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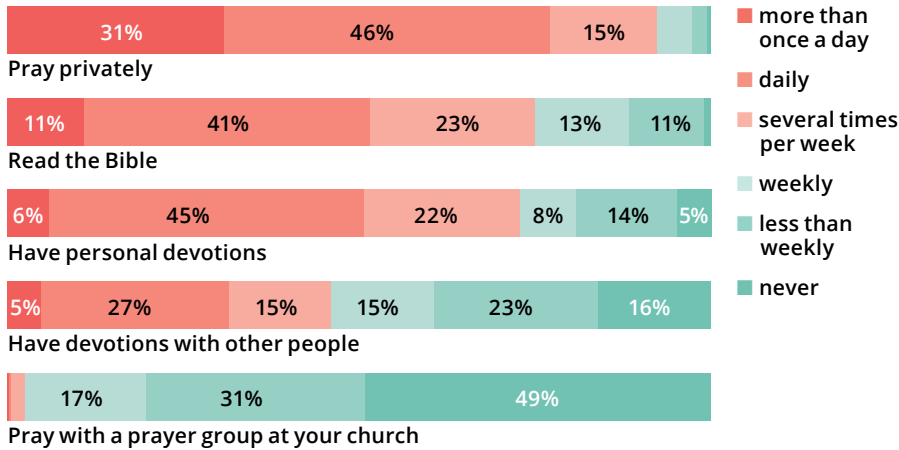
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BY THE NUMBERS

The 2023 CRCNA Congregant Survey shows respondents pray or do devotions alone most of the time. 77% pray privately daily or more than once a day. 49% never pray with a prayer group. 51% have daily or more than daily personal devotions. Only 32% have devotions that often with others.

Solo Spiritual Practice

How often do you:



Percentages are rounded - not all add to 100. The 2023 denominational survey was conducted by DataWise Consulting LLC with 1530 respondents. Find the full survey at bit.ly/CRCNA2023survey.

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.)

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Faith and Love

Faith without
love is not faith,
only speculation
or knowledge
or mere
intellectual assent.



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

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

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

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

I AM STILL WRESTLING with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Holy Spirit has prompted me to dwell on this passage. I brought it up in my previous editorial (“Is Love a Salvation Matter?”, Sept. 2023) which generated some interesting reactions from readers, and it might not even be the last time I dig into this Scripture. A common concern was whether I was suggesting a theology of salvation by works of love.


I believe that our salvation comes through God’s grace alone and that we are justified by faith in Christ alone. Christ’s teaching in the parable of the Good Samaritan, however, challenges my formerly neat theological categories of how faith, love, and salvation are supposed to work in relation to each other. I used a question as the September editorial’s title because I am not completely sure about my exegetical conclusions. As in many of my editorials, I offered an honest exploration from a fellow struggling Christ follower, not an authoritative word from on high. I do not pretend to have the last word on any matter I write about. But I do believe in offering what the Holy Spirit has placed on my heart and has graciously helped me to discover.

I am trying to read Scripture on its own terms and, to take my own advice from another editorial, not domesticate Scripture to fit in my theological comfort zones (“Signs of Domesticating Scripture,” Nov. 2021). I could easily have read the parable through my own theological lenses and have predetermined conclusions. But I am choosing to honestly wrestle with the passage, laying aside preconceived notions and seeing what the text is saying in its own historical and cultural context. (See also “Misreading Scripture Cross-culturally,” p. 32.)

As much as we talk about “saving faith,” might Jesus also have a concept of “saving love”? And because the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of both

(Gal. 5:22-23), is it so hard to conceive that the two are intertwined? The late Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul once wrote, “Faith without love is not faith, only speculation or knowledge or mere intellectual assent. The fruit of authentic faith is always love” (*The Purpose of God*, p. 37). Most of us are more comfortable with the language of love as the fruit of faith. Faith comes first. That fits better in our neat theological system. But what if it’s messier than that?

Some who wrote me letters grasped the interconnectedness of faith and love. One affirmed that love is indeed a salvation matter, citing James 2:26: “Faith without deeds (of love) is dead.” (See also Justin Bailey’s Big Question on faith on p. 13.)

I think it is important to ask if love is a salvation matter, even if only to remind us of Sproul’s warning that faith without love is not genuine faith. We Reformed folks in practice act and react as if believing rightly, which often gets reduced to intellectually holding correct doctrines, is a salvation matter. Maybe the Holy Spirit placed that question on my heart as a corrective nudge for me and for us. We have too often elevated the intellectual parts of faith to the detriment of its other parts. Let’s try to find a biblical balance to our spiritual lives. 



REPLY ALL

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

Synod 2023

So *The Banner* concludes that Synod 2023 was “Incomplete and Broken” (July/August 2023) without, if that is true, (noting) one of the big reasons for that being the recent arbitrary synodical rule that says that Synod ends at 3 p.m. Thursday. A truly deliberative assembly cannot operate properly with such a rule facing it throughout its deliberations, as this year’s synod shows. That arbitrary rule must be removed, and the three-minutes-per-speech rule should be reevaluated. Synod’s deliberations should be directed by the Spirit, not by restrictive rules.

» Rev. Marvin Van Donselaar //
Sioux Center, Iowa

I find myself frustrated, disappointed, and discouraged by the reports that have come out of Synod 2023. We yet again allowed the conversations and discussions at synod to be dominated by the human sexuality report, and yet again we ... have all clearly missed the signpost that Jesus laid before us Mathew 22:37-40: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” If we look at what happened at synod, I doubt anyone would say the discussions around the human sexuality report were loving to God and our neighbor. ... Could you imagine how differently synod would have turned out if every discussion and decision was built on the framework of loving God and loving our neighbor above

all else? Perhaps we arrive at the same conclusions, but the journey would have looked vastly different.

» Dan Veeneman // Abbotsford, B.C.

Watching our synod in action on our computer, with very competent leadership, was a delight. The LGBTQ+ issue dividing our denomination and our leaders’ desire to hold our denomination together were respectfully done. In retrospect, I think all the delegates would agree that the LGBTQ+ community is not to be disdained nor ignored and (that) we are all sinners and need Jesus. The main issue before our denomination was not our attitude in this regard, but whether the LGBTQ+ lifestyle was, in the past and now currently, ever looked upon by God with favor. Once our denomination’s members can agree on this question, then we can spend our time on how we approach this community. Answering this question is key. This issue is black and white. As oil and water do not mix, no matter how hard we try, so also right and wrong do not mix. Unless it can be clearly shown that this behavior was ever, anywhere, approved in Scripture, we must side with Scripture. Then we can proceed prayerfully in determining God’s strategy forward.

» Carl R. Smits // Cedar Lake, Ind.

As I watched the proceedings of Synod 2023, I found it hard to recognize the church I thought I knew. While I was growing up, my church taught me that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” This synod tried to teach me that unless we are already pure, we are not acceptable to the church. What a change in perspective! I hope we realize that if we try to purge all the sinners out of the church we will not have any people left to be the church.

» Ellen Hamilton // Grandville, Mich.

The Synod 2023 debate on same-sex marriage made clear that the conservative majority intends to prevent its confessional dictate from ever being challenged, permanently requiring that every church officebearer not only accept but agree with the majority position. But the majority did not answer a second question I have about its intentions: Does it want to force out every Christian Reformed Church member who disagrees, or will it be satisfied with denying us all decision-making authority forever?

» James Leunk // Rochester, N.Y.

Had this synod been around to advise Amos, the book of Amos would likely read very differently (“Synod Urges ‘Discretion’ in CRCNA Communications on Social, Political Issues,” July/August 2023). When Amos addressed these leaders about social justice, he did not mince words. ... If the church wants to prove itself relevant in today’s world, perhaps it should take a lesson from Amos and speak plainly and assertively about issues that have social and political dimensions. The church hasn’t been bashful about abortion and same-sex marriage; it should be equally assertive in advocating for access to health care and equal educational opportunities for poor communities, economic inequity due to racial discrimination, and welcoming strangers in need to our shores.

» Frank Barefield // Holland, Mich.

What Is Unity?

I so resonate with Ron Polinder’s Vantage Point, “Will We Ever Learn What Unity Means?” (May 2023). He writes, “Synod 2022’s decision to make a traditional view of human sexuality ‘confessional’ is what creates the greatest threat to our unity.” We are faced with a brand-new reality: legally sanctioned same-sex covenanted relationships. It’s understandable that we differ in how to interpret Scripture, since it does not and could not directly address this 21st-century phenomenon. But it does directly address the sin of

A Strength-based Dementia Perspective

turning differences into divisions: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit ...” (Eph. 4:3). Ron is my kind of “right-winger.” He knows that churches, like airplanes, fly best on both a right and a left wing.

» Bob De Moor // Edmonton, Alta.

Unity should not be the goal; it should be scriptural unity (“Will We Ever Learn What Unity Means?” May 2023). The Bible is very clear that the Lord’s purpose for his human creation was that of a permanent, monogamous marriage between one man and one woman (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:21-24; Matt. 19:3-6). Synod 2022 and 2023’s decisions rightly affirmed that biblical truth. Unity to me means that we all believe and agree with the Bible (“sola scriptura”). To have true scriptural unity, all members of the CRCNA’s agencies, ministries, boards, broader assemblies, and other entities should “affirm, without reservation, all the doctrines and beliefs of the CRCNA” (Classis Central Plains’ overture, p. 17, May 2023 *Banner*).

» Carmen Reitsma // New Sharon, Iowa

SINCE RETIRING IN 2022 from a nursing home career of more than 30 years, I have been reconsidering my own perspectives on dementia. I attended the 2022 Dementia Action Alliance Conference in Indianapolis. When I checked in, the desk clerk told me to follow the yellow tape to find conference locations. My first thought was, “What a great idea—wayfinding cues for people living with dementia.” But why do I think I do not need wayfinding cues myself? I followed yellow tape to the correct elevator, the bathroom, the exhibit hall, across the street under train tracks, and into a different building. Though I’m hopelessly poor at directions, not once did I need help. I thought how great it was to have the tape in place for people living with dementia.

When I checked out, I mentioned to the desk clerk how helpful the yellow tape was. She shared how sorry they all were to see the dementia conference end. “None of us was interrupted answering the same direction questions over and over and over,” she said. The yellow tape helped us all find our way around an old building.

Understanding what we have in common helps me not only to understand my own cognitive function, but to better support those living with dementia.

In the introduction to his book *Living in the Memories of God*, John Swinton challenges me to consider how I want to be treated if my memory is lost. His own answer is: “I hope that I will be loved and cared for just for who I am, even if who I am is difficult for me and for others.” And in the book *Dementia with Dignity*, author Judy Cornish reminds me that not all cognitive skills are lost to dementia. Yes, dementia diminishes

Persons living with dementia do have strengths.

rational thinking, memory, and some attention skills, but we seldom hear about the cognitive skills that remain, such as our intuition, experiential skills, and other attention skills.

The real experts are people living with dementia and their companions. Persons living with dementia do have strengths. When words and facts are forgotten, emotional memories accumulate. And memories can be present even as they become less accessible. I am learning as a dementia companion that I can fill in memory gaps if I understand which cognitive skills have been lost and how to work with those that remain.

Loss of memories and abilities doesn’t make a person less of a person, and there is value in seeing how much we still have in common. As the yellow tape at my conference reminded me, we are all in this together. **B**



Ruth Minnema is the owner of Perspectives Coaching (perspectivescoaching.us), a dementia education and coaching business that supports families, churches, and long-term care communities. She is a member of Hope Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Denver, Colo.

As I Was Saying

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- » Reducing Anxiety by Burning Sweetgrass
- » What Happens After the Party?
- » The Difficult Synod of 2023 and What It Says About the CRC



Belonging Gets Complicated

By William Katerberg

Editor's Note: This is the second in a three-part series about what enduring values have helped hold us together in the Christian Reformed Church and what might continue to hold us together going forward. You can read the first article online at TheBanner.org or in the September issue.

The Christian Reformed “world” of the immigrant era was a network of “complete institutions.” I described this network in my previous article.

Immigrant-owned businesses and CRC churches, schools, and magazines fostered a powerful sense of belonging, religiously and ethnically. “In our isolation lies our strength,” Dutch Reformed folk sometimes said.

This isolation was unraveling in the CRC in the United States by the 1950s and in Canada by the 1990s. John Kromminga, who would become president of Calvin Seminary, wrote about this in 1949. He argued that faithful churches combined with Christian schools and strong ethnic ties had allowed the CRC to retain its Reformed orthodoxy. But what would happen as isolation ended and Dutch Reformed folk in the U.S. became confidently American and increasingly well-off?

In 1955, Kromminga discussed “problems and opportunities in Canada.” The tens of thousands of Dutch Reformed immigrants arriving in Canada would assimilate quickly, he predicted, leaving behind their isolation. But they would become Canadians, not Americans, and appropriately so. Kromminga wondered whether national differences might lead the American and Canadian wings of the church to separate.

CRC leaders in Canada soon did raise questions about whether an American-based denomination could effectively serve people in Canada. Must Canadian congregations send their “quota” money for denominational ministries to Grand Rapids? Or could they direct money to Canadian projects, perhaps in cooperation with other Canadian churches? Should there be American and Canadian national synods in the CRC as well as a general synod? Some American CRC members in turn worried about the impact on “their” church of this new wave of Dutch immigrants, with their unfamiliar ideas and old-world accents.

The end of isolation thus gave CRC leaders reasons to worry. They observed middle-class CRC families, like other Americans, going on

vacations and enjoying prosperity. Some were wintering in Florida in their retirement. Would worshiping at non-CRC churches while away from home lead them astray? The CRC developed its conference grounds in 1950 as one response. But would people from distant parts of the United States and Canada come to Michigan to camp? Similarly, worried about its “covenant youth” joining the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the CRC started the Calvinist Cadet Corps for boys and Calvinettes (now GEMS) for girls.

While he saw potential problems coming with assimilation, Kromminga also saw opportunities. He observed, for example, that the CRC might “loom even larger in Canadian life” than in America, as Canadian members would be a larger percentage of the national population than those in the U.S.

Kromminga also played a lead role in organizing the CRC’s centennial celebrations in 1957. Centennial programming told the story of the CRC in North America. The story included the history of Dutch immigration but downplayed ethnicity in favor of emphasizing faithfulness to Reformed orthodoxy. It was designed to encourage CRC congregations to evangelize in their local communities and to have influence in society. But opening to

the outside world did not just mean Christian Reformed influence going out. It also meant the world coming in.

'Going Out' and 'Coming In'

An example of the "going out" was the influence of Calvin College (now University) on evangelical colleges in the U.S. and Canada. Calvin's signature emphasis was and is integrating Christian faith into all areas of study and encouraging graduates to do the same in their lives and work. Its faculty were among the leaders in developing and promoting this approach to higher education and scholarship.

I remember from my own youth an example of the world "coming in." In 1980 or so, my church in Wellandport, Ont., showed the Focus on the Family film series about parenting and disciplining children. Our parents made teens like me watch it over a succession of Thursday evenings in the nearby Christian school gym. The series, produced by James Dobson's Focus on the Family organization, was meant to help parents cultivate a strong family life. But why force us kids to watch it? Maybe they wanted us to understand why they disciplined us. All I know is that my friends and I, in the semi-dark gym, did our best to ignore the films.

