, husband, grandson Christopher Nagle, brother Melvin Bulk, sister-in-law Janet (Ernie) Feenstra, 2 brothers in infancy, and 4 step-sisters. Dorothy was a member of Alger Park CRC.

**ORDT, Kenneth L.** went peacefully into the arms of Jesus on December 1, 2022 at the age of 67. He was at home surrounded by his loving family.

**PETERS, Neal** of Hudsonville, MI, age 94 passed away on Nov 12, 2022. He is survived by his wife of 67 yrs, Ann and his children Ed (Susan), Tim (Sharon), Kathy (Ken) Brock, Ernie (Maria), 11 grandchildren and spouses, and 15 great grandchildren. Neal was a member of Ridgewood CRC, Jenison MI.



**VANDER SLIK, Marjorie J. (Westra)** went to be with the Lord on November 25, 2022. Marjorie was born on October 27, 1939 in Kalamazoo, MI. She was preceded in death by her parents, Orin and Marie Westra, and also her brother, Wallace. She is survived by her husband, Rev. James, her three children, Cristine (Cliff Wrenner), William and James II, along with her three grand children, Samuel, Avery and Kate Wrenner, and sisters Velma Otten and Phyllis Young. Marge was a gifted pianist and organist with the Christian Reformed Churches in Kalamazoo, MI (Millwood CRC), Oak Lawn, IL (Kedvale CRC) Port St. Lucie, FL (Sunlight Community Church), and Modesto, CA (1st CRC). The family is comforted by knowing that Jesus was her Lord and Savior and that she is now free from cancer and with her Heavenly Father.

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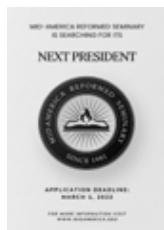
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**VANHAMERSVELD**, Dorothy Mae Lindemulder, entered heaven on All Saints Day which was Sunday, November 6, 2022. She is survived by her children Mike (Peggy) and Terri (Jack) DeJong; grandchildren Jack (Sonya), Paul (Elizabeth), Mike (Colleen), Lynn (Zachariah), Rachel (Aaron), Matt (Adeola), Sarah (Mario), Samuel, Sarah, and Nathaniel and 16 great grandchildren. Preceding Dorothy in death are her husband, Dale; parents Ralph and Tressa Lindemulder and brothers and sisters: Harold (Marge), Bill (Phyllis), Ralph Lincoln, Gary, Patricia (Gil) Contreras; several nieces and a nephew. She was a member of Church of the Servant.

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## When You're Tired, Lean In

When God's restful presence is the power that fuels your life, pushing through hardships will be worth it because you'll be doing it for the kingdom of God.

**MY ALARM CUT INTO** my too-short sleep, and I groaned. I snoozed it until a sliver of light slipped underneath my blinds. I sat up and peeked out the window. Snow blanketed the trees, and birds sang their hearts out into the cold. As I stepped into the nostril-freezing air and admired the beauty, a sense of weariness dragged me down.

Now, almost a year later, I can understand why I was so exhausted. I had just temporarily moved from Ontario to Alberta, started as an intern at a local church, and entered a new job with a think tank. Throughout these transitions, the enemy was trying to steal my identity as God's beloved daughter, and I was grieving many losses in my life.

During the church internship, my mentor would often check in with me by asking, "How's your heart doing?"

That question soothed my weary soul.

So, I am going to ask you now:

How are you doing?

No, how are you *really* doing?

Some of you, like me, are going through a season of change. Maybe you're graduating high school, starting post-secondary schooling, entering a new job, or leaning into a new opportunity. You might be excited by all this change, but perhaps you feel that this is all taking a toll on your body.

Recently at the dinner table, I asked each of my roommates to describe their current emotions in one word. They responded positively at first because we were having delicious stuffed peppers for supper, but then I asked, "Do you also feel a general undertone of tiredness?" The answer was a resounding "YES!" This is a good example of my peers' experience of constant exhaustion. If I were to ask you this question at the dinner

table, what would your answer be? You might be surprised by what you discover if you dig into what you're truly feeling.

One reason you could be exhausted is because of this season of change you've found yourself in. Might I suggest that this season is birthing growth in you, and that this growth is causing you pain, and that's why you're tired?

If this is you, I have two words for you: lean in.

Lean into this season of growing pains with your Father. Growing is hard work, yet know this: God has placed you in this season for a reason, however hard it might be. Lean into the hard times and the good times. Lean into your job when it's exciting and when it's boring; lean into your friendships when they're frustrating and when they're fun. Lean into your school assignments and the community that God has placed you in. Lean into these highs and lows while clinging to your Father for dear life. Because the more you lean into God's call on your life and the more you take risks for the kingdom of God, the more you are going to grow in Christ. And when God's restful presence is the power that fuels your life, pushing through hardships will be worth it because you'll be doing it for the kingdom of God.

I'm not saying that this will solve your alarm-snoozing habit, but when you lean in with God even when you're tired, your life will be more beautiful than you could ever imagine. For Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." **B**



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

## Comfort from an Epitaph

On a foggy  
summer morning,  
I woke with the  
word *Go* in mind.  
I got up and drove  
to the cemetery.