If adolescent me thought the Dobson series was weird, historian me, in retrospect, sees cultural change happening. Dobson was American, not Dutch or Canadian. He was not Reformed. His roots were Nazarene, in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. Good Reformed folk like my parents should have been skeptical of his Arminian theology. Those Thursday nights were signs of the evangelical world coming into the CRC and American culture infiltrating Canada.

My point is that as CRC folk Americanized and Canadianized, they became part of networks of North American Christianity. Those networks gradually replaced historic ties to Dutch churches, seminaries,

The boundaries
between "us"
and "them"
grew porous.

and universities—ties that were thinning and fading. Fuller Theological Seminary became a more common reference point than the Dutch Reformed seminary in Kampen. My pastor father subscribed to *Christianity Today* and other American and Canadian magazines with helpful ideas about pastoring and worship. Members of the CRC began to participate in nondenominational missionary and Bible societies, charities, and aid organizations. We became less distinctively Dutch and Reformed and more Canadian, American, and broadly Protestant.

The same was true in all areas of life. Young CRC men in my area played in Dutch Reformed soccer, hockey, and baseball leagues. But we also played local youth baseball, soccer, and hockey. It was not that we turned away from our CRC networks, but that we also participated in other networks. These became "ours" too, and more so over time. The CRC increasingly had competition for our money, attention, and time. We had alternatives. Instead of a holistic network of Dutch Reformed institutions, we had layers of institutions from various religious and social networks. The boundaries between "us" and "them" grew porous. And we liked having more choices.

Success in attracting modest numbers of Canadians and Americans to CRC congregations in turn brought new ethnic and racial diversity into the denomination. The varied religious backgrounds of these new members—Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, and more—leavened our Reformed religious culture. Sometimes it was Reformed Christianity that drew them in; other times it was marrying into a CRC family. CRC folk similarly left the fold to join other churches.

It's not that belonging no longer mattered or even that our loves inevitably changed. It's more that we came to care about and belong to more networks, institutions, and communities and that our religious and cultural identities no longer reinforced each other in a singular way. Belonging to many communities and networks meant that belonging to any one of them mattered a little less. These changes could be disorienting and upsetting or a breath of fresh air. This kind of transition has not been unique to the Dutch Reformed, but common in many ethno-religious traditions. Belonging becomes flexible, complicated, even fragmented.

This article has focused on ethno-cultural change and its relationship to religious change and belonging—especially belonging to multiple overlapping networks rather than a single "complete" one. The next article in this series will look at growing diversity in the CRC and how social and political trends have changed the idea of belonging in the CRC and other church traditions. It also will suggest what belonging in the CRC might look like going forward. 



Will Katerberg is a professor of history and the curator of Heritage Hall at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich. He is a member of Church of the Servant CRC in Grand Rapids.

BIG QUESTIONS

Vocation/Calling

My college-aged children seem to focus mostly on hobbies. I want them to find joy and fulfillment, but I'm concerned about their ability to pay their bills in the future. How do I bring up my concerns with them?

In my work in campus ministry I often listen to young adults wonder about their future. Some have extensive plans with clear next steps, and others speak about being open to whatever is next. Regardless of their planning, most feel uncertain about the future, whether that be pursuing a career or having a family. Many have seen people lose their jobs or not get the jobs they were qualified for. They've grown up in the housing crisis, and the current costs of housing feel overwhelming. Can you imagine what it's like at 25 to have the sense that you'll never be able to buy a house?

As someone who is older, you've been able to experience God's presence through good times and challenging times. When your children feel that you've listened to and tried to understand their situation today, hopefully you can share with them the hope and wisdom you've gained from your experiences. Because of God's grace, neither you nor your children need to look to the future with fear.

It can be hard to know which choices come from wisdom and which are born out of fear. Choosing a practical major can be a way of trusting in our own efforts to secure a safe future. On the other hand, choosing a major where there is little likelihood of a job can be a way of avoiding looking honestly



Illustration for *The Banner* by Gisele Bohórquez

at one's talents and/or the future. Somewhere there is a healthy middle where one can enjoy and even study music or sports while also developing practical skills through taking classes or through part-time jobs.

I pray that your conversations together might allow you to mutually encourage each other as you discern what it looks like to trust God, to enjoy God's gifts, and to live wisely.

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

Digital Life

Does God want us to create computers with artificial intelligence even though God gave us perfectly good brains to do the work ourselves?

Throughout history, our God-given brains have been used to create a host of things that allow humans to do much more than one body alone could do. I think God is honored by our creativity and innovation. Artificial intelligence is just one more thing that right now might seem incomprehensible but in another five or 10 years will be commonplace.

But first, what is artificial intelligence (sometimes mistakenly called machine learning)? The definitions keep changing, but AI is really neither intelligent nor able to learn—not in the typical sense, anyway. AI is the ability of computers to be programmed to come to mathematical conclusions with incredible speed. Think of it this way: What if your car had the ability to remember everything—where you're

going, the traffic patterns, the weather, and so on—as you drive it around town? In time, it'd pick up your habits and preferences and could drive itself.

Whether you know it or not, you're probably already using AI. How does your phone's email or texting often know what you were about to type? How do "smart" audio applications like Siri or Alexa figure out what you want it to do with just the little bit of information you gave it? How does your bank know to notify you when they think your credit card has been compromised? AI is helping humans already.

But our world is clearly broken, and the same efforts that result in good things can also wreak havoc. "Unsinkable" ships sink, electricity kills, and social media created to connect us breaks us apart. AI is no different, and we need to pay attention to the power we hand over to it.

AI-powered facial recognition is one example. It recognizes me, so I don't have to enter a password when logging into my computer. But people could also use it to systematically discriminate.

Think of any bad things humans have a propensity for—lying, cheating, abusing, stealing, discriminating—and add a little AI. What was bad is now much worse—and a faster worse. And if it works one time, the machine will repeat it at an even faster pace.

Stay diligent, humans!

Dean Heetderks is co-director of Ministry Support Services of the CRC and art director of *The Banner*. What part of your life could use a little artificial intelligence? Tell him at dean.heetderks@gmail.com.

Bible/Doctrine**What does “faith” mean in the Bible? James 2:26 (“Faith without works is dead”) seems to contradict Galatians 2:16 (we are “justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law”).**

Like all words used in the Bible, “faith” has a range of meanings that depend on its context. We should not expect individual authors to mean exactly the same thing each time they use a word. Yet Scripture is unified in the one story it tells and the one God whose voice we hear in its pages. This means we should expect harmony in its overall message even if individual texts seem to be dissonant.

In his letter, James’ point is that what we do matters. A person should not claim to have faith if it is never shown in concrete works of love. Even the demons believe in God, he reminds us (James 2:19). But real faith is more than mental assent. It is also covenantal fidelity. This fidelity shows itself in acts of daily discipleship as we take up our cross and follow our Lord (Matt. 16:24). It’s wrong to think that faith does not claim one’s entire life.

In Galatians, Paul’s point is that we cannot save ourselves. We are justified—included, accepted, approved—because of what Christ has done for us, not because of what we do. Although works of love are the fruit of saving faith, union with Christ is its root. As the Belgic Confession puts it, it is only because we draw our life from Christ that anything we do can be counted “good.” Without Christ, our works “could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place” (Art. 24). We are wrong to take credit for the good works “which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

The Reformation’s “solos” are always held together: we are saved through “faith alone” (*sola fide*), and we always live “for the glory of God alone” (*solus Deo gloria*). As the faithful love of Jesus heals our hearts, it births faith in us: confidence in God’s promises, trust in God’s character, and fidelity to God’s commands. As Paul goes on to say in Galatians, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6).

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

Church Matters**Our Christian Reformed congregation called a minister from the Reformed Church in America, and the RCA church in town called a CRC minister. Is that allowed?**

Yes, it is! Christian Reformed churches may call Reformed Church in America ministers, and RCA churches may call CRC ministers, just as they’d call a minister from their own denomination. The ministers retain their ordination in their own denomination even while serving in the other denomination.

The CRC has this arrangement only with the RCA. It’s one of the ways our two denominations have worked together in recent years—quite differently from our history, as the CRC began as a group that left the RCA back in 1857.

Synod 2005 adopted the “Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers” between the CRC and the RCA and made that arrangement a supplement to our Church Order (Art. 8, Suppl. D).

These ministers are expected to demonstrate a “knowledge of and

appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline” of the calling church and to “preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in a manner consistent with the polity” of that church. They are able to serve as delegates to classis and synod in the denomination where they are serving but remain subject to the church that holds their ordination regarding matters of discipline, and they can remain in the pension and benefits plans of the denomination of their ordination, though the calling church is obligated to cover those costs.

One important caveat is that this arrangement is not intended for a minister’s first call because it is essential that a minister “first be formed and educated for ministry in one’s own tradition and have experience in serving in that church’s ordained ministry.”

Again, this arrangement is only between the CRC and the RCA. Calling a minister from any other denomination is allowed only after putting forth “a sustained and realistic effort to obtain a minister from within the CRC and the RCA” and would require that minister to become ordained in the CRC with the approval of the CRC’s candidacy committee and the classis of the calling church. Those approvals would also be needed if an RCA minister wanted to leave the RCA and become a CRC minister.

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



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

CRCNA Receives \$1.248 Million Through Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative

NEWS

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The Christian Reformed Church in North America has received a grant of \$1,248,172 to support development of its family faith formation resources and leadership.

The Christian Parenting and Caregiving Initiative, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., awarded 77 grants of up to \$1.25 million each in 2023 “to help interested parents and other caregivers share their Christian faith and values with their children.”

Lilly, which announced the initiative in October and released a list of grant recipients in July, said the program “builds on recent research that affirms the pivotal role parents play in the religious lives of their children” and that the effort would “assist organizations in designing and implementing programs to help interested parents and caregivers ... learn, adapt, and embrace time-honored practices to share their faith and values with their children.”

The CRCNA’s Thrive ministry will use its grant over five years “to strengthen the partnership between church and home” and “to accelerate and amplify support of children’s ministry leaders in Christian Reformed congregations and develop resources these leaders can use to encourage and equip parents,” a Thrive press release said.

“Lilly Endowment’s objectives for this initiative line up quite closely with our priorities around faith formation with children,” said Thrive co-director Chris Schoon. In discerning whether to apply for the grant, he explained, “We noted how research in the U.S. and Canada continues to point toward the importance of parents and caregivers in forming lifelong faith among children and youth. We also recognized that children’s ministry leaders in Christian Reformed congregations have been saying similar things as well. They want to know

how to better come alongside parents in supporting faith-formative efforts that work with family routines and commitments that often have less room for traditional discipleship programming.”

Thrive plans to start this fall with “listening opportunities to hear directly from parents and caregivers in their unique contexts.” Virtual and in-person forums will “ensure that we are listening well to parents and church leaders across the various ethnic and linguistic communities represented within the CRC,” Schoon said.

Thrive co-director Lesli van Milligen said the ministry agency has had frequent requests from several Christian Reformed communities to develop resources in a variety of languages. With this grant-funded project, she said, Thrive hopes “to develop resources that reflect the felt needs of diverse families and that support the congregation-based ministry leaders with regard to faith formation with children, and not simply default to those designed for the majority English-speaking communities.”

Other grant recipients include denominations such as Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Church of the Nazarene; schools including Boston University and City Seminary of New York; and specialized ministries such as Philadelphia-based Esperanza, which strengthens Hispanic communities, and Grand Rapids-based Mel Trotter Ministries, which supports people experiencing homelessness in West Michigan.

—Alissa Vernon

Michigan Church Brings Coffee to Campus



In the student welcome center at Muskegon Community College, Bethany CRC's Common Grounds aims to make connections with students by sharing coffee.

Bethany Christian Reformed Church in Muskegon, Mich., launched Common Grounds, a pop-up coffee ministry at Muskegon Community College, in late March. About 60 cups of coffee were served on the first day at no cost. Coffee drinkers were asked only to tell one amazing thing about themselves—a conversational icebreaker—in exchange for a free cup.

On other days the ministry poses a “question of the day” as a way to create conversation.

“We’re just trying to make positive connections that have an effect” on the students, said Jill Young, a pastor at Bethany CRC who came up with the idea for the ministry. Two of Young’s four children attend the college.

“We were looking to find a way to offer the peace of Christ to believers, people who might be questioning their faith, are of a different faith, or don’t have a faith at all,” Young said.

Resonate Global Mission supported Common Grounds with a \$5,000 ministry experimentation grant. The project also received support from Classis Muskegon, a regional group of churches serving that area.

Young said she and the Common Grounds volunteers have already begun to build relationships with students. “The people who want connection will stick around and chat with you,” she said. “We’ve been able to take discussions into deep faith areas, and that’s a real blessing.”

This school year Young will be on campus with Common Grounds on Tuesdays, and she’ll “also spend time on campus with the soccer team and student success staff,” she said, making connections wherever she is able.

—Greg Chandler

Elder Care Program Bridges Generations

Wellspring Adult Day Services, which opened in April 2016 as a partnership with Reeman Christian Reformed Church in Fremont, Mich., has begun a “grandfriends” program that connects older adults with eighth-grade students from Fremont Christian School.

“When those kids would walk through the door, you should have seen the smiles they would get from our guests,” said Tammy Cowley, Wellspring’s business manager.

Over the last school year, Wellspring brought students to Reeman CRC, where they shared a meal and life stories with their grandfriends and taught each other technology and board games. The grandfriends in turn attended a school open house, sports events, and eighth-grade graduation.

Participants were surveyed on how they perceived the other generation both before and after the year together. “It really did change some of their views—both ways,” Cowley said.

Many of Wellspring’s guests don’t have grandchildren living nearby, and for them Wellspring friends become a family. “People need to belong,” Cowley said. “As you age, your world starts to shrink. You feel isolated. Here, they actually feel a part of something.”

Initially Wellspring focused on serving adults with dementia, offering day programs three times a week that give respite to caregivers, but after the pandemic it widened its welcome to all seniors in need of socialization. Wellspring can accommodate 15 guests with three staff and a group of dedicated volunteers.

The support is an encouragement to caregivers, Cowley said. More older people today want to stay in their homes, “but it does take a toll on the caregiver.”

The grandfriends program is funded in part by a grant from the Fremont Area Community Foundation. Wellspring plans to continue the program this school year with a new group of eighth graders.

—Maia VanderMeer



Marlene (left) and Opal enjoy a meal together organized by Wellspring.

What Is ‘Estuary’ All About, and Is It Coming to a Church Near You?

If you live in California, New England, or a certain corner of the internet where Christian Reformed pastor Paul VanderKlay posts long, deep think pieces on the big questions of life, you might have heard of Estuary. It’s a place where ideas get stirred up and people who might have been alienated from Christians are finding themselves in fascinating conversations with them.

CrossPoint Church, a large, multilingual Christian Reformed congregation in Chino, Calif., is home to the Inland Empire Estuary meetup group. Meeting since 2021, this group is part of a growing number of groups that use the Estuary model to facilitate two-hour conversations on big questions the group chooses at each session.

Many Estuary groups meet in person; some meet online by video conference. The Chino group was started by John Vandonk, a former CRC pastor who is one of roughly 26,400 subscribers to Paul VanderKlay’s YouTube channel. VanderKlay is pastor of Living Stones CRC in Sacramento, Calif. Responding at first to things he found interesting about psychologist, author, and speaker Jordan Peterson, VanderKlay started a “thinking out loud” YouTube channel in 2009. He hosts conversations and commentaries on cultural happenings, movements in the CRC, and the intellectual explorations of people like the controversial Peterson,



Photo by justinwellsfilms.com

John Vandonk speaks at a conference hosted by CrossPoint CRC in May.

Awakening From the Meaning Crisis lecturer John Vervaeke, and *The Symbolic World* commentator Jonathan Pageau. Vandonk encouraged VanderKlay to find a way to extend and improve on the disjointed and disembodied conversations comment sections on social media are known for. Together they developed Estuary to be a place and a way to have those conversations.

In addition to meetup groups—24 are currently listed on estuaryhub.com—there have been conferences: in September 2022 in Thunder Bay, Ont., and in May 2023 in Chino, Calif. Pleasant Street CRC in Whitinsville, Mass., hosted VanderKlay for a sample Estuary meeting Aug. 2.

The name “Estuary” was chosen because of the imagery it projects. In geography

an estuary is where rivers meet the ocean. “It is a sometimes chaotic space where mighty currents may encounter crashing waves, where floods may change the boundaries, ... where the water is neither fresh nor salt, but something in between, where shifting currents may alter the wetlands,” the CrossPoint website explains. Vandonk said Estuary is “a place for the exchange of ideas, where questions are encouraged, where judgment is not tolerated, and where finding answers is secondary to the journey.” The discussion groups use specific protocols to ensure that their conversations are fruitful, nonjudgmental, and well-run.

Vandonk said it’s common for a group to include a wide variety of viewpoints, backgrounds, and religions. He recalled a meeting earlier this year where there was an atheist, a few Christians, a Muslim, and a Jew all participating in the same conversation.

“The discussions we have are rooted around the bigger idea of what it is to be human; these are questions that every person of every tribe and religion is trying to answer,” Vandonk said.

The conversations are not purposely centered on spiritual or religious topics, but VanderKlay and Vandonk each said the discussions they’ve participated in usually turn in that direction because



Photo by justinwellsfilms.com

Estuary gatherings, like this one during a conference at CrossPoint CRC, focus on listening to understand.

that's where the deep truths of what it is to be human lie.

Vandonk said he doesn't like to put too many labels on what Estuary is "because then it limits what it can become."

Estuaryhub.com offers this definition: "Estuary is a place where people come for conversation. Honest conversation. Not ideological warfare, memes, and trolling, but mutually respectful attempts to understand one another, and to learn to appreciate different perspectives and viewpoints. Estuary is a place where different ideas and ideologies meet. Where participants allow themselves to be exposed to new ways of thinking, where listening may be as important as talking, where being open to feedback will force you to hear yourself think."

Although most Estuary groups on the Estuary Hub are in the U.S., there are some in Canada, Australia, Germany, and Greece, and new groups are popping up all the time. Many of the groups use Meetup, an online events calendar, to keep track of their gatherings. Leaders are encouraged to follow the protocols for conducting conversations so every group is run in a similar way. Leaders attend an online group to be introduced to the process, which Vandonk said is designed to ensure that the conversation does not become a debate about who is right or wrong and instead encourages mutual understanding and respect.

Spreading The Word

In August of 2022, VanderKlay and Vandonk took the Estuary concept on tour. They spent some time in Germany, introducing the conversation model in a festival format. It was an introduction for the uninitiated and encouragement for those who were already participating in online and in-person gatherings. VanderKlay's online presence drew many interested people to the festival. "I'm somewhat of a celebrity," he said, "albeit only in one specific corner of the vastness that is the internet. It is a great pleasure

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to meet people face to face after having shared many conversations with them via comment sections and forums."

A month later, several Estuary leaders and subscribers gathered in Thunder Bay, Ont., for a four-day event called Consciousness and Conscience. That successful conference sparked plans for an event this past May in Chino, The Quest for a Spiritual Home, which featured lectures, a tour of a Greek Orthodox church, and an afternoon of paintball. One of the conference attendees, Moises Pacheco, pastor at Grace in Garfield CRC in Chicago, Ill., said, "The lectures and the panel discussions were really insightful. Having a couple of Protestants, an Orthodox artist, and a non-Christian cognitive scientist all talking about a spiritual home and seeing similar things and giving common language for it to (speak to) people from all over is something important."

Pacheco said that while many of the talks can be viewed online, the way most conference attendees usually consume content, "the embodied nature of the conference gave the opportunity to do some things that are likely not common in an academic conference or even a

religious conference with this level of intellectualism."

Vandonk said that many attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to meet people from different walks of life, different religions, and different backgrounds all coming together in an effort to broaden their understanding. Pacheco shared how one evening he, a Protestant pastor, ended up on stage singing "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" with a Sikh man who "seemed to know the song better than I did."

Nothing Quite Like It

VanderKlay and Vandonk share a passion for Estuary, believing there is nothing else like it around today. "In a world of cancel culture, groupthink, and binary thinking," VanderKlay said, "a space for the free exchange of ideas and experiences with fellow humans is a cool breeze on a hot day, a gentle rain falling on a parched landscape."

Lon Wagner, pastor of discipleship at CrossPoint CRC in Chino, called Estuary "a ministry of the church, but not for the church," recognizing it instead as a place for people to ask questions and explore in ways they might not be comfortable doing or able to do in regular Sunday morning services.

VanderKlay would love to see every church have an Estuary group. In a July 2020 video describing his vision, he said churches have a long history of hosting various kinds of not-specifically-religious groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, other recovery groups, or community groups, and they'd benefit from welcoming the spectrum of people Estuary groups attract.

"Churches are too insular. Churches don't know what's going on in the hearts and minds of the people around them too often," VanderKlay said. "Churches need these kinds of credible conversations that are on the edge."

—Dan Veeneman

IN MEMORIAM



*Rev. E. Robert
Tigchelaar*

1942-2023

A hard-working and faithful minister of the gospel, Bob Tigchelaar loved each congregation and community to which he was called. Earnest and contemplative, he cared deeply for others and the world. Bob wanted the best for everyone around him and did what he could to bring it about. He was bold in his beliefs and open with his heart. He always ended conversations, even hard ones, with gratitude and words of love. It is said that he never met a person who didn't quickly become a friend. Bob, 81, died June 25.

A graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, Bob was ordained in 1980, then served Ebenezer Christian Reformed Church in Leota, Minn. He went on to pastor Immanuel CRC, Wyoming, Mich.; Mountain View CRC, Lynden, Wash.; First CRC, DeMotte, Ind.; and finally was pastor of visitation at Kelloggsville CRC, Kentwood, Mich. He retired in 2012.

Bob was immensely curious and never stopped reading and learning. An avid athlete and former college cross-country runner, he took up triathlons at age 58 and completed 48 races, four of which were full Ironman length: 140.6 miles.

Bob is survived by Deanne, his wife of 57 years; four children and their spouses; and two grandchildren.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Navajo Minister, Native American Ministry Developer Retires



Stanley Jim

Rev. Stanley Jim, past director of Native American pastoral ministry in Classis Red Mesa, a leader in the Christian Reformed Church's former ethnic ministry council, and pastor at Window Rock (Ariz.) CRC, retired as of Sept. 1. Jim is one of only a few Navajo members who have been ordained as ministers of the Word in the Christian Reformed Church of North America. After his retirement, none with that distinction is active, though several exhorters and commissioned pastors still serve.

Jim was ordained in 1996 and spent 27 years in various roles within the CRCNA. He started as staff at Maranatha Fellowship CRC in Farmington, N.M., and then pastored First Navajo Christian Reformed Church in Tohatchi, N.M., for four years. In 2000, he began working with the denominational agency then known as Home Missions, serving as Native American ministry leader. He later joined the Ethnic Ministry Council, where he continued to build relationships between the denomination and Native American communities. (Home Missions, which joined with World Missions in 2017 to become Resonate Global Mission, stopped using the ethnic leader model during the reorganization.) In 2016 Jim joined Window Rock CRC as its pastor.

Jim was delegated to synod, the CRC's annual general assembly, several times, including

to Synod 2023. He also served on the Council of Delegates, the leadership body of the CRC that works on behalf of synod between meetings of synod.

Throughout his ministry, Jim has focused on building relationships with people. "In some ways," he said, "that was one of the things I maintained through my traditional (Navajo) upbringing and trying to live the life that Jesus lived." He noted the importance of "building a bridge with non-Navajo and Navajo people to come to a common ground where we understand the Scriptures in a certain way and understand each other."

One of his achievements was helping start a leadership development network in Classis Red Mesa. The network includes programs to teach the creeds, confessions, and Church Order, lessons in pastoral care and how to teach the Bible, and opportunities for spiritual formation.

A few commissioned pastors and several people licensed to exhort (preach) who trained through the leadership development network continue to serve the classis, but leaders acknowledge the lack of ordained ministers.

Pastor John Greydanus, stated clerk of Classis Red Mesa, said, "Our classis is hurting for leaders, and his (Jim's) retirement, as well as that of Rev. John Dykhuis of Fellowship CRC, will certainly cause some ripples in the structure of our classis." Window Rock CRC is still putting together a search committee to find a new pastor.

"It saddens me that I'm stepping off and no one is stepping in," Jim said. The development program and the commissioned pastors help, he added, but "I wish someone would be able to have more in-depth knowledge with what the CRC is like with all its polity and how the denomination works."

In his retirement Jim intends to take a year to relax and then he wants to invest in church leadership among younger generations.

—Kristen Parker

Florida Church Planters Left Haiti but Still Serve Haitians

Obelto Cherubin and Johnny Gryglewicz, two men with a heart for Haiti, are working to plant Haitian churches in southern Florida.

Cherubin led the founding of the Christian Reformed Church in Haiti in the late 1980s but since 2005 has lived in Orlando, Fla., where he has pastored a church plant, Haitian CRC, while working at Disney World. In January, he left Disney to become a full-time church planter, raising up leaders to plant multiple Creole-speaking CRC congregations in Florida.

Gryglewicz and his wife, Kim, became missionaries with Resonate Global Mission in 2018. After Haitian President Jovenel Moïse was assassinated in 2021 and political upheaval ensued, the Gryglewicz family left Haiti with their three children. Rather than returning to their home state of Texas, they relocated to Tampa, Fla., to be among the Haitian expatriate community. Johnny Gryglewicz spends about 60% of his time helping to administer congregations of the Haitian CRC and the other 40% planting Florida churches.

"Obelto is wonderful at empowering other people," said Gryglewicz, who meets with Cherubin once a week. "He's someone who is very much into discipleship."

Cherubin meets with a group of nine Haitian men every other week. Three of the men are older pastors, and the other six are young men being trained to start new churches. One new church plant is already in the works. Cherubin is also translating a church-planting course so he can teach the group in Creole.

"I'm trying to transfer my calling to them," Cherubin said. "I was 22 when I felt the call of God. I'm trying to find more people to teach. Young people are easier to train, because it's easier for young people to adapt with a new doctrine or new system."

In November, Classis Southeast U.S., a regional group of Christian Reformed churches, gave \$20,000 to support the Creole-speaking church plants.



At a meeting of Classis Southeast U.S., (from left) Resonate missionary Johnny Gryglewicz, Pastor Obelto Cherubin, Simon, a young man who attends Cherubin's church, and Pastor Leclair Paurice, who is exploring church planting in the CRCNA.

"Our classis has a vision for church planting, mission, (and) reaching people for Christ," said Scott VanderPloeg, chair of the classis missions committee. "We recognize that here in Florida there's a real opportunity for reaching all kinds of people."

Thousands of Haitians have fled the country since 2021. Building up leadership to minister in their own language and reflecting their culture in their new home fits an emerging model in Resonate Global Mission: ministry from everywhere, to everywhere.

"A lot of people around the globe are being displaced, and in that, there is an opportunity," said Tim Sheridan, church planting leader for Resonate. "Ministering to the diaspora is one of Resonate's priorities, because our priorities emerge from where we see the Spirit at work."

—Roxanne VanFarowe

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. Bernard Dykstra

1942-2023

Berny Dykstra, a quiet man who loved the Lord and his family, died May 17. He was 80 years old.

Berny was born in Friesland, a province of the Netherlands. After his family immigrated to the U.S., Berny worked on the family dairy farm while attending Lynden (Wash.) Christian School. After high school, he served in the Marine Corps Reserves for six years, then became a carpenter.

At 28, Berny accepted the call from the Lord to become a pastor and attended Reformed Theological Seminary and Calvin Theological Seminary. He was ordained in 1986 and served Peace Christian Reformed Church in Menno, S.D.; First CRC in Taber, Alta.; and Holland Center CRC in Lodgepole, S.D. In 2007 Berny and his wife, Vicky, retired to Nooksack, Wash.

Berny loved the outdoors and enjoyed gardening, hiking, camping, and fishing, especially when he could do them with his family. He was an excellent carpenter who people said could build just about anything. This extended to boatbuilding.

Berny is survived by Vicky, his wife of 57 years; a son and daughter-in-law; and five grandchildren and their spouses.

—Janet A. Greidanus

IN MEMORIAM

*Rev. Jerome Burton*

1957-2023

Jerome Burton was a humble man, a streetwise pastor, an evangelist at heart, and a friend and encourager to the friendless. He died July 6 after 42 days on a ventilator in an intensive care unit due to pulmonary fibrosis and pneumonia. He was 66.

Jerome grew up in Selma, Ala., in the 1960s. After years of addiction and turmoil, he had a powerful conversion experience in his 30s and experienced a call to ministry. For nearly 30 years he pastored Coit Community Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich. In that time he studied at Reformed Bible College and Calvin Theological Seminary and was ordained in 2002.

Jerome served in many ministries and on boards related to race relations and racial reconciliation, and he partnered with organizations that help restore the lives of former prisoners, people with addictions, and those experiencing homelessness.

He was an avid sports fan and a history buff who loved to read. He was skilled at building and renovating and was a connoisseur of local thrift stores, where he bought his smart wardrobe.

Predeceased by Vivian, his first wife, Jerome is survived by his wife, Kristin; Grace, whom he and Vivian helped raise from birth like a daughter; 11 grand-godchildren; and one great-grand-godchild.

—Janet A. Greidanus

Centre for Public Dialogue Director Takes Role With Indigenous Learning Community

Mike Hogeterp, founding director of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, is leaving the role after more than 21 years. He began work Sept. 25 with NAIITS, an Indigenous learning community, as lead facilitator for the Canadian Learning Community for Decolonization and Innovation in Theological Education.

Hogeterp will guide four partnering seminaries in sharing their approaches to justice, inclusion, and decolonization work. What they learn together will then shape curriculum to help transform theological education, he said. The goals align with Calls to Action 59 and 60 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which call for ongoing education to ensure congregations “learn about their church’s role in colonization” and for the development of history- and legacy-addressing “curriculum for all student clergy, and all clergy and staff who work in Aboriginal communities.”

The Centre for Public Dialogue promotes active citizenship and “a positive voice of Christian faith in Canadian public life,” according to its website.