Alice J. Wisler is the author of numerous novels and a devotional on grief and loss (*Getting Out of Bed in the Morning*). She attends Blacknall Memorial Presbyterian Church in Durham, N.C. Her website is [alicewisler.com](http://alicewisler.com).

**YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT** will wake you in the morning—a reminder of something you forgot to do the day before, a cherished memory that rests against your chest, or a word that turns into a call to action. On a foggy summer morning, I woke with the word *Go* in mind. I got up and drove to the cemetery.

When I arrived at the sloping green grounds dotted with bouquets of flowers, I walked to a tiny slab of stone and gave my usual greeting: “Hey, honey.” Taking a lemon-scented wet wipe, I cleaned my son’s marker of bird poop and brushed away twigs so his name and dates were clearly visible.

*Daniel P. Wisler*

*August 25, '92 - Feb. 2, '97*

*Our Darling Boy*

Continuing with the rituals I’d developed over the years, I ambled across the grass, pausing to read familiar epitaphs. Both Audrey and Taylor had only one date on their graves; they were born the day they died.

Solomon’s grave was new to me and drew me in. The Scripture passage on his marker was well known: *I have finished my course. I have kept the faith.* The line, from 2 Timothy 4:7, was quoting a version of the Bible that reads “my course,” not “the course.”

My first response to this stranger’s epitaph was “Well, Solomon, you had 75 years, so the passage makes sense to put on your resting place.” Daniel, Audrey, and Taylor didn’t get that much time.


Images of Daniel cycled through my mind. There was the day he wore a “Jesus Loves You” pin to the hospital and said that Jesus was his friend. Once he told me that you give gifts to your friends, so he handed out stickers to his. When we crossed the mile-high swinging bridge at Grandfather

Mountain during a family vacation, he held my hand because I am afraid of heights. I saw his little face and the way it lit up when his siblings entered his hospital room or when I bought watermelon.

From memory I recited another part of the verse. *I have fought the good fight.* Or to put it in Solomon’s style: *I have fought my good fight.*

As a cancer patient, Daniel had fought through rounds of chemotherapy, surgeries, radiation treatments, infections, and invasive needles.

I stood immobilized for a few minutes. Then I walked back to Daniel’s spot. “You were created for a purpose, and you lived it,” I said in the way a mama talks to her child’s grave. “I don’t know why you had to leave for heaven at 4 years old, but your life was every bit as profound as someone who got to live to see 75 or 85 or 92.”

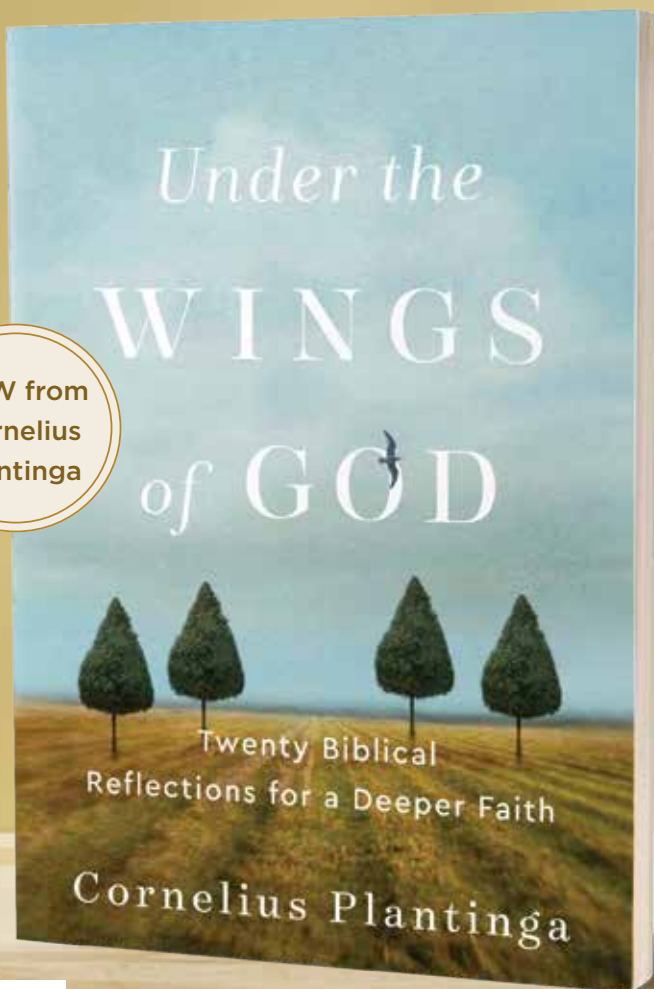
The mist still hovered; there was no burst of sunlight, no sound of angel wings or trumpets, absolutely no physical indication that I had had an epiphany. But I knew that God had spoken to me through the words on Solomon’s grave and that the comfort of the Scripture verse would stay with me always. 

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