In his years with the Centre, Hogeterp said the period of response as Canada considered its role in Afghanistan in 2008 stands out as a “really remarkable set of exchanges and stories that left a big impression on me.” Connections made with Indigenous leaders have also been significant. “Ecumenical and other connections drew us into rich and meaningful relationships with Indigenous people in communities around the country,” Hogeterp said.



Mike Hogeterp is leaving the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue for a role with NAIITS, an Indigenous learning community.

The Committee for Contact with the Government, formed in 1968, is the grassroots group behind the Centre’s work. With Hogeterp’s departure and only four of the usual six committee spots currently filled, Al Postma, the Christian Reformed Church’s transitional executive director in Canada, said it and the two other Canadian justice-related committees are “currently discerning the overall direction and strategy” for continued justice work in Canada.

The Canadian Indigenous Ministries Committee, which supports Adrian Jacobs, senior leader for Indigenous justice, and the Decolonization and Antiracism Collective, which supports Pablo Sun Kim, senior leader for antiracism and intercultural conciliation, are the other justice-seeking ministries of the CRCNA in Canada.

—Kristen Parker

Seminary Internships Include Cross-cultural Experiences

Calvin Theological Seminary students completing Master of Divinity degrees do Cross-cultural InContext Learning internships as part of their 600 credit hours. The 200-hour internships, which many fulfill during their summer breaks, give future pastors an opportunity to be in a different setting.

“This is about being a good pastor,” said Geoff Vandermolen, director of vocational formation and of the Doctor of Ministry program at the seminary. “You’re always going to be involved with people who are different from you. This is about being engaged in a world that is different from yours.”

Vandermolen said students select a placement that is ethnically, economically, and/or ecumenically different from their majority experience, which gives students a chance to consider questions such as how the gospel sounds when it’s preached in a different denomination or what leadership looks like in congregations that are not Christian Reformed.

InContext Learning partners include prisons, church plants, homeless shelters, and organizations in countries outside North America. Students in each placement help design the work they’ll do, making goals for what they’d like to observe and achieve both personally and in ministry engagement. Next they come up with strategies to accomplish these, and finally they complete an assessment, reflecting on what happened and what changes they see in themselves because of their experiences.

Debbie Jin, in her third year at the seminary, completed a one-month internship with the Al Amana Centre in Oman in January. “My internship was life changing,” Jin said. She completed training sessions in trauma healing, visited people in prison, attended interfaith dialogues, led children’s ministry sessions, and visited local Muslim families and mosques to learn about Islam.

Jin already had experience with multiple cultures. She was born in and grew up in



Debbie Jin (left), who interned in Oman, with her friend Tamanna.

China, spent five years at university in South Korea, and has now spent three years in the U.S. Still, she said, the Oman internship “helped me to break my stereotype of mission and be able to respect and appreciate (other cultures). Mission and ministry are so diverse and strongly affected by their contexts.”

While missionaries are welcome in Oman and at the Al Amana Centre, they are not to evangelize. “I have never imagined that a form of ministry that was not directly asking people to convert to Christianity could also be a kind of mission,” Jin said.

She said the Al Amana Centre emphasizes reconciling relationships.

“It’s quite typical to see Christians hanging out with other Christians,” she said, “but at Al Amana Centre, Christians and Muslims are good friends.” Jin said that the friendships could happen in part because people are willing to listen. “I think when I listen first, people are more willing to listen to me,” she explained. “When I respect others first, people are willing to respect me.”

Jin said she returned to the U.S. with a deeper willingness to listen to others and an understanding that while the Christian “bubble” can be comfortable, Christ’s followers should be able to communicate and connect with the non-Christian world too.

—Callie Feyen

IN MEMORIAM



Rev. John Rop

1950-2023

Described as an unyielding warrior, John Rop faced challenges with resoluteness, courage, humor, and a reliance on Jesus. He died July 2 after living for 23 years with a genetic liver disease. He was 72.

John first felt called to ministry after graduating from Muskegon High School in 1968, but he was discouraged from pursuing it. Instead, he proudly served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War, then obtained an undergraduate degree in sociology and psychology from Grand Valley State University. After working for 15 years in the manufacturing and furniture industries, John again experienced a call to ministry. At age 45 he graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary.

Ordained in 1995, John pastored Highland Christian Reformed Church in Marion, Mich., then Phoenix (Ariz.) CRC. His third and final church was Calvin Church in Muskegon, Mich., where he served until retiring in 2015. He is remembered as a “heart” preacher who understood brokenness.

John loved learning about the Civil War and also enjoyed baseball and collecting baseball cards. In retirement, he liked to garden, read, and make furniture.

John is survived by Ellen, his wife of 50 years; two children and their spouses, 10 grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren (with two more on the way).

—Janet A. Greidanus

'OK, God, Use Me,' a Grieving Mother Prayed. For 44 Years, God Has.

Diane Wendt has led the Coffee and Comfort grief group at Orland Park (Ill.) Christian Reformed Church since 1980. As long as God can use her, she says, she'll keep doing the work of walking with people through their grief.

For 15 of the past 44 years, Wendt's commitment has meant a five-hour round-trip commute each month to the grieving mothers' group. She and her husband moved to Sturgis, Mich., in 2008 when her husband retired, but the distance hasn't kept her from the group.

"I'm a mom who lost a child, and I want to help," Wendt said. "Death is a part of life."

Over the years she's shared her experience of grief over the loss of a child on The Oprah Winfrey Show and on WMBI, the Chicago radio station run by Moody Bible Institute.

Wendt's son Karl died when he was 4 years old and she was 35. She wrestled with God for three years, but then surrendered, praying, "OK, God, use me."

And God did. For 44 years now, on the fourth Wednesday of every month, Wendt has led Coffee and Comfort in the choir room at Orland Park CRC. About 20 mothers show up to share and to help others carry their grief.



Diane Wendt at her home in Sturgis, Mich.

"One lady came a day after she buried a child," Wendt said; "another one came after 13 years." Wendt hears stories of overdoses, car accidents, suicides, and illnesses, but the shared grief has made a fellowship of women over the years. "They cling together," Wendt says.

At 45, Wendt trained to become a home health care nurse. At 52, she graduated with a master's degree in counseling and then worked as a private therapist for 22 years. She ran Coffee and Comfort while working and found her medical and counseling training helpful in her work with grieving mothers.

Each Coffee and Comfort session includes prayer and a time for each mother to introduce herself and share what happened to her child. "It gives them joy to mention their child's name," Wendt said. Next Wendt introduces a discussion topic, usually having to do with something seasonal that might trigger a mother's grief: Mother's Day, Father's Day, graduation and wedding season, and other holidays. "We talk about all the things that have died for them," she said.

Talking through grief helps mothers heal, Wendt said. She's led ministers in workshops on grief and tells them that after marking the funeral on their calendar, they should flip forward six weeks and make a note to "contact the mothers then, because that's when their grief will start," Wendt says. "It's just beginning."

While pastors of a variety of denominations have supported Wendt's work, different theological views have posed hurdles at times. A pastor told one mother in the group that her son had died because of her sins. Wendt has also been told that having a grief support group means that her faith in God isn't strong enough. To this she responded, "When you are sick, do you go to a doctor?"

These types of comments have not stopped Wendt from doing this work. "I'm thankful God is using me this way," she said. Orland Park CRC has told her Coffee and Comfort will always have a home there. Currently three women serve as Wendt's backup if she is unable to make the trip, and though they insist they couldn't do what Wendt does, "they could, of course," Wendt said.

—Callie Feyen



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Honoring the Creator by Stewarding Creation

Photos by Calvin University

By Calvin University

In the opening chapter of Genesis, God gives the newly created humans a “cultural mandate.” This command to “be fruitful and increase in number,” to “fill the earth and subdue it,” and to “rule over ... every living creature” (Gen. 1:27-28) is both an exhortation and an act of profound generosity that embodies God’s overflowing love for creation.

But the cultural mandate isn’t just about what we do; it’s also about who we are. Humans are made in God’s image and ought to rule over creation in ways that reflect how God rules—not by lording it over creation, but as those who serve (Matt. 20:25-28).

At Calvin University, this is what drives the call to environmental stewardship. In response to the cultural mandate, Calvin has been committed to interdisciplinary sustainability work for a half century.

Calvin believes the call to care for creation isn’t limited to a single discipline or committee. Everyone is invited into this work. At Calvin, that work includes installing curb-cut rain gardens, leading groundbreaking research in the physical sciences, social sciences, and humanities, and investing in renewable energy.

Faculty lead students in sustainability initiatives. Plaster Creek Stewards, for example, is a group of faculty, students, and locals led by biology professor Dave Warners to restore the Plaster Creek watershed, which includes much of the Grand Rapids, Mich., area.

Using grants totaling more than \$5 million since 2009, PCS combines a commitment to sustainability research and innovation with the hard but important work of community building and on-the-ground environmental restoration work. Students conduct research and communicate with local partners about their discoveries, all while harvesting and preserving native plants and trees. Warners also heads up a 12-student Green Team that works on restoration projects throughout West Michigan.

Another example of sustainability at work involves engineering professor Matthew Heun and economics professor Becky Haney. They teamed up with Clemson environmental engineering and earth sciences professor Michael Carbajales-Dale to advocate for resource preservation in a book called *Beyond GDP: National Accounting in the Age of Resource Depletion*.

Students from Calvin University’s Green Team and Plaster Creek Stewards work on installing a nearly two-acre bioswale on Calvin’s campus that will help with stormwater runoff.



At first glance, this alliance seems unlikely: What do engineering, economics, and earth sciences have to do with one another?

Quite a bit, actually. In the book, Heun, Haney, and Carbajales-Dale frame international economics in terms of managing both natural and manufactured resources and assert that routinely gathering and analyzing information about earth’s “natural capital” is essential to making policies for a sustainable future.

Calvin students interested in sustainability come together through programs such as the Outdoor Recreation and Creation Care Floor, an intentional residential community committed to wilderness experience, environmental stewardship, and sustainable living.

This fall Calvin also launched the Sustainability Fellows program, an interdisciplinary experiential cohort that fosters one-of-a-kind learning experiences and promotes holistic sustainability efforts on campus. Students and faculty from all disciplines come together to learn about creation stewardship challenges and generate solutions.

The spirit behind these newer sustainability programs isn’t itself new to Calvin. In 1980, Calvin faculty Peter DeVos

and Loren Wilkinson wrote a book on creation care titled *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Eerdmans). In 1985, Calvin established an ecosystem preserve that spans more than 100 acres. Certified arborist Bob Speelman, who has been with the university for more than 34 years, has planted more than 300 trees on campus, allowing Calvin to be designated as an arboretum in 2022.

The student-led Environmental Stewardship Coalition has been active since the 1990s. In 2004, Calvin built its first LEED-certified campus building. A few years later, the school established the Calvin Energy Recovery Fund (CERF), aimed at reducing energy consumption on campus. And in 2017, Calvin's then-president Michael Le Roy pledged to make the campus carbon-neutral by 2057.

President Wiebe Boer remains committed to this important work and to accelerating and expanding it wherever possible. Boer brings five years of experience in running a renewable energy investment fund to his work at Calvin.

Students in Heun's capstone sustainable engineering class this year will have Calvin as their "client": they'll design methods for accelerating the university's carbon-neutrality timeline.

The school is already being recognized for its sustainability efforts. In five of the past seven years, Calvin has earned a STARS Silver rating from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, which

assesses sustainability in curriculum, public and campus engagement, operations, planning and administration, and innovation and leadership. That means that people at every level and in every vocation have contributed to the sustainability of Calvin's campus.

Many students are involved from their very first day. Some help track and pioneer sustainability initiatives as the leaders of student groups. Some intern with the Calvin Energy Recovery Fund to learn about financial planning and energy management. Others serve as sustainability coordinators within their residence halls and run an annual "Kill-A-Watt" contest.

Students even contribute to Calvin's creation care work when they sit down in the dining hall. Calvin offers green food containers, and dining hall staff are continually making improvements to reduce food waste and increase sustainability.

These diverse collaborative efforts are supported by a research-based incentive structure designed from the beginning to motivate everyone on campus to join in creation care work in 13 different areas covering all of Calvin's campus. Engineers, botanists, economists, and laborers of all stripes bear the same call from the Creator: lifelong stewardship that begins with everyday opportunities. **B**



Learning Together for a More Accessible Future

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES are an important part of God's body of believers, but churches often overlook their gifts and are unaware of the visible and invisible barriers that can limit or exclude their participation.

Four Christian Reformed congregations and one Reformed Church in America church, all from Northwest Iowa, recently committed to working together over a 13-month period to make their churches more welcoming and accessible for people with disabilities.

"The beauty of a cohort is that congregational leaders learn from each other. There's synergy when churches commit to doing better together," said Elaine May, Ph.D., who oversees the Thriving Practices cohorts for Thrive, an organization of the Christian Reformed Church.

Thriving Congregations is made possible through a grant from Lilly Endowment. The program involves a leadership development component called Thriving Essentials and a church cohort component called Thriving Practices.

This Accessible Church Cohort is a collaboration between Thrive's disability work, RCA Disability Concerns, and Hope Haven, a nonprofit based in Northwest Iowa that provides services for people with disabilities.

Rev. Dan DeVries is the regional disability advocate in that region, serving CRC and RCA churches as he recruits and supports disability advocates in local churches.

"After participating in a church cohort about discipleship," DeVries said, "I wanted to do something similar to help churches do a better job of welcoming people with disabilities."

DeVries and his colleague, Rev. Missy Dokter, are chaplains at Hope Haven



Photo used with permission

Pastor Bob Pollema of Faith CRC in Sioux Center, Iowa, shares with other churches what Faith is doing to become more accessible. Listening in is cohort coach Debra Rensink.

and ordained in the RCA. DeVries and Dokter planned this cohort with staff from the CRC and RCA.

The Accessible Church Cohort is helping congregations learn to model hospitality and equity by learning from people with disabilities and then developing practices that anticipate and reduce barriers.

Lynn Wielenga, disability advocate at Bethel CRC in Sioux Center, said, "I've learned to listen to what people with disabilities are saying about their experiences and not to just assume they need or desire assistance in the ways I might imagine."

Each church has a team of people with and without disabilities leading their church into a more accessible future. Rev. Deb Rensink, an RCA pastor, connects with the teams between

meetings to talk through their action plans and to help them solve problems.

The cohort kicked off in January 2023 when May trained cohort members and church leaders in Thriving Essentials, a program designed to help churches grow in mission, discipleship, discernment, and leadership.

In March the group hosted a meeting that included a session on defining disability and a panel of people with disabilities sharing their church experiences. In May congregational representatives shared with each other what they were working on in their churches. Attendees also learned about the five stages of disability attitudes—a tool created by Dan VanderPlaats, a longtime volunteer of Thrive's disability and accessibility efforts.

Calvin CRC of Le Mars has been considering what modifications could be made in their church building to make the pulpit area accessible. They also have completed a congregational survey about accessibility.

"I think we've been learning to think more broadly about different barriers that church members and visitors might face in participating in our worship and realizing that more people are affected than we originally thought," Pastor Brian Hofman said.

—Lindsay Wieland Capel,
Thrive

The View From Here

Works in Progress

IN 2010, MY WIFE, Arlene, and I bought our current home in Muskegon, Mich., for \$20,000. While this home was not in the part of town with the highest housing prices, and while the housing market was still recovering from the recession, this was still a small amount to pay for a home.

There was a reason our house was so inexpensive, and when we toured the house with our good friends shortly after signing the papers, we could see by the looks on their faces that they were seriously questioning our judgment.

In making our decision to buy the house, Arlene and I needed to look beyond the plaster that had fallen off the ceiling. We needed to understand that the plumbing could be replaced and the broken glass in the windows—and sometimes the whole window—could be repaired. We were pretty sure that new plumbing would eliminate the foul odor coming from the basement (it did!) and that removing the carpet and refinishing the floors would be a simple solution to the flooring issues. We needed to believe that this old house could be restored and be a suitable home for us and our five children (plus an exchange student).

In his book *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, Cornelius Plantinga writes, "In the Bible, shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be" (emphasis his).

As we display
the fruit of the
Spirit's work in
our lives, we
more closely
resemble
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ought to be
according to
God's design.

This simple concept of shalom as "the way things ought to be" has given me a lot of personal satisfaction in the work we have done on our home. Each step of the way, we have sensed that we are, in a way, undoing the effects of the fall and shaping our home to become more of what God would declare it "ought to be." We also enjoy and benefit from using the home for its intended purpose—namely, providing a place for our family to find shelter and to share our love and support of each other. We feel gratitude for the opportunity to continue the work of shalom that God first began in us.

This idea of describing shalom as the way things ought to be illustrates the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for each of us personally. When God looks at us, he doesn't see us in our fallen state, with cracking plaster and stinky basements. As the love of Jesus fills us, the process

of restoration begins, and it is ongoing. As we display the fruit of the Spirit's work in our lives, we more closely resemble the way we ought to be according to God's design. And as we nurture, develop, and care for this world and the people in it, we take joy in fulfilling the purposes for which he created us.

In my short time working for the Christian Reformed Church (I started July 3), I've been inspired by learning about all the ways God is using this little denomination. From the physical support the disaster response teams of World Renew provide to thousands in the name of Jesus, to the sharing of the gospel in dozens of countries and languages through the efforts of Reframe and Resonate, to the work of Thrive as it strengthens congregations and bolsters their witness, we can be eternally grateful for God's sustaining hand as we are used to make this world more as our God has declared it ought to be—and will be one day soon. 



Dan DeKam is director of U.S. ministry operations for the CRCNA. He is a member of Bethany CRC in Muskegon, Mich.

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

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Finding Peace Again

GUNSHOTS.

Abel* sprang out of his bed and looked outside the window. With guns at the ready, men in military uniforms were running through his family's compound in South Sudan. Several of Abel's extended family members had already been killed.

Trying to decide what to do, Abel turned toward his family—but it was too late. The military men forced their way into his home. They stole their possessions and abused Abel's 12-year-old daughter.

Abel is one of the two billion people in the world whose lives have been shattered by war and violent conflict. Resonate Global Mission is helping them heal through the Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations ministry (HHTN).

Because Abel was a respected local ministry leader, he and his family's lives were spared that morning, but they would never be the same.

"Since that day, I have not been able to sleep through the night," Abel said.

"The tragedy cast a long shadow over (Abel's) once-bright spirit," added Patience Mutie, who works with HHTN. "This left a deep wound and chipped away at the mosaic of his self-worth."

Abel was invited to attend HHTN's East Africa School of Reconciliation (EASOR) in Kenya, hosted by Way of Peace Kenya and run jointly by Resonate, World Renew, HHTN Global, Rabagirana Ministries, and Le Rucher Ministries.

"The school (brings) together Christian leaders and influential community members from diverse backgrounds and cultures in pursuit of a common goal: reconciliation and transformation," Mutie said.

Before being able to pursue peace and reconciliation in his community, Abel



People participating in Resonate Global Mission's Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations ministry bring their pain to Jesus for healing. Participants burn papers naming their wounds and losses and then lay flowers in the ashes to symbolize their faith that God can make something beautiful from their pain.

needed to experience peace in his own life and heal from his pain. At EASOR, ministry leaders walked Abel through a process of confronting his trauma and bringing his wounds to Jesus.

It was difficult for Abel to think about the night men killed his family members and abused his daughter, but bit by bit, he was able to find healing and forgive those who had harmed him.

"(Abel) took the opportunity to put his faith into practice by symbolically nailing his pain to a cross and giving it all to Jesus. He realized Jesus had always wanted to redeem the things that had been robbed from him and his family on that fateful night," Mutie said.

For the first time in a long time, Abel could sleep through the night.

Through Resonate's work with HHTN, God healed Abel and gave him a new beginning. Now Abel is one of 39 new HHTN leaders helping more people

in their communities to heal and seek reconciliation.

"Each of these new HHTN facilitators has the potential to reshape the narrative of conflict and division that plague our world," Mutie said. "Nations can be healed and transformed when individuals confront their prejudices, embrace the beauty of diversity, acknowledge the centrality of the work of the cross, and build lasting relationships based on forgiveness and reconciliation."

Learn more about Healing Hearts, Transforming Nations at resonateglobalmission.org/hhtn.

**Name has been changed for security*

—Cassie Westrate,
Resonate Global Mission

Farmers Must Adapt to Survive

FOR A LONG TIME, when Lydia Waweru ventured into her fields she was met with the discouraging sight of dry soil. Without enough rain, her crops were failing—and her much-needed income was diminishing.

Like many farming families in rural Kenya and other areas of Africa, Waweru and her children depend on good harvests to survive. Changes in climate have only added further difficulty and unpredictability to their livelihood. Some seasons bring too much rain; others, too little.

“You can imagine the stress when you plant your seeds and you want to grow something, and then the rains don’t come,” said Stephan Lutz, a program consultant with World Renew in Kenya. “For the first season, you might have some stored food or some cash, maybe some animals to help get you by. But every time the rain doesn’t come, it adds stress to people’s lives and makes it harder for them to recover.”

To meet the many challenges of a changing climate, farmers must adapt to survive.

Through World Renew’s training in environmentally-friendly conservation agriculture, farmers are being equipped to minimize tillage, maximize soil cover, and strategically place crops to reduce pests.



Farmers in Kenya like Lydia Waweru are learning to thrive by implementing climate-adaptive farming methods with mentoring from World Renew.

Waweru went through this training with great enthusiasm and then put what she had learned into practice on her farm. When the first year wasn’t successful, she consulted with program staff to make necessary changes. She diversified her crops and ensured that there was enough mulch cover using organic matter to keep the soil moist.

Finally—encouragingly—Waweru saw a dramatic change in her crop yields, even in seasons of poor rainfall.

“My land is now productive,” she said. “I am a happy mother who can provide my family with a variety of food, which is healthy and nutritious. I meet my household needs, and I can serve God and our church with what I have produced from my farm. I have made significant income, and with it I have managed to construct a permanent house.”

For Waweru, climate-adaptive farming combined with the ongoing mentoring from World Renew has been life-changing. She is deeply grateful to those who helped equip her for success, including World Renew staff, partners, and supporters.

Today, this hardworking mother and thriving farmer finds herself more hopeful as she heads into her fields to see what’s growing.

—Adele Gallogly

From Hindu Priest to God's Servant

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN 20 years since India abolished its system of classifying people into castes. But in rural villages such as Jandrah, the caste system is still alive in the way people act socially.

Rajan* was a Hindu priest and one of the people at the top of that system.

"Rajan had great wealth and power compared to those in his community," ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader* said, "and for many years, he used this for evil, helping his village gain a reputation for opposing the gospel and even torturing people who shared God's Word with others."

Despite Rajan's high status and material success, his actions left him feeling spiritually exhausted and even afraid. Rajan began to sense a spiritual battle taking place in his village, and he wanted to seek new answers.

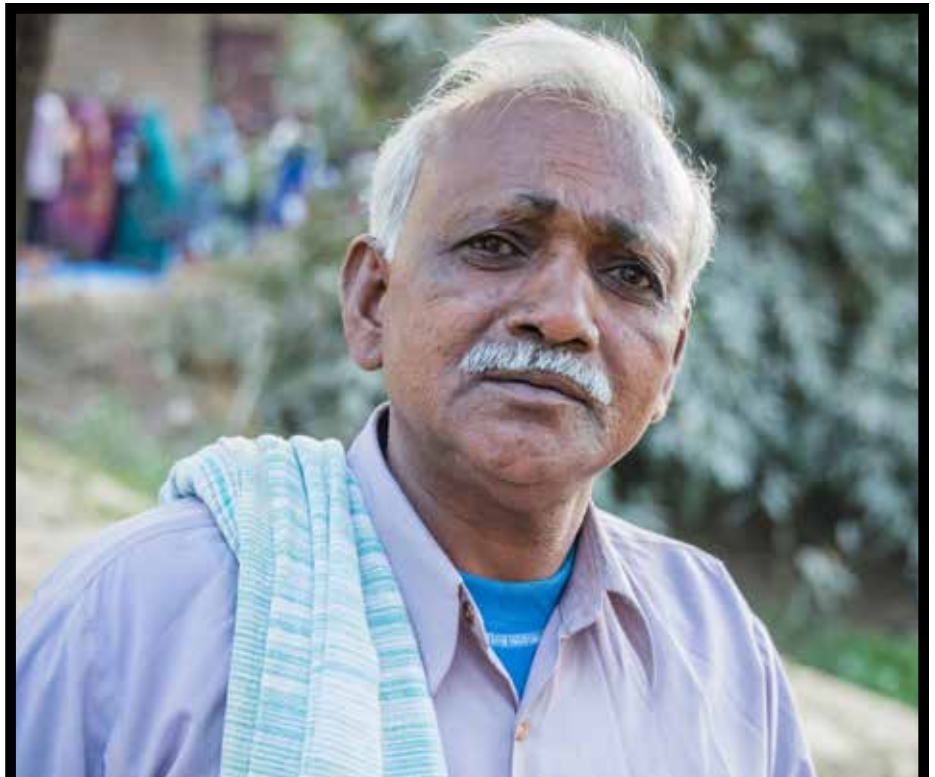
"Rajan and other leaders in Jandrah felt tortured by evil spirits," ReFrame's Hindi ministry leader said. "As a religious leader in the village, he was feeling spiritually helpless as to why his village was undergoing these attacks."

God's Word Intervened

In Rajan's search for answers, he found a radio program produced by ReFrame's Hindi-language ministry partners and supported in part by ministry shares. Just out of curiosity, he began to listen—secretly at first. But God used those messages to stir Rajan's heart. He began praying some of the prayers from the program, and soon he shared his secret with his close family members.

Today Rajan calls himself a Christian, forfeiting his high caste for one of the least-respected people groups in his country.

Rajan has faced opposition and even torture from those who once looked



Most of the people in Rajan's community turned against him when he gave his life to Christ.

up to him as a religious leader, but his faith in Jesus remained intact. Not only did he openly confess his faith in Jesus, but he also donated a large portion of his land for a church building. Today there is a church in this village where more than 200 believers gather for worship!

"Although we're celebrating with Rajan and his community, we know that there are many more villages like his that are still under spiritual distress," said Kurt Selles, ReFrame's director. "Our partners in Egypt, Indonesia, and

West Africa have similar stories of believers who cannot openly share their faith. Please continue to pray for Christians around the world."

**Names have been changed or withheld for security reasons*

—Brian Clark,
ReFrame Ministries



Photo by Chris-Liu/Unsplash

Misreading Scripture Cross-culturally

By Shiao Chong

I vividly remember the time in my youth when I was in a Bible study with my pastor and we were looking at Luke 14:25-35. I got stuck on Jesus' words in verse 26: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple." I was a new believer, and it was the first time I had read that passage. I was horrified by the verb "hate," which today means to intensely dislike something or someone. As an Asian youth steeped in a culture that almost idolizes respect for one's parents, how could I hate my parents or my siblings? I loved them!

At the time, the Bible passage seemed clear to me: If I don't hate my parents, I can't follow Jesus. But I could not choose between the seemingly irreconcilable options, and I began to weep. After realizing why I was crying, my pastor quickly reassured me that Jesus did not mean for us to literally hate our parents but simply that we must love Jesus more than anyone or anything else. It was hyperbole, he explained.

Of course, it was still a radical claim and, to some degree, offensive. But it became less harsh when understood not as disliking one's parents, but as loving them less than one loves Jesus.

My youthful self read our modern understanding of "hate" back into Jesus' use of the word, making his claim more offensive than it already was. I now know that people in Jesus' ancient Middle Eastern culture often spoke with colorful hyperbole to make a point. This was their custom, and Jesus' original audience would have understood his statement to be an exaggeration.

That incident was an early lesson for me in this truth about biblical interpretation: The Bible, even though it's *for* us, was not written *to* us, but to audiences greatly removed from us in time, culture, and language. We can never read Scripture plainly, if by "plainly" we mean ignoring our own cultural biases and the cultural and historical gaps between us and the text. If we do not respect the historical, cultural, and linguistic differences between us and Scripture, we are in danger of reading modern cultural ideas back into the

Bible and distorting whatever insights we might get out of it.

Clarity of Scripture

I am not saying that the Bible is so obscure that only Bible scholars can understand Scripture properly. Neither am I arguing against the Reformation's doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, historically called the "perspicuity of Scripture." That doctrine does not assert that everything in Scripture is clear and easy to understand. It only teaches that what is necessary for salvation is clear in Scripture. We see this in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646): "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them" (Ch. 1.VII).

Scripture itself shows that some parts of the Bible are not easy to understand:

“(Paul’s) letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction,” the apostle Peter writes (2 Pet. 3:16), and the Ethiopian eunuch needed Philip’s help to understand the prophet Isaiah (Acts 8:26-40).

So even without biblical scholarship, anyone can still read the Bible and sufficiently discern its main message of salvation. But not everything in the Bible is easy to understand, not even for first-century readers like the ones Peter wrote to. How much more difficult must it be for those who are centuries removed from the Scripture’s cultures, customs, and contexts?

Lost in Translation

Modern translations of the Bible, though generally reliable, are not infallible. Despite the translators’ best efforts, there are many cultural and linguistic nuances that cannot always be adequately translated into English or some other language.

For example, most of us know that ancient Greeks had multiple words for “love.” *Agape* means sacrificial love, *philos* means brotherly love, and *eros* denotes erotic or romantic love, to name the most common ones. All of these words are usually rendered into English from the original Greek of the New Testament as simply “love.” Readers of English translations can thus miss out on some linguistic nuances.

In John 21:15-19, for instance, Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves him. This is, of course, reminiscent of Peter previously disavowing Jesus three times. We can understand this story as Jesus gently reconciling with Peter and restoring him to his apostleship. What might be lost on us without reading the original Greek, however, is that two different words for “love” were used in that conversation.

If we do not respect those historical, cultural, and linguistic differences between us and Scripture, we are in danger of ... distorting whatever insights we might get out of it.

The first and second times Jesus asks Peter “Do you truly love me?” he uses *agape*. In other words, he asks if Peter loves him sacrificially. Peter, however, responds both times with *philos* rather than *agape*: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love (*philos*) you.” Jesus was asking for a higher standard of love from Peter, but Peter was honest: at that point, he only had a friendly, brotherly love for Jesus.

On the third ask, however, Jesus uses *philos*: “Simon son of John, do you love (*philos*) me?” In other words, Jesus condescends to Peter’s level of love. It’s probably why Peter felt a little hurt by that third question. Peter had already said twice that he loved (*philos*) Jesus. He might have felt that Jesus was questioning whether he truly loved Jesus

even at the *philos* level after conceding that he did not love Jesus with an *agape* kind of love.

Therefore, despite Peter’s honest admission that he did not love Jesus sacrificially (at least not then), Jesus still commissioned him to feed and care for the spiritual flock. This was Christ’s grace to Peter. His prophecy concerning Peter’s martyrdom (vs. 18-19) suggests that though Peter on that morning might not have loved Christ sacrificially or unconditionally, he would grow to love Christ even to the point of death. All of this rich nuance in the story is lost in translation.

Another example of lost nuance is the phrase “eternal life.” We conventionally understand the phrase to mean living forever in heaven. But for the Jews of Jesus’ time, “eternal life” meant the life of the world to come, bestowed after the resurrection of the dead (*IVP Bible Background Commentary*, p. 824). This understanding was derived from Daniel 12:2-3. The world to come is the new heaven and earth where God will rule, where sin and its consequences will be no more (Rev. 21). The emphasis, therefore, is not only on the length of life—eternity—but on what kind of life: a life that partakes of God’s new future reality. But our modern minds, obsessed as we are with time, tend to focus on the longevity of eternal life.

Forgotten Contexts

In addition to its linguistic nuances, Scripture also contains a host of assumed and unspoken historical, social, economic, political, and religious contexts. The original audience would have known all of these contexts—they were living in them! The Bible’s authors did not need to spell them out. But we, centuries removed, do not know those contexts without biblical scholars and historians helping us fill in the gaps—and

sometimes those contexts can be pivotal for understanding a passage.

As one example, the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14 is better understood if we know its social and religious contexts. For one thing, the parts about seating arrangements are better appreciated if we understand the social customs of the time. But another part of the story is also enriched by cultural understanding.

Jesus had encouraged his host, a prominent Pharisee, to invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, (and) the blind” (v. 13) instead of people with social status who could repay the host with favors down the road. “Although they cannot repay you,” said Jesus, “you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (v. 14).

On hearing this, one of the dinner guests says, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God” (v. 15). Behind this saying is a theology about the messianic banquet in God’s kingdom. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, there is one that talks about a common Jewish belief in Jesus’ time about the messianic banquet—the celebration feast when the Messiah ushers in the new world of God’s kingdom (Kenneth Bailey writes about this in his book *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, p. 311). Gentiles, they believed, would not be part of this messianic banquet. Any unrighteous Jew is also excluded. So is anyone who is crippled in hand or foot, lame or blind, deaf or unable to speak, senile or diseased. So when this guest said, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God,” what he meant was, “You know, none of those poor, crippled, blind, or lame you asked the host to invite will be part of that messianic banquet when God’s kingdom comes. You, Jesus, seem to forget that those people are ultimately

not blessed.” He was trying to correct Jesus’ theology!

Jesus responds to this challenge with a parable about a great banquet. In this parable, all of the originally invited guests—presumably those with high social status—fail to honor the host’s invitation. The host instead invites the poor, the lame, and the blind, and when there’s still room, he goes out to compel those who are out on the roads and the lanes—people who might be homeless or Gentiles or foreigners traveling along the roads. Jesus, in response to the theology of his day, was saying (among other things), “You think that the messianic banquet is only for religious leaders and do-gooders? Well, you are wrong! God’s table is graciously inclusive. God’s feast is radically hospitable to all. It’s a feast that will be filled with precisely those people you think are excluded: the outcasts, the poor, the lame, the blind—even Gentiles!”

Without knowing that religious context about the messianic feast, we might not have grasped this layer of meaning—one of many in this text.

Cultural Humility

I hope the few examples here show why we need to have cultural humility when we read the Scriptures. Failure to do so can cause us to misread Scripture. And that can sometimes cause a great deal of harm.

How much harm, for example, did American Christians in the antebellum South cause by misusing 1 Peter 2:18? It reads (in the then-popular King James Version), “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward (i.e., difficult or fractious).” Christians had used this text to resist the abolition of slavery and to require Black slaves to remain subservient,

even to cruel masters. After all, the Bible’s instruction seemed pretty clear.

What antebellum Christians didn’t know—or forgot—was that Peter was giving pastoral advice to household slaves in an imperial setting where there was no real possibility of emancipation. Those Christians should not have applied Peter’s words uncritically to their context as if Peter was writing to 19th-century Black slaves in America.

Finally, no matter how clear a specific passage might seem to us, we need to always interpret and apply it in light of the whole of Scripture. For this example, Paul’s admonition to slave masters and the belief of equality between slaves and masters before God (Eph. 6:9) provide important balance.

Despite knowing more today than many Christians in the past did, we still need to be careful and humble when interpreting and applying Scripture. If we do not respect historical and cultural differences, we can inadvertently misread Scripture through our own modern cultural lenses. **B**



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

1. How have you understood the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture? How have you heard it explained or (mis)used by others?
2. What other examples can you give that illustrate how historical and cultural contexts or linguistic nuances can help you better understand a Bible passage?

READ MORE ONLINE

The Man in the Blue Crocs

When he noticed me, I asked, “Are you alright?”

ONE BLUE CROC, large and dirty, lay askew on the sidewalk.

“Too bad,” I thought. “Someone lost a shoe, and one shoe without the other is useless.” As I kept walking on that sunny Sunday afternoon, I noticed a patch of blue far up ahead on the sidewalk. “You can’t be serious,” I thought as I approached it. Another blue Croc! If I went back to get the other Croc, I thought, they could be cleaned up, and maybe someone could use them.

But that felt awkward. Besides, I wanted to keep walking. So I did. Far ahead, I noticed a man on a motorized scooter, chugging along at a snail’s pace. Stop. Start. Stop. Start. Coming up beside the person, I saw his bare foot resting on the scooter’s floor. Discolored skin hinted at a medical condition. A catheter bag peeked out from beneath his pant leg. When he noticed me, I asked, “Are you alright?”

The man’s woeful tale spilled out. He had gone to buy his groceries and had left his phone and wallet in the basket of his scooter. When he wasn’t looking, they were stolen. Confused and disoriented, he was making his way home from the grocery store. But the scooter’s battery was dying and needed to be recharged. I offered to go to a nearby house to ask if the scooter could recharge there, but the man declined. Even if he went in fits and starts, he said, he could make it home. But he was worried, too, because his personal support worker was waiting to help him with his medication, and he had no way of letting her know where he was.

As the man continued to lament his situation, I noticed that his other foot was also bare, and suddenly everything made sense.

“Did you lose a pair of blue Crocs?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said, “and they’re extra large, especially for my feet.”

“I saw them back there,” I said. “Do you want me to get them for you?”

“Yes!” he exclaimed.

As I retraced my steps, I realized that when the Crocs slipped off his feet, he had been unable to get off of his scooter to pick them up. I thought of all that had gone wrong for him that day and what might have gone awry in the years before that. How vulnerable he was!

Back at the scooter, the man laboriously put the Crocs back on. I asked if I could help him in any other way. No, he assured me, he would get home, slowly but surely.

Before I left, I said, “I want you to know that Jesus loves you.” I knew who had put me on this man’s path, even if he didn’t know it. Walking on, I thanked God that I could serve Jesus in this unusual way.

In the following weeks, I walked that stretch of road many times and often prayed for The Man in the Blue Crocs, as I came to call him. I wondered how the rest of his day went and how he was doing now.

A few months later, I walked into a grocery store near my home. A motorized scooter zipped past me in the store’s entryway. The Man in the Blue Crocs! Except this time, instead of looking vulnerable and disoriented, he was happy and seemed well, not wearing the blue Crocs that had led to our encounter, but dressed for winter weather with his feet adequately shod. I recognized him, but he didn’t notice me. I smiled and thought that if I ever get a chance to talk to him again, I’ll ask him his name. But for now, I’ll call The Man in the Blue Crocs a beloved child of God, because that’s who he is. 



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer and a member of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Orchid Theology

God himself
is beauty, and
he creates
beautiful things.

“GOD ALMIGHTY FIRST PLANTED a garden. And indeed, it is the purest of human pleasures.” —Francis Bacon, *Of Gardens* (1625)

I adore orchids. Tending to them in my home is a hobby that brings me much joy. The beauty and variety in the orchid reminds me of God’s creativity and God’s loving care for every part of creation, and I derive great satisfaction from raising them.

With more than 28,000 species found all over the world, orchids are the largest family of flowering plants. Some orchid plants are minuscule; others are enormous, weighing hundreds of pounds. Some have a delicate or delicious perfume, others a spicy fragrance, and a few stink dreadfully. Many types of orchids can live for decades. Some are terrestrial; others are epiphytes, meaning they grow on trees or shrubs with their roots exposed to extract moisture from the humid air in their environment.

When fertilized, orchids produce vast numbers of exceedingly tiny seeds. Fascinatingly, most varieties require a compatible fungus in their environment to germinate. Some varieties will interact with only one type of fungi, making them extremely vulnerable to changes or interference in their ecosystem.

Orchid cultivation as a hobby began in the mid-1800s among wealthy collectors in England. In a period sometimes called “orchidelirium” or “orchidmania,” enthusiasts financed sometimes dangerous and extreme expeditions all over the world in an effort to obtain rare species from the wild for their collections. They would pay exorbitantly for plants that ultimately had a very low survival rate because so little was known about their care. In 1973, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna

and Flora banned international trading of orchid species taken from their natural habitats, but even today, theft of rare and desirable orchids from botanical gardens and illegal harvesting from the wild continue, putting many species at risk of extinction.

In reflective moments while watering my own small collection, I have wondered if my own fascination with orchids is entirely honoring to God or if I am subject to a little bit of “orchidelirium” myself. Is the time and money I spend purchasing and cultivating admittedly expensive houseplants a selfish act? Is the pleasure I take in bringing them to bloom merely frivolous, incompatible with seeking first God’s kingdom? I suppose the question could be put more broadly: Can our investment in things or activities that make our lives and living spaces more satisfying and beautiful be honoring to God?

I am an admirer of the work of William Morris, an English textile designer and leader of the Arts and Crafts movement of the turn of the 20th century. Morris rejected the clutter of Victorian homes and lower-quality mass-produced products and focused instead on simplicity, beauty, creativity, and quality handmade craftsmanship. His mantra was, “Have nothing in your houses that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful.” Can this attitude be reconciled with a Christian point of view? Should our gardens include flowers, or only vegetables?

Pursuing Beauty

Beauty in the natural world is a sign of God’s provision: “Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully



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Photo by Earl Wilcox/Unplash

for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?" (Matt. 6:28-34, NLT).

Growing things like houseplants or a garden is in itself an optimistic and hopeful act—an act of faith, even. There is no guarantee that the seed will flourish, the plant will flower, or the vine will produce fruit, and yet when we tend to plants, we trust in God's provision. It can take a long time to see results, especially with slow-growing plants such as orchids. Gardening teaches me that good things don't always come quickly. A life lived for God requires patience, trust, and optimism. When life is disappointing, the beauty of an orchid reminds me to lean into grace. God is in control.

Lucy Maud Montgomery wrote in *Anne's House of Dreams*, "To potter with green growing things, watching each day to see the dear, new sprouts come up, is like taking a hand in creation, I think. Just now my garden is like faith—the substance of things hoped for." Or consider this quote from author Phyllis Theroux: "I think this is what hooks one to gardening:

It is the closest one can come to being present at creation." In Genesis 1, we find the echoing refrain "And God saw that it was good." The Hebrew word for "good" is *tov*, which can also be translated as "beautiful" or "functioning as it was intended to." Genesis 1:31 could be read like this: "Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was perfect and beautiful!" Everything in creation was good, beautiful, and working the way it was supposed to work.

Creation brings glory to God because it reflects God's attributes. God himself is beauty, and God creates beautiful things. Psalm 96:6 says, "Honor and majesty surround him; strength and beauty fill his sanctuary" (NLT). We are made in God's image, we reflect God's attributes, and by our nature we are drawn to beauty, creativity, and order. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul instructs us to live our daily lives for the glory of God. David De Bruyn contends, "A Christian understanding of leisure is also grounded in beauty. Recreation is truly re-creation. We do those acts of restoration, of creativity, that bring beauty into the world. ... All of life can be an act of contemplating God's glory, or consecrating acts for God's glory" ("Beauty and

Christianity's Primary Endeavors," tinyurl.com/3wacvbbb). This aligns with the Reformed view that when we do our daily work well—when we create a piece of artwork, grow a flower garden, or care for others—we are bringing glory to God by working according to our purpose, and in that, we are participating in and stewarding creation.

I believe that when we consecrate our work and our leisure activities to God's glory, or when we contemplate a sunset or a beautiful landscape or a baby's face and see the fingerprints of God, it brings God glory. Scripture says believers "see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord ... makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image" (2 Cor. 3:16, NLT). In tending to my orchids I see a reflection of the beauty and glory of the Lord and am reminded that the God who cares enough to make a fragile houseplant so mysteriously and incredibly beautiful cares that way about me too, and that God is working in my life and in the world to bring about God's kingdom in beautiful ways that I can't always understand. Truly, "God has made everything beautiful for its own time" (Eccles. 3:11, NLT). **B**

1. What are some of the most beautiful things you have ever known?
2. "Gardening teaches me that good things don't always come quickly. A life lived for God requires patience, trust, and optimism." What experiences do you have that may echo or support this statement?
3. How do we encourage people, especially Christians, who might see themselves as "ugly" or not beautiful?

READ MORE ONLINE

Four Books to Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month

EVERY MONTH, I try to read four books: one classic, one newish fiction title, something from my unread shelf, and one from the perspective of an author of color. Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15 to Oct. 15) offers the chance for me to learn more about my Hispanic siblings via books, my favorite teachers.

Here are four titles that will help you step in the shoes of Hispanic neighbors around the world and teach you about Latin American history, cultures, foods, joys, and challenges:

In the Time of the Butterflies by Julia Alvarez

This modern classic, written in 1994 but referring to mid-20th-century events, is based on the true story of the Mirabal sisters—Patria, Mariá Teresa, and Minerva—together called *las mariposas*, or the butterflies. It's an apt nickname, as butterflies are symbols of freedom from oppression. *Las mariposas* fought for freedom from the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and led a resistance movement that inspired the world. I learned about the book from my teenage daughter, who read it in school. She thought it was "depressing" because three of the sisters are assassinated in the end, but I was energized by the raw courage of these real-life heroines depicted gloriously in historical fiction.

Violeta by Isabel Allende

This sweeping novel from the great Chilean novelist Isabel Allende, still writing books at 81, tells the epic story of Violeta Del Valle, a woman whose life spans 100 years, from the Spanish flu pandemic to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Violeta bears Allende's elegant use of language, comparative wholesomeness

(it has no swearing or sex scenes, though characters do not live pristine moral lives), and a plot that carries you along like a rolling river. If you like this 2022 book, try Allende's 2023 release: *The Wind Knows My Name*.


Abuelita Faith by Kat Armas

This book weaves the faith history of the Cuban author's grandmother with biblical reflection.

From the publisher: "Abuelita Faith tells the story of unnamed and overlooked theologians in society and in the Bible—mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and daughters—whose survival, strength, resistance, and persistence teach us the true power of faith and love."

Good and Beautiful and Kind: Becoming Whole in a Fractured World by Rich Villodas

"We have to rediscover the truth that wholeness, healing, and love are found in the ancient path of Jesus," writes Villodas, who is of Puerto Rican heritage.

I adored this book, my favorite nonfiction read of 2022. Villodas is a winsome, relatable writer, and his stories will linger with me for years. But most importantly, this book gave me a new vision for being in this world—a more humble, healing, tender, and abiding way. 



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

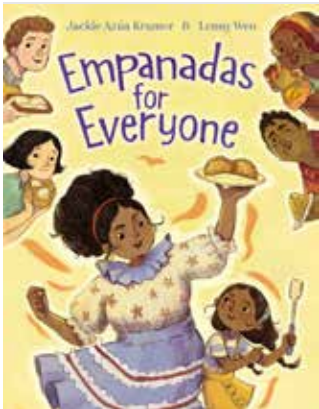


Malcolm Guite **YouTube Channel**

Reviewed by Sam Gutierrez

The door opens gently into Malcolm Guite's office. Viewers are invited in while Guite searches his cluttered shelves to choose a treasured book to read out loud. But before he does, he'll often light his pipe, pour a drink, and speak about the power of words to open doorways into worlds full of magic, courage, heartbreak, risk, and adventure.

It's not professionally produced, but it doesn't matter. His wonderful English accent and that twinkle in his eye make you feel like Narnia might be hiding right behind his bookcase. Like children, we're drawn in as Guite puffs smoke rings like Gandalf as he reads poetry to people all over the world lucky enough to have found his channel. (YouTube)



Empanadas for Everyone

By Jackie Azúa Kramer, illustrated by Lenny Wen

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Carina looks forward to Saturdays, when she visits Tia Mimi in her New York barrio and together make their favorite empanadas. As they create the filled-pastry turnovers, they move to the beat of salsa on the radio and sing, “I like empanadas! I like you!”

But this Saturday, Tia has left Carina a note asking her to shop at the neighborhood stores and gather the ingredients they need for their empanadas. She’s reminded that people from different cultures have their own versions of empanadas, and she understands that they are “the same, but different.”

Jenny Wen’s artwork captures the joy and vitality of a neighborhood that is “always humming with life” and that is a welcoming space for people—and their empanadas—from around the world. (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers)



Barbie

Reviewed by Lorilee Craker

What does it mean to be human?

This is the question posed by the blockbuster movie directed by Greta Gerwig and starring Margot Robbie as the plastic plaything.

We meet Barbie in Barbieland, a kind of Eden before the Fall. But before you can say “stereotypical,” Barbie starts thinking about death and becomes a fallen creature, all too aware of her fallen arches and other proofs of humanity.

Barbie teaches us that to be human is to risk pain and even death, but that it is worth it to live an authentic, honest life. Not every day is the “best day,” but some days are, and it’s the hard, sad days that make the good ones even better. (In theaters; rated PG-13 for suggestive dialogue and brief language. Warner Bros.)



Wings in the Wild

By Margarita Engle

Reviewed by Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Soleida and her parents are acutely aware that if Cuban government officials discover their secret garden filled with sculptures of chained birds, they will be arrested and imprisoned. When a hurricane devastates the nation and the sculptures are revealed to the public, Soleida’s worst nightmare is realized: Her parents are arrested, and she is forced to flee her homeland.

Meanwhile, 16-year-old Dariel, a Cuban American teen, joins his grandfather, Abuelo, on a trip from Miami to the refugee camp where Soleida is staying.

Written in free verse and alternating between Soleida’s and Dariel’s voices, Engle’s poignant narrative captures the angst and hope that fuel two teens’ present goals and future dreams. Recommended for ages 14 and older. (Atheneum Books for Young Readers)

The Lowdown

Applying the Bible to Politics: In *The Ballot and the Bible*, Kaitlyn Schiess unpacks examples of how Americans have connected the Bible to politics in the past, highlighting times it was applied well and times it was egregiously misused. (Brazos Press)

Killers of the Flower Moon: In the 1920s, members of the Osage tribe of Osage County, Okla., are murdered after oil is found on their land, and the FBI decides to investigate. (Paramount, in theaters Oct. 6, streaming Oct. 20 on Apple TV+)

Based on the Bestselling Book: In *All the Light We Cannot See*, the paths of a blind French girl and a young German soldier collide during WWII. (Netflix, Nov. 2)

Mitch McDeere Returns: More than 30 years after *The Firm* helped put John Grisham on the map, the prizewinning author is releasing a sequel, *The Exchange*. (Penguin Random House, Oct. 17)

Take a Break!

OFTEN OUR LIVES GET SO BUSY that we forget about the importance of rest. It is so easy to “take a break” but actually just switch activities instead. Television, phones, computers, and video games easily fill that time we set aside to rest. We often do not take time to simply stop and take a few moments to just be. Boredom is important to help us process what is going on in our day. It helps spark creativity, something we enjoy because we’re made in the image of God, the ultimate creator. Taking a moment to rest in silence—and yes, in boredom—can help us connect to God and his creation.

We can learn about rest by looking at one of the creatures God made: the bear. In Ojibwe culture bears are associated with patience and strength. They got that reputation because they’re very good at resting. A bear can spend several months peacefully sleeping over the winter, when food is scarce and temperatures drop. The bear’s heart rate drops, it doesn’t need to eat or drink, and its kidneys cycle

waste. The bear rests, completely trusting in the coming spring.

Rest, whether it’s sleeping or just taking a break, is important for our physical and spiritual health. We have been made in the image of God, and even God took time to rest (Gen. 2:2). God’s rest was taking time to enjoy and spend time just being with God’s creation.

The book of Leviticus includes the rules God made for rest—not just for God’s people, but for the land too. For all of creation, rest helps to restore and strengthen.

To fully rest, we need to trust that we will be safe. It is hard to rest when we are worried or frightened. But just like the bear trusts that spring will arrive, we can trust that God is with us, and we can rest peacefully.

Try This!

Take some time to find a spot in a local forest or park to just sit and enjoy God’s creation without phones, music, or books—just you and creation.

How did it make you feel?

Where did your mind go?

What did you see that you wouldn’t have if you had been distracted? **B**



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



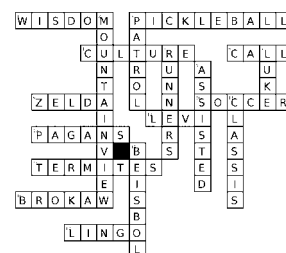
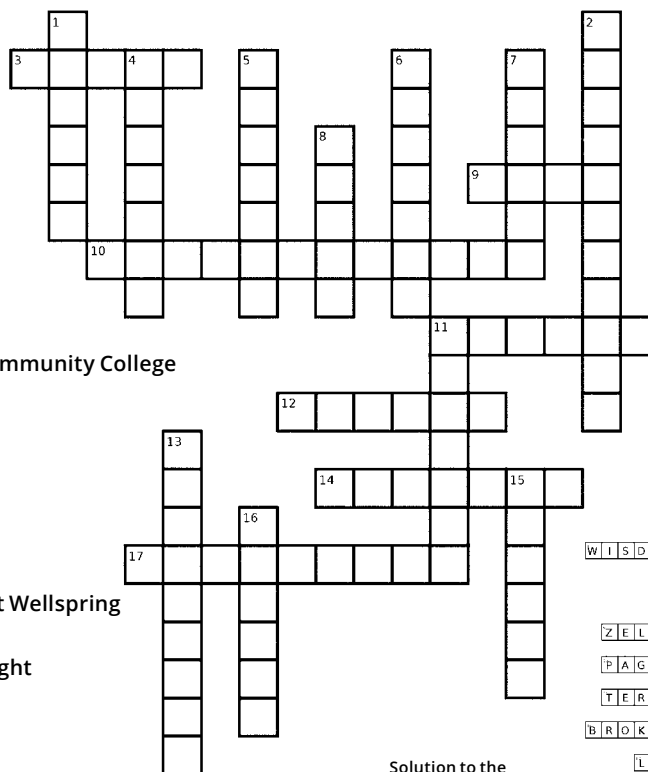
Find the answers to the crossword clues in this issue of *The Banner*. See the solution in the next issue!
 (Word Play appears monthly except for the July/August issue.)

Down

1. A language spoken in Haitian church plants
2. *In the Time of the _____* is a modern classic set in the Dominican Republic
4. A conversation group where ideas mix
5. There are over 28,000 species of this plant
6. _____ Creek Stewards
7. Greek for "brotherly love"
8. In Ojibwe culture, this animal is associated with patience and strength
11. Common _____ is a new ministry at Muskegon Community College
13. Former president of Calvin Seminary
15. Theologian cited in this month's editorial
16. A Kenyan farmer helped by World Renew

Across

3. Diane Wendt helps other mothers carry this
9. The color of the Cross
10. Older adults and eighth graders become _____ at Wellspring
11. Greta _____ directed *Barbie*
12. It means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight
14. Author of *Dementia with Dignity*
17. _____ for *Everyone*, a book by Jackie Azúa Kramer



Solution to the September 2023 puzzle

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DEADLINES: Ads for the November issue are due October 2, 2023; December issue: October 30, 2023.

Subject to availability. Details online at thebanner.org/classifieds, or for display ads see thebanner.org/ads. Advertising in *The Banner* does not imply editorial endorsement.

Congregational Announcements

BRADENTON CRC WELCOMES WINTER VISITORS & VACATIONERS! Our Florida church is diverse in ages and interests but united in passionate service to our Savior. Sunday services at 9:30 AM and 5 PM. Weekly Bible studies, Senior Fellowship and more. See our website calendar for information.

Denominational Announcements

CLASSIS KALAMAZOO FALL MEETING Classis Kalamazoo will hold their fall meeting on October 10, 2023 at 6:00 PM at Northern Heights CRC.

CLASSIS NORTH CASCADES is meeting Thursday, October 19 2023 at 7 pm in Sumas CRC, Sumas, WA.

Church Positions Available

ASSOCIATE PASTOR/MINISTRY FACILITATOR Is God calling you to a new adventure serving Him in the spectacular foothills of the Rockies? First Christian Reformed Church in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta is searching for a full time Ministry Facilitator with a heart to serve. The successful candidate will work with the senior pastor, be a liaison and support person for church ministry leaders, facilitate small group development and outreach, and welcome and enfold newcomers. It is not essential that the successful candidate be ordained, but does require a strong grounding in Scripture with a Reformed perspective. Please check out our website at firstcrocky.ca and contact us at rockyfirstcrcsearch@gmail.com.

FULL TIME PASTOR Exeter CRC in Ontario, Canada, is prayerfully seeking the next pastor God has prepared for us. We are an imperfect church looking for an imperfect pastor who will be the perfect fit in our multi-generational congregation. Exeter is a rural community nestled in the Great Lakes basin of southwestern Ontario and located 40 minutes north of London (pop 540,000). If you are interested or intrigued in this position, please contact us in confidence at pastorsearch@exetercrc.on.ca. We would love to hear from you!

FULL TIME YOUTH DIRECTOR CrossPoint Church in Chino, CA is seeking a full-time Director of Youth Ministries to join our leadership team. CP Youth serves over 60 youth in grades 7-12 from our church and community as we invest in the next generation and seek intergenerational ministry. Primary responsibilities would be providing program leader-

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ship and teaching for youth and youth volunteers, in addition to managing program and event details. Find the opportunity profile at crosspointchino.org/employment.

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

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

LUCKNOW COMMUNITY CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH is prayerfully seeking a full time Pastor. We are a small rural town in Ontario. Please contact our Search Committee at plbrink13@gmail.com for more information

PART-TIME LEAD PASTOR AT CITY LIFE CHURCH (SACRAMENTO, CA) City Life Church seeks an ordained pastor. CLC is a small, 18-year-old, multi-generational community with a passion for social justice and creation care. Stipend: \$5,000/mo (.75 FTE). See job post on The CRC Network. Contact office@sacramentocitylife.com

Anniversary

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 60 YEARS



POOL, Melle and Diane were married for 60 years on August 22, 2023. We rejoice and celebrate. With our children, Ken (Renee), Cheryl Godin (Bill), Randall (Maria), Chris (Daria), and Doug (Tricia), and our 17 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren, we give thanks to God for this blessing. mellepool@gmail.com.

SWIERENGA, Don and Mary of Grand Rapids, Michigan, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 18, 2023. Don is originally from Cicero, Illinois and Mary (Vogelzang) is from Holland, Michigan. They were brought

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together at Calvin College in 1959. God has blessed them with 6 children, 20 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren; Patty and Karl DeLange (William & Kari and Arielle, Sarah & Max Vruwink, Rebekah & Nathan Hall, James & Ellie and Silas, Christina), Jon and Marj Swierenga (Rachel & Quincy and Lydia Jackson, Deena & Karl Gustafson, Andrew & Brooklin, and Matthew), Betsy and Rev. Tim Blackmon, (Luke & Krysta, Jessica, David, and Jonathan), Debbie and Paul Kennon, (Olivia, John, and Marissa), Jim Swierenga (Mary Frances and June), David and Courtney Swierenga (Kate and Hank). Children are a heritage from the Lord and we thank God for them and the blessing of 60 years of marriage.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY 65 YEARS

BEEZHOLD On Aug. 15, 2023 Jim and Carol (Van Noord) celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary in Pauma Valley, California with their 3 children and 4 grandchildren. They thank God for many blessings.



EVENHOUSE, John and Marcia (DeBoer) 413 Jamestown Ave. Westmont, IL 60559 celebrated their 65th anniversary on August 23. Children: Doug & June, Norm & Teresa, Jim & Rachel, John & Jana, 16 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren. We love you and thank God for His faithfulness!

Birthdays

BIRTHDAY 100 YEARS



EDWARD (BUD) JOLING will turn 100 on Oct. 12. He and his family are thankful to God for a long and full life. Birthday greetings can be sent to 2920 Crystal Lane, Kalamazoo, MI 49009.

Obituaries



BUIKEMA, William Robert, age 95, a man of strong faith and a Korean War veteran, passed away peacefully on August 22, 2023. Bill was born on August 17, 1928, in Chicago, IL to Robert and Angeline

Buikema. He was preceded in death by his parents, his brothers Robert, Jr. and Ronald, his sister-in-law Elizabeth and his daughter-in-law Debra. Bill is survived by his beloved wife of 72 years Gertrude (Werkman), dear sisters Gertrude and Laverne, dear sister-in-law Ruth (Van Druenen), treasured children William, Jr. (Jean Hoffman), Janice (Joseph Ehrlich), Robert (Danette Bergsma), Mary (Thomas Beltman), and Timothy (Irene Feyer), and cherished 14 grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren. Bill graduated from Chicago Christian High School, received a BA from Calvin College, and a Masters Degree from Loyola University. Bill was hired by his alma mater, Chicago Christian, in 1953 to teach Biology and Bible and was subsequently appointed principal, faithfully serving the school for 30 years. He led the school during its transition from Englewood to its present location in Palos Heights, and he was respected for serving in a caring and understanding manner with students, faculty, and parents alike. In 1983 Bill retired from education and finished out his career as owner of Slater Dorn Shoes. We praise God for his love and faithfulness to his family and to the Christian community he served. Memorials to Southwest Chicago Christian School Foundation, 12001 S. Oak Park Ave., Palos Heights, IL 60463 or Providence Hospice, 18601 North Creek Dr., Suite A, Tinley Park, IL 60477 are appreciated.



DUTHLER, Edna Mae, age 91, went home to be with her Lord on Saturday, August 12, 2023. She was born on December 12, 1931, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to Reverend William and Mary Masselink. When she was 10 years old the family moved to Chicago where she finished high school. She then came back to Grand Rapids and graduated from Calvin College and began teaching. She taught at Seymour Christian school and West Side Christian school. She and her husband, Harvey Duthler married in 1959 and adopted their two children from Bethany Christian Services. They were married for 55 years before he passed away in 2014. Above all, Edna was a person of very strong faith. Her faith was steadfast and evident every day of her life. Even up until the very end she would say, "The best is yet to come!" Edna is survived by her daughter and son-in-law, Mary and John Leese, and her son and daughter-in-law, Robert and Vicki Duthler; 7 grandchildren, 1 great grandchild, sister-in-law, Glenda Masselink; and several loving nieces, nephews and cousins. She was preceded in death by her loving husband, her parents, and by her brothers, William Masselink, Jr., and Paul Masselink. Edna's family will celebrate her life with visitation on Wednesday, August 23, from 10 till 11:30 AM at Shawnee Park Christian reformed church. A funeral service will be held at 11:30 AM with Reverend Darrin Compagner officiating.

FAUBLE, Barbara Jean, age 98, of Wyoming, Michigan, passed away Feb. 25, 2023. She is survived by her daughter Gloria; daughter-in-law Kathy; son Douglas (Claire); and daughter Penny (Philip) Thomas. She is also survived by grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren. Barbara was predeceased by her husband Lloyd Ray Sr, son Lloyd Ray Jr, and daughter Darlene. Barbara was a member of Lee St. CRC in Wyoming, Michigan, and had previously been a member of Rogers Hts. CRC, Franklin St. CRC, and Hillcrest Chapel.



STERK, Martin James, 72, of Bellflower, California, entered his heavenly home on July 1. Born and raised in Bellflower, after graduating from Calvin College, he returned there to work in the travel industry. In 2009 he moved to Vietnam to work with Pastor Bao Nguyen in serving local ministries. The ten years he spent there enriched many lives, including his own, and nurtured his love for the Vietnamese people. He was preceded in death by his parents Martin and Anna Sterk, and is survived by his sisters Lois (Gene) Miller, Jeannie (Vern) Snoeyink, Frances (Alvern) Miersma and Don (Valerie); also 10 cherished nephews and nieces. Memorial contributions may be made to Saigon Reform Presbyterian Church.

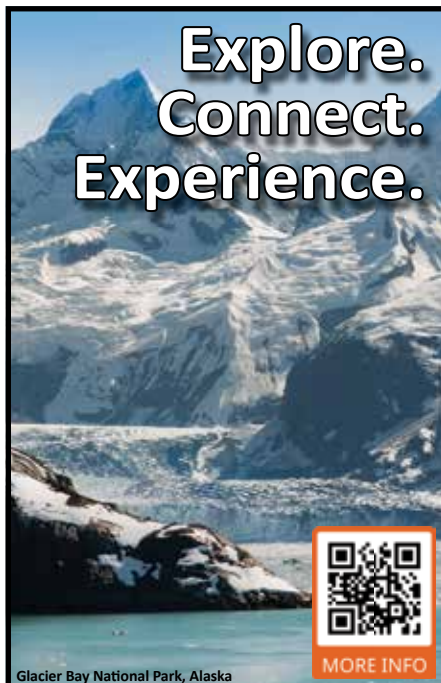
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My Journey With Chronic Pain

Honoring God with my pain is not easy, but it is possible.

I HAVE BATTLED chronic pain my entire life.

Born with cerebral palsy, my body is messed up. My muscles are extremely tight, deformity plagues my right side (particularly my hand and arm), and scoliosis means my back regularly slips out of alignment. It doesn't help that I am 6-foot-7, making me frequently reach or twist. Arthritis is an unwelcome foe too, especially when I get out of bed in the morning. One medical professional said my body is constantly fighting itself.

I am well acquainted with the medical system. If I could capture the time I have spent driving to appointments and occupying medical offices, it would amaze me how much it adds up. My body has undergone numerous procedures, including three hip surgeries. I have counted loads of ceiling tiles as I lay on my back waiting for a test or surgery. I joke that medical personnel greet me by name at the front door.

My coping mechanisms include stretching exercises, frequent chiropractic visits, formal physical therapy sessions, occasional massage appointments, healthy eating, and taking a boatload of supplements. I figure taking the best care of myself that I can will help my condition and lessen inflammation.

The physical aspect of chronic pain is one obstacle, but the emotional or mental issues go deeper. My mind frequently churns through ways I can gain relief and lessen my pain. Those thoughts don't ever leave my brain. Also, with each added pain, I wonder if it will become part of a new normal. Fear and worry are a particular challenge.

But how do I respond to chronic pain as a Christian? I have heard numerous sermons and read many articles on temporary trials. The Bible includes

several verses about temporary troubles, such as 2 Corinthians 4:17: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (ESV). But what happens when you face unending trials such as chronic pain? My consistent pain doesn't seem "light" or "momentary."

Honoring God with my pain is not easy, but it is possible. Centering my thoughts on the fact that God allowed this in my life for a purpose helps. I might not know the reason or appreciate it, but God is working all things out for my good, according to Romans 8:28.

My best response is acceptance, knowing that God wants me to experience blessings and joys. Thankfulness and contentment are also key. Am I thankful for the blessings God gives me, such as days when I experience less pain, or am I more focused on the hardships in my life? I confess I need improvement in that area.

Being in my 60s, I often think about heaven. I look forward to it more and more every day because God says suffering will end there. This life's trouble will be a distant memory. I believe I will have a new body free of the present pain and limitations in this life. No more trips to the chiropractor or to physical therapy. I will be healed. That provides glorious hope.

But while I'm still here, I want to practice faithfulness and esteem God in my pain and suffering. My desire for when life ends is to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." **B**



Paul Delger is a longtime professional writer and inspirational speaker to young people and lives in Kanawha, Iowa.

10 O'Clock and 2 O'Clock

As we passed the car, I glanced over.



Esther Kruis Brower is a retired florist. She and her husband enjoy wandering America's national parks and hoped to hit their 43rd this past summer. They are members of Centerpoint Church in Kalamazoo, Mich.

"KNOCK, KNOCK." That was my cell-phone letting me know there was a text message coming in as my husband and I readied for church.

Turns out we weren't the only ones getting ready for church that morning. I picked up my phone and saw I had been sent a picture of our new grandson, dressed and ready to go to church for the first time! At only two months old, he looked so bright-eyed in the picture, nestled in his car seat and looking directly into the camera with a glint of expectation in his brown eyes. His "Sunday best" clothes included a smart little bow tie.

During our drive to church I peeked at the picture a few times. It brought a smile to my face each time.

While making our way across town, a slow-moving vehicle pulled in front of us. As we followed it, the car drifted out of its lane but then straightened itself out. It moved slowly and cautiously. My husband commented that the driver was probably an elderly person driving the short distance from their home to their church.

As we passed the car, I glanced over. Sure enough, there behind the wheel, alone in the car, was an elderly woman dressed in her "Sunday best." She was sitting erect, with her hands firmly placed at 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock on the steering wheel. Leaning forward, she had a look of determination on her face.

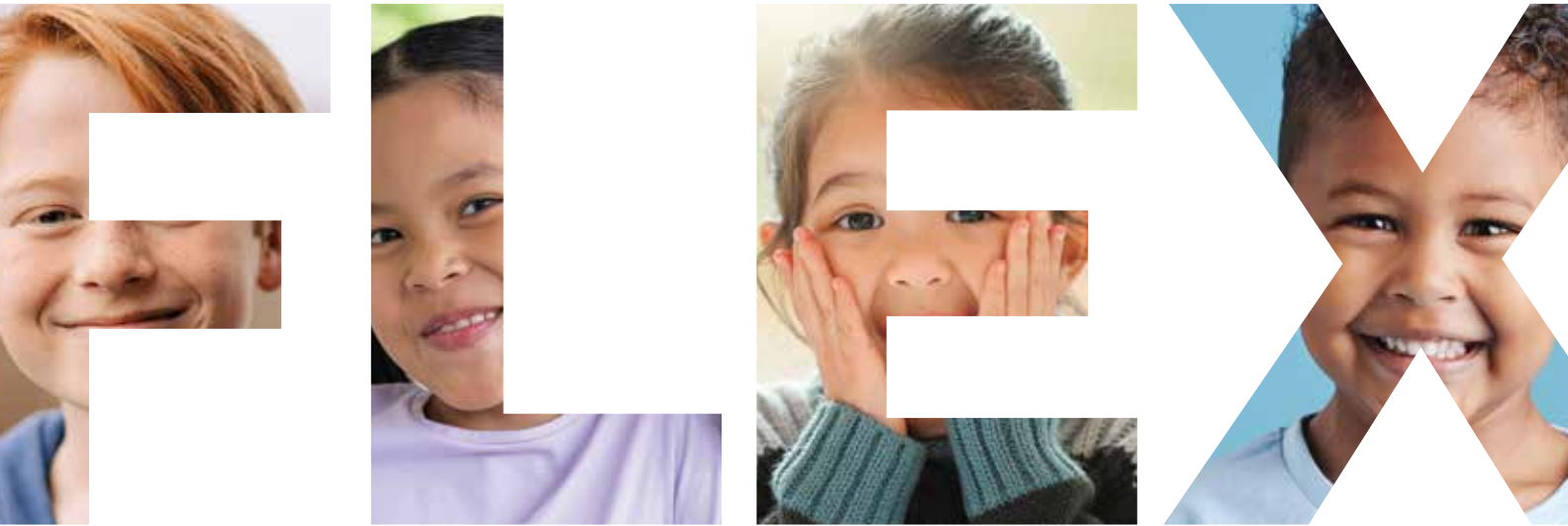
I suppose a lifetime of going-to-church experiences rode with her in the car. Maybe a young girl looking out the window (probably not wearing a seat belt back then) repeating her Bible memory verse in her head so she would be ready to recite it at Sunday school. Possibly a trip home from church in the dark as a young person driving on a snowy road after a Young People's Society meeting, trusting God to keep her safe. Likely a few noisy rides when the family car was

filled with children. Then the first ride to church alone after the family had grown and her husband had died. I watched in my side mirror as her right turn signal came on and she slowly turned into the church parking lot.

Glancing once again at the picture of my grandson, who is just beginning his faith journey, I prayed that his future trips to church would be blessed (and consistent), that his parents would realize this rich inheritance to which they are exposing him has more value than any earthly purchase they might want for him. I prayed that, even as those little hands learn to grasp and hold things, his heart would grasp at 10 o'clock—how wide and long is the love of Christ—and at 2 o'clock—how high and deep that love is.

I suspect that the elderly woman we passed that morning on her way to church had a firm grasp on that love—as firm as her hands on the steering wheel. **B**

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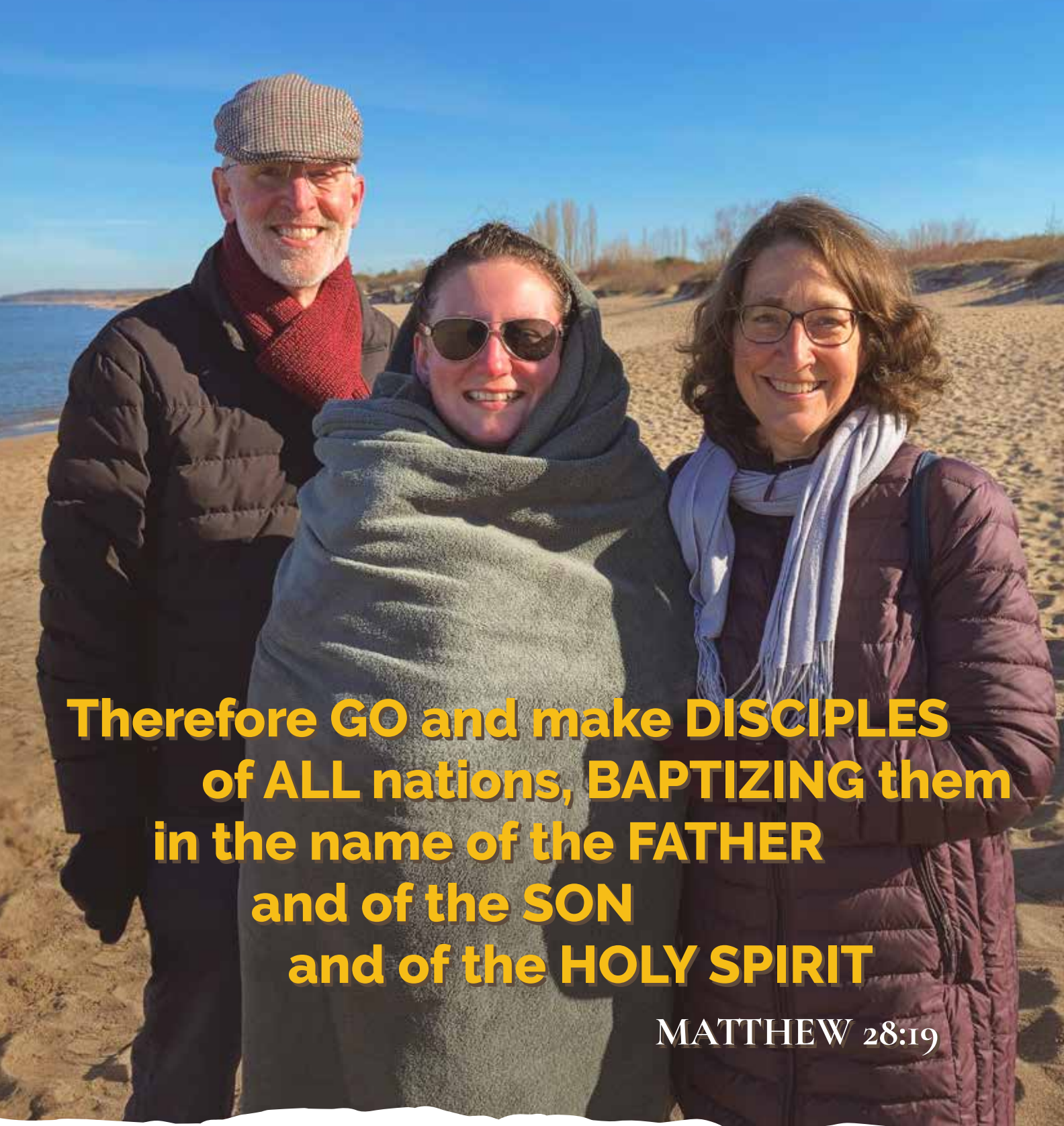
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MATTHEW 28:19

